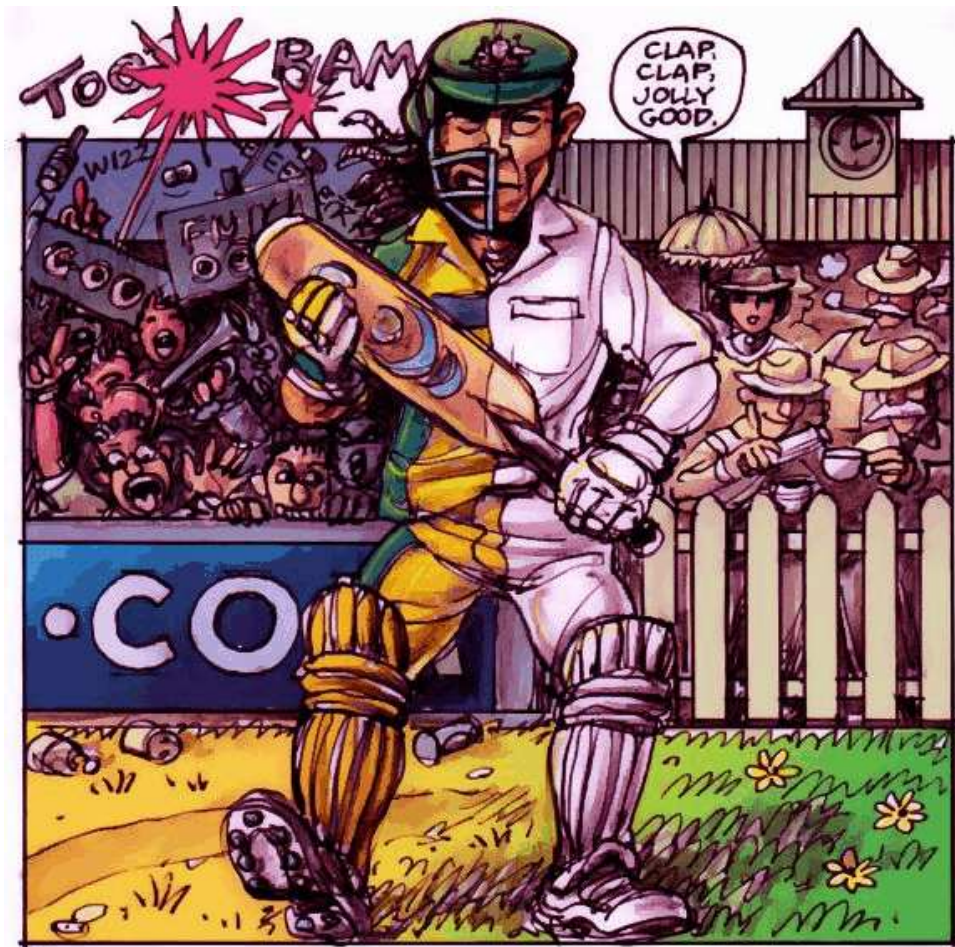


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PO Box 553
Richmond
VIC 3121
Australia

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

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Cricket viewed from the Tower of Babel

THEOLOGY

Andrew Hamilton



Christians, like other people who have sacred books, commonly look for guidance on questions of everyday life. But it is notoriously difficult to find illumination about current issues. Take, for example, the ruckus after the second cricket test between India and Australia.

That is partly because we instinctively look first for direct and unequivocal statements. Thou shalt not steal, for example. Such statements let us know who is to blame for what. But it is usually hard to apply these statements helpfully to modern events like test matches.

Perhaps, though, deeper illumination is to be found in stories than in instructions, condemnations and exhortations. Stories do not offer instant judgments but different and provoking ways of looking at situations.

If you want to reflect on the conflict between the Indian and Australian teams, for example, you could do worse than detour past the Tower of Babel. It is one of a cycle of stories that tell how God's love always intervenes to rescue humanity from the destructive consequences of its bloody-mindedness.

The Tower of Babel is an image of the capacity of technology to disturb deep human values. In the story the discovery of bricks and mortar has made possible the construction of towers and the shaping of cities. New technology and a shared language inspire a concerted effort to build a tower that will reach to heaven — God's world. God responds to this vaulting ambition by confusing the people's languages.

At first sight, this story seems to say that a controlling God punishes human beings for their cheeky pride in technology and human progress. But in context it is more subtle. Although these early stories in the Book of Genesis represent God as intervening from outside, their deeper concern is to show the inner dynamics of human action. God is about relationships, and the stories return human beings to relationships.

The point of this story is that new technology focuses human beings narrowly on domination and on power. They see human fulfilment in these terms. The new technologies and the consequent change in economic relationships inspire great

concerted projects. But the narrow focus on domination and technical expertise destroys the conditions that allow people to cooperate. They need to rediscover the priority of relationships, and particularly the relationship with God that relativises instrumental goals.

That brings us back to the recent test match. The Tower of Babel discourages us from asking who is to blame for what happened. It encourages us to ask instead whether in cricket, too, technological changes have distorted human relationships and so put test cricket at risk. We might think particularly of changes in media.

The capacity of sport to provide popular and relatively cheap content to the electronic media, with the consequent increased funding for sport, has modern test cricketers to work as full-time professionals. As a result their play has become their work, and they spend their lives mastering it. Games serve as places where they express their domination of their craft both in their technique and in establishing mental ascendancy over their opponents.

The development of camera technology, too, allows players, commentators and viewers to see the mistakes both of players and umpires. What might be passed over quickly in a game can constantly be recalled and brooded over.

These changes in technology encourage a narrow focus on domination of technique, of opponents and of umpires. But they also undercut the conditions which test matches have required in order to be played. To play matches that extend for the whole day over five days demands a network of relations that embody respect for the opposition players, the recognition that there are more important things in life than cricket, and acknowledgment of the authority of umpires and acceptance of their fallibility. If this pattern of relationships is weakened, the opportunity to play test cricket will be threatened.

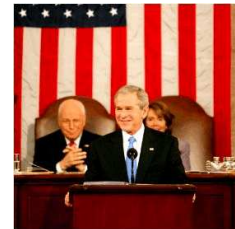
But the Tower of Babel is more than a grumpy old man's lament. In its wider scriptural context it says that God will invite always human beings, including cricketers and business people, to return to deeper values and to pay attention to relationships. And that the common language they form in reconciliation will eventually lead to later strife. Just like the resolution of the charge against Harbhajan Singh that concluded this cricket war.

Bush constructing legacy as peacemaker

INTERNATIONAL

Kylie Baxter

For Israel and the Palestinians, 2008 is shaping up as yet another crucial year. US President George W. Bush, who history will remember for his propensity to make war, has made international headlines with his determination to make peace. In the tradition of administrations past, Bush is facing the reality of a tattered legacy, and the temptation to 'solve' the complex Palestinian-Israeli conflict has proven irresistible.



The international community cautiously welcomed Washington's re-engagement. In East Jerusalem, claims of an impending peace deal received a more tempered response. In the communities of the West Bank, the much-hyped visit of the leader of the free world made little difference to a daily life which continues to be defined by road-blocks, checkpoints and the separation wall. In the Gaza Strip, the peace process remains irrelevant.

When the Bush entourage arrived in Jerusalem, sealing off streets, taking over hotels and closing businesses, there was scant popular Palestinian support. Indeed, the situation was met with barely concealed humour. This disintegrated into disbelief and anger as the saturation media coverage of the revived peace-process gave way to images of despair from Gaza.

Israel stepped up its military strikes and placed Gaza's civilian population under siege. This policy aims to pressure the Hamas leadership into containing the militants who fire Kassam rockets at Israeli towns and territory. National security is a legitimate right of all states, yet the principle of proportionality is also enshrined in the international system. Israel's blockade constitutes collective punishment against a civilian population, an action which is illegal under international law.

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert's assertions that a humanitarian disaster would be avoided were belied by the sewerage which ran through the streets of Gaza and the images of desperate Palestinians storming the Egyptian border in search of food and fuel. By creating this situation, Israel has intensified its own security dilemmas and potentially those of its neighbouring state.

Yet since the takeover by Hamas, the political and physical isolation of Gaza by both Israel and the United States has become expected. Therefore, the real test for Bush's peace-making penchant is in the PA-led West Bank.

Despite recent events, the Annapolis process will continue, as the major players have much to gain from signatures on a peace accord.

The outgoing US President, who presided over a period of destruction in the Middle East, now seeks to claim the mantle of peace-maker.

In Tel Aviv, Olmert is facing an uncertain future and a likely commendation with the imminent publication of the Winograd report into the failed war of July 2006. He also stands to gain from a US-brokered agreement that is unlikely to compel him to alter long-standing Israeli policies such as settlement expansion in Palestinian territory.

The Palestinian Authority, weakened by the split with Hamas and losing credibility in the face of Israel's unrelenting pressure against Gaza, also needs to score points. Its legitimacy rests in part on the stalled Oslo process of the 1990s and, as was demonstrated in the electoral success of Hamas in 2006, the Palestinian people are weary of its inability to deliver. Indeed, a failure to broker a deal now could increase the possibility of the PA's total disintegration.

The PA is aware that each month that passes without some form of agreement places the Palestinians in a weaker position. Yet in the current tense climate, the signing of a 'solution' which does not bring the hoped-for peace could be even more disastrous.

As the Annapolis process unfolds, the international community needs to be vigilant in its advocacy for the rights of the civilians caught up in this conflict. A future Palestinian state needs to be a viable physical and political entity and needs to be established in accordance with the long history of UN resolutions affirming the rights of the Palestinians to sovereign land, human dignity and the chance at economic prosperity.

Israel has long claimed it is a partner for peace and that the separation wall is a reversible security measure. If Israel is serious about peace it needs to cease policies of collective punishment. It also needs to open negotiations on the wall or, at the absolute minimum, the sections which deviate from the green line of the pre-1967 border.

If the Palestinians want peace they need to unify their leadership and contain militant actions which merely provide Israel with an excuse to tighten its strangle-hold.

If the Bush Administration wants peace, it should break a long-standing US tradition and exert the political pressure required to attain a viable agreement.

A peace accord signed by political leaders will only hold if the prospects of the

people in the West Bank, Israel and Gaza are improved. The danger is that this reality will be forgotten as embattled and weakened leaders on all sides negotiate for legacy, legitimacy and position.

Different song, but new Jesuit leader 'on message'

THEOLOGY

Andrew Hamilton



Adolfo Nicolás, elected last week, has spoken to the press for the first time as Jesuit General. His speech coincided with the release of Pope Benedict's speech for World Communications Day. The two speeches together illuminate the relationship between churches and media.

Benedict XVI reflects on media out of the Catholic moral tradition. So he looks beyond the everyday questions that people in media ask about their profession. He asks what place the media should have in society and what human values they should commend. His answer is that the media should and often do contribute to human flourishing. They should enhance the respect for human dignity and commend a true view of humanity.

He appreciates the contribution of the media: 'There is no denying the contribution they can make to the diffusion of news, to knowledge of facts and to the dissemination of information: they have played a decisive part, for example, in the spread of literacy and in socialisation, as well as the development of democracy and dialogue among peoples.'

But in his view the media, when judged by these high standards, often fail. The roots of failure lie in ideology, the cult of consumerism and the pursuit of profit. These things shortcircuit the pursuit of the deeper human truth. The Pope gives few examples, but does mention the growing trend for the media to create rather than report reality.

Written for a Christian audience, the speech concludes by commending a respect for the dignity of each human being and the search for truth as the proper concern of the media. Even Christian journalists may find it challenging to set the Pope's speech against the everyday reality of their craft. They work in a society in which there is no agreed understanding of human flourishing, and in media which has no captive audience, and whose continued existence generally depends on profitability.

It is not always easy to engage with deeper questions about truth. Adolfo Nicolás' speech illuminates this conversation. His own style is self-deprecating and

straightforward, that of a man talking to his equals. He also remarks on the tendency of media to create reality, in this case to see a conflict between Pope and Jesuits. He remarks that it is as easy instinctively to impose an image of conflict over these relationships as it is to impose it over the daily ebb and flow of family life. In family life we should expect differences, but it is misleading and unilluminating to describe them simply as conflict. It makes a pathology out of the stuff of everyday life.

Fr Nicolás also is able to enter the Pope's world view, which looks surely from the Catholic tradition at a world to which this tradition is strange. But he offers a different perspective. His own life was shaped by his move from Spain to Japan. There he found a world in which many of his own natural responses and instinctive values were not shared. He found also that where his own understanding of life differed from that which he encountered in Japan ways, this new world offered a richness that could enrich his own tradition.

Like the Pope, he concludes with the claims of truth in the media. But he promises his media audience a complex dialogue that goes beyond truth to engagement: 'In the dialogue which we will have I hope to follow the principles of Ghandi, who said that when we speak, it first must be true, because if it is not true it is not interesting; second, it must be charitable, and do good; and third, it must do good for others.'

Benedict XVI and Adolfo Nicolás take a different way to the truth — the Pope directly from the tradition to a world of diversity, the Jesuit through a new world laboriously entered back to the tradition. The differences do not add up to conflict but to rich complementarity.

[Click here](#) for Fr Nicolás' full speech.

Australia's answer to the Great Firewall of China

ONLINE

Kirstyn McDermott

Much has been made in recent weeks of the Federal Government's announcement that internet service providers would soon be required to offer a 'clean feed' to their Australian customers, with undesirable sites and content being blocked by default. Civil liberties groups in particular have been up in arms, touting the proposed legislation as nothing short of censorship and likening it to the infamous Great Firewall of China. But is this an erroneous comparison?



Although Telecommunications Minister Stephen Conroy has been accused of sneaking his legislation in quietly under the radar, the clean feed initiative has long been part of Labor policy. In a media release prior to the 2007 election, Labour stated that, should they win government, they would 'provide a mandatory 'clean feed' internet service for all homes, schools and public computers that are used by Australian children' and that ISPs would be required to 'filter out content that is identified as prohibited by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA)'.

Thus far, the government has been somewhat vague on the finer details of their Clean Feed policy. It is expected that the system will be run along the lines of that already operated by British Telecoms in the UK, with websites being blocked on a report/blacklist basis rather than the notoriously unreliable system of generalised content or keyword filtering. Exactly how this will be implemented and what effect it will have on internet speed, reliability and cost is also uncertain.

However, it is clear that, while the government will make it mandatory for ISPs to provide a clean feed service — so that all consumers will have access to it, regardless of which ISP they are signed up with — they are *not* making it mandatory for the feed to be used by all Australians. Consumers who do not wish to have their internet content filtered or blocked can opt out of the clean feed system.

So, can this really be considered censorship? Surely not. The clean feed policy will ensure the provision of a service which allows consumers, with particular mind to children and minors, to surf the internet without running across content to which they'd rather not be exposed.

When boiled down to bare bones, the argument against censorship is essentially one in support of both freedom of expression and freedom of choice: the choice to read, view, write, create and speak whatever we, as consenting adults, wish within the bounds of the law. Conversely, this should include the choice *not* to view or read whatever we wish. Shouldn't adults have the choice to access a clean feed on the internet, for themselves and/or the children in their care, if that is their preference?

There is, however, a very real and justifiable fear that people who opt out of the clean feed will be placed on some sort of government or law enforcement watch-list. Australia, while certainly not at the top of the list when it comes to the abuse of its citizens' privacy, doesn't exactly have a spotless record either. Consider our involvement with the controversial Echelon program, as well as the gradual erosion of personal privacy afforded by recent amendments to the Telecommunications (Interceptions and Access) and Anti-Terrorism Acts.

Likewise, there is concern that such legislation might it be the first step on a proverbial slippery slope. Might the clean feed become mandatory in the future? Could blocked content be expanded to include not just the stipulated target of child pornography but also anti-government websites or anything else that moral majority groups such as Family First might deem to be 'inappropriate'? All of this is absolutely possible. But is it being proposed now? Of course not, and the immediate knee-jerk hysteria which has gripped some in the media seems inappropriate at this point.

There is very real censorship taking place in this country at all sorts of insidious levels and the clean feed issue is distracting at best. If the anti-censorship fight is to be taken up in earnest, there are many things that can be done, from regularly viewing the list of films and publications that have been 'refused classification' and lodging appropriate appeals, to petitioning Attorney Generals at both State and Federal levels to lift the bans on non-classified films and publications, to arranging protest screenings and distribution of banned material.

It is worth remembering that people who spend too much time running around in circles and screeching that the sky is falling, will not be taken seriously when all that blue finally does start tumbling down..

Nationalist zealots stealing Australia Day

AUSTRALIA

Tom Crannitch



As a fourth generation Australian male approaching middle-age, I must confess I do not like Australia Day. Not even the public holiday gets me excited. I am certain at some point, perhaps when I was a late teenager around the time of the bicentenary celebrations, it may have meant something to me. No more!

Critical analysis skills garnered in undergraduate Australian history subjects started the rot. The dawning realisation that the date of white settlement was not an occasion to inspire national reconciliation was a further incentive. Credible research that suggested the first few days of settlement were a veritable orgy of rapes and murder did nothing but crystallise my private loathing for the date.

What has finally tilted me ardently against the day is its growing use by Australian nationalists for the purpose of reviving perceived certainties of a rather dubious monoculture. Instead of being used for a forward-thinking and inclusive dialogue on our country's future, it heralds an opportunity for populists to hark for a return to 'good old days' Australian values with their inherent, yet cleverly disguised, divisions and power imbalances.

The chief flag-waver for the nationalists was John Winston Howard. But not even he could have predicted how dangerous nationalist sentiment could become under his rule. I refer to the Cronulla riots of December 2005 and the shameful nationalist 'initiations' at Big Day Out events the following month, where concertgoers were encouraged to kiss our national flag or face the consequences from roving mobs of thugs.

No doubt the same good Australians a week or so later were celebrating our national day with 'mates' over a lamb-laden BBQ and a game of backyard cricket fuelled by a Cold Chisel CD.

Why provide such a sovereign outlet for these ignoramuses? Surely a patriot manifests their love for country by daily deed and does not need a singular date on the calendar to celebrate civic pride.

The spiel from the Chair of the National Australia Day Council, former champion swimmer, Lisa Curry Kenny, seems unobtrusive. She claims Australia Day is an opportunity to 'reflect on how we all contribute to a peaceful society' and suggests the occasion 'reminds us to embrace our difference and celebrate friendship, the

things that unite us and values we all share’.

They would be nice words if they were true. Unfortunately, the very act of celebrating Australia Day excludes a significant number of indigenous Australians. Neither is it helped by flag wearing/waving idealists, both young and old, who are either too ignorant to appreciate the ramifications of their actions or are plainly zealots.

It seems to me the Council has failed in its number-one aim in its published ‘statement of intent’, namely its objective to ‘unite all Australians through celebration with a focus on Australia Day’. How can this intention be compatible with its advertising campaign this month featuring an insidiously-mannered man approaching individuals with information about their lax efforts on Australia Day the preceding year, and extolling them to participate in suggested activities which display national pride, this year? The inference is clear. Do something and you are a ‘true blue’ Aussie. Don’t, and you are an unpatriotic slacker.

In its promotion of Australia Day, my local council issued a pamphlet that featured a young boy swinging on a Hills Hoist with his dog snapping at his heels, and the slogan ‘It would be ‘un-Australian’ not to plan some fun’. Do organisers even think about what messages they are sending when they endorse such clichéd dribble?

I don’t own a BBQ, and won’t be draping myself in the flag or any other nationalist insignia on 26 January. My wife probably has designs on an afternoon family drive and my eldest son will want me to roll the arm over at some point. I don’t care if these activities qualify me for celebrating Australia Day because I don’t need a whole lot of nationalist claptrap to encourage me to do them. I am a candidate for them any weekend of the year.

The Rudd Government should put a stop to this nonsense. The charter for the National Australia Day Council expires at the end of this month and it should not be renewed. The body should be dismantled and its funding given to local communities across the country to plan locally-inspired events throughout the year. This should be the case until a majority of Australians decide upon an alternative, unifying day of patriotic celebration.

Future doctor's challenge to Federal Health Minister

POLITICS

Andrew Dobson

Who is Nicola Roxon? No one knows. Even a seasoned political journalist may struggle to tell you that the new Minister for Health and Ageing has been the Member for Gellibrand since 1998, and loves a verbal scrap in Question Time. This rising star within the Australian Labor Party seems to have come from nowhere.



Nicola Roxon's official website does tell us something of where she has come from. Educated at Methodist Ladies' College and the University of Melbourne. A successful student and winner of the Supreme Court Prize for the top law graduate of 1990. Her list of previous Parliamentary Positions is formidable She was elected to the House of Representatives in 1998 and served as Shadow Minister for Children and Youth, and for Population and Immigration, Shadow Attorney-General, Shadow Minister assisting the Leader on the Status of Women. In December 2006 she replaced Julia Gillard as the Shadow Minister for Health. Then Kevin Rudd won the election.

Her website tells something of her life outside politics. There's a small picture gallery with no captions. But you won't find her beliefs, values or views on any of the pages. Follow the link to her MySpace page and you won't find much more. Ms Roxon is 'in a relationship' and a 'proud parent'. And she is an Aries. She tells us she is passionate about health and that many of the Howard Government's policies are having a detrimental effect on working families. Standard stuff really. Personality excluded.

It is likely that Ms Roxon will have a difficult time raising her public profile, if that is what she sets out to do. It seems like a long time since Australians have been seriously talking about health and hospitals. The utterly dominant issue of the last two election campaigns has been money. Specifically, how to get it, and how to stop losing it. It was a strong economy that saw the Howard Government re-elected in 2004, and job security (and entitlements) that saw a change of Federal Government in favour of a non-offensive alternative. In fact, 2004 marks the last time that a truly significant health policy was created: Gillard's ill-fated Medicare Gold. Since then, very little. Health has been put on the backburner.

How Ms Roxon will attempt to give this portfolio the status it deserves is anybody's guess. We've seen a new Sun Smart campaign launch recently, with a promise of spending. And funding for youth mental health.

But it is unlikely that Labor will be able to get away with the line many politicians used on health during the last election campaign. A strong economy — in other words, high spending on health — will not necessarily ensure a quality healthcare system. How funding is spent is, obviously, the critical issue.

In the United States, more money is spent on health per capita than anywhere else in the world. Yet the health outcomes achieved are comparable to those achieved by Costa Rica. What makes a healthcare system great is, generally, equity and fairness. That's why the life-expectancy of a Cuban is the same as that of an American. In Cuba, healthcare is practised at the community level and is readily available.

In addition, a strong emphasis on medical research, and effective public health campaigns, are very important. If Ms Roxon is not committed to widespread reform, it is measures like these that she must promote. First, however, she must address Australia's single greatest health policy failure: indigenous health. While non-indigenous Australians are as healthy as anyone else in the first-world, indigenous health is comparable to Ethiopia and Zimbabwe in some key indicators. There's no excuse for this. It must cease, if not for ethical reasons, for the fact that it is holding back Australia's healthcare system.

Nicola Roxon must put health back on the national agenda. She might start by letting us know who she really is. Importantly, she must tell us why health deserves to be the number one issue in all political and social discussion.

Aboriginal art before it became an industry

ES CLASSIC

Rosemary Crumlin



The following excerpt is from an article that appeared in *Eureka Street*— volume 1, number 1, back in March 1991. In it, Rosemay Crumlin recalls travelling in search of Aboriginal Christian art for an exhibition to coincide with the World Council of Churches Assembly. She was joined on her pilgrimage by exhibition co-curator Anthony Waldegrave-Knight and the project's conceiver, Frank Brennan, then director of the Jesuit research and social action agency Uniya.

Our first journey into the outback was full of adventure, incredible 49-degree heat, and quite a lot of disillusion. You see, part of the process involved visiting remote Aboriginal communities to see whether we could discover any art that gave evidence that people were re-thinking Christianity in their own symbolic system. And what Christian art we did find was often as bad as I'd expected.

But at Balgo, in the Central Desert, we came across some huge wall-hangings and panels rolled up in the church the people there use for liturgies. I knew we were at the edge of something. But the heat was terrible and Anthony and I and even Frank (who looks like God, walking around in his hat) thought we'd had enough. It wouldn't have taken much to persuade us to omit Turkey Creek from our itinerary.

I rang Sister Clare Ahern at Turkey Creek, admitting to some hesitation. Her reaction was unambiguous: 'I think you should have come here first.' So we caught the little mail plane to Turkey Creek and arrived at the Meriingki Centre.

There, on the walls, was what we had been looking for. Startling! ... absolutely knockout works from the people of the Warmun Community. But particularly astonishing were those of Hector Sundaloo, George Mung and Paddy Williams. These three had been Christians from way back, and now, in their late 50s or early 60s ... they are the unmistakable community leaders. Hector is regarded as a ngapunya man,

a man of God.

There were many paintings we might have taken from Turkey Creek, all of them done not as an artist would paint in a studio but as part of liturgy, done for use.

George Mung had carved a statue out of a piece of tree, a work of extraordinary beauty. Here it was, sitting on top of a hot-water system. About a metre high, it is an Aboriginal woman, a Madonna, pregnant with a man-child who stands in a shield just below her heart, his feet extended and his hands tipping the edges of the shield. It's almost like the image you get in the Leonardo drawing, but also like a Russian icon (which George Mung could never have seen).

The woman's body is painted with the paint reserved to young Aboriginal women before they have children. Accompanying her is a carved wooden bird, because Aboriginal people in this area believed in the holy spirit long before Christianity came. They believe that each person is accompanied through life by a holy spirit, male for male and female for female.

This work of George's would take its place, I believe, beside the great sculptures in the history of art. It is as moving as the carvings at Chartres, as great as the Germaine Richier crucifix in the church at Assy or the great Lipschitz sculpture at Iona. It is incredibly moving.

This image alone raises major questions, as did the whole Turkey Creek experience. The art would be worth millions of dollars to a collector. It is not well-known as yet. I wondered, what if we take a sculpture like George's and show it to the world? What happens to the community?

We spoke of this together with the people, backwards and forwards. Our argument was that this work of theirs no longer belonged just in that little group. The world is entitled to its greatness. Not that the people expressed it like that themselves. George Mung said simply (of his sculpture), 'You take it. You take it. I'll do another one.' Never was it so clear how different was his sense of time, value and ego from that of European Australians ...

A lot of people think Aboriginal art is about dots and circles on canvas. In that they are really just thinking of the Central Desert and what has happened with Central Desert art. In fact, Aboriginal art differs in each part of the country and has its own local tradition.

What you have are people with a highly developed sense of vision, and because their languages have not been written down until now, their eyesight and sense of story — their visual and oral traditions — are enormously well developed. That will change, of course; the young people's eyesight will not be as finely tuned as the elders', nor their psyche as captivated by story.

Two of the Turkey Creek paintings exemplify that outer and inner vision. When I asked Hector, the painter, about one, he explained in a softish voice (he's a big tall man): 'This is the young Joseph and the young Mary before they came together.' Since, in the tradition of that area, they would not be able to speak to each other, each is seen to have a holy spirit, and so their spirits can commune. It is a marvellous image.

On my return to Turkey Creek to collect the paintings, the people invited me to an adult baptism. Though a priest spoke the words, it was in fact Hector, regarded by the community as their own ngapuny man, together with the elders and the community itself, who performed the ceremony. We discovered something from that: the second criterion Anthony and I had set ourselves — a sense of immediate spirituality — meant that the paintings in the exhibition have all been done by an older man or an older woman, since it is they who have the law. For Aboriginal people, art is valid and good if it truthfully tells a story, and if the story is told by someone with the required authority.

I was struck by something Salman Rushdie said in an interview shown last November. Rushdie claimed that he couldn't imagine a world without story. I feel that very strongly myself. It reminded me that those who do not understand story or its importance will never understand Aboriginal art. Nor can anyone who under-values symbol find a way into the art.

Howard mandarins capturing Labor ministers

POLITICS

Tony Kevin

Worrying questions are re-emerging over Australia's people-smuggling disruption program in Indonesia.

Last week, Immigration Minister Senator Chris Evans paid a little-publicised visit to Jakarta for talks with ministerial counterparts on border control and people smuggling. According to Bruce Haigh, writing for [New Matilda](#), Evans' visit was intended to stay under wraps. But persistent media enquiries generated some public briefing. Evans gave a stumbling ABC [Radio National interview with Steve Cannane](#) on 16 January. This was followed by a report by Jewel Topsfield in [The Age on 17 January](#).



Both stories show a worrying picture of a new minister out of his depth on the sensitive people-smuggling disruption issue, and at risk of policy capture by his department whose present secretary, Andrew Metcalfe, was himself the First Assistant Secretary, Border Control and Compliance Division, in 2000-2001.

In those years, DIMIA and the Australian Federal Police together ran the now notorious covert people-smuggling disruption program in Indonesia, a program that gave rise in 2002 to serious questioning in the Australian Senate, from Senators Faulkner, Ray, and others.

Many asylum-seeker boats, dangerously overloaded, were sinking, experiencing engine failure or cooking-stove fires, or 'losing their way' during this period. We don't know how many boat people's lives were thus lost.

We do know 353 lives were lost when *SIEV X* sank, and there could have been comparable fatalities on the earlier overcrowded and unsafe *Palapa* (the boat finally rescued by *Tampa* after nearly foundering in a storm), or *Olong* (the boat towed in a circle by *HMAS Adelaide* for 22 hours while it slowly foundered). We don't know to what extent, if any, the Australian people-smuggling disruption program may have been involved in the history of such journeys.

Until there is a full-powers judicial enquiry into the Australian disruption program

— as called for by repeated Senate motions in 2002-2003 — we will not know.

The same senior public officials — Mick Keelty in AFP and Metcalfe in Immigration — continue to run their agencies, and to advise their new ministers (Robert McClelland and Chris Evans) on Australia's people-smuggling disruption policy. It is thus worrying to see Evans now offering these kinds of public statements in support of the status quo ante (as reported in the Topsfield article):

Australia's controversial disruption program aimed at preventing people smugglers leaving Indonesia will be retained by the Rudd Government, despite Labor expressing deep concern when in opposition that it may involve the sabotage of boats. Immigration Minister Chris Evans ... said Australia was 'still very interested in people-smuggling disruptions'.

'The concerns about that disruption policy will obviously be addressed by various ministers responsible, but certainly we are very committed to ensuring that we are attacking the people-smuggling operations at source,' Senator Evans told the ABC.

Senator Evans added that he shared Senator Faulkner's concerns about some of the past activities, and that the Government clearly would not support people scuttling boats and putting lives at risk.

Back in September 2001, at the height of the disruption program, John Howard was offering similar bland public assurances: 'We don't, in this nation, sink boats.' We now know, for example, from Marr and Wilkinson's *Dark Victory*, what thin ice such assurances rested on.

Would Evans and McClelland know now if they were being snowed by the AFP and DIMIA? Perhaps not. Perhaps it is time that Ministers Evans and McClelland sat down for a thorough discussion with Senator Faulkner, who knows more about these matters than anyone else on the Labor Government front bench.

How long before another mysterious life-threatening refugee boat incident happens in Australia's northern maritime approaches? Is this what the new ethical Rudd Labor Government wants to see happen on its watch? I don't think so.

Time, surely, for the full-powers judicial inquiry into people-smuggling disruption, that Faulkner and the opposition-controlled Senate advocated in 2002 and 2003. Kevin Rudd has the power to set up this enquiry tomorrow. He should seriously consider doing so.

The Republicans' dark horse

INTERNATIONAL

Binoy Kampmark



Michael D. Huckabee is battered but still fighting. The former Arkansas governor and Baptist minister remains a dark horse in the race for the Republican nomination for US President. His enemies grow more numerous by the day, notably within his party, but he seems undeterred.

He has had little by way of party machinery or fundraising acumen, two things that have culled American politics of many colourful presidential candidates. Before the Iowa caucus, he wasn't given a prayer. But he stormed home in the Republican ballot, roping in not merely the evangelicals but disaffected low-income voters. A third placing in New Hampshire and Michigan, and a second placing in South Carolina won't deter him.

Senator John McCain has the pragmatic grit and Mitt Romney that political hunger that can come across as distasteful. But only Huckabee comes across as a true 'outsider' who may revitalise the Republicans. Many dislike Romney, and his Mormon background has its obvious handicaps. The obvious alternative for the evangelical Right is Huckabee. Low-income groups may well also flock to him.

Other candidates are seen as unreliable. The reckless Rudi Giuliani, with his procession of wives and interest in female attire, seems more at home at an Oxbridge college rather than the Bible Belt. The radical 'mad uncle' Ron Paul is seen as too critical about American power overseas, an isolationist in modern dress. The actor-come-politician Fred Thompson comes across as incoherent.

Encouraged by the former governor's populist sparkle, groups such as Hucksarmy.com have formed, seeking to fill the coffers and expand Huckabee's appeal across the country. Founded by Alex and Brett Harris, Portland twin teens keen on improving Huckabee's image, Hucksarmy.com has reached national stature. For the Harrises, supporting Huckabee is a religious duty, a 'rebellion against low expectations'. They have organised Christian youth conferences and have written a book due in April (*Do Hard Things*) that will read like a manifesto for Christian youth.

Huckabee on economics is an interesting creature. He did something that makes

Republicans apoplectic: raising taxes in his state and increasing expenditure on public services. Services were, by most accounts, improved. He is also an unabashed economic populist. He suggests the introduction of a 'FairTax', one that will literally abolish the Internal Revenue Code with a consumption tax. A flat tax on consumption is not quite as bad as a flat income tax, despite incurable limitations. Huckabee hopes to exempt those below the poverty line by providing them with rebates.

His right-to-life stance is more nuanced than conventional members of the Christian Right. Gore Vidal once described America as the land obsessed by God and the foetus. Such a reading of Huckabee would be too narrow. He maintains that life after birth is just as important. To that end, he has what some Republicans regard as dangerous humane tendencies, an irksome social conscience. He has pardoned death row inmates, and commuted death sentences. Even undocumented migrants have tugged at his heartstrings, despite his current hardline stance against an amnesty.

On Bush's foreign policy, he is trenchant, accusing the president of a 'bunker mentality'. A Huckabee administration, he promises, will prise open the bunker, and seek a conciliatory approach to other nations. It will wean America off its insatiable appetite for foreign oil and neutralise avenues for conflict in the Middle East. It will educate Americans on the roots of 'jihadism' (a crash course in the writings of Sayyid Qutb, for instance), and encourage the support of Islamic moderates. Those who don't fall into that category will be dealt with, using 'human intelligence', special forces and the assistance of other countries.

His views on war itself are worth noting. Politicians, for all their good intentions, are incapable of handling military affairs. Reversing the wisdom of centuries, he feels military affairs should be left to the general in the battlefield.

The strategy in Iraq was a mistake. The involvement of American forces should only take place when the odds are certain. 'If force, then overwhelming,' he suggests on the website [Foreign Affairs](#). Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's endorsement of a 'light footprint' in occupying Iraq was a 'contradiction in terms'. America the bully is ever present in his mind. The US is best when it is trying to be 'a top high school student'. If it 'is generous in helping others, it is loved. But if it attempts to dominate others, it is despised'.

In one of the most open races in recent American history, the primaries are bound to yield a few more results that will bemuse and startle. Although Huckabee will be accused of being everything from a religious extremist to an economic populist, his message will reach voters. The question remains whether it will carry him to the Republican nomination, and ultimately to the White House. But one thing is clear: he is not there to make up the numbers.

Idealists don't own cricket

SPORT

Tony Smith

If one is forced to choose, idealism is preferable to cynicism. Unfortunately, idealists are prone to naïveté. The fuss over the behaviour of the Australian Cricket Eleven in its desperation to beat India at the Sydney Cricket Ground recently owes much to the idealistic — and perhaps anachronistic — attitude that many observers have towards the game.



Cricket is a microcosm of society and the furore over sportsmanship reflects the division of Australia into two classes — the venal, whose ultimate measure of success is the potential for profit, and the naïve, who believe in higher values. While insistence on the retention of sporting ideals is more than nostalgia for some mythical golden age, idealists cannot influence top-level sport unless they accept reality. As with so many important social institutions, top-level cricket no longer belongs to the people.

Cricket lovers would like to think that international cricket is just as much a sport as it ever was. At junior level, the old values of equal opportunity, patience, self-discipline and rejection of unfair advantage persist. In his novel *Cricket Kings* William McInnes created a team and a match that exemplified those values. Chris Anderson, captain of the Yarraville West Fourths preserves the best traditions of the game, and McInnes suggests the rest of society could do worse than to emulate the sporting spirit of the Saturday afternoon cricketer. At several points Anderson condemns racism as incompatible with the cricketing ethics he holds dear.

The survival of these traditions is a tribute to the coaches and parents who instil such values into young players. Children are unlikely to find great role models in star players as the media generally create idols for their own cynical, commercial purposes. Coaches must now teach their players to distinguish carefully between the abilities of national heroes and their behaviour. While junior cricket might retain traditional values, full-time national players are professionals who serve a different master. The separation is enforced by contracts that keep the stars too busy to participate at state, let alone club level.

All but the most naïve must accept that international cricket today is essentially a business. The pattern of creeping commercialism is similar in most sports.

In phase one, the traditional, players and administrators are amateurs. Far from being rewarded for their time, dedication and skills, they suffer financially because of their love for the game. The game prospers and attracts many interested followers. Typically the game is covered by public broadcasters and reporters of lowly status.

In phase two, some businesses realise that there is money to be made. They offer sponsorship to reap the public relations rewards but most players remain amateurs.

In phase three, businesses become greedier and seek to organise the game for maximum profit. They offer contracts that make administrators salivate. Public broadcasters are priced out. Team colours are modified to suit the sponsors and matches are scheduled to maximise advertising opportunities.

In phase four, administrators and players become complicit and openly accept that he who pays the piper calls the tune. They are sportsmen (and women) and not ethicists so there is no contradiction for them in doing as they are told by their employers.

In phase five, the time for pretence is over. The star recognises that he is a salesman and that it is his job to attract buyers, either directly through endorsement of products, or indirectly by attracting viewers and spectators who are exposed to advertising. Spectators at first class cricket matches are bombarded by material broadcast over the p.a. system and displayed on the giant video screen to the extent that normal conversations during breaks in play are impossible.

Phase six will emerge from the strains between the behaviour of the Australian Eleven and public expectations. The future will be determined by those who manipulate the sports market, so while there may be some modifications to the demands on players, these will involve compromise. If 'values' feature at all, it will not be for their intrinsic worth but because of the instrumental benefit that they bring. The chief motivation for a code of player ethics is to ensure that the game does not lose popularity.

Journalists might complain about falling standards, but in the final analysis, they do not stand outside the game to report it, but are part of the peripheral entertainment. In the long run, they toe the company line because they must maintain the 'integrity' of cricket — not its traditional values, but its position on sports pages. Should reality prevail, then Test cricket, like so many social institutions since the Howard revolution, would be subsumed into the business pages.

2008 up and rolling

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



Eureka Street joins other online publications in beginning the new year with a fresh roll of the dice.

We are adopting what is known in the business as a 'rolling' format. That means we are publishing two articles each weekday instead of around 16 every second Thursday.

The other change is that all the articles are unlocked. Paid subscriptions are being phased out. We trust you will continue to support Eureka Street fundraising activities and events, as well as our advertisers.

We will continue to produce a fortnightly PDF edition, for libraries and those who like to print the fortnight's articles and recreate the 'magazine' experience.

A daily email newsletter will alert you to what we have published. We hope you will accept this, as this is the best way for us to alert you to our articles that interpret current news events while the events are still news. However we will send an alternative weekly email newsletter to those who do not want a daily email.

We are not alone in moving to a free access and rolling format. Online publications big and small have been doing so in recent months. Last week, Rupert Murdoch dumped the [Wall Street Journal's](#) paid access model. Also last week, *New Matilda* relaunched its website and confirmed its decision to go free and daily.

[New Matilda](#) is a sister publication of *Eureka Street*, in that it is small, Australian, and occupies a niche that intersects with our own. Another sister publication was launched last Friday. It is [Thinking Faith](#), the online journal of the British Jesuits.

The appearance of *Thinking Faith* at this stage illustrates how members of the community of small publications work together and learn from each other's experiences. *Thinking Faith* launched nearly two years after *Eureka Street* online, and it knows to move immediately to free access and daily publication.

While the British Jesuits are new to online publication, they preceded us with their print incarnation, which lasted from 1864 until 2001, and appeared under the banner

of *The Month*. The print version of *Eureka Street* (1991-2006) no doubt learned from the experience of *The Month*.

Caste complicates progress for India's Dalits

INTERNATIONAL

Peter Hodge

'I am zero when it comes to caste,' says Moses Vattipalli. 'I was told again and again that I was not fit, I was a Dalit, untouchable, low-caste man, and leatherwork, that is my caste-work.'

A rare case among Dalits to have escaped the same work as his father, 30-year-old Moses is Assistant to the National Administrator of the All India Christian Council. One of his tasks is to record abuses against Dalits on the organisation's website. 'Every day I have things to report,' he says. 'Every day killing, every day a Dalit was raped, humiliated, beaten up.'



This picture of caste-based oppression is at odds with common perceptions of modern India as an economic tiger and IT superpower. Few Dalits have reaped the benefits of the recent boom, due to lack of education and ongoing discrimination that mocks the outlawing of 'untouchability' in the Indian Constitution.

Like most Dalit children, Moses' education about caste status began early. In his own village, he knew not to take water from the well the upper-caste people used. But when visiting another village he unwittingly drew from the wrong well. 'Those people scolded me because I went there while they were drawing water. I came home crying.'

The Dalits in Moses' village are isolated on the eastern side. 'When the wind blows, the wind of the Dalits should not touch the upper-caste people,' explains Moses. Visiting the village shop, he had to stand at a distance so the shopkeeper would not be contaminated. 'When I asked for something from the shop they used to pack it and throw it. If I catch it, I catch it, otherwise things would fall on the ground and we have to collect them from the mud.' Similarly, payment would be thrown to the shopkeeper and the change tossed back.

The general rule in Indian culture that respect should flow to elders is skewed by caste. It was painful for Moses to see his father treated with disrespect by upper-caste children. 'I used to feel so embarrassed. My father might have had a problem, but he didn't do anything because Dalits think it's their fate.'

Children growing up under such conditions develop a sense of inferiority. That is precisely the intention. 'There were many times, I was told I am a Dalit and equal to

any other animal,' says Moses.

On one occasion Moses was treated worse than an animal. He and his father had been invited to an upper-caste wedding. Moses was performing well at school and expected to be treated well. He was in for a rude shock. 'When the time for the feast came they asked us to sit on the mud where the cattle and cycles travel.' Not wanting to upset the people who had invited them, they stayed. 'There were people walking that way and I remember the sand and dirt was coming into our food. It was such a humiliation.'

As his education began to empower him, Moses sensed the contradiction between his knowledge base and the respect afforded to him in the village. He argued with an upper-caste colleague in senior high school: 'I shouted at him, and he went and complained to his parents. His parents came and shouted at my parents and my parents shouted at me. Ultimately, I had to realise what is my place.'

Freedom, to some extent, came when he moved to the city, where his caste identity wasn't so obvious from his family name. Further emancipation came from his study of the Bible; he took solace in the Christian perspective that, contrary to his upbringing, everyone is born equal.

Two years travelling on the Christian ship *MV Doulos*, where he was one of a multicultural crew, exposed him to a different world, where he could be judged more by his ideas and behaviour than his birth. 'I had a difficult re-entry, because your friendships, your way of socialising, was totally different on the ship to back home.'

The most insidious characteristic of the caste system is the deliberate attempt to brand each human with a designation that determines their dignity and life expectations. 'It's always in the back of my head that I'm a Dalit and I'm not a first class citizen,' says Moses. The system he describes as 'evil' continues to haunt him and all Dalits. 'We can run away from it but we can not get rid of it.'

Moses married and has a young daughter. With his colleagues at the All India Christian Council and Operation Mercy Charitable Company, he is working to educate Dalit children and help Dalit families develop economically, so that his daughter may grow up in a different India.

There is a positive correlation between abuses of Dalits and regions where there have been improvements in the living conditions of Dalits. With extremist Hindu groups like Rastriya Swam Sevak Sangh and Vishwa Hindu Parishad unlikely to back down, further empowerment will come at a cost.

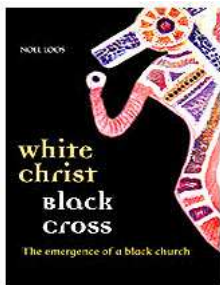
Still, Moses is committed. 'I want to work with my people, help them, encourage them.' For Moses, there is no next life. He decided long ago to make the most of this one.

Truth about Aboriginal missions requires study

BOOK REVIEW

Robin Koning

Loos, Noel. *White Christ, Black Cross: The Emergence of a Black Church*.
Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007, [website](#) .



What was going on in Christian missions to indigenous Australians? This is one of the underlying questions raised by Noel Loos' book *White Christ, Black Cross: The Emergence of a Black Church*. He addresses this question through an exploration of the Anglican Church's indigenous outreach, with a particular focus on Yarrabah in northern Queensland and the work of the Anglican Board of Missions (ABM).

This kind of detailed study of mission history is essential if we are to move beyond clichés about mission history and its effect on indigenous Australia. Too often, generic statements about missionaries colluding with colonialism and destroying indigenous cultures are presumed to say all that needs to be said about this aspect of contact history. On the other hand, some Christians can whitewash mission history, as though any injustice suffered was justified by the fact that people gained access to the saving Gospel of Christ.

Both these positions call for a more discerning account of concrete mission histories for two reasons: to do justice to indigenous agency in the encounter with Christianity, so that indigenous people are not presented as mere victims; and to do justice to the ways in which the missionary agenda was not only parallel with that of other colonial forces, but also diverged from it.

In Loos' book, we find the sort of case study that helps to offer this nuance. He shows how missionary attitudes, while very much culturally conditioned, were also, in some cases at least, counter-cultural. While not denying the view of many missionaries that indigenous peoples were only capable of being 'civilised' to the level of the British working classes, he notes also the firm conviction as to their fundamental humanity.

He points to the ABM's early awareness of the devastation caused by dispossession and of the responsibilities incumbent on those who benefited from this dispossession. A major character in Loos' story is Ernest Gribble, a veteran of a

number of Anglican missions, who, despite a reputation for being an authoritarian mission superintendent, played a key role in uncovering the Forrest River massacres, leading to a Royal Commission investigation.

Loos also offers a more nuanced picture of Aboriginal responses to missions, one which points to their active agency within the considerable limitations imposed on them. Some indigenous people discerned something of value in what was being offered and made choices about how they would engage with that offering. Loos shows this especially by tracing the history of Aboriginal leadership within the Anglican Church, from early leaders like James Noble, through a range of lay evangelists, to significant milestones such as the episcopal consecration of Bishop Arthur Malcolm as the first Aboriginal bishop in the Anglican Church.

He also points to the more recent Christian revival at Yarrabah, led by Aboriginal people, interpreting their experience in ways that make sense to them, despite scepticism from some white Church people. For some indigenous people at least, Christianity and mission history 'is not an aberration in their experience; it is as central as the Dreamtime.'

One point that Loos refers to only in passing requires further development. This is the area that philosopher-theologian Bernard Lonergan calls incarnate meaning — the meaning of a person or group or way of life.

Mission studies tend to focus on two areas: the verbal communications of missionaries (what they said in their catechesis and preaching); and the social structures of mission life (how missionaries controlled indigenous life, as in the prohibition of local languages and rituals, or the creation of dormitories which separated children from their families). But for all ethnocentrism of the verbal communications, and all the destructiveness of the social control, there were also the missionaries themselves — their presence and the relationships they formed with the people.

At various points, Loos shows the deep respect indigenous people had for at least some of the missionaries — people who lived with them for long periods of time, who maintained contact and relationship with them, who shared the hardships of mission life, who persevered with little support from their own churches and culture, and who gave witness, in fragile earthenware jars, of a treasure they wished to share with indigenous people. The tragedy, of course, is that these same people undermined this reality by various forms of collusion and paternalism.

This book, though, ends on a note of hope, as Loos outlines the growth of a 'black church' in which, out of a most ambivalent history, indigenous people emerge with a desire to continue to engage with Christ and to share his Gospel, not simply with their black sisters and brothers, but with the wider Australian Church and beyond.

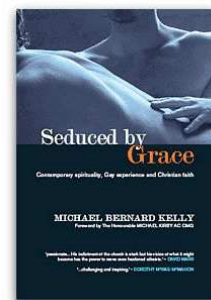
Deep spirituality underlies gay Catholic's activism

BOOK REVIEW

Terry Monagle

Michael Bernard Kelly, *Seduced by Grace: Contemporary spirituality, Gay experience and Christian faith*. Melbourne: Clouds of Magellan Publishing, 2007, [website](#) .

The essays assembled in this book are passionate and prophetic. Kelly must be a man of courage. He undergoes the personal struggle to reconcile his own deep faith with being proudly gay; he then commits to the struggle of achieving a right to an accepted presence for gay people in the church.



Kelly came to prominence within the Catholic Church in Australia, most noticeably, for his part in organising the Rainbow Sash movement, and its contentious attempts to receive communion from bishops in cathedrals. From 1998 he has been the movement's writer, spokesperson and co-convenor.

These essays are both strongly personal narratives, and the proclamation of a manifesto.

In some sense he is not alone. 'Liberal' Catholics have an habitual deep frustration with the managers of the church tradition to which they have a powerful sense of belonging. Women, in particular, have felt marginalised and patronised by the clericalised Church. Kelly experiences this, but not only does he find incomprehension for his point of origin inside the church, he also finds incomprehension from many outside the church in the mainstream gay movement. 'Why would you bother?' is their challenge to him.

This guy is not going to win, you think. You wouldn't volunteer for this role, this multi-focal isolation, unless you were both sincere, generous and prepared for loss. It makes you think of prophets like Jeremiah who knew they were on a hiding to nothing, and begged God for leave to resign from the cause to which God had conscripted them.

Kelly says, 'There are few precedents in Church history for what we are trying to do. This is a radical experiment. It is not surprising that the Churches are unnerved by

it — we are as well.’

For establishment Catholics, with maybe a neurotically narrow conception of orthodoxy, with a sense that the tradition is so wise and timeless that nothing new could come along, Kelly’s position and advocacy are a frightening challenge. It is a challenge that has emerged and is viable only because of the spread of toleration through modern secular societies.

Kelly has placed first in the book those essays which are more directly spiritual. If we are going to be persuaded by the more declamatory pieces, and those which focus on the minutiae of male to male sexuality, we will need to be convinced by his spirituality.

He describes a strong call to a contemplative spirituality, in a chapter entitled ‘On the Peninsula, alone with God’. ‘In 1988, exhausted after years of teaching and ministry, I moved down here to rest and live alone for a year. I walked the beaches and sat by the fire, and slowly I fell in love with a contemplative way of being.

‘Contemplatives, they say, are not people who have solved the mystery of God. They are those who can no longer keep the mystery at bay.’ It is from this silence, he says, that the contemplative speaks when he is called into action, even as a trouble maker.

It is a spirituality within which the erotic has a privileged place. Quite a few of the chapters in the book reference US gay groups and gay rights campaigners. Kelly has built up international links which have obviously given him strength and encouragement. From seminars and conferences he attended in the US he describes the sometimes erotic elements in the pedagogy and activities of sections of the gay movement. Tutorials on the role of the anus in sexual pleasure during male to male sex will not be everybody’s cup of tea. But as suggested above, this material needs to be considered alongside the integrity and sincerity of the chapters on spirituality.

There are also chapters which address contemporary issues such as freedom of speech in the church, the proportions of priests who are gay, and the incidence of sexual abuse in the church. His is a call for honesty and justice in church administration.

Church officials clashed forcefully with Kelly and the Rainbow Sash Movement. Some display the same defensiveness in response to the emphasis being given to climate change. They remain sceptics. 2007 saw the challenge to the church from Bishop Geoffrey’s Robinson’s book *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church*. The insistence of Kelly and other gay people in the church, that they are entitled to a public presence, that their orientation is compatible with a full and rich faith, is a challenge not just to the authorities but to most of us who sit in the pews and who

would rather duck the harder questions.

Like climate change, this one won't go away.

Oppression by unresolved grief

FILM REVIEW

Tim Kroenert



***Sweeney Todd*: 116 minutes. Rated: MA. Director: Tim Burton. Starring: Johnny Depp, Helena Bonham Carter, Alan Rickman. [Website](#) .**

You'll find a certain archetypal character in most of Tim Burton's films. Many of the defining features are physical: unkempt hair, pale skin, dark eyes, morose expression. Others are social: the character is a social misfit, often introverted, sometimes anarchistic.

At times it's a villain — think Betelgeuse in *Beetlejuice*, the Penguin in *Batman Returns*, or the Headless Horseman in *Sleepy Hollow*. At other times it takes the form of a hero, or antihero, such as Edward Scissorhands, the Corpse Bride, or Willie Wonka from Burton's reimagining of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

Good or bad, Burton's favourite archetype is always a sympathetic character (with the possible exception of Betelgeuse). It represents humanity at its most fallen, or furthest removed from the norms of society.

More than simply a reflection on the dark side of humanity, the archetype represents the tragic end-result of oppression by unresolved grief or of rejection-turned-grudge.

Burton's latest film, *Sweeney Todd*, features the archetype in double. The most obvious representation is found in the title character (Depp), an 18th-century barber driven to homicidal mania after his life and family are destroyed by a sadistic judge (Rickman).

But Todd's admirer and accomplice, Mrs Lovett (Carter), also fits the type. She's a pie maker, struggling to make a living due to the impoverished state of London's lower class and the poor quality of available ingredients. When Todd starts offing his customers, Lovett helps clean up by processing the bodies for pie filling.

It's a win-win situation: Todd feeds his blood lust, and Lovett, with a tasty new item added to her bake-house repertoire, feeds her now plentiful patrons.

Such a hellish alliance can only end badly. But *Sweeney Todd* is not just a cautionary tale. Todd's ultimate tragedy is that his all-consuming quest for revenge blinds him to the things that could make him happy again. Lovett, on the other hand, gradually discovers the Faustian implications of her blood-soaked pact with Todd.

Sweeney Todd is faithful to the cult Stephen Sondheim musical from which it is adapted (most of the dialogue is sung). But it is also every inch a Burton film.

The lavish period detail and bleak fairytale vision of London's streets is textbook Burton. Even Sondheim's score is reminiscent of the grandly morbid tones of Burton's regular composer, Danny Elfman.

In fact this may well be the most accomplished 'Burton film' that Burton has ever made. Not since *Edward Scissorhands* has he evoked so vividly the tragedy of his doomed outsider. A lot of blood is shed along the way, but *Sweeney Todd* finds its way to the heart.

Afghan stranger's homecoming

FILM REVIEW

Tim Kroenert

The Kite Runner: 128 minutes. Rated: M. Director: Marc Forster. Starring: Khalid Abdalla, Zekeria Ebrahimi, Ahmad Khan Mahmidzada, Homayoun Ershadi.

Marc Forster certainly enjoys strumming heartstrings. *Monster's Ball* (2001) was racially charged melodrama. *Finding Neverland* (2004) raised a treacle-sweet tribute to Peter Pan creator J. M. Barrie. *Stranger Than Fiction* (2006) even managed to make loud-mouthed comic actor Will Ferrell show his sensitive side.



Forster's latest film, based on Khaled Hosseini's eponymous novel, *The Kite Runner* ultimately suffers under this deference to the emotive, although its first act, a bleak 'magical realist' fairytale set in Afghanistan, is memorable enough.

In fact, there is one scene in particular that makes the film worthwhile. Two young Afghani boys, Amir (Ebrahimi) and Hassan (Mahmidzada) participate in a kite-fighting tournament during the late 1970s. The sight of thousands of kites dog-fighting high above the rooftops of Kabul is an almost-fantastical vision that evokes the wonder of childhood — and foreshadows, in bittersweet whimsical fashion, the real-life warfare that will later wrack the country.

But not all is magic and wonder. Hassan's father is Amir's father's servant; they are minority Hazaras, and the boys' friendship feels the strain of the class and cultural distinction. This is exacerbated when Hassan is bullied and brutalised by a local budding racist, and Amir, already artistic and sensitive in his youth, fails to intervene.

The event puts a wedge between the boys, not due to resentment from Hassan (who is played by Mahmidzada with an earnest sense of loyalty that is difficult to look away from) but to Amir's own guilt. The friendship ends, at least temporarily. Not long after that Amir and his father Baba (Ershadi) are forced to flee to America following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

The film loses its stride during a middling middle act, which studiously ticks off the milestones that carry Amir (Abdalla) from adolescence to adulthood. This portion

of the film is disjointed and tokenistic — and Baba, initially a compelling and enigmatic character, fades to soap opera caricature — although to its credit it does efficiently capture Amir's tangential journey from his cultural heritage into Western modernity.

All of which provides the set-up for an ambitious but troublesome final act, where Amir, now a stranger to his homeland, is compelled to return. He discovers that Afghanistan is also now a stranger to him — the Taliban is in power, and his home city of Kabul lies in waste. His purpose for returning is largely concerned with confronting the guilt from his childhood, but the film degenerates into mindless adventure with a dwindling sense of characterisation and ineffectively heavy-handed pathos.

Effective or not, it's fair to read a political subtext into the film. The plot concludes in the year 2000; within 12 months September 11 will have occurred. The final scene, where an Afghani man and child fly a kite on a Californian hillside, pays testament to a US with its arms open in welcoming embrace. The unspoken inference is that a year later, that embrace will have turned to a vice grip. On reflection it's the film's most potent moment.

Still following through

POETRY

P. S. Cottier

Progress

When I turned twenty
I thought the world could be changed
like a pair of jeans, a little dirty
at the knees, fraying at simple seams.

Emergent detergent left
the great unwashed.

Thirty, I decided to be a lawyer
who'd unmask justice,
let her see into dark corners
with right vision goggles.

I stand convicted
of blank stupidity.

At forty, I realised
I'd better decide what I'd be
when I grew up.

Too late for Wimbledon,
I made a poetic racket,
served and volleyed
just inside the lines.

I'm still following through.

Courtyards

No pepper trees here, those spicy tangled willows
with a tacked-on launch pad for toilet roll rockets
or pink bungee fairies, who like to test their wings.

This is an exercise in the geometry of heat,
set square angles edging multitudinous bricks.

Gardening without flowers or bird singing bush,
mondo a mere margin between flat plains of colour.
Secrecy rooted out, and surprise. Bleached wall lion
dribbles spit at this jungle-less expanse, sneering.
A lack of trust in random seed, careful pavers planted,
perhaps some tepid topiary, that IVF of ivy, to mark
a flat packed display, where garden used to grow.