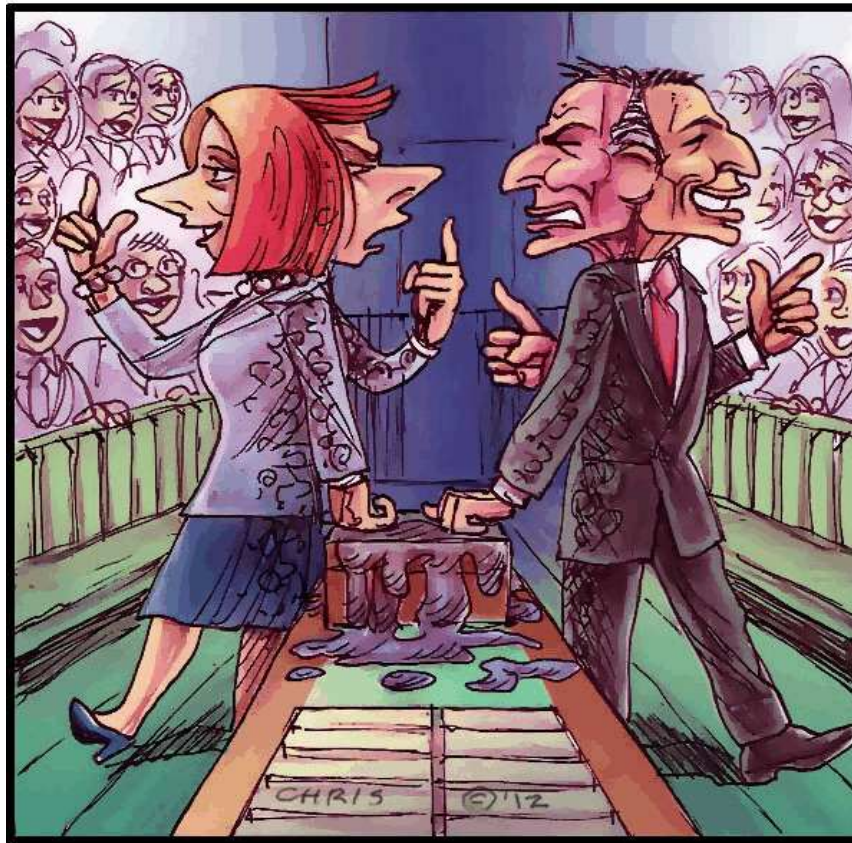


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Eureka Street is published fortnightly online, a minimum of 24 times per year by Eureka Street Magazine Pty Ltd

Requests for permission to reprint material from the website and this edition should be addressed to the Editor.

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Richmond  
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Responsibility for editorial content is accepted by the publisher.

Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned.

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## Michael Kirby on sexuality and churches

### VIDEO

*Peter Kirkwood*

In Western countries, gay rights is a hot button issue, with a focus at the moment on gay marriage. US President Barack Obama recently came out in favour of gay marriage, while in Australia leaders on both sides of federal politics are against it.

In the Vatican's Notification published last week [censuring](#) American nun, Sister Margaret Farley for the views expressed in her book *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*, the Catholic Church has once again affirmed its stance against homosexual acts and gay marriage.

It quoted the 1975 Catechism of the Church: 'Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered.'

With regard to gay marriage it cited a 2003 document from the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith: 'Legal recognition of homosexual unions or placing them on the same level as marriage would mean not only the approval of deviant behaviour, with the consequence of making it a model in present-day society, but would also obscure basic values which belong to the common inheritance of humanity.'

Nevertheless there is widespread disagreement in Australia with the Church's teachings. Surveys have consistently shown growing majority support for gay rights. A recent major survey conducted by Federal Parliament and published in April showed 64 per cent of Australians [in favour](#) of gay marriage.

The interviewee featured on Eureka Street TV this week, [Michael Kirby](#), is a former Justice of the High Court of Australia, a practicing Christian, and one of this country's best known openly homosexual citizens. The video shows excerpts of a speech he delivered at the Uniting Church, Paddington in Sydney's eastern suburbs launching a book called *Five Uneasy Pieces: Essays on Scripture and Sexuality* edited by Nigel Wright.

Kirby wrote the introduction to the book, in which five Anglican theologians rework interpretations of biblical texts traditionally used to condemn homosexuality. Kirby argues against the view that homosexuality is an unnatural 'disorder', claiming that modern science and psychology reveal it to be a natural condition for a minority of people.

Kirby was born in 1939, grew up in Sydney and attended the prestigious Fort Street Selective High School. He studied Arts, Law and Economics as an undergraduate, and received his Master of Law with first class honours from Sydney University.

This began an illustrious career in the law and judiciary including stints on the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, as a judge in the Federal Court of Australia, as President of the NSW Court of Appeal, culminating with his appointment to the High Court of Australia in 1996. He retired from the High Court in 2009.

Kirby has received many honours for services to the law including being made a Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George in 1982, and Companion of the Order of Australia in 1991. In 1991 he also received the Human Rights Medal, and in 2006 was elected an Honorary Fellow of the Australian Academy of Humanities.

From 1984 until 1993 he was chancellor of Macquarie University, and since 1987 he has received honorary doctorates from some 20 Australian and overseas universities.

Kirby has been open about his homosexuality since 1999 when he outed himself in *Who's Who* by naming Dutch-born Johan van Vloten as his same-sex partner. Since then he has been outspoken about gay rights.

He is a prolific writer, having penned scores of articles for legal journals, and a number of books, including a number of legal tomes and a memoir entitled *Michael Kirby: a Private Life, Fragments, Memories, Friends*.

There are also many articles and books written about him including Freckelton and Selby's *Appealing to the Future: Michael Kirby and his Legacy*, and A. J. Brown's *Michael Kirby: Paradoxes/Principles*.

## **Lay off the Gina Rinehart fat attack**

### POLITICS

*Moira Rayner*

My first and most wonderful secretary worked, after me, for Gina Rinehart, and never had a harder word to say for her other than she was 'quite an unusual lady'. Wendy must have been raised by a mum, like mine, who'd say (but never lived up to it) that if you can't find something nice to say about somebody, don't say anything.

I'm afraid I'm not too good at it either, having learned how easily the tongue can humiliate or inflame.

Yet it would be a bloody good piece of advice for anyone wishing to weigh in (another witty AFR in-joke headline about Rinehart's latest obstacle to a seat on the Fairfax Board) to the discussion about Rinehart's contribution to Australian culture in terms of her perceived unattractiveness as a woman. 'Fat', therefore greedy and nasty and ill-controlled, and thus a target for ridicule based on how she looks and therefore of what worth she is.

On Q&A in May we were subjected to a thoroughly vile display of playground mobbing, the kind that ends with Piggy getting killed before the grownups break up the game of *Lord of the Flies*.

Rinehart wasn't there, but nobody defended her, and in her name any powerful woman. Tony Jones' half-rueful smile as virtually the whole panel got stuck into 'Gina' doesn't relieve him of responsibility for feeding her reputation down the razor-blade of public taste.

Presumably he thought it was funny to let Barry 'Dame Edna' (really, his despised Glen Iris mummy) Humphries opine that Rinehart should get herself a hairdresser. From beneath his floppy, improbably black hair. Which encouraged David Marr to call Rinehart 'greedy' and criticise her public warring with her children.

Sneers flowered on famous faces. Even John Hewson, who could have stood up for civility, instead went along with the pack with a pathetic remark that he could understand what Rinehart was trying to do but 'didn't excuse' because he 'didn't understand' how she was doing it.

Have we tried to understand? No, because she's 'ugly', according to a misogynist, a gay man, a former politician, and Miriam Margoyles, the fabulously British and famously lesbian actor who doesn't know 'Gina' (who does?) but doesn't like her.

It was a despicable 'debate' and did the ABC no credit. Does nobody appreciate that by sniggering at a rich and powerful woman and pecking at her 'worth' because of her physical features, they undermine every and any woman who has a

powerful role in business, politics or the professions? The only voice in defence of 'Fatty Arbuckle' was actor [Jacki Weaver](#), who quietly said they were all being unkind.

And so they were.

Our news and political media love pictures of Rinehart when she was young, slimmer and (obviously) happier, often adorning a piece announcing, incredulously, that Rinehart is the richest woman in the world, yet has an unhappy family life, estate disputes, business frustrations and no seat on the board of Fairfax.

Rinehart makes headlines because of her court jousts with Rose, with her late father's business partner, Wright's, heirs; and with business competitors. Tell me which business man has not had such battles. And every time her weight is brought up along with her wealth, when another big businessman with political interests, Clive Palmer's enormous girth isn't mentioned, just as her own late father's physical beauty and fitness was not.

We have stood by and laughed at representations of a polka-dotted Joan Kirner, the Gianni Versacci-bloused Amanda Vanstone, and even (for God's sake) Hillary Clinton's drab pants suits, hairstyle, lack of makeup and 'dowdiness'. And even Germaine Greer had a crack at Julia Gillard's bum and 'ill-cut' jackets.

Stop, and let's grow up. Rinehart is a rich and therefore influential woman. She was brought up by a loving daddy who wanted her to inherit his vision — like it or not, and I don't — and his business. And she did, but not before he hurt her greatly — by marrying a woman she couldn't stand, by privately deriding her weight gain (the fat hypocrite), and by wimping out on protecting her interests by doing a King Lear on his deathbed.

Rinehart inherited and out-did daddy's ruthlessness. She made herself a private and family life, which has fallen apart publicly, and horribly. She has fought to be what she is today, and yet she is but mortal. She is a woman who believes in her own capacity to strive, survive and thrive, and believes in her power as an individual, at the cost (it seems) of privacy, apparent unhappiness (borne stoically) and an enhanced sense of insecurity.

She would hate to be pitied, but one can.

The Rinehart-Hancock business ventures should be assessed for what they are, not for who leads them or what she looks like. Rinehart is no feminist, but with her background, why would we expect her to be? She influences the economy, politics, the media and our public culture, but only as much as the strength of civil society has to match and outmatch her.

Men and women of Australia, lay off the fat attack. The best safeguard against the misuse of personal power is time and persistence, and a powerful sense of who we are and what we value. The location of power is always, and forever, fleeting

but never rests for long in one set of hands.

Fat, flesh and bone all turn to dust. Our minerals will turn into (pig)-iron and steel. And then they're gone.

Let's focus on that.



## **Peter Steele's hymns in sickness**

### BOOKS

*Andrew Bullen*

'What are those Golden Builders doing?' asked William Blake in 1818, and went on to ask further might there be some showing of Jerusalem 'near Tyburn's fatal tree? Is that/Mild Zion's hill's most ancient promontory, near mournful/Ever-weeping Paddington?' The great private visionary in our literature, Blake was given, as we know, to finding eternity in a grain of sand, so more likely than anybody then and now to find the heavenly Jerusalem in the enduring ordinariness of Paddington.

Peter Steele's great friend and mentor, Vincent Buckley wandered purposively around the streets of Parkville and Carlton in the early 1970s asking the same question of our immediate locality — 'names of their Lordships./Cardigan, Elgin, Lygon: Shall I find here my Lord's grave?' ['Golden Builders', I, page 46]. By the end of the 27 poems of the sequence 'Golden Builders', though certainly finding mournful ever-weeping Carlton, and for all the notated moments of his intense longing, Buckley heads out of town Romsey-wards, his birthplace up country, with that key question unanswered.

And what of Peter himself, another long-term denizen of these parts? Here he is, as early as 1972, out of bed one misty morning in time for 'Matins':

Out there in darkest Parkville it's a kind  
of animal country. Morning displays —  
I thought it was the gardener — someone trotting  
hale and compulsive, barely attached  
to four maleficent greyhounds, sleek and dumb.  
He's Bogart or Camus, a bigboned ghost  
easing himself and his charges around the block;  
they move as sweetly and as bloody-minded  
as if their talent were for treachery,  
not coursing and the would-be kill.  
We've traded words on form in wetter days,  
sodden together into comradeship,  
but not this morning. I'm praying in his trail,  
a sort of christian and a sort of man,  
watching him get between us the police



the park the children's hospital  
the bolted shelter for old derelicts  
and the zoo, that other eden, where  
some cruciform and prestidigious monkeys  
hang in the sunlight, and the sombre bears  
rove their concrete to sweat out the duration.

Among the half a dozen new poems in his latest book, *Braiding the Voices: Essays in Poetry*, 'Monday' tells us that Steele is still on the alert for signs, easily mistaken for something else, often cruciform:

Monday is Day Oncology, where the dark  
Burses arrive by courier, and we're glad  
To see them stripped for action, hooked in the air,  
Lucent against fear.

Maybe only Steele could see these bags of chemo as Christological signs, like 'the sixteen quilted maple leaves[?]/Their sugars candescent still, as is/To those who hope, scattered throughout the wards,/The upsprung Silver Man.' That's because Steele has always been a visionary; as with the zoo once, so now the oncology ward at St Vincent's Hospital offers hints of that other eden. If Buckley could surprise us with his essay 'The Strange Personality of Christ', then there's a PhD topic awaiting on 'The Strange Ubiquity of Christ in the Writings of Peter Steele'.

Christ is among us, he believes and his poems witness, in a thousand guises, seemingly mundane. Has anyone probed more constantly, more imaginatively, more in dialogue with contemporary culture, the Jesuit call 'to find God in all things'? His poems send sudden and often oblique glints, candescent moments, of what, of whom, he has seen glowing in the depths, the core, of things.

So I am tempted to say that Steele writes golden poem-bricks. He is one of our Melbourne golden builders, placing poem-brick on golden poem-brick. But Steele might well say 'But, mate, hold it, poems are not solid as bricks but fluid as words, pungent as voices. I've given you the clue in the title *Braiding the Voices*.'

How many voices are gathered into this book, as in all Steele's writing, voices past and present, famous and obscure, foreign and local? For Steele voices are presences, persons there before him and speaking to his attentiveness.

In this braiding book a dedicated essay of attentiveness is given to fellow poets Dante, Anthony Hecht, Buckley, Peter Porter, Les Murray, and Seamus Heaney. Other voices are called up for honour: in the Introduction Steele writes that 'two presences brood over this book' — Andrei Sinyavsky, the Russian dissident who

celebrated Russian writers to keep the best of Russia alive, and Anthony Hecht, American poet and a personal friend of Steele's who saw the poet's task as 'braiding his loose ends into a coherent pattern'.

The Introduction, to go no further, mentions John Dryden, John Donne, Norman MacCaig, George Herbert, and Shakespeare, in that order. In the second poem, 'Audience', Steele lines up, like birds on a wire, in one line Cicero and Buddha and then in another four lines Johnny Cash, Von Moltke (hero of the July Plot against Hitler), and St Paul, before coming to the Good Lord himself, all of them braided together by Cash's line 'Convicts are the best audiences I ever played for', and by Steele's seeing that means just about everybody, but these four of course are full-on convicts.

Moreover, Steele has honoured many of his friends and companions, including myself, and in this book Bill Uren (the rector of Newman College), with poems dedicated to them: we have the honour to be conjured presences in his work, the only chance of immortality this side of the grave for most of us. On their behalf I am bold to say, 'Thank you Peter, we are honoured more than we can say.'

Then there is the braiding voice itself, Steele's own: welcoming, celebrating, turning things over aloud in his mind and heart, testing — after all, as a man instructed long ago by Dean Swift, Steele still sometimes finds himself in the tiny southern continent of Lilliput and the truth of how things are with us here still needs to be told. And humorous, as his A to Z celebration of food in 'Auguri!', dedicated to Uren, shows us — he likes his lists does Peter Steele, and so in comic Homeric mode takes a deep breath in this poem to get us through a feast of food words. Comic exuberance suggests the Rabelaisian Steele, the man is a pubful and a choir of voices.

Steele's core voice is conversational, so suited for evoking presences and for braiding loose ends into coherence, always alert to the variety of the other, quickly shifting into different registers and back again and so holding and repaying our attention, sounding out the vastness of the world.

Given the encyclopedic range of voices and references in his work, we might suppose that Steele is the last Jesuit polymath, but living as I do, out there in darkening Parkville, at Jesuit Theological College I can tell you that is not the case, but Steele is master of us all in getting his knowledge to work and to the point — well, maybe only poets can do so. I find it exhilarating that Steele can round up so much into his work, ordering recondite references and fabled names into place, lining them up, with the gentle nudge of his voice, sonorous and quick. Read him aloud, readers; study his diction, poets and essayists.

The 18 essays in this book, seven for named poets, explore and celebrate poetry, and two the relationship between art and poetry, with titles that tease the mind: 'Poetry's Fugitives: A Christian Hearing', 'A Poet's Horizon: Four Faces of Reality', 'The Rocks and the Riot: Making Poetry'; most sweet of all, 'Past, Present,

Future: Poetry as the Mind in Love' makes me want to read not only it but also re-read so much poetry. I think, however, my favourite will be 'A Blessing of Creatures: Birds, Beasts, Verse'. Here's how the essay concludes:

If I ask with this essay's title in mind, 'How is this bird blessed?' then the simple answer is that it is blessed by being chosen — chosen to sing God's presence, even if sometimes in a blues key. And if I ask, 'How is this bird a blessing?' the equally simple answer is that, in haunting its hearer, it may be said to mediate that greatest of all hauntings, the Holy Ghost. Its mission is, after all, sacramental, because such is its song.

Little surprise I think that birdsong in this key should finally remind us that Steele's own voice is one ready to praise and give thanks and bless, a voice echoing and conveying gospel voices, a voice seeking out above all the Good Lord — who surely appears in 'Auguri!' as the Bread Man, as 'the convict's-in-waiting' in 'Audience', as 'the upsprung Silver Man' in 'Monday', and baldly as 'the Man' in 'Motley'.

And there's an essay here called 'Elemental Man: Contours of Christ' in which Steele gives us four of his own poems that align the Good Lord with the classical four elements: 'Breathing Days' for air, 'Star Man' for fire, 'Green Man' for earth and 'Water Man' for water. The essay gives us the experience of reading four of Peter Steele's poems through the eyes of Peter Steele. He is surprised at what he himself has written, partly because that is how poetry is, but mostly because they are poems about Christ. 'You write a poem', he says, 'partly to see what will happen, this time round, when you put yourself in the presence of mystery'. Poems, this essay tells us, can by their very nature mediate the Good Lord.

The essays in this book are a form of thank you to many of the significant presences in Steele's writing vocation. And surely all the poems of these last years are a hidden 'Hymn to God, my God, in My Sickness', John Donne's last and greatest poem. What more could any of us ask for ourselves, or for him?

So thank you Peter Steele for all your words, over many years, prayers and blessings, essays and poems. Thank you to your editors and publisher, and all the enablers of this book. All of them carriers and handlers of a hodful of essays and poems, worthy helpers in your task of laying a few more golden bricks of what we can boldly call the new Jerusalem. I'd bet on it, Marvellous Melbourne to a brick.

*Adapted from the speech given by Fr Andrew Bullen SJ at the 12 June 2012 launch of [Braiding the Voices](#), the latest book of poetry and essays from Fr Peter Steele SJ..*

## Teachers are wrong about performance pay

### EDUCATION

*Andrew Hamilton*



The Victorian Government plans to introduce performance pay for teachers. The teachers' union has objected to this proposal on the grounds that teachers are special. The union is right to object, but its argument is faulty. Performance pay is not wrong for teachers because they are special, but because it is wrong for everybody.

The case for performance pay rests on the assumption that work is a commodity. It is the possession of the worker, and can be broken into its component parts and traded accordingly. The more marketable we make our work by meeting KPIs and the like, the greater the financial return we can negotiate. The theory is that financial incentives of this kind will develop more profitable and productive enterprises.

This view is destructive because it focuses on a single aspect of work. Work involves a complex series of human relationships that far transcend the payment by employer to employee for something possessed by the latter.

In working relationships people engage other persons to join them and to act with them in particular ways. The relationship implies commitments by both sides. It is expected that persons employed by an enterprise will give themselves to the persons who employ them, to the enterprise itself, and to the people whom it serves.

The relationship also implies that employers will welcome and have a care for those whom they employ and make them participants in their enterprise. The long-term health of the organisation itself will depend on the quality of all these complex sets of relationships.

In this understanding of work, the relationship between employer and employee is not that between a buyer and the seller of a commodity. It is between a person who offers a service and another who accepts that service and rewards the giver. This relationship has a contractual aspect, but it also needs to be described in terms of mutual gift. Those employed give themselves fully within the relationships involved in their work. Employers thank employees for their work through the gift of a wage.

The concept of performance pay at best obscures the quality of relationships and the element of gift involved in work. At worst it treats work as a commodity that can be quantified and traded. To the extent that performance pay comes to be seen as natural, it will make irrelevant good working relationships, turn workers into competitors who vie to sell their skills and polish their KPIs, and minimise loyalty and responsibility both to the community and to the wider society through

the enterprise.

It naturally leads to short-term employment, and corrodes the mutual loyalties of workers and management, so leading inevitably to the loss of stored wisdom in the enterprise.

These consequences will be particularly harmful in educational, health and welfare organisations that work directly with people. Their effectiveness depends on the generosity of their workers in forming, encouraging and sustaining a gossamer web of relationships that are often intangible and involve self-effacement.

Workers strongly committed generally to these enterprises, and concretely to those whom it serves, will be insulted and betrayed by the suggestion that more money might inspire them to work harder, or by temptations to work harder in ways that are personally unsustainable for financial profit.

It is significant that performance pay is rife in financial businesses like banking and accounting, and has so generated support in business schools and consultancy firms that conduct surveys for government. Its effectiveness for productivity has become part of conventional wisdom.

It should give pause that it was precisely the breach of trust in relationships in the financial industry and the loss of wisdom in banking institutions that created the financial crisis. Pay for performance appears to have worked very efficiently in producing catastrophe.

I do not wish to deny the complexity facing the Victorian Government. It needs a policy that will attract good teachers who have a good understanding of their disciplines and skills, who can teach them well, and can interest and attract young people to realise their possibilities at all levels. These are high goals that require high commitment as well as high gifts. People serving the community so generously should be well remunerated.

But there are many calls on the public purse. As in all other areas, too, some teachers will surely have given up on high goals and do only what is necessary to keep their job.

These are realities. But at best the introduction of performance pay would be an irrelevance. No doubt many people with strong values will survive it, as they do other forms of idiocy. At worst the ideology that inspires it will fracture the delicate network of relationships that links teachers, students, schools and the larger community, and make it natural to view education as a commodity. That would be a tragedy for all of us.

## **Sex, drugs and Patrick White**

NON-FICTION

*Patti Miller*

Although I never met either of them, I once received a postcard from Patrick White and his partner Manoly Lascaris. I keep it in a small wooden inlay box in the hall closet with a few other treasures.

The card has a botanical drawing of fringed Australian violets on the front and on the back is written the date, *28.8.82*, and *Thank you for the honour*, signed first Patrick and then, underneath, Manoly. It arrived after I sent a note to White telling him that we had named our new baby son Patrick Manoly — to 'honour both the inspiration of your writing and your long and loving relationship'.

Our Patrick Manoly is now a beautiful young man who occasionally wonders in a good-natured fashion if he is the only bloke in Australia to be named after a gay couple. (He's not the only one to question it; recently at the Sydney Writers Festival, a young man, on hearing I had named my son Patrick for Patrick White, remarked, 'At least you didn't call him 'Manoly'. 'Oh but I did,' I responded gleefully.)

But for us, my partner Anthony and I, there was no question. White was part of our daily life, our conversations, our meals, even our relationship; you could say it was a kind of literary ménage à trois.

I found White first, when I was a teenager, so I had a prior claim. I studied *The Tree of Man* at school and fell into White's harsh arms without question. Stan's transcendence, seeing God in a line of ants and finally in a gob of spit, delighted my romantic mind, ever hungry for the glowing moment when the ordinary skin of the world split open and revealed its true nature.

But the real moment of no return arrived soon after when I read *Voss*. I came to an image, which, at 18, I recognised and adopted immediately as the central motif of my life.

I still have the original dusty copy with my name and 1972 written inside and, today, when I started flicking through the pages trying to find the image, I found a red circle around page 99. There it was: 'Then sometimes it seems that all these faults and hesitations, all the worst evil in me is gathering itself together into a solid core, and that I shall bring forth something of great beauty. This I call my oyster delusion.'

Oh yes, I thought then, that is me. I bob around in the tide of events, never doing anything of real significance, yet somehow I think one day that all 'these faults and hesitations' (though not evil, that was too big a claim to make even for a pretentious teenager) will produce a pearl of great beauty. The oyster delusion; I understood and feared even then it was delusion that could control a whole life.



Not long afterwards I went to New Zealand and met Anthony, who being a New Zealander, had not read or even heard of White. I gave him to understand there was no future for us without White in it. Being already a great reader, he allowed himself to be seduced, and to my great relief, fell equally in love with *The Tree of Man* and *Voss*, and then *A Fringe of Leaves* and over the years, *The Solid Mandala*, *The Twyborn Affair* and all the rest.

Back in Australia we went to university together and lived in a share house with our first-born son and a collection of art school students. Hurtle Duffield was our companion for weeks and months on end as we all read *The Vivisector*, passing the one paperback copy around the household. I must have been last to read it because it is still on my bookshelf 30 years later. *Riders in the Chariot* too went the rounds of the house, its four mystics singing to our youthful longing for something extraordinary.

I am making it sound as if we were a very bookish and perhaps pitiable household, having the most fun ever with Patrick White, but there was all the usual sex and drugs and rock'n'roll. None of that clashed with White, in fact the drugs in particular affirmed the transcendent moment, the light that could shine in any ordinary day.

Anthony and I moved away to the Blue Mountains, but the White affair continued for us both. We bought his books for each other, we read sentences or pages out to each other, we sat and read silently side by side in front of the fire, we trekked down to Sydney and saw *A Season at Sarsparilla* and *A Cheery Soul*, never quite as convinced by his plays, but always loyal.

So loyal in fact both of us discounted all reports of White's grumpiness, his ill temper. That was uncharacteristic, especially of me, because I've never thought being an artist was any excuse for bad behaviour. I've always thought a writer behaving badly was no different to the butcher behaving badly, but somehow, White's famous ill temper escaped my stolid censure. He was exempt. No one was allowed to criticise White to my face.

This morning I went to my bookshelf and slid out the half row of White books. I opened *The Solid Mandala* and saw Anthony's notes for a short story from 20 years ago in the back pages. The same in *A Fringe of Leaves*. *The Tree of Man* was falling to bits, no back or front cover; *Voss* was sticky-taped together.

And then I picked up *Flaws in the Glass* with its poetic opening deconstruction of the possibility of an innocent or truthful autobiography. Because it is a life story, I recalled the day White died. I was in the shower when Anthony came in to tell me and my tears mixed with the shower, making it seem as if I were shedding far too many tears for someone I had never met.

I wrote another note then, this time just to Manoly, expressing our sorrow and sympathy. Some weeks later we received a plain little card from 20 Martin Road, thanking us for our 'kind letter'. It also said 'Patrick and I were very flattered



when we first heard about 'Patrick Manoly' and I wish him luck — Yours Manoly Lascaris.'

And then to our shame, White started to fade a little in our daily lives. We remained faithful of course, still no one was allowed to criticise him in front of us — I once disrespectfully headed my lecture notes 'Leonie's lies' during an Oz lit class on White given by the Dame herself — but we didn't read him any more. When I taught at university I despaired of students enrolled in literary studies who had not even heard of White, but we didn't read him. He was a cherished memory, a shared love in the heart of our lives. But his books gathered dust.

And then I walked past my local bookshop last week and saw [The Hanging Garden](#) . I was afraid. What if I didn't like it? What if it was just our foolish youthful passion? What if I found him dreadfully overcooked as I found Christina Stead when I looked at her again?

I bought it of course, but gave it to Anthony first, unable to face the possible disillusionment. Anthony took it overseas with him to read in interminable airport lounges. I waited anxiously, not confessing my fears, not wanting to admit disloyalty. It seemed like it would somehow call into question everything we had shared if White turned out to be a youthful indulgence, an embarrassing extravaganza.

A week or so later Anthony skyped from his hotel room and said 'I've finished.'

'Yes,' I said, hearing my voice failing a little, holding my breath. 'And?'

'It affirms everything we ever thought and felt. Australia was lucky to have him. He sees and knows the human heart and mind, and expresses it, like no one else. Head and shoulders.'

I breathed out again. Anthony kept talking about the words, the awareness, the story, and I drank in every word like lovers do.

The next day I went to the hall closet and found the wooden box and dug through the cards and letters until I found the fringed violet card. It was wrapped in a plastic grocery bag with the plain card from Manoly. It seemed exactly right, an ordinary daily plastic bag, containing an affirmation of the way words make possible tender connections between human beings. I put the cards back, reassured that the centre held.

Today I opened *The Hanging Garden* and began to read; 'It made the reasonable child feel grave, important ...' The still familiar observations and rhythms fell around me like grace.

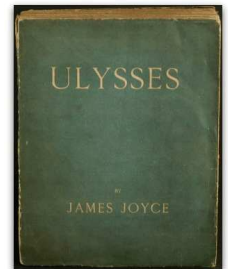
Thank you for the postcard Patrick White, I forgot to ever say. Thank you for all your words.

## 'Jesuit' James Joyce's Church challenge

### RELIGION

*Philip Harvey*

Religion is sometimes defined as an attempt to establish a more complete explanation of life. Perhaps this is why certain creative artists are seen as at odds with religion, their works an attempt to establish a more complete explanation of life. Shakespeare is a prime example. Emily Dickinson is incomprehensible without a knowledge of the Christianity she prosecuted. James Joyce is infamous for a worldview thought irreligious, if not anti-religious.



Shakespeare had reasons for keeping his religion private. Dickinson was more religious in her tendencies than her writing suggests. Likewise Joyce.

Claims that Joyce is a religious writer have gained traction over the past few years; some believe it is more like reclamation. When we read *Ulysses* the matter of Irish religion bedecks its pages.

The aesthete Buck Mulligan on page 1 delivers words of the Mass jocosely while shaving; he later sings a risqué self-made satire called 'The Ballad of Joking Jesus'. Stephen Dedalus employs Thomas Aquinas to explain the reality of Sandymount Strand, a beach on Dublin Bay. The main character, Leopold Bloom, an assimilated Jew, wanders into a church where he misinterprets the liturgy to comic effect. The one character in the novel quoted as definitely believing in God is the raunchy and adulterous Molly Bloom.

It is little wonder that the puritanical Catholic hierarchy were offended by this adverse picture of Dublin life. It acted against the strict moralism they wished to instil throughout a nascent Irish Free State.

Suppressing *Ulysses* in Ireland was one of the great imaginative losses for that growing nation; it was denied a version of its selfhood that took until the 1980s to discover. But it was also a religious loss. Undeniably, Joyce worked to undermine and question the dominant Catholicism of his upbringing, but this is quite a different thing to saying that he was opposed to religion, or had no religious sensibility.

Literature like *Ulysses* is not given to typecasting. Mulligan turns out to be a Wildean believer in Hellenism who preaches a delusory form of Irish classicism. Dedalus rejects priesthood, choosing instead the priesthood of artistic creation. He searches for a father figure who can free up the quandary of his own frustrated intellectualism.

That figure turns out to be Bloom, someone wrestling with the conflicting inheritance of scientific utopianism and Judaic yearning. His wife Molly is herself a

life force, a lover of the world who relishes every moment of existence, whatever her present circumstances.

The characters deepen with each re-reading, which is why [Bloomsday](#) is celebrated like a literary secular feast-day each 16 June. The novel honours the complexity of Dublin, including the possibilities of its religion. Far from shying away from the doubts and hypocrisies of Dubliners, Joyce puts them centre stage, there to play out their certainties and uncertainties.

Such a book was going to be a bugbear for those in church and state trying to introduce a uniformity of belief for all in Ireland. Joyce was not only saying that Irish religion had a history outside of Christianity, but that its Catholicism had lost connection with past Celtic traditions. The novel is a celebration of the senses, of the body as a wonder in itself in all its processes, and of the very Christian awareness that this is all something that grows in meaning by being shared with others.

One pioneer of this elevation of Joyce as a religious writer is the current abbot of Glenstal Abbey in Limerick, John Patrick Hederman. In his book *The Haunted Inkwell* Hederman says that Joyce's work is 'a life of search for the word: not the word of incarnation which would allow his word to be made flesh in the most satisfying and aesthetically pleasing form, but the word of resurrection — his flesh made word and restored to life'.

Joyce's religious vision gets even more intense in that macaronic maze, *Finnegans Wake*. The poet Seamus Deane has argued that the *Wake* is one end result of the 19th century search for a key to all mythologies, represented by such figures as Sir James Frazer, and in the 20th century Carl Jung and Mircea Eliade.

Joyce's solution was not going to be academic. We inherit a 'novel' that is unclassifiable, a babbling babel of astounding verbal inventiveness that retells the legends of East and West in a continuous cycle of death and resurrection, i.e. fin agains wake.

This is heady storytelling in anyone's terms, and my attitude has always been to plunge rather than dip. Did Joyce write the *Wake* to test the strict interpretation of litterateurs and dogmatic clerics?

There is no doubt religion as a means of human understanding is central. Lots of fun at *Finnegans Wake*, which in one portmanteau Joyce calls a 'funferal'.

Neither of these masterpieces would exist in their final form were it not for Joyce's Jesuit education. Joyce is one of the truly great products of that educational method, with its respect for classical education, its propensity for creating extraordinary structures of categorisation, and its cultured skill in making all sorts of unlikely connections.

Joyce was once asked why he gave his Jesuit teachers such a hard time in his novels, to which he replied that they're the ones that can take it. Another time he

said to a colleague, 'You allude to me as a Catholic. Now for the sake of precision and to get the correct contour on me, you ought to allude to me as a Jesuit.'

Make of that what you will, but it seems to me that the psychological penetration and heightened sense of relationship in his books owe much to St Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises. His remarkable testing of language and form itself is not an accident of his schooling.

Jung himself said that 'There are major and minor prophets, and history will decide to which of them Joyce belongs. Like every true prophet, the artist is the unwitting mouth-piece of the psychic secrets of his time, and is often as unconscious as a sleep-walker. He supposes that it is he who speaks, but the spirit of the age is his prompter, and whatever this spirit says is proved true by its effects.'

## Sympathy for the dodgy salesmen of Australian politics

### POLITICS

*Zac Alstin*



The Thomson and Slipper affairs may have brought parliament into disrepute, but this should not imply that parliament was well reputed before these scandalous stories emerged. Greens Leader Senator Christine Milne has [called for](#) an integrity commission or anti-corruption body, to restore public faith. But when it comes to the integrity of politicians, corruption alone cannot explain the extensive public disdain for our ruling class.

Such diverse elements as sexism, Tony Abbott, broken promises, climate change, Tony Abbott, faceless men, minority government, and even the allegedly intractable negativity of the Opposition under Tony Abbott, have been blamed for the decline of our political discourse.

However bad the current political malaise, it is only exacerbated by the endless partisan squabbles over who exactly is to blame. There's plenty of blame to go around; it would be quicker and easier to start by identifying those who are not to blame (nominations will be accepted in Comments, below).

In the meantime, let us examine one of the more endemic factors in the present political distemper: duplicity. Duplicity implies being 'double' in one's conduct. It is the opposite of integrity, which comes from the word 'integer', as in a whole number, and implies wholeness or soundness, a relationship of equivalence between one's words and thoughts, or one's thoughts and actions. In other words, what you see is what you get.

Yet for most of our politicians, what you see is definitely not what you get. How many times have you heard a politician verbally weasel his or her way through the tiniest gap in credulity, saying evidently inane and childish things, merely to score a point against his or her political opponent?

Instances abound amid the recent scandals wherein any given Opposition member will utter seemingly sincere and emotionally invested words that nonetheless convey the distinct impression that he or she will say almost anything in order to strip the minority government of a precious vote.

Of course, the Government is able to issue equally impressive appeals to the principles of justice, or whatever other principle of convenience will ornament their desperate wish to retain that precious vote. Public sympathy for either side is tempered if not nullified by our strong suspicion that both Government and Opposition would change their positions in a heartbeat if circumstances were reversed.

But this duplicity is hardly new. Nearly every public utterance from every politician is tainted by the subtext of scoring political points. When the opinions expressed by almost any politician are crafted to tip the scales in their favour, we soon realise there is nothing to be gained by listening. Why bother attending to political debate when we already know the conclusion: government good, opposition bad, and vice-versa.

If it is painful for us to listen, how much worse must it be for politicians, forcing themselves to behave in such a way? Duplicity is not healthy. It is unpleasant, uncomfortable and dispiriting to constantly undermine one's own integrity. The 'dodgy salesman' is no one's ideal of human flourishing.

Likewise, no one admires people who put others down or build themselves up with empty words. Yet a politician is often called upon to condemn their enemies as pig-headed while describing their allies as people of conviction; to decry their enemies' change of heart as weakness, while praising their own as virtuous pragmatism. The beam in thine own eye is, no doubt, a tribute to the hardworking Australians in our construction industry.

It should come as no surprise that the public has hardened in disdain. What is surprising is that the public did not react to these antics sooner.

But the fact is that such tricks are not so objectionable when they are performed for the sake of a good cause. When politicians become the avatars of our personal causes, their vices mysteriously turn to virtues. This is, after all, the same dynamic that causes politicians to behave so oddly in the first place: the difference between Abbott's wearisome negativity and his insuperable determination is relative to which side of politics you are on.

The real change in recent years is that Australian politics is running out of passionate causes. As symbolised by our precarious minority government, there is little by way of firm public conviction to distinguish Labor from Liberal. We have two major parties telling us we are hard done by, and promising to make things better. But relatively minor economic promises are overshadowed by the desperate struggle for control of the parliament.

It is the primacy of this purely political struggle that has brought the objectionable duplicity of everyday political behaviour to the forefront of public attention.

There is undoubtedly something degrading to the individual politicians caught up in a political culture that encourages them to constantly speak against their true minds. We can only hope this public disillusionment prepares the way for a future wave of political sincerity; and thank God we are not in politics.

## **Vietnam mates' post-war suicides**

POETRY

*Karl Cameron-Jackson*

### **Roger, my staunch, dear friend**

Roger — why did you choose to die that hot summer '84?  
I have many sweeter memories than your too early death.  
I look up as the wild geese fly over me in arrow formation  
heralding the promise of an early spring.  
Remember passion's chariot my wild geese companion  
so huge and bright in steely blue with white-walled tyres  
your soft fold-top, bull-wheeled Buick  
silver spare strapped astride the door  
happy charioteer — you drove her with tartan scarf wide-swept  
flapping from your laughing neck in the slipstream of your joy.  
Remember the secret we shared of slant-eyed Suzy  
your inherited summer love, and the two campaigns  
of sad and wasted souls  
when you strode those two unrewarded wars with me.  
Ideal-driven youngsters we followed a dream  
to cleanse Malaya's steamy heart of Chinese Terrorists  
instead, saddened by the premature death of your older  
only brother, shared with heroes in that now forgotten war  
that doomed him to die a lonely, jungle death in Vietnam  
and John's far off dying broke your lonely mother's heart.  
We proudly flew Australia's flag, we two  
then laid him on it when he died.  
I remember well your journey to purge your soul's  
bitter-sweet memories. You sought a hero's death  
to die — perhaps to live — once again like your brother  
in the core of your distracted mother.



Later — on Africa's daily bloodstained sheets  
you found no absolution  
as a mercenary you found only heartache  
in the crazed and raging war on Apartheid.  
Lion-hearted — strong in so many ways — my heart  
cries out, Mate, but I cannot absolve your pain  
a hurt no-one has ever heard, nor will again  
except in my brain, where your memory lingers on.  
I hear your laughter in the freshening wind  
your joy in simple things  
fills the sails of each passing breeze  
as it stirs and open the curtains of my soul.  
We dreamed to make a better world  
Mate, you should have waited  
'cos then you could have created  
a line of sturdy boys and winsome girls.  
Instead — your family name ended with you  
the Mother's love for which you yearned — was wasted  
in the bands of time. For she — held by tightly tethered  
bonds, wrapped John's soul in hers.  
Your Mother's first-born hero son, ripped out your heart  
on the altar-stone of her worship. You tried, my friend  
but few others knew the tragic, heavy cross you bore  
until living became too hard a grief.  
In dying there is freedom, yet, I am still saddened  
by the final way you chose  
to die ... to sleep ... a slow encroaching death alone  
in some quiet, filtered-sunlight, eucalypt-wooded glen  
the exhaust pipe left running smoothly  
slowly breathing soothing, smothering smoke

to drift away in dreams that would not survive.  
Your over-heated, bloated, forlorn corpse  
took three hot days to fill you full of maggots  
birthed from frantic buzzing blowflies  
to die, alone like this?  
Is this the death you really wanted?  
To fill some passing innocent with loathing  
stuffing their the nostrils  
with the stench of your slow decay.  
But then, you and I know too well the smell of Death  
— death is death  
— to it we all succumb.  
In memory's eye I still see you smile my friend  
— showing off to God  
I remember passion's chariot my wild geese companion  
your soft fold-top, bull-wheeled Buick  
silver spare strapped astride the door  
you driving her, Mate with your tartan scarf wide-swept  
flapping from your laughing neck in the slipstream of your joy.  
**tears hardly fall anymore**  
my dad and his RSL mates repeatedly told us  
'Vietnam was a toy-boy war, only 501 died'  
as though numbers are a marker of grief  
I grieve for diggers murdered by land mines  
sown in unpredictable rows by our sappers  
then picked up at night by VC — then re-sown  
camouflaged on tracks to kill or maim our own  
my tears often fall in an unremitting flood for eight mates  
who committed suicide soon after they arrived back home  
for Roger, who drowned in carbon-monoxide

alone among the trees he loved in Toowoomba  
for Russ, when he parachuted off South Head  
his clothes laid military style on the cliff-top  
for John, my best mate, who died of a brain tumour  
caused by Agent Orange they claim was never used  
another — banished to the 'doghouse' — was found  
by his son — swinging slowly from a beam in his shed  
Craig took a long midnight swim — we were told  
'It must have been an accident' — but his dog tags  
lay on top of his neatly folded clothes  
Sandy — tired of being stuffed around by DVA  
blew his head off lounging in one of their chairs  
two of my diggers — drowned in an alcoholic haze  
from memories of their lost families — indifference  
and a falsely indoctrinated GUILT

a VVCS councillor in Tassie's early days made some believe  
they'd fought in a 'filthy war' — in a place we had no right to be  
as a brave ex-Moratorium hero reminded me — quite recently  
it isn't fear of death that drives these brave officers  
and men to take their lives — it's heartbreak  
tears hardly fall anymore  
for the fog of forgetfulness descends on those bold 501 'Young Ones'  
killed during Vietnam's long ten-year war — but when desperate mates  
suicide — all alone — the waste of good men's lives depresses me more

## **Feminists and gay Christians who accept the Church**

### RELIGION

*Kristina Keneally*

'Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them,' says Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. Look at what these words say to his followers.

You don't need a crowd, just two or three. 'Gathered in my name', not 'gathered in a church' or 'at a certain time or place', but simply 'in my name': that is, two or three, with Christ as the common centre of their faith, gathered to pray and praise God. 'There am I among them.' This is an affirmative statement. It's a positive statement. It is a statement of assurance. It is a statement made with no other qualifications.

Throughout history, this radical idea, that all you needed to form a Christian community is two or three people gathered in the name of Christ, has kept the Christian faith alive in the hearts of believers.

Think of the early Christian community in the first three centuries, threatened by a lack of religious freedom in the Roman Empire and a ban on public church buildings. Think of the persecution of Christians, and especially Catholics, in countries like Poland under communism.

Look at the growing house church movement in China — a country that is on track to become the biggest Christian nation on earth, and you can see that a community doesn't need a building or clergy or a large number of people to be a Christian community. Just two or three people gathered in Jesus' name.

For 40 years, people have been gathering to celebrate their Catholic faith under the name [Acceptance](#). At first they met in people's homes. Later they met in halls, sometimes provided by other faith congregations: the Uniting Church, the Unitarian Church. They celebrated Mass. They put their faith into action by supporting good works in the community. They supported one another, prayed for one another, and grew in their faith together.

In the 1980s Acceptance moved physically closer to the Catholic Church, celebrating Mass at a hall next to St Canice's, Elizabeth Bay. Finally in 1990 Acceptance members gathered for the first time in a Catholic Church, at St Canice's, to celebrate Mass. Today, they gather at St Joseph's Newtown. They have celebrated a weekly Mass continuously for most of the past 40 years.

The founder of Acceptance, Garry Pye, had a mustard seed of faith. A homosexual Catholic man who grew up when homosexuality was illegal, he knew the harsh reality of accepting himself in a civil society and religious community that rejected, condemned and punished people who were homosexual.

And yet, despite all of that, he had enough faith in Jesus' promise that

'wherever two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among you' that he invited others to join him in Acceptance.

I never knew Pye. He died in 1990, before I moved to Sydney. I wonder what he would have thought about the Australia we live in today. I wonder what he would have thought about a former premier of NSW launching Acceptance's 40th anniversary — make that the female, American-born, Catholic former premier of NSW. I'm not sure which part of that sentence would have surprised him more!

While Pye patterned Acceptance along similar lines to [Dignity USA](#), he wanted to give the group a distinctive Australian identity. *Acceptance* refers to both the individual's struggle to accept both their faith and their sexuality, and society and the church's struggle to accept people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender.

A lot has changed since Pye travelled to America and met with Dignity in the early 1970s. Homosexuality is decriminalised, and many rights for same sex people and their families have been won. Not all families are equal yet before the law, but so much has been gained.

Even in the church there are some signs of acceptance: members of the organisation can now worship freely and participate in liturgies in a Catholic church, though some places adopt a kind of 'don't ask, don't tell' approach.

Just two months ago the Bishop Emeritus of Sydney, Geoffrey Robinson, spoke in Baltimore and called for 'a new study of everything to do with sexuality' — a kind of study that he predicted 'would have a profound influence on church teaching concerning all sexual relationships, both heterosexual and homosexual'.

He went on to say that churches' emphasis on the profound significance of sex is correct, but that natural law approaches to sexual morality and interpretations of ancient scriptural passages on homosexual and other sexual activity are in need of correction.

I think again of Pye and all the members of Acceptance, of the priests who have supported Acceptance, of the families and friends and members of other churches who responded in faith to Pye's invitation to join him in Jesus' name. Acceptance truly is a mustard seed of faith that is moving mountains.

I have spoken a great deal so far in terms that reflect the perspective of a Christian believer. But I want to speak to another audience, too: those who are not Christians, who struggle to accept why people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persist in a Church that in many ways continues to reject them.

Sometimes I find it harder to speak to non-believers than to the hierarchal church. The responses can range from genuine inquiry through to ridicule and condemnation. For example, if you permit me to draw an analogy with the experience of being a feminist woman in the Catholic Church. Recently the writer Catherine Deveny tweeted that my claim to be a Catholic and a feminist showed I

was 'suffering serious cognitive dissonance'.

Twitter is great, but it is hardly an easy place to have a serious or detailed discussion about the complexity of human life and the intertwining issues of faith, liturgy, ritual, identity and ecclesiology. But we should have those discussions. They are opportunities for, as one of my university professors called them, educative moments.

Acceptance's anniversary provides the opportunity to add another rich layer to our understanding of the experience of gay, lesbian, transgender and bisexual people in Australia. Just as importantly, it is also an opportunity to add a rich layer to the history of the Catholic Church in Australia.

It is a chance to invite people who may have strong views in any particular direction to understand better the complex fabric woven from church, faith, identity and culture that Acceptance represents.

A moment ago I purposefully mentioned ecclesiology, the study of the church itself. One of the greatest ecclesialogists of the modern era is Hans Kung, a Swiss Catholic priest and theologian. He asserts that the church is both sinful and sinless, that it is made up of the people here on earth and the kingdom of God in heaven. He takes seriously the claim that we are called to bring about the kingdom of God on earth.

What do I see in that? I see a church that doesn't belong to Rome or the hierarchy exclusively. I see a church that is made up of all its believers. I see a church that is on a mission, striving to perfection, making mistakes and evolving, full of grace and seeking forgiveness.

When people ask me how I reconcile being a Catholic with being a feminist, I try to describe this vision of church. I try to explain what my faith means to me, how the liturgy and sacraments and ritual sustain me, how I find grace and forgiveness and acceptance within the Catholic Church.

Yes, I find things that abhor and disgust me, like the abuse of children, and I condemn them. I also find discrimination and teachings I don't accept and want to change. But none of these takes away from the core tenets of my faith: that Jesus is both human and divine, the son of God, and in him I am saved.

And when they ask: why not convert, I say why? Why give up the sacraments, liturgy, ritual and faith that the Church gives to me? If Kung is right, indeed, if Vatican II is right, then we are all the church. The history of Acceptance, and Robinson's statement, makes clear that the church does change, the attitudes, teachings and understanding can change, the Holy Spirit moves within the church by stirring the hearts of believers.

## Lingerie football's naked sexism

SPORT

*Catherine Marshall*

There are lessons to be learned from the debacle that is the American Lingerie Football League (LFL), a female gridiron competition that requires its players to wear bras, panties and garters as they come to blows on the field, to potentially forego payment for their efforts, and to sign a contract that requires them to wear clothing that might result in 'accidental nudity'.



The first is that we Australians are a gullible lot. While groups like [Collective Shout](#) and some individual columnists have done much to highlight the misogyny that is inherent to this form of entertainment, they have done so against a rousing tide of public support for this seedy American import.

Some 6000 people are reported to have attended the recent exhibition match in Brisbane; hundreds of commentators have clogged internet forums calling the LFL 'harmless fun', and pointing out that 'the players are happy that they're finally getting an audience'. People are flocking like sheep to join the LFL fanclub, insisting all the while that it's 'real sport' rather than female objectification.

It's hard to believe the crowds haven't noticed that the emperor, as it were, isn't wearing any clothes.

But this is just the response the league's founder, Mitchell Mortaza, will have been hoping for: televised LFL games in the US currently attract 40 million viewers; if the league is embraced by Australians, just imagine how much more enlarged his wallet will become .

As international expansion goes, the league's move to Australia has been too easy, with few people bothering to question Mortaza's disingenuousness.

On the one hand, he claims that the LFL is not sexually exploitative ('If we just based this on sex appeal, this sport never would have grown at the pace that it did in the States, because you can get far more sexier content anywhere else,' he told SBS). On the other hand, he implicitly concedes that the only way female athletes can attract attention in a saturated sports market is by taking off their clothes.

'I didn't create that environment,' he adds as if to vindicate himself . But the enthusiasm with which he is promoting his brand — and its 'True Fantasy Football' tagline — implies he's pleased as punch such an environment exists. And Australians, it seems, are happy to give him the platform he needs for success.

The second lesson is that we Australians are not the progressively egalitarian people we imagine ourselves to be. As much as we give lip service to female equality, women, it seems, will still be exploited whenever the opportunity arises, they will still be judged on their appearance, and those who carry the feminist flag



will be vilified as though it were still 1972.

The popularity of the LFL is the perfect experiment in how women's physical attributes play a crucial role in their commercial success: according to the Australian Womensport and Recreation Association, male-dominated sports are represented in between 90 and 99 per cent of sports coverage in the Australian media, an imbalance that is repeated in other western nations. But the numbers change when the sportswomen in question remove some of their clothing, as the rip-roaring popularity of the LFL shows.

And the expectation that women become more interesting the less clothing they wear applies to even the most elite of athletes: in the lead up to the 2000 Sydney Olympics, the International Volleyball Federation introduced a rule (recently revoked) obliging female players to wear bikinis that were no more than six centimetres wide at the hip. (There was no similar demand on male players). In South Africa, a journalist was told by a Cricket SA official that the women's national team couldn't get sponsorship because 'they don't show enough skin'.

It's no surprise that there are plenty of young women happy to comply with this requirement, for it reinforces their desirability, and feeling beautiful is a powerful evolutionary imperative. What is surprising is the level of public support — in stadiums and on internet forums — for a practice that reduces women to a field full of breasts and bottoms and, somewhere amidst it all, a football.

The final lesson is that we will always have among us men who will never comprehend the damage that sexual objectification does to all women — their mothers, wives, sisters and daughters included. They are the ones who have claimed behind their anonymous online signatures that feminists are 'fat and ugly' (thus reinforcing feminists' assertions that women are judged on their looks); they refer back to Darwinism when excusing their treatment of women; they behave like teenage boys when the LFL comes to town.

These men — and all those who support or perpetuate spectacles like the LFL — could learn a lesson themselves: the 'red-blooded male' excuse has grown stale, and it is time to separate men's libido from the value that they attribute to women. Few women would sanction a 'sporting code' that required male athletes to run around nearly naked and unprotected on a sports field, all in the name of titillation; indeed, they would regard it as inhumane. Let's show women the same respect.

## **The feminist diet**

MEDIA

*Ellena Savage*

There are certain places where beauty is extreme, and everyone seems to have it. One of those places is Tokyo, where I have been living. It is an affluent city, and as such, people-watching is like browsing a catalogue. The clothes are elegant and expensive, hair and makeup slick, footwear impossibly clean and for women, totally impractical. Last week I saw a woman on crutches on the train wearing heels. That's commitment.

The bodies underneath the carefully draped Italian linen are slender and lithe, observant of careful calorie control. Among these impeccably-dressed animatrons, I feel like a mass of pink flesh. Which, given my average size, is ridiculous. It would be ridiculous even if I were big. But having felt fat since before puberty, like most little girls exposed to the culture they're being trained to fit into, it's a feeling I'm used to, and one I prefer to ignore.

Sometimes it's impossible to ignore, though. Squeezing my own body fat in front of the mirror is a horrible, but familiar experience. Reflecting on the self-loathing involved makes me red with rage and embarrassment. I should be above that.

Today's women are united more by their collective disgust of their bodies than they are by any other factor. Many statistics consolidate this, a scary one being that 51 per cent of nine and ten-year-old middle-class girls in America feel better about themselves if they are on a diet.

Different strands of feminism, those which emphasise women's economic participation, peace activism, campaigns around sexual safety or sex work, or around women's health or parenting issues, consistently encounter women who can't identify with their subset of feminism. Perhaps they don't experience violence, or they have enough buying power to not feel economically isolated.

But all women know what it feels like to hate their bodies. To hate the only material thing they truly own, the vehicle with which they participate in life. It's truly absurd.

The preference for women's thinness is often thought of as a straight male preference. But given the variety and complexity of male sexualities, and the changing standards of beauty between generations and cultures, it is difficult to believe that there is one 'type' that straight men biologically prefer to look at.

The body-type plastered everywhere we care to look is long and bony, broad shouldered and with a hollowed-out chest. It is white. It might be truly attractive to some straight men, but if anyone's sexual preferences are communicated in those images, it is the iconic gay male designers who pioneered the modern

fashion industry. The waif aesthetic resembles adolescent male beauty.

The architects of this beauty are of course, as men, also complicit in bolstering male privilege, even if they don't enjoy it to the same degree that straight men do. But the prestige ascribed to this body type — it is, after all, the body of the fashion industry, a huge economy — should not be conflated with sex. It is about class. That kind of beauty takes a lot of time and money.

Which might be the reason straight men don't volunteer their objections to the bag-of-bones look they are taught to admire. Maybe they're not aware of how their conscious-level tastes have been manipulated as much as women's have. They want what they're taught to want, not what they really want. In our culture, the act of selecting mates is more about social status than it is about expressing the honest desires we have. Of course individuals break this mould all the time, but structurally, it's something we are constantly fighting with.

Magazine beauty has a high status because of the cost of its maintenance. This is no biological basis for attraction. In other cultures, different body shapes are prioritised for the same reason — prestige — with the same negative effect on women's self-worth.

We often hear women excuse their indulgences in fashion by declaring their exercise of 'personal choice'. But we women are looked-at people, constantly weighed up by our appearance. We are unable to imagine how we'd present ourselves if we weren't looked at, if our choices were truly for ourselves alone. It is highly unlikely our choices would reflect the arbitrary trends of fashion. Until we are not looked at, we won't know true choice.

This uncritical fixation on 'choice' — a capitalist idea, really — brings to mind an unpopular quote by Simone de Beauvoir. The French feminist once declared, 'No woman should be authorised to stay at home and raise her children. Society should be totally different. Women should not have that choice, precisely because if there is such a choice, too many women will make that one.'

It sounds as though de Beauvoir doesn't want women to exercise choice. But what she's really saying is that we are so shaped by our history of confinement — to the domestic, the emotional, the beautiful — that given the freedom to 'choose', the easiest choice is to stick with the thing that has oppressed us all along.

Obviously, women should oppose the structures that restrict their choices. And they should do it with their wallets. But men should oppose them too; as it is, they are reduced to consumers of women's appearances that have little to do with the human dimensions of their desires.

## Intimate study of a failing marriage

### FILMS

*Tim Kroenert*

***Take This Waltz* (MA). Director: Sarah Polley. Starring. Michelle Williams, Luke Kirby, Seth Rogen. 112 minutes**

A group of women debate whether fondness and familiarity with a long-term spouse are not better than the thrill and passion of a new relationship. If you still *like* your husband after decades of marriage, one argues, then that is both fortunate and preferable to the uncertainty of starting over with a new and unproven partner.

Besides, interjects another, everything new gets old. The scene takes place in a communal shower at a local swimming pool, and the contrast between the women's varied naked bodies reinforces the truth of this statement.

*Take This Waltz* is an intimate study of one failing marriage, and of a woman torn between the familiarity of the 'old' and the excitement and danger of the new.

It is actor Michelle Williams' second film about marriage breakdown in as many years, following 2010's devastating [Blue Valentine](#). The marital disintegration that was the subject of that film was marked by accelerating and mutually destructive ferocity. In *Take This Waltz* the breakdown is more passive and wearying, but no less horrific.

Margot (Williams) has been married to Lou (Rogen) for five years. It seems that the majority of their interactions these days are of an affectionately infantile nature: she speaks in a faux baby voice while he coos and cajoles her.

Watching these private moments feels like an invasion, but they are utterly revelatory about the nature of this relationship. Rogen, a brash comic actor who is surprisingly effective in this more dramatic role, and the always-superb Williams, nail the dynamic perfectly. To Lou this playfulness is a mark of intimacy, while to Margot it is a kind of deflection; at one point she is appalled when Lou tries to kiss her in the midst of one of these games.

In fact writer-director Polley hints frequently that Margot is in a state of arrested development. When Margot uses dated slang, a friend quips that she is stuck in 1982; we know indirectly that 1982 was actually Margot's birth year. Another key scene for Margot's character is soundtracked by the early 1980s hit 'Video Killed the Radio Star'. The film's title comes from a Leonard Cohen song that would have been released during Margot's childhood.

Margot's marital ennui, masked by this 'baby game' with Lou, is exacerbated by her attraction to their artist neighbour, Daniel (Kirby). Tellingly, the attraction is as much about communication as it is physical. Margot and Daniel have real conversations, and their first, intense sexual encounter is entirely verbal.

This, in contrast to an anniversary dinner where Lou prefers to sit in silence than engage in small talk. Arrested development or not, it is hard not to sympathise with Margot's dilemma of choosing between the unfulfilled present and the risky promise of a vastly changed future, even if we disagree with her way of resolving it.

Rather than relentlessly earnest, *Take This Waltz* is quirky in a sometimes heavy-handed manner, though its oddities are loaded with meaning. Early in the film we find Margot on assignment rewriting pamphlets for a medieval theme park; mundane work (she's not exactly a novelist) with a fantastical facade.

Soon after it is revealed that she has a debilitating (unlikely) fear of 'transfers'; of the anxious, uncertain time between when you disembark from one plane and board the next. This fear of transition can easily be extrapolated to reflect a fear of the space between the two relationships that make claims upon her.

Such loaded quirkiness is also employed to illuminate the male characters — or, more accurately, Margot's perceptions of them. Lou seems to be endlessly cooking innumerable permutations of chicken, as research for a themed cookbook that he is working on. He is thus linked inextricably to domesticity.

Daniel, on the other hand, apart from his romantic appeal as a struggling artist, works as a rickshaw puller. He is associated with the outside world and with movement. This attracts Margot just as Lou's domesticity repels her.

Margot's fear, not of change but of the uncertainty that lies between one state of existence and the next, is revealing. Such times may be fraught, but they are also times of growth. If Margot is in a state of emotional immaturity, then, it becomes apparent, the condition of her marriage is as much a symptom as a cause.

## **Politics played as holy comedy in Cambodia**

### RELIGION

*Andrew Hamilton*

Meetings between holiness and politics are inherently dramatic. Think of Jesus' trial, of A'Beckett's murder, of Luther at Worms, of Romero's last sermon. Most of these were tragedies. In Fr Pierre Ceyrac, a French Jesuit priest who [died last week](#) at the age of 98, politics and holiness met dramatically, but as comedy.

I met Pierre in the Cambodian refugee camps by the Thai Border. It was at the beginnings of the Jesuit Refugee Service. Pierre was then in his early 70s, having come from India where he had spent most of his Jesuit life, notably helping to form a national association of many thousand Catholic students.

He was a charismatic figure whose focus was entirely on the people whom he gathered together. He had an instinctive grasp of pastoral needs, but little interest in the institutional structures that might carry his work into the future. He lived for the day because the day is the place where people live.

Pierre was a recognisably holy man in the tradition of Francis of Assisi, whose gaiety, freedom and deep compassion he shared. He was totally present to the people with whom he was speaking and enjoyed their company. As a result those of us who knew him came quickly to treasure and to love him.

He also had a total freedom with money. He was comfortable begging for funds for his beloved refugees from leading people in French society and enjoyed their company. But he wanted nothing for himself. By my counting he had only a pair of sandals and a change of clothing, and never seemed to eat.

The Cambodian refugee camps were set in a complex and cynical political context. The United States and ASEAN nations supported them because they were associated with resistance groups, including the Khmer Rouge, which fought the Vietnamese occupation. The camps were supplied with food by the United Nations Border Relief Organisation (UNBRO) that also established the rules under which the many NGOs and volunteers worked.

The camp was set between the guns of the Thai army and the Vietnamese forces. It was guarded and gutted by members of the Thai paramilitary, many of whom were recruited from prisons.

Pierre was involved in simple community work, resourcing refugee groups that supported women and children at risk. Like other volunteers he had to find a way of working that expressed his idealism and faith and at the same time recognised the morally ambiguous context within which he was working. Nails given for building schools in the camp, for example, might be used to make mines that cost children their legs inside Cambodia.

These larger questions did not trouble Pierre. He was ruled by a single-minded

love of the refugees whose faces he saw. They alone mattered. In serving them he was ready to disobey regulations whether made by the Thai authorities, UNBRO or NGOs. The challenge was to act in this way without being expelled from the camp.

Pierre managed to do this by being himself. He adopted a patently open hearted and friendly approach to people, including UN officials, Thai army colonels, the paramilitary and others who controlled the life of the refugees. His love was indiscriminating and his judgments of people kind to a fault.

Pierre's violations of rules were notable. The camp regulations allowed volunteers to bring into the camp only \$5 each day. Pierre often brought in more than \$1000, having cashed cheques from overseas relatives. The Thai authorities must have known what he was doing, but they knew, respected and liked him.

He was caught only once, and by mistake. The guards were told to look out for an old driver in Pierre's NGO who was bringing in large sums of money. The guards thought Pierre was the offender, and duly caught him red-handed. In fact, the target was a bus driver who was organising a lottery inside the camp. But having been caught, Pierre had to be sanctioned. The authorities sinbinned him for a month, and then allowed him to carry on as usual.

The United Nations security procedures for NGOs were also strict. If a shell landed in or near the camp, inevitable from time to time given the position of the camp, all NGO members had to evacuate the camp. Pierre scorned these provisions because they provided security only for expatriates, not for refugees. When there was danger he declined to leave the camp if he was there; he drove to the camp if he was away from it.

Like the Thai authorities, the UNBRO officials saw Pierre as an unguided missile, but also respected his integrity and allowed him space.

Young volunteers, in particular, had to reconcile their idealism with the ambiguous political reality of the camps. Pierre's pastoral presence and his celebration of Mass helped many find meaning and a way to live within ambiguity. The simplicity of his life and the depth of his accompaniment of people embodied the story of Christ that he recalled in the Eucharist.

He gathered up all the pain the volunteers encountered and experienced in the camps, all the joy they found in acts of accompaniment, and all the hope that life might come through them in this place and experience of death.

Pierre's resolution of the tension between holiness and politics was neither intentional nor a blueprint. It demanded a simplicity and transparency that were unique to Pierre. Some saw him as like the Holy Fool of Christian tradition. But this description does not do justice to his brilliant intuitive feel for pastoral strategy.

After he returned to Chennai in his 80s he hung out with the poor. One day a taxi driver approached him and asked him to help him educate his children. Pierre asked to meet them. So along came 12 children, all orphans, whom the driver was



supporting.

Together they devised a scheme perfectly fitted to rural society. Pierre saw that widows needed income, young unmarried women were not free to work outside their homes, and orphans needed mentoring and tutoring. So they boarded the orphans with widows and employed the young women in the acceptable work of mentoring and tutoring the orphans. Pierre raised the money that blessed the lives of the widows and young women.

A simple and elegant solution. As simple and elegant as the humanity of Pierre himself.

## **What gay parents are worth**

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

*Frank Brennan*

The same sex marriage debate is not going away in Australia or the US. It may be delayed in the UK, and it is concluded in Canada. It is not a debate about what restrictions church communities might continue to impose rightly on church weddings. It is a debate about what recognition the civil law should give to committed monogamous partnerships which may or may not involve the nurturing and education of children.

I remain committed to legal recognition of civil unions while maintaining the distinctive institution of civil marriage as the bond between a man and a woman open to bearing and nurturing each other's children. I am aware that the maintenance of this distinction is causing hurt to some people, while others think it is too compromising.

It was a galvanising moment in the same sex marriage debate when audience member Ross Scheepers asked Joe Hockey on Q&A to 'tell us and Senator Wong why you think you and Melissa make better parents than her and Sophie'. Hockey replied: 'I think in this life we've got to aspire to give our children what I believe to be the very best circumstances and that's to have a mother and a father ... I'm not saying gay parents are any lesser parents but I am being asked to legislate in favour of something that I don't believe to be the best outcome for a child.'

Compere Tony Jones then asked Penny Wong for her opinion.

'It is sad', she replied, 'that some families have to feel that they have to justify who they are because when you say those things, Joe, what you're saying to not just me but people like me is that the most important thing in our lives, which is the people we love, is somehow less good, less valued. And if you believe that then you believe that, but I have a different view.'

When asked if it was hurtful Wong replied, 'Of course it is but, you know, I know what my family is worth.'

When Wong's partner Sophie Allouache gave birth to daughter Alexandra a fortnight before Christmas last year, many Australians delighted in the front page photograph of the newly founded family. Allouache and Wong are not married but they are committed in love to each other and they have now committed to bringing up their child.

Like all children, Alexandra has a biological father. Unlike the children of Hockey and his wife Melissa, Alexandra will be brought up and nurtured primarily by a couple not including her biological father. In future, couples like Allouache and Wong may have the option of producing a child who does not even have a biological father.

The essence of equality is that things which are the same are treated the same and things which are marked by relevant differences are treated differently. If things marked by irrelevant differences are treated differently, there might be a breach of the principle of equality and there might result an unjustified act of adverse discrimination.

It would be wrong for the state not to recognise mixed race marriages. The marriage of a mixed race couple should be treated in the same way as the marriage of a couple of the same race. Race is not a relevant difference when it comes to marriage. On the same reasoning, I've argued that the time has come for the state to recognise the unions of same sex couples who are committed to faithful, supportive, long term exclusive relationships.

The state has an interest in seeing such relationships supported even though some citizens for religious or other reasons may have reservations or objections about the sexual relations and sexual acts which might be entailed in such relationships. Basically that's none of the state's business, nor is it the business of religious persons whose views about the good life are not being sought by people living in such relationships.

I have continued to draw the line at civil unions. If a same sex relationship was to be treated exactly the same as a heterosexual marriage, then the couple in a same sex relationship recognised as marriage should have exactly the same entitlements as the couple in a heterosexual marriage. I have two substantive reservations, which could be held in good faith by people of any religious conviction or none whatever.

Couples who are unable to bear their own children can avail themselves of medical and scientific assistance. Naturally couples would like to be able to bear and nurture children who have their genetic imprint, and only theirs.

I am enough of a 'natural lawyer' to think that all persons have a natural right to a known biological mother and a known biological father. The idea that the state would routinely authorise state assistance for the creation of children without a known biological father and a known biological mother concerns me. It will not be long before scientists will be able to create a child from the genetic material of just two men or two women. Such children and their advocates would need to concede that but for such a technological breakthrough they would not exist.

But some of these children will undoubtedly face existential challenges of novel dimensions when they realise that they do not have a known biological father and a known biological mother. I am very wary about the state writing a blank cheque in the name of non-discrimination committing itself to the development and provision of artificial reproductive technology such that children with these challenges will be routinely created.

Though I have no objection to adoption being available to same sex couples when the child for adoption is related to one of the couple (and that is usually the

case), I do think that a child who is not related to any prospective adoptive parent should be given in adoption to the available couple most suited to bringing up the child. All things being equal (which inevitably they are not), the state acting in the best interests of the child should be able to show a preference for a family unit including an adult male and an adult female.

Can we have 'marriage equality' while maintaining a ban on reproductive technology using the genetic material of just two men or two women, and while maintaining a state entitlement to choose adoption in the best interests of the child who has no adoptive relations?

If not, then we should settle for civil unions which remove all adverse discrimination against a same sex couple by virtue of their relationship while maintaining state preferences for all children having a biological mother and a biological father and for adoption of any unrelated child into a family with an adult male and adult female.

When the matter comes on for debate, all political parties should provide their members with a conscience vote. While some conservative religious groups in Australia support Tony Abbott's denial of a conscience vote, the shoe is on the other foot in the UK where the Liberal Democrats want to force their members to support a vote for same sex marriage.

The Catholic Archbishop of Southwark, Archbishop Peter Smith, has said: 'The Government's proposal to change the definition of marriage is a profound legal reform which, if enacted, would have major longterm consequences for our society. It is very important in my view that MPs of all parties should be given a free vote on an issue of such major significance. It is an issue of conscience because fundamental moral questions are at stake about the true meaning of marriage and how the common good of society is best served.'

This principle should apply whichever foot is shod.

## Poverty's skanky tarts

NON-FICTION

*Barry Gittins*

Poverty is an ocean of submerged, twinned predators: neglect and abuse, disease and stunted futures, malnutrition and obesity, fear and anger, hatred and ignorance, self-absorption and apathy.

Poverty's the crook water dribbling from broken faucets and fouled cisterns. The leftovers and congealed crumbs scraped off the plates of the rich. Polluted air from crowded, noisome cul-de-sacs, barely sustaining life. Fouling our lungs. Rotting our soil.

Poverty monopolises websites, takes out the front pages of newspapers and leads news bulletins, masquerading as homelessness, crime, unemployment, violence and substance abuse.

Poverty is this land's ochred custodians and carers, branded by government propagandists as addicts, paedophiles, wife-beaters, coffin cheaters, and ne'er-do-wells. Poverty is the unpaid rent of more than 200 years of colonisation.

Poverty leaves a kid to her own solitary devices in the corner of a one-bedroom unit. It's a child who will never be read to. Who doesn't access a computer, learn to play or study, or score a well-paid job. It's teenagers who bash exchange students for iPads and points of difference.

Poverty is pensioners eating canned excuses for a decent meal. The bloke with a broken back whose job's gone. Whose health is broken. Whose marriage is stuffed.

Poverty is what happens when I don't care about you, you don't give a toss about me, and our neighbours have got no hope. For many Australians, even high flyers, poverty's skanky tarts — foreclosure, repossession and bankruptcy — are only a handful of missed paydays away.

Poverty is more than an empty purse.

Poverty is people despairing of ever being held and wanted. It's broken spirits who no longer sustain any belief in life, any hope for the future or any joy in the present. Jumping headlong onto train lines, OD-ing in laneways, cracking on to suicide by cop.

Poverty is anyone who can't or won't take the time to stop and listen to another human being.

'Blessed are the poor in spirit' who end up touting as case studies for faith-based organisations and NGOs; that's their only chance to come up for air and be affirmed as belonging to 'our mob'.

Poverty is feeling (being?) Godforsaken. Shattered in a world of incredible creativity and beauty. Losing hope when you need it most. Being robbed of peace, on this inspired, inspiring sphere.

'Misfortune pursues the sinner, but prosperity is the reward of the righteous' — that's the worst proverbial untruth we offer our own progeny. We spit on Christ, we wipe our orifices on our coat of many 'druthers', when we neglect poverty street's salivating children.

## Mystery of the pro-Rudd Coalition voters

### POLITICS

John Warhurst



Should Tony Abbott connive in allowing Julia Gillard to remain prime minister or should he try to force her out come what may?

This question is a version of the old conundrum that faces any opposition which secretly wants an unpopular government leader to stay until the next election while publicly trying to remove them as soon as possible. It is not a particularly unusual situation, but neither Coalition voters nor the Leader of the Opposition appear to have thought this through at the moment. Nor have the media outlets that report on the big public opinion polls.

This week's Herald/Neilsen poll shows Abbott is preferred to Gillard as prime minister by 46 per cent to 44 per cent. Neither leader is popular, though Gillard is especially unpopular. Only 39 per cent approve of Abbott's performance (57 per cent disapprove) and 36 per cent approve of Gillard's (60 per cent disapprove).

The poll also asks voters about their preferred Labor leader. The *Sydney Morning Herald* report shows that Kevin Rudd leads Gillard by 62 per cent to 32 per cent. But that figure is distorted by the overwhelming pro-Rudd preference of Coalition voters who prefer Rudd to Gillard by a massive 71 per cent to 19 per cent. Labor voters actually prefer Gillard to Rudd by 53 per cent to 45 per cent.

Despite having such a low approval rating Gillard retains the majority support of Labor voters, which, in one important sense, is what should matter, though Rudd is still remarkably popular given all that has happened.

Why are Coalition voters so anti-Gillard? One possibility is that Rudd is out of sight out of mind. Another is that they detect particularly unattractive qualities in Gillard.

Yet another is that they are just taking Abbott's lead. In his Budget reply speech he called for Labor to replace Gillard. This is good rhetoric but is it good strategy? Is this really what Abbott wants? He has also called for an early election which, presumably, would be fought against Gillard, whom he admits refuses to lie down and die.

On the question of whether Labor should change leaders, the *SMH* again gives prominence to the overall figure, that 52 per cent of the electorate say Labor should change leaders, while 45 per cent say stay with Gillard. But again this figure is distorted by the opinion of Coalition voters. They want Labor to change leaders by a margin of 62 per cent to 34 per cent. Labor voters say stay with Gillard by 66 per cent to 33 per cent.

Labor voters loyal to Gillard make an interesting study, but Coalition voters are much more interesting. What do they really want and why?



One inescapable reading of these polls is that Labor may do much better under Rudd's leadership. Rudd's greater personal popularity with disaffected Labor voters and long-term Coalition voters might even bring some of both groups across to the Labor fold.

Yet there is a contradiction. Some Labor voters admit this possibility that Rudd as leader might be good for the party, but still want to stay with Gillard. Presumably their motivation is either loyalty to Gillard or a belief that it is now too late to change leaders, or a personal assessment of Rudd.

The reasoning of Coalition voters, like that of their leader, is less explicable. They are caught between two stools. Surely they should want Gillard to stay put as PM if her unpopularity makes eventual Coalition victory more likely. But instead they want Labor to change leaders.

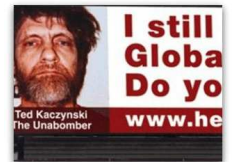
In electoral terms this is strange thinking. If Coalition voters like Rudd more than Gillard, then if Labor were to make him leader it may do better at the next election. Perhaps Labor would do so much better that the Coalition might even be in danger of losing that next election. That surely is not what Coalition voters want.

## How to tame free speech extremists

MEDIA

*John Wright*

The conservative US organisation the Homeland Institute recently placed a billboard on the streets of Chicago. The sign read 'I still believe in global warming. Do you?' Above it they had placed an image of the 'Unabomber', Ted Kaczynski. A representative of the Homeland Institute said the intention of the advertisement was to suggest that anyone who still believed in global warming was, in his words, 'more than a little nutty'.



The billboard elicited a negative response from some people who had previously been supporters of the Institute, and has since been removed. But still, the billboard raises important issues of freedom of speech.

The billboard did not break any law. It was removed, not because it was found to be illegal, but because even erstwhile supporters thought it had 'gone too far'. The question therefore arises: even though the Homeland Institute was free by law to post the billboard, ought people be free by law to post such a billboard?

Many people — even those who would describe themselves as global warming skeptics — felt the billboard was inappropriate. But precisely what was wrong with it?

It did not assert anything that was factually in error. Kaczynski does believe in global warming. It does not incite anyone to violence. It does not vilify any ethnic, cultural or sexual minority. It might be claimed to libel a group — those who believe in climate change — by suggesting they are 'nuts'. But it was not removed for this reason.

It was removed because of the adverse reaction it received, even from other skeptics. Some sponsors of the Homeland Institute withdrew their support. The billboards were condemned as 'dumb', in 'incredibly bad taste' and 'offensive'. Obviously, the billboards did not constitute a high quality contribution to public debate.

But — assuming they were not actually against the law because libelous — ought they have been banned? Ought people be prohibited by law from making contributions to public speech that are rude, offensive, in bad taste or show astoundingly bad judgment? There are at least two sides to this question.

It might be argued that words can cause suffering. We have no hesitation in making it illegal for one person to, for example, cause suffering to another by clunking them over the head with a piece of wood. So why not also make it illegal for one person to cause suffering to another by uttering words that are offensive, in bad taste, or indicative of egregiously poor judgment?

But who would have the power to prohibit speech on the grounds that it was offensive? The answer, in broad terms, is people who occupy positions of power or authority of some kind over the rest of us, whether they be elected or appointed officials. And it has long been recognised as potentially very dangerous to hand over to such persons the power to decide what sort of public discussion is to be permitted.

Public discussion is one of the most important means by which we, as a community, evaluate our rulers. It is a means by which we decide what powers, as a community, we consent to our rulers exercising and retaining. Free, open, critical discussion, including discussion of our rulers, is an integral part of democracy.

To hand over to our rulers too much power to decide what we may or may not say carries with it the danger that our ability to criticise, and change, bad rulers may thereby be diminished.

There are dangers associated with allowing people to use public speech in a way that some might regard as offensive or indicative of egregiously bad judgment, but handing over to our rulers the power to prohibit such speech plausibly has even greater dangers.

So what is to be done?

One reason why people on both sides of the global warming debate disapproved of the billboards was that they were merely insulting rather than a rational contribution to the discussion of an issue. They were not a fair-dinkum attempt to get to the truth. They flagrantly lacked any spirit of intellectual fairness and integrity.

Of course, it would be difficult, perhaps impossible, to legislate people into being fair minded and to have intellectual integrity. Perhaps this reminds us that, for free speech to work, it needs to take place in a society in which fairness, integrity and respect for those with different beliefs are seen as virtues, and valued.

## **Church's preferential option for kids**

POETRY

*Brian Doyle*

### **Suffer the children**

I am talking to the archbishop about the letter he just wrote,  
Resigning his seat after fifteen years, a note he had to write,  
By canon law, because he grew old in service of the Church,  
And I get distracted by a drawing that's right in his sight line  
No matter where he turns in his office. You cannot not see it.  
It's a drawing of him, by a little kid; the kid was maybe five,  
He says, and I think he had just started kindergarten, and we  
Met when I came to visit for some reason, and he painted me,  
And gave it to me real shy, and something about that kid just  
Nailed me. I keep it where I can't miss it. It's about kids. No  
Matter what we say it's about, it's about kids. The worst sins  
Ever committed are against kids. That will never occur again,  
Not here, not if I have anything to do with it. I owe that little  
Boy, I guess. That drawing has kept things clear for ten years.  
If it's not about kids then it's not first priority. Simple lesson;  
But we forgot about it for a long time there. Never again, not  
As long as I breathe. There's kids and there's everything else.

### **Yesuah**

In the same way He elevated the cup,  
And gave thanks, and gave it to them,  
Saying drink ye, all of this, this is Me,  
Do you understand what I am saying?  
But they did not, nor were they idiots,  
Nor are we fools, it's just that the idea  
Is huge and new and really hard to eat.  
That He would be in us, rather than us

Kneeling and moaning and prostrating  
To a Lord, even a Lord of the starfields,  
This was new and confusing. It still is.  
We were used to worshipping the sun,  
Then, and a series of bloody overLords,  
And various incarnations of not-death,  
But the thought that He was in us, was  
Us, that we are the shards of His light,  
And that the work is to resolder shards  
Until they are again His seamless love;  
Well, this was revolutionary then, and  
Remains so. He was murdered once by  
The shock of it, but He's no fool either.  
He slipped Himself into every moment,  
Every act, every mercy and forgiveness,  
Every kindness, and so He grows closer  
To being born again, in some confusing  
Way; the man is a master of puzzlement.  
In dark eras we ask when He will return,  
But we already know the thorny answer;  
When we have summoned Him with our  
Love like an ocean; when He cannot say  
No, because we have become as He was.

**In the lime quarry on Robben Island**

A tall man pauses from the pick and shovel work  
And says to his two companions, today let us talk  
About Joseph Conrad. It is Friday — literature day.  
The three men divvy up the week by subject. One  
Acts as questioner. In this way the years pass with  
Something fresh as the salt of days otherwise dull;

Although the penguins have returned, and the seals  
For whom the island was named. Conrad, working  
In an acquired language, is always after hard grace  
Set against duress like adamant stone, says the tall  
Man — 'harder than flint have I made thy forehead'  
As the Prophet Ezekiel says. His companions grin  
At this, for their tall friend is as hardheaded a man  
As ever walked this dirt, and they often tell him so.  
I heard also the noise of wings of creatures, that is  
Ezekiel also, says the tall man. As we do. I believe  
That if I did not hear the birds we would all be lost.  
There are days I believe the birds are sent this way.  
Conrad teaches us that we are capable of greatness  
Despite our equal and proven talents for weakness.  
To set your forehead like a flint against the despair,  
To do so daily against all sense and reason or what  
Appears to be sense and reason, that is what I draw  
From Conrad. But one of his companions is still on  
The wild sea of Ezekiel, and suddenly says fear not,  
Neither be dismayed at their looks, just as one burly  
Guard glares at the three prisoners; and though they  
All three want to laugh so hard they weep, they turn  
Back to their work, smiling. Tomorrow: philosophy.

### **In the Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain**

News item this morning over coffee: a number of parrots in Sydney,  
Australia, having escaped their confinement among human creatures  
Who taught them to talk, are teaching galahs, cockatoos, and corellas  
What they know, such that in the lush Botanic Gardens, for example,  
Birds of various species have asked people how you going? and who  
Is the pretty boy, then? which is unnerving enough but then the other

Remarks, many of them lewd and vulgar in nature, often about rugby,  
And proposing intimacies you would not usually associate with birds,  
Also the bevy of political insults and scurrilities, are causing a ruckus.  
For one thing the birds are now drawing crowds in the early evenings,  
Particularly the parrots, who have it in for the Australian Labor Party;  
Park officials who arranged a redistribution of the birds to other parks  
So as to break up 'the ringleaders', in one official's phrase, have been  
Accused of bias against the Prime Minister and her carbon-tax efforts.  
Ornithologists called to the scene were initially puzzled by the galahs'  
Seeming obsession with magpies until two parrots were found to have  
Been taught to speak by a fan of the Adelaide football club the Crows.  
As yet the ability to speak, make lewd propositions, and razz Magpies  
Has not apparently spread to the wider avian population, said officials,  
Who are watching the situation while attempting to maintain decorum.



## A helicopter view of the Gillard Government

### POLITICS

*Moira Byrne-Garton*



Fairfax political journalist Michelle Grattan stated on Radio National last week that Australians are unlikely to take the all-encompassing 'helicopter' view at the next election. And this, despite the 300 pieces of new legislation achieved so far by the Gillard Government under the extremely challenging conditions of a minority government.

Instead of focusing on the overview of this remarkable achievement, these citizens will be bogged down in the detail of one scandalous union funds abuse, the misbehaviour of another high profile government official and the alleged impact of some new progressive taxes on their personal lives.

It has become the fashion to trade negative remarks about the other side of politics but this takes us nowhere. Better to contemplate the advantages of Grattan's 'helicopter view' which is very like the concern of the Canadian political philosopher, John Ralston Saul, about the proliferation of 'experts' in the conduct of affairs in the West.

We need the generalist citizen, Saul argues, who remembers it is his or her right to speak up on all matters from a citizen's broad perspective. We are responsible as citizens for what happens to our country. This means taking the whole picture into account, being prepared to hear all perspectives and to participate in the public debate. We have an early template for the benefits of this process in readings about the ancient Greek city state.

Australia has a headstart with respect to the helicopter view. Our own Indigenous people have manifest in their art the most miraculous ability and inclination to see landscapes as though from the sky. Many Aboriginal artists, without having viewed their area from above, have mapped their 'country' on canvas with remarkable sensitivity.

Perhaps it is because of this overview of the lie of their land that they tended it so sustainably in pre-European days, as detailed in Bill Gammage's recent award-winning book *The Biggest Estate on Earth*.

Some years ago I was blessed with a personal lesson in the value of the helicopter view in the classroom, at a centre for specially challenged students. Before each session the teacher would require the students to discuss why the learning we were about to do was important in the world's terms. Then at the end she would have us review why, for example, the algebraic sums we had just completed would be useful, in the long run, in our lives.

Initially I thought this was excessive and was privately critical of the teacher.

But I soon learned to treasure these helicopter moments. They could be profoundly energising for both students and adults. From that time, I have book-ended my own teaching with big picture perspectives.

It might be indeed the only wise way to contextualise any undertaking, especially when casting one's vote in a federal election.

Writing for the *Canberra Times*, the executive director of the Australia Institute Richard Dennis — a commentator who can be relied upon to give an overview for the common good — [reminded](#) us that, despite our interest in the new enquiry into particular taxation methods, it is the amount of taxation we take, rather than the method we use, which will ultimately determine the quality of our shared national life.

Or consider the [Federal Budget](#) with its humble moves to increase equity and sharing of resources. It may well be a mistake at this time to require single mothers to return to work earlier, but the aim of this change is their participation in the whole functioning of the country.

From our helicopter we should be glad to see that there will be a greater degree of sharing of the profits of the mining industry across the nation, and that we are taking steps to move on from our carbon dependence.

As Grattan's comment implies, it is foolish to focus on how a person speaks, how she responds to questions, or the fact that she has changed her position in order to negotiate a way through quagmires of powerful interests, while ignoring her government's significant achievements under the most trying political circumstances.

## Coalition of the willing targets messenger Assange

EDITORIAL

*Michael Mullins*

Julian Assange effectively conducted an inquiry into the quality of western democracy and found it wanting, if not a sham. It is well known how he did this through the WikiLeaks organisation, which published often confidential information that impugned US and allied war efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq, and much more.

The world was shocked, and it was up to the US to choose how to react. They could opt for contrition, or they could discredit and shoot the messenger.

Contrition would be humiliating but could save democracy by giving it a fresh start. On the other hand, pursuing Assange — as they did bin Laden — would play well at home, but elsewhere might make the US seem like an international thug that uses human rights as a smokescreen for its totalitarian behaviour and its disregard for the lives of the ordinary citizens of Afghanistan and Iraq.

There is little doubt that they have chosen the latter. They are confident they will get Assange in the end as they got bin Laden, and they are waiting patiently for the pieces to fall into place.

The US pursuit of Assange is being played out with what is largely the cooperation of other western democracies. Last week the legal system in the UK rejected his appeal against extradition to Sweden.

*Guardian* columnist Amy Goodman [pointed out](#) that the UK government could overrule the court if it wanted to. It did this when it intervened in the 1998 Pinochet extradition case when it allowed the former dictator to return home to Chile. It looks as if they did a favour for Pinochet that they won't for Assange. Are crimes against humanity more forgivable than the allegations without charges that Assange is facing in Sweden?

Meanwhile US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is enjoying a [warm welcome](#) in Sweden for what is coincidentally the first such visit from a US official for years. Not surprisingly, Assange is not listed on her [website](#) among the topics for discussion. Do we need to wait for WikiLeaks to reveal the actual content of discussions, and the likelihood that Assange ranks high on the list of topics? Or have we not learned the lessons of WikiLeaks?

Rightfully Australia should have no small part to play in the fate of one of its own. But do we ourselves care whether Assange ends up with a lengthy jail sentence or possibly the death penalty for his whistle blowing?

Some do. Last December former prime minister Malcolm Fraser and several dozen public figures called on then Foreign Affairs Minister Kevin Rudd to ensure Assange is protected from 'rendition' to the US. The [signers](#) expressed concern that 'the chances of Mr Assange receiving a fair trial in the United States appear

remote’.

Unfortunately Rudd’s [initial](#) support for Assange was not sustained, and on Thursday his successor Bob Carr almost laughably reduced the issue to [quantifying](#) the support Assange has received, insisting that ‘there’s been no Australian who’s received more consular support in a comparable period than Mr Assange’.

As if Carr, as a self-professed man of letters, cannot see the broader implications of Assange’s plight for the future of democracy.