

enjoyed as an intellectual, as a member of the ruling elite, such as access to decent food and to other scarce goods.

The easiest path was simply to become a cynical realist, paying lip service to the ideals of communism while taking advantage of its corrupt practices. Those who chose not to take that path were true believers, individuals who believed in the communist ideal and were disgusted that it did not live up to its high ideals. They shared many characteristics in common with whistleblowers in modern corporate organisations who pull the plug on dishonesty and corruption, even though they know that it will lead to painful consequences for themselves.

In his *War & Peace & War*, Peter Turchin cites experiments that claim that in any society about 20% of people are free riders, about 60% are conditional co-operators and about 20% are what he calls 'saints'. It is from the highly idealistic 'saints' that those who opposed communism from within came. They were individuals who could not stomach the disparity between ideology and reality, who were disgusted by the mass rapes of German women by Soviet soldiers only to be told that the authorities turned a blind eye to them, or who could not reconcile the ideal of equality with the system of privilege practised by all communist regimes.

The second cost of departing from communism was the loss of a set of beliefs that made sense of the world and of a culture that provided these individuals with intellectual and emotional support. Hence when many of them found flaws in the system their response was to immerse themselves in the works of Marx and Lenin looking for answers. The situation

is similar to that of an individual brought up in a Christian sect such as the Closed Brethren. To leave means renouncing one's former life, including family, but not necessarily Christianity.

This is particularly the case with those in the West who were led to renounce their former communist convictions. Many came out of families that owed an allegiance to communism and they had been brought up in a Left intellectual subculture. They had to deal with the disparity between ideal and reality, or with the hypocrisy of their fellow communists. One individual, interestingly, was turned off communism because of its inability to provide decent plumbing. But it was one thing to renounce the reality of real-life communist regimes and another to move away from Marx, let alone a faith in what a number call Left Libertarianism.

What sustained many Western communists and leftists was a combination of the belief that countries like the Soviet Union showed the way to a much improved future with a very strong hatred of capitalism in general and the United States in particular. Hence their disillusionment with the communist model did not necessarily lead to an embrace of the United States or American ideals. For example Christopher Hitchens renounced the Left because of its failure to denounce terrorism in the face of Islamic extremism but he still considers himself to be a 'Marxist libertarian'.

Hollander argues that someone like Noam Chomsky has not changed because what drives him is not a desire to locate utopia that is an alternative to capitalist America but an obsessive hatred

of America and Israel. He has invested nothing in a 'better world' and such hatred can be sustained regardless of what happens in the wider world.

What Hollander demonstrates in these various studies is the importance of personality in determining the path any particular individual takes in re-evaluating their past ideological allegiances. Strangely enough it appears to be the true believers who possess the strength of character to break with a political system or a system of beliefs when it fails to live up to its utopian hopes. They have needed all their strength to face the consequences of making such a break.

Reviewed by
Greg Melleuish

*Voting for Jesus:
Christianity and Politics in
Australia*

by **Amanda Lohrey**

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Religion in politics: what is more susceptible to distrust in the modern liberal mind? For millennia religion and politics were intertwined, till the rational spirit won out. Since the triumph of the secular state the western mind has perched itself upon the battlement, ever watchful for its enemy's return. If the plethora of books and essays on the rise of the Christian right and the growth of the megachurch are anything to go by, the fight has begun. A Christian herself, Amanda Lohrey is, nevertheless, a passionate secularist, and it is as

a secularist denouncing the spread of the Christian right into politics that her essay on Christianity in politics ought to be viewed.

The essay itself may be separated into two parts. The first is a sociological study of Christianity in Australia, and in particular deals with the rise of the megachurch and the nature of Jesus' identity in the modern world. The second focuses on the influence of the Christian right in politics, using the Family First Party and the NSW Liberal Party as microcosms through which to assess this phenomenon.

The rise of the megachurch is not unique to the Australian religious landscape, and as pointed out by Lohrey, owes its antecedents to the American experience. The more interesting question, which has attracted most of the attention, is why they have been so successful. Lohrey argues for an economic model. The megachurch works because it is the best competitor within the economy of churches. It is a truer reflection of current consumer demand and, thus, is able to attract a larger market share. This is evidenced by the complete modernisation of facilities, such as the incorporation of business park architecture, modern interior design and modern popular music. In other words, the megachurch is following standard business models.

This analysis is fine but hardly new. It has long been understood that Hillsong owed itself to marketing theory rather than to

Augustine's City of God. It would have been better to comprehend this phenomenon as a function of the same mentality that is shaping the re-identification of Jesus within mainstream churches: not the secularisation of Jesus, but the individualisation of Jesus (secular implies spiritual absence, which is not true of any modern denomination). As Lohrey rightly points out, at the core of Hillsong's work is the fundamental mantra: 'one must have a relationship with Jesus!' This core belief has not only affected how the church is run but how Jesus himself is viewed.

The individualisation of Jesus is not new, and indeed, has been a persistent competitor to the 'catholic' perspective for almost two thousand years. From the hidden knowledge of the Gnostics to a number of medieval 'heresies', Scriptural Protestantism to modern

Evangelicalism, individualism has always offered an attractive alternative for those who despise or distrust complex authority structures. It is little wonder, then, that groups promoting this perspective are attracting larger audiences. However,

Lohrey goes on to cite rather earthly statistics: most young Australians do not believe in God and very few attend church.

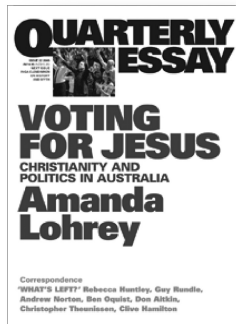
Her response to the statistics is philosophical; religious conviction in the young tends to be ephemeral. Yet, Lohrey does not consider that the two effects (the rise of the megachurch and the decline of Christian belief amongst the young) are driven by the one force: liberalism. With the churches' adoption of popular culture, a paradox occurs. In a

world where Christianity strains to reflect a secular and individualistic society, we should not be surprised that fewer see it as necessary to investigate. Christianity does not represent an alternative philosophy that might attract the disillusioned and disenchanted (This is of course not true of all denominations, or even sections of the same denominations).

This leads us directly to the second part of Lohrey's essay: the role of religion in politics. As Lohrey rightly asks, if Christianity reflects a minority of constituents, should we not be worried about the possibility of the Christian right affecting policy? Her question is as much about the nature of a modern democratic state as it is about religious representation, but at its core is a strong belief that disproportional representation is wrong. That may be, but it is no stranger to the system, it is in fact a symptom. Inherent in the Westminster system is its capacity to be hijacked by minorities, both within parliament and from lobbyists; the most one can do is draw attention to it. For instance, the Greens do not represent a major constituency, nor do the Democrats, but both have been able to affect legislation. To suggest they ought to be considered differently from Christian groups would be a non sequitur.

Lohrey's next point is the identification of these groups. She points to how Christian parties have re-branded themselves with socially responsible appellations, having comprehended the unpopularity of Christian political slogans. The Family First Party is the obvious example; Lohrey considers their title deceitful.

There are two problems with this view. First; if the party had not wanted its Christian beliefs to surface, it failed miserably;



re-branding has not affected the public's comprehension of Family First as a Christian party. Second; what ought to be done about it? To demand strong legislation on how a party must brand itself is unsatisfactory in a modern liberal state.

Politically, Family First has not lined up to predictions, neither being able to impose a Christian agenda or becoming a puppet of the Liberals. Family First failed to stop the Therapeutic Drugs Administration from taking cognisance on the matter of RU486, and openly inhibited the government's recent asylum seeker bill.

This latter development takes us to the final part of Lohrey's essay: the extent to which the pseudo groundswell of Christianity is being manipulated by the right wing of the Liberal party. As evidence, Lohrey cites the activities of David Clarke and his staffer Alex Hawke, and the Exclusive Brethren. This is not the place to consider whether these people are acting in sinister fashion, but it is the place to consider whether such activities would constitute a failure within the political system; they would not. It is, instead, a space of positive tension. Indeed, the idea that right wing Christian thugs are damaging democracy is, all in all, much ado about nothing. *The Latham Diaries* affirmed what most had always known, that the ACTU perform the same role within Labor. That a liberal democracy must put up with minorities seeking to undermine its very foundation is a paradox inherent to its nature; the alternative is much worse.

Reviewed by
Andrew Pettinger

The White Man's Burden: Why The West's Efforts To Aid The Rest Have Done So Much Ill And So Little Good
by William Easterly

Penguin Books, London,
2006
448pp, \$46.95
ISBN 1594200378

Few books on development economics begin by marvelling at Harry Potter. But while millions around the world delight at the antics and angst of the boy wizard, William Easterly, begins his latest book, *White Man's Burden*: by marvelling at how publishers, distributors and retailers are able to supply hundreds of millions of copies of the latest Harry Potter novel on the same day all over the world. In the same sentence, he laments that food and medicines, certainly in no short supply, cannot get to where they are needed most.

More than two trillion dollars have been spent globally on aid in the last 50 years and yet 12 cent medicines cannot get to children who need them. The problem, says Easterly, is an incentives mismatch.

He divides the world into 'planners' and 'searchers'. Planners are the villains of his story—the bureaucrats in rich world offices of NGOs and multilateral organisations with big plans for ending global poverty. Theirs is a top down approach that reflects goals important to the donors rather than the aid recipients.

Searchers, on the other hand,

are the good guys of his tale. They look for what locals want and then work on filling this demand. Since they face penalties for failure, searchers incorporate 'feedback mechanisms' and adjust their strategies accordingly.

For Easterly, the difference between the two is clear. 'Planners determine what to supply; Searchers find out what is in demand. Planners apply global blueprints; Searchers adapt to local conditions. Planners at the top lack knowledge of the bottom; Searchers find out what the reality is at the bottom. Planners never hear whether the planned got what it needed; Searchers find out whether the customer is satisfied.'

Top-down aid lacks mechanisms

for feedback and accountability, key for establishing what works and what doesn't, and letting aid providers know about it. Easterly provides some provocative examples of how these could be integrated into aid programmes;

including development vouchers the poor could use to purchase services from NGOs and aid groups.

A key mistake is that the success of aid is measured by its inputs not buy its outputs. Organisations typically boast of how much aid they have given rather than what they have accomplished with it. In a memorable line, Easterly quips that this is akin to declaring the movie *Catwomen* wasn't really so bad because it cost \$200 million to make.

He reviews an extensive array of economic literature to show development myths like the

