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Women who discovered the world

MEDIA

Eleanor Massey

'When young men approach me,' [writes](#) Peter FitzSimons in his *Sydney Morning Herald* article 'Plenty to Write Home About', 'I give them a brief speech that runs along the following lines. If you want to write, you have to have something to say that people will give a stuff about ... you need to get out of the safe bubble of your existence and broaden your experience.'

Then, tongue in cheek, he lists the possibilities, which include hitchhiking around Australia, contracting the clap in Amsterdam and driving through Uganda with some drug-addled truck drivers.

And no, he says, he doesn't give the same advice to young women. 'I push the same theme, with different specifics, and then steer them towards my wife.'

It's true that adventure and travel writing has long been the domain of males; males like the free-wheeling James Hamilton-Paterson, who, in his book, *Playing with Water*, talked of messing around in the Philippines, along lava-strewn tracks, in a tropical jungle and far from home.

Discovering a deserted island, he decided it was just the place to live for a year and write a book. The local chief granted permission after they had drunk enough liquor between them to lay them flat. A young woman would have been hard-put to do that, for in this part of the writing jungle, biology has traditionally dictated destiny.

An uncertain stream of women travel writers has meandered through history, but even the indomitable Freya Stark braved foreign climes with an enormous entourage, while Rose Macaulay had a car and bank account to keep her out of strife, and probably didn't walk out at night. Even the more recent travellers, like the wonderful Alice Steinbach, stick to well-trodden places like Paris, London and Florence.

So, in the past, most feats of derring-do were achieved by men; gentlemen travellers exploring lonely places: Wilfred Thesiger crossing the Sahara in *Arabian Sands*; Paul Theroux striding down a blighted continent in his *Dark Star Safari*; Colin Thubron adrift in *The Lost Heart of Asia* after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Norman Lewis, Patrick Leigh Fermor, Bruce Chatwin, Jonathan Raban, Peter Matthiessen, Simon Winchester and Pico Iyer also belong to this illustrious band of adventurers, all now gone, or hanging up their walking boots.

However, as British explorer Benedict Allen points out in his recent *Guardian* [review](#) of *The Great Explorers*, by Robin Hanbury-Tenison: 'From the point of view of our dear old absurd

and shrunken planet they (the explorers) do now seem entirely unnecessary.’ He adds that ‘Exotic travel is no longer the preserve of a few privileged and romantic males. You do not need us; we are all explorers now.’

This, of course, includes women women. Young, Australian women, who have somehow ignored, or escaped the advice of such diehards as Peter FitzSimons.

Robyn Davidson trekked with her camels across the Australian outback, and wrote about it in *Tracks*. Paula Constant, inspired by Thesiger, set out on foot to cross the Sahara Desert, and said, after writing *Sahara*, ‘One of the greatest gifts that this walk has given me is the knowledge that I can write, and that’s possibly one of the things that I’ve been most proud of.’

And, most recently, Jessica Watson, our young Australian of the Year, sailed solo around the world at the age of 16, and recorded the experience in her book, *True Spirit*.

But FitzSimons, undeterred, is back with his young male acolytes. Once they broaden their experience, he says, and for their writing to finally succeed to the point where they can earn a living from it, they will need, among other things, to read, find their voice, rewrite and ‘push through the hard yakka’.

Timely advice for young men, who have not yet pushed off from shore, or written their books, but there is another ingredient which, throughout history, has been shared by a fortunate few writers, men or women, adventurous travellers, or stay-at-homes, and this is the magical ability to turn the base matter of their experience, no matter how narrow, into written gold.

Two hundred years ago, an unmarried, clap-free, village-bound and bubble-safe Jane Austen wrote to her nephew, modestly referring to her writing as ‘The little bit (two inches wide) of ivory on which I work with so fine a brush as produces little effect after much labour.’

What else might she have written, one wonders, had she gone to sea in a yacht, or even, God willing, traversed a desert or two.

Theology coloured by clergy sex abuse

VIDEO

Peter Kirkwood

Neil Ormerod is symbolic of the deep and contested changes in the Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council. Prior to the Council it would have been almost unheard of for a lay person to be studying, let alone teaching Catholic theology. But this married lay man, this father and grandfather, pioneered the path, and is now one of the leading Catholic theologians in Australia.

Ormerod is a frequent contributor to *Eureka Street*, and this interview with him is part of a special series marking the 20th anniversary of the journal. He spoke to Eureka Street TV at the Strathfield campus of the Australian Catholic University where he is [based](#), and he talks about developments and trends in theology since the foundation of *Eureka Street*.

Ormerod's career in theology had an unlikely academic start. His first undergraduate degree was in pure mathematics at the University of New South Wales, and at its completion he was honoured with the University Medal. Three years later he gained a PhD in mathematics.

He then radically changed direction and began studying theology, culminating with a doctorate in theology in 1997 from the Melbourne College of Divinity. His doctoral thesis was based on the work of great Canadian Jesuit theologian and philosopher, Bernard Lonergan.

Ormerod has lectured at many Australian Catholic institutions including St Paul's National Seminary, the Catholic College of Education Sydney, the Centre for Christian Spirituality Randwick, Pius XII Seminary Brisbane, the Catholic Institute of Sydney and most recently the Australian Catholic University where he is currently Professor of Theology.

His approach to theology was strongly coloured in the early 1990s by the clergy sexual abuse that began to be spoken about openly around that time. He and his wife Thea became activists on behalf of survivors of abuse, and they jointly wrote a book, *When Ministers Sin: Sexual Abuse in the Churches*, that was published in 1994.

Ormerod is much in demand as a speaker, and is a prolific author, not only of academic papers, but also of more popular articles. He has the knack of bringing a theological sensibility to bear on everyday life issues.

He has written several books including *Grace and Disgrace: A Theology of Self-esteem; Society and History; Method, Meaning and Revelation; Trinity: Retrieving the Western Tradition; Creation, Grace and Redemption*; and *Introducing Contemporary Theologies: the What and Who of Theology Today*, his most popular book, which has been republished a number of times.

Exploiting natural disasters

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Hereafter* (M). Director: Clint Eastwood. Starring: Matt Damon, Bryce Dallas Howard, Cécile De France, George McLaren, Frankie McLaren, Jay Mohr. 129 minutes**

It would be too generous to excuse *Hereafter* as an old man's rumination on death (director Clint Eastwood will turn 81 this year). Eastwood achieves a sense of neither fear nor awe nor existential angst in his approach to this most human preoccupation.

The best that *Hereafter* seems able to muster is clichéd afterlife imagery (the dearly departed silhouetted by acid wash light) and half-baked characters pestered by half-formed thoughts of the 'hereafter'.

There are no great insights into the human condition or compelling questions about the mysteries of death to be found here. Instead Eastwood adopts an air of maudlin, shallow musing with an unearned aura of profundity.

A near-death experience during the 2004 Asian tsunami offers holidaying French journalist Marie Lelay (De France) a glimpse of heaven (cue acid-wash silhouettes) that becomes her obsession.

Taciturn London schoolboy Marcus mourns the death of his garrulous twin Jason (both portrayed by the brothers McLaren) and toys with the idea of enlisting a medium to help him make contact.

Reclusive American psychic George Loney (Damon) resists his brother Billy's (Jay Mohr) urgings that he make a career out of his gift of contacting people's dead loved ones. 'It's not a gift, it's a curse!' he insists (of course), and the film dallies in a doomed-romance subplot to illustrate his point.

These stories unspool in parallel, before converging in the final act. Other filmmakers have adopted this kind of multi-faceted structure (notably *Babel* and *Amores Perros* director Alejandro González Iñárritu) to good effect.

But the stories lack momentum, and Eastwood fails to imbue them with any sense of inevitability or of external forces driving these kindred but geographically distant characters into each other's orbits. This, despite the fact that the film's ridiculously mawkish, swelling-strings-laden ending seems to insist that Fate played its part.

In short, where Eastwood shoots for mysticism, he attains only tedium.

Hereafter wins a laugh or two with its portrayal of the chain of charlatanic mediums who

attempt (and fail) to contact Jason — John-Edwards-*Crossing-Over* style — on Marcus' behalf. But these exist primarily to illustrate that, by contrast, Damon's George is the real deal. Clearly, Eastwood really wants us to *believe*.

Frankly, the film is utterly vapid, and vacuous. And this has serious implications.

Its explicit references to the Tsunami, as well as the 2005 London bombings, are redundant — unless it is to fuse Eastwood's fiction to the historical record, thus passing as fact his theological fancies, like Kirk Cameron spruiking the End of Days.

This is worse than misguided. The Tsunami, in particular, is recreated in spectacular fashion, but devoid of any significance except as a catalyst to one uninteresting character's uninteresting journey.

The fact that this character is a well-to-do, white-skinned European tourist, who survives a disaster that killed hundreds of thousands of people, the vast majority of them brown-skinned Indonesian and Sri Lankan villagers, is exploitative in the extreme.

Shit doesn't just happen

MEDIA

Andrew Hamilton

When Tony Abbott referred to the death of a soldier serving in Afghanistan as 'shit happens', it became a manufactured news event. Offence was taken, explanations given and accepted, and the news cycle rolled on.

But the colloquial phrase itself is of broader interest because it embodies an attitude to individual events that politicians would not normally take. 'Shit happens' suggests a randomness, lack of meaning and lack of significant agency in events like car accidents, assaults on railway stations and drownings. It refuses to attribute responsibility or to accept it when involved in such incidents.

We rarely meet this kind of attitude and language in connection with military deaths. Military language normally emphasises meaning, responsibility and the virtues that go with personal agency. Tombstones and speeches for dead soldiers are replete with phrases like 'for country and for king', 'he died that we may be free', 'brave to the last', 'made the supreme sacrifice'.

During wars, too, the enemy is usually represented as a malign force whose representatives habitually act in cruel ways to reach sinister ends.

This kind of rhetoric, often heightened by religious reference, provides a framework in which the life of the dead soldier has meaning. His death is dignified by the rightness of his cause, by the massive evil that he resisted, by his nation's indebtedness, by the soldier's intention and by the bravery and endurance that he showed.

Descriptions of military deaths brush out the randomness of war, in which a soldier may well have been killed by 'friendly fire', by malfunctioning equipment or by inattention. In this account shit does not happen. Instead bad people act violently, good people resist them, and may die while resisting.

That kind of sentiment is consoling to relatives of the dead, but it loses credibility when people understand the waste and randomness of war. Wars are never a straightforward struggle between good and evil, and people who represent a cause seen as justified often behave wickedly in war.

And many military actions, like those in Iraq and Afghanistan, are undertaken without sufficiently serious reflection and maintained without moral justification.

But even if that is so, the deaths of those killed in wars that are lightly undertaken and prosecuted without due attention are not rightly described by the phrase, 'shit happens'. Nor

does the phrase do justice to car accidents or random violence. It denies the human context of such events.

Car accidents involve drivers who have responsibility for their actions. Bashings also involve people who are responsible for them, and complex sets of relationships that help explain their actions. The victims and bystanders are also agents who respond to the violence in distinctive ways.

Even in a war that has no larger meaning, soldiers and civilians often act with bravery and nobility. Their virtue does not ennoble the cause which is said to inspire the war. But nor does the frivolity of the war lessen the dignity of those caught up in it.

In fact, any human misfortune is demeaned if we believe it is a sufficient explanation to say, 'shit happens'. And while it is refreshing to hear politicians speak in unguarded colloquial language from time to time, it would be disastrous if they believed that 'shit happens' were an adequate response to any apparently random events in Australian society.

It would let them off the hook for ignoring the influence of gambling and addiction from which they gain state revenue on poverty, the connections between poverty and violence, and the irrationality of dealing with violence by building more and more prisons.

Neither individual deaths nor deaths in war just happen. They occur in the context of social relationships which we expect politicians to reflect on and address. In the vernacular, we expect them to use their head and to pull their finger out.

Ending the Intervention

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Sarah Burnside

Over three and a half years since the Northern Territory Emergency Response ('the Intervention') was launched, it has ceased to be front-page news.

Although criticism of the Federal Government's Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (SIHIP) still regularly makes the headlines, the day-to-day realities of living under the Intervention remain somewhat mysterious.

Originally, the Intervention was premised on the notion that, where 'self-determination' policies had 'failed', decisive action would enable the Government to 'stabilise, normalise and exit' remote Aboriginal communities. In other words, it would storm in, fix the problem, and leave when its radical solutions were no longer needed.

The Intervention was announced by John Howard and Mal Brough on 21 June 2007. The question hovers: what is the endpoint? When, and by what measures, will remote Aboriginal communities be deemed to be 'normalised'?

Boyd Hunter, a Fellow at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, wrote in 2007 that the Intervention had been launched in such a hurried fashion that there had been no lead time to prepare an evaluation framework.

'It will now be very difficult to evaluate the outcomes,' Hunter wrote, 'because no groundwork was laid to establish credible benchmarks for what existed before the policy shift.'

'Consequently, the NT intervention is unlikely to be held to account and the Government can make almost any claim it wants about what happens as a result of its policy.'

Boyd has proven to be prescient: arguments about the Intervention's effectiveness have largely become a matter of competing anecdotes, contested legitimacy and ad hominem attacks — who has the right to speak?

On 7 February 2011, a non-partisan group of 'concerned Australians' — including former prime minister Malcolm Fraser, Professor Larissa Behrendt, Reverend Dr Djinyini Gondarra OAM, the Hon. Alastair Nicholson, Reverend Alistair Macrae, The Hon. Elizabeth Evatt AC, Professor Fiona Stanley, Julian Burnside QC and Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne Phillip Freiere — released a statement expressing their concerns about 'the failure of the Federal Government, with the tacit support of the Opposition, to properly address problems facing Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory'.

These signatories note that the Intervention 'has been progressed without credible consultation with, or the approval of, Aboriginal people'.

It is important to note that there is no one homogenous view of the Intervention within Aboriginal Australia. Prominent figures such as Marcia Langton, Noel Pearson and Bess Nungarrayi Price have welcomed it as a long-awaited initiative to help vulnerable children.

In 2009, Price wrote 'I am one of those people who embraced the Government's move. To me it meant at last somebody was acknowledging that there was a crisis and that it needed to be addressed.'

The 'concerned Australians' note that there 'are some limited aspects of the Intervention that have been viewed positively in some Aboriginal communities' and make it clear that 'it is the compulsory nature of the policies which are of concern'.

They argue that positive change 'requires respect and genuine engagement with the people themselves at the local level, rather than an isolated policy development in Canberra'.

Importantly, the non-indigenous members of the 'concerned Australians' do not seek to speak for Aboriginal people; the statement coincided with an event at Melbourne Law School where elders from remote NT communities spoke on 'the impact of living under the Intervention'.

The Intervention necessitated suspending the Racial Discrimination Act (RDA) which it clearly contravened; the legislation imposed restrictions — such as compulsory income management for welfare recipients — only on 'prescribed [Aboriginal] communities'.

The Rudd/Gillard Government reinstated the RDA, but did not remove these restrictions. Instead, the relevant legislation was extended to all Northern Territory citizens. The 'concerned Australians' characterise this move as a mere 'vener of non-discrimination' and 'call upon the Government to start afresh'.

In addition to concerns about discrimination, the statement suggests the Intervention is failing on its own terms. For instance, the signatories note that despite the removal of the welfare entitlements of those whose children fail to attend school, 'recent figures from the NT Department of Education show a steady fall in attendance at schools in very remote areas between 2006-7 and 2009-10'.

They charge, in effect, that the Intervention is being maintained in spite of evidence as to its counter-productiveness.

Similarly, Professor Jon Altman of the ANU argued last year that the 'state policy of normalisation is not delivering even by its own benchmarks. This is unconscionable policy failure without any apparent policy risk assessment or contingency planning.'

The 'concerned Australians' conclude that the 'policy approach must move from one of bureaucratic control by Canberra to one of recognition of Aboriginal leadership, negotiation, capacity building and direct input by Aboriginal people ... Without the direct engagement

with Aboriginal people, policy changes will fail.’

The political year is still young. Whether 2011 will herald any change, though, remains to be seen.

Where children used to play

NON-FICTION

Vin Maskell

Once a year the children come out to play. They arrive with their parents, who are laden with salads, drinks, folding chairs. Cupcakes, chips, plastic plates. The children bring chalk, scooters, skateboards, lightness.

Before long the women have nestled into the folding chairs in the shade of the bottle-brushes and the wattle myrtles. They unburden the loads of their lives by talking of work and holidays and children, in between their offspring seeking attention.

The men stand about in their shorts and their beers, talking of hammers and nails and of children. Sometimes a youngster appears at a father's hip, asking for what their mother has refused.

Once a year the children come out to play. On the footpath at first, in small groups, but then onto the road as a collective of energy and curiosity. They draw pink stick figures on the bitumen with their chalk. They draw a yellow line for scooter races, a wobbly line the length of the 300 metre street. They scribble their names in blue and green and white onto the bumpy tar.

If the children were older — in high school, say — you might mistake the chalk for spraycans, the drawing for graffiti, the playfulness for vandalism.

As the children decorate, their parents talk and turn over sausages in the shade. The coolness is courtesy of a former neighbour who planted some of the street's trees 30 years ago. He and his girlfriend were the hub of the street for many a year. He mowed nature strips, fixed leaking pipes, welcomed newcomers. She talked, spread news and opinions, pruned roses. He hung Christmas lights, played Santa. They hosted the street party year after year, outside their home. Poured the drinks, fired up the barbie. And together they planted some trees.

But a few years after she died — her mind went first, then the rest — he moved across town. At his first street party as a guest rather than as a host, *Thank you* was written in chalk in big letters on the footpath.

Across town he lived in a different type of street. A busy street with traffic and noise. A place for him and his new girlfriend, but no place for a street party.

Once a year, though, he returns to see the next generation of neighbours. New leaves on old trees. As always, the party is halfway down the street, outside his old home. There's a picket fence where the roses once bloomed. There's a four-wheel drive where the boat used to rest.

There's a blue-light alarm system where the Christmas lights used to blink in time. Fresh paint, new grass.

The former neighbour drinks in the shade and talks of hammers and nails and fishing and bait, and of neighbours now in nursing homes and elsewhere.

On the street the children play, some only toddlers, some nearly teenagers. High voices burble and bubble or cry out when knees are grazed. Two of the older boys bring their billy-cart, welded together by their father in the winter. One girl sits on the footpath and reads a book for a little while, her finger following the large print.

Sausages are served with the salads. Drinks are topped up. The talk takes in the weather and the mosquitoes, the rain and the tomatoes.

As the sun begins to drop the parents' unspoken thoughts turn to tomorrow's work, to school, to children's baths. Here and there a toddler is scooped up in loving arms, amid thank-you smiles and promises to do it all again next year. The older children linger but the barbecue is cold now and the cupcakes are just crumbs.

The parents pack up the empty salad bowls, fold up the chairs, cart away card tables. The former neighbour bids his annual farewells again, says he'll be back in 12 months' time. He and his partner drive away. Perhaps he spies, through reddened eyes, his old home, receding in the rear-view mirror.

By nightfall the only evidence of the day is on the bitumen. Cars will drive over the coloured dust tomorrow, cars on their way to offices and building sites and schools. And rain will fall on the chalk too, washing away the stick-figure self portraits, the proud names, the hopscotch squares, the wobbly lines.

The children will wake reluctantly. As they are cajoled into the day they might wonder if yesterday was a dream, a dream their parents dreamt, of life decades past: a dream possibly of false nostalgia, of a time when children came out to play, on the street and on the road, until darkness, each and every day of the summer.

Our blind search for sweetness

POETRY

Kevin Gillam

the one of us

one is the fret and first on top of zero and
morning is what we drew with the sun in the corner,
at our desks, all urgent, tongues awry and
the fact that ants like fingernails was the
beginning of a beautiful clasp of hours but beauty's
of little consequence measured against the
summer of all our contentments, for
summer with its flywire slack and stretch, days
of shimmering bitumen and brindled leaves, the
beginning of the bake and rise of us,
the ache and yearn and drip but just
at that moment it was the house, the windows, the clouds,
morning in crayons, our Christian names, only the
one of us, penciled proud on the back

small religion

it's as if, roaming these back streets and lanes,
you're writing a small religion, a haiku
of creeds. it's honesty, a symphony of
missing pickets and dropped fruit. the tongue
is bleeding, but the words come out the same.
checking spelling, cursive immaculate,
an orderly flight of birds across a
yellowing page. some forgottens, of course,

won't be worded. whose hours are those dressed
as cirrus? who connects the whirr of moth wings
to make theory? at these moments the hand
stutters, moves like cut up water. and some,
some here might make a diagnosis. undiluted,
urgent, serrated thinkings. you've entered this pact
between disease, a second hand and all that's
left and in between. 'inside 18 months',
the doctor's eyes upon you. here in the lane
watching ants, the blind search for sweetness

learnts

number of sips equals number of tastes
cirrus is a smeared, silent language
smother hides mother holds other
more salve in horizons than creeds
thinks spin but a moon librates
we're ants in the blind search for sweetness
monks can tell one silence from another
in ICU it's the day and your name
it's in forgetting, losing North
not long after I'm dead, you'll be dead
a peppermint brailles in bark
we're all wide-eyed in the sudden light
a hammer feels the purpose of a nail
can see the black in the blue

louvred light

it rises in scent and wet bracken
it doesn't need a wall around it
it's empty, further away than death
it could be dust motes, the soft focus
it's withered to nought but still singing
it pulls away, slides into regret
it's becoming unnecessary
it's written in the scrawl of cirrus
it whispers that North's not important
it's perforated and unbreathing
it's better in the absence of thought
it leaves moth-wing stains on fore-fingers
it's in the split lino, louvred light
it's yesterday, but no-one's noticed

Why private schools need more money

EDUCATION

Chris Middleton

At this time of year, there is normally a raft of stories about private school fees and government funding. Now, there seems to be a swing in public sentiment towards questioning the level of financial support given to private schools.

A recent poll shows 70 per cent of people think the Federal Government gives too much money to private schools. The Australian Education Union, representing state school teachers, is campaigning on the issue, and a number of newspapers and commentators are [pushing](#) the same agenda.

Such commentary is significant because the Gonski review into Federal funding of schools is [underway](#). The review may shape the funding of non-government schools for many years to come.

But headlines about rising school fees and claims that the majority of funding goes to private schools are full of misinformation and bias, and amount to a campaign against non-government schools.

Two images are being projected: the majority of government funding is going to a minority of students in private schools; and that 'private schools' refers to wealthy independent schools.

In reality, non-government schools educate about one in three of all Australian students, most of whom are educated in Catholic schools and various low fee-paying religious and community schools. The rhetoric hardly acknowledges this.

And all schools do not get the same funding. The Socio-Economic Status (SES) score determines whether a school will have as much as 70 per cent of the estimated cost of educating a student in a government school or as little as 13.7 per cent.

The AEU and others talk of non-government schools receiving more government funding than state schools. They ignore the fact that state schools receive most of their funding (88 per cent) from state governments.

The fact is that if you combine federal and state funding, only 20 per cent of government funding goes to non-government schools that educate one in three Australian students. If critics argue that federal funding of non-government schools should reflect the percentage of students in the two sectors, why does the same argument not apply to the level of state funding?

Students at government schools receive about twice as much government funding as students at non-government schools. Also, contrary to perceptions of ever-increasing funding

of non-government schools, Productivity Commission data shows a 1.2 per cent increase in funding to government schools in recent years, compared to a 1.6 per cent decrease in non-government schools.

Critics claim that private school fees have risen by about 100 per cent in the past ten years against an inflation rate of 37 per cent. It is implied that this gap between inflation and the rise in fees is because private schools are greedy.

However, inflation in the area of education is much higher than average. The Government's Average Government School Recurrent Cost (AGSRC) index measures inflation in the educational sector and determines the per capita increases each year. Every year this is higher than the inflation rate.

The biggest educational expenses are salaries which have consistently (and rightly) gone up by more than the inflation rate each year. Other fast increasing costs include the heavy technology component which has climbed dramatically over the past decade.

Additionally, normally non-government schools do not get any funding for capital works such as new buildings. Therefore independent private schools have to factor building expenses into their fees, and many rely largely on fundraising to minimise the impact on fees.

In the government sector the construction of new buildings is met by the Department of Education.

Aside from the specific issues of funding and fees, Catholic schools can claim to have contributed enormously to the Australian community, and thus make a claim for some funding on the basis of the common good.

The historic success of immigration and multiculturalism in Australia owes something to Catholic schools that played a role in the integration and advancement of significant migrant groups: Irish, Italian, Maltese, East European, Lebanese, Vietnamese, Filipino.

In recent years, Catholic schools have contributed to the education of refugee groups such as those from East Timor. Every unaccompanied minor among the asylum seekers at Woomera and Baxter (all Muslims) was given a place in South Australia's Catholic schools.

Indirectly also, Catholic schools, as a backbone of the Catholic community, underpin a Church that is the largest non-Government provider of welfare, healthcare and aged care services in Australia.

In countless other areas of Australian life (the arts, sport, healthcare, to name a few), governments subsidise private endeavour — and the fabric of Australian life would be the poorer without it. It would be ironic if government funding of the non-government sector was seen to be under threat because its investment in our young had proved to be too successful.

Preparing to kill the internet

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



Perhaps what is most remarkable about events in Egypt over the past few weeks is that authorities were able to switch off access to the internet for five days. That has not occurred in any other country in the course of the 20 year history of the internet. Internet access has continued during political turmoil in Iran, Burma, and many other countries.

It's also worth noting that US President Barack Obama's carefully crafted [remarks](#) last week on the situation in Egypt failed to specifically mention the denial of access to the internet. His address included the usual declaration — 'we stand for universal values, including the rights of the Egyptian people to freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, and the freedom to access information'.

But it did not make reference to what is surely the most striking violation of those freedoms on this occasion: denial of internet access. It would have been reassuring to hear him link freedom of access to the internet with the other freedoms he mentions.

In the minds of some, the reason he's treading warily is that the US Government itself is preparing the ground for switching off internet access in a national emergency. The [Protecting Cyberspace as a National Asset Act](#) is being introduced by US Homeland Security committee chair Senator Joe Lieberman. It would grant the President powers to seize control of the internet, and shut it down if necessary.

Popularly known as the 'kill switch', it's intended for use in a situation of cyber warfare. But there are fears that it could be used just as easily to control the flow of information. What we've learned through WikiLeaks helps us to understand why the US Government may be interested in such a power.

Any form of control of the internet does not sit easily with [remarks](#) made by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in January last year, when she accused countries that build barriers to parts of the internet or filter search engines of contravening the UN's Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Australia was [implicitly](#) in her firing line, with the setting up of our internet filter well advanced.

Communications Minister Stephen Conroy — charged with setting up the filter — was therefore open to derision last week when he responded to questions about the internet shutdown in Egypt. He [declared](#) that 'Australia's a vibrant democracy, where the government doesn't control the internet'. He continued:

I don't think we have any of these powers — that we could pass a law to make ISP services

turn off when we want them to? I don't think we have that power now, and I don't think anyone's seeking it.

If only the conviction suggested by these words could be enshrined in legislation or, better, a bill or rights.

The future shock of aged care

COMMUNITY

Martin Laverty

Those younger than the Baby Boomer generation may have missed the release of a Productivity Commission aged care report. Pre-Baby Boomers may wrongly have thought it doesn't impact them.

Anyone who has had to find an aged care home for a loved one will tell you the system is a maze. It's hard to access, and hard to find a way through. It's not able to give everyone what they want.

The reason younger people should worry is that if they have family members, chances are they'll take a crash course in aged care navigation if, without warning, a family member needs care urgently.

Younger people should also know if we don't fix aged care today, the system they'll encounter when they get older may not be sufficient. They'll also be funding it in their working lives through higher taxes if we don't change the current financing system.

The last two years have been unique in aged care. Consumers, providers, and groupings of staff who work in aged care have been mostly unified in arguing what reform should involve. Most agree aged care should be provided to all older people who are assessed as being in need.

Most agree the aged care system should be easy to navigate, and give older people and their families genuine choice of service types. Also, that funding should meet the actual cost of services provided, to ensure that staff are better paid, and that quality standards are met.

These united calls for reform jump out from the 482 submissions the Productivity Commission.

The aged care community has not always been united. The Howard Government reforms in 1997 ensured that bonds are the prism through which many of our current elected representatives and senior journalists approach aged care matters.

Bonds, which are refundable deposits that are returned to a family when aged care accommodation is no longer needed, enable residential aged care services to have capital to build aged care homes.

Bonds have worked well in low care services for the last 13 years. Yet in response to the Commission report some have questioned, and many journalists have rehashed, misunderstandings about bonds; mainly, that the proposals might result in the forced sale of family homes to fund high care bonds.



The Commission has in fact put forward a method that will put an end to the forced sale of a person's family home to fund an aged care bond, through a number of options such as a government-backed equity access scheme. But you'll not have seen too much detail about this in the media. Discussion of equity access options hardly deliver engaging newspaper headlines.

In any case, the issue is not bonds themselves, but a bigger question of 'Who pays?'

The Commission approaches this sensitive topic by separating aged care into its different types of costs: accommodation, daily living expenses, and attended care and nursing support.

During a person's life, accommodation is self-funded. Governments support social housing for those unable to self-fund. This principle — self-funding, underpinned by a social safety net for those who are unable to self-fund — should apply in aged care as well.

Daily living expenses are also something we typically self-fund, be it through income or superannuation, or through welfare or aged pensions. Again, entering aged care should not alter the way in which an individual pays for normal living costs.

Care is different. All Australians have public hospital access; additional private coverage is available to those who are able to pay for it. Similarly, aged care should be provided on an entitlement basis: all should have universal access, while those who can afford to make a contribution shall do so.

The Commission suggests the contribution, even for the most wealthy, should be capped at 25 per cent of the cost of care. It's hard to argue against the Commission's logic.

We need to come to terms with the fact that in order to have a sustainable aged care system to meet the demands of a retiring Baby Boomer population, those with capacity to contribute to the total cost of their aged care will have no choice but to do so. Government will similarly need to guarantee a robust safety net for those not able to meet the cost of their care.

The westernisation of Asian beauty

NON-FICTION

Ellena Savage

While on a holiday recently I had my first pedicure. I was in Hong Kong, in someone's 15th floor apartment-turned-salon, watching a Steven Segal movie on the wall television and avoiding the disparaging glances my pedicurist shot my way as she shaved away several kilograms of my dead foot-skin.

A young Asian woman entered the salon and asked, in English, how much it would cost her to have artificial eyelashes implanted. Struggling in English, the beautician informed her that she wasn't able to perform the procedure that afternoon and that she would have to book ahead, shoving a flyer in the woman's hand. 'How much to just remove my eyelashes, then?' she persisted.

'Ouch!' I almost said aloud. Remove? Eyelashes?

I was struck by the realisation that not only do many women of all ethnicities spend a great deal of money on painful procedures in the name of beauty, but they do so to look like one woman: Pamela Anderson. That ridiculous wide-eyed, straight-nosed, enormous busted white woman maintains international currency as a beauty standard, despite our knowing better.

Feeling significantly lighter from my pedicure treatment, I headed straight to the internet café to read up on cosmetic eyelid surgery, blepharoplasty. It's a popular cosmetic procedure some East Asian women (and men) pursue where the eyelid is sliced and fat removed to add a fold in the lid, which has a 'widening' effect on typically 'Asian' eyelids.

The desired result strives for a more 'western', less 'Asian' appearance.

We know that in many Asian cultures paleness as an indication of class and beauty predated colonialism. But whiteness, western-ness, arrived as a beauty standard with colonisation — and with a racialised imbalance of power which favoured Europeans.

So why would an Asian woman want to look like Pamela Anderson? Probably for the same reason white women do: there's a globalised beauty standard that is gendered, racialised, and hierarchical.

Whether white people choose to participate, challenge, or opt out of their prescribed cultures, whiteness — like any other marker of speciality — is entrenched in a complex history of manufactured power. Whiteness is equated with normativity and privilege; whiteness, western-ness, is the index. It remains the 'us' to a brown 'them'. Just turn on any television station other than SBS and try to find a program that reflects the way ordinary (read: diverse) viewers at home look.

It's distressing to think of women altering their physical markers of ethnicity to conform to such an arbitrary notion of beauty. More distressing is that, like cosmetic surgery, we describe it using the rhetoric of choice. As though a female could wake up one morning and, free of cultural coercion, invent what femininity means, and choose to spend \$10,000 to attain it.

This perception of autonomy as merely the right to mutilate one's body without any regard to the historical hierarchy one is born into is insulting. If an Asian woman living in the west who solicits eyelid surgery is exercising 'choice' and 'autonomy' over her body, she is doing so only to conform to an ethno-centric norm and so escape prejudice based on her physicality. Similarly, a white woman does it to conform to a gendered, damaging beauty standard.

Outside the west there are other, more optimistic ideas about plastic surgery. Residual from wartime, surplus Iranian surgeons earn a living by trimming the Aquiline snouts of the middle-classes in Tehran. If rumour is to be believed, a bandage pulled across the bridge of one's nose is something of a status symbol in urban Iran.

One Iranian artist, Shirin Aliabadi, plays with the idea that affordable cosmetic surgery 'democratises beauty'. If the luck of birth dictates that one's nose and chin meet where one's mouth is supposed to be, why shouldn't one correct it and join the ranks of beautiful people?

Here, I'm ambivalent. I know that beauty is bound up with race, gender and power, but it appears so transcendent and desirable that almost nothing could convince me to stop wearing lipstick and ostentatious outfits. But I cannot forget that women keep paying and paying to belong in the world.

I know that women as the primary consumers of the beauty industry are still conditioned to identify with their bodies above all else, and that the small number of women lucky enough to escape or transcend this do not set the standard.

Remember Sudan

HUMAN RIGHTS

Jack de Groot



Little more than one month ago, I [urged](#) *Eureka Street* readers to stand by the people of Sudan in their moment of hope and fear. Today, we can reflect on the challenges overcome and those that still lie ahead for the people of what look sure be independent North and South Sudanese states.

During the Christmas season, we anxiously awaited a historic referendum: the keystone to Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement. As we prayed for a peaceful outcome, we prepared for the worst; while January's vote held for Sudan the promise of desperately-needed change, the threat of violence and bloody civil war once again loomed in the region.

From 9 January, Sudanese people flocked by the millions to polling stations across the south and queued for hours to imprint their thumb on ballot papers. As the polls closed on 14 January, more than 3.1 million voters in Southern Sudan — 83 per cent of those registered — had voted.

Whether they voted in favour of unity or for independent states, this act of self-determination was the first step towards lasting peace in Sudan.

The final result of the referendum is due to be announced on 14 February, but the preliminary count shows more than 98 per cent of voters in favour of secession. It appears likely that Southern Sudan will declare its independence from the North in July 2011.

To date our worst fears have been allayed. Neither the vote nor its presumed outcome have ignited the bloody conflict of Sudan's past, and mass migration from North to South — more than 1.5 million people so far — has not yet created the kind of humanitarian challenge aid agencies prepared for.

But a vote for independence, despite its political and symbolic significance, is just the beginning for a vulnerable Southern Sudan. The people now face the challenge of nation-building, no easy feat for a region plagued by political rivalry and displaying some of the world's worst development indicators.

Following the release of results later this month, the leaders of both the North and the South will be charged with negotiating the logistics of an arduous separation.

During six months of transition, they must decide how borders will be demarcated; how citizenship for those displaced from their homes shall be determined; how Sudan's debts ought to be divided; and how valuable oil, water, and mineral resources will be shared.

Until independence is declared in mid-2011, the threat of violence remains high.

Although in secession the South stands to acquire up to 80 per cent of Sudan's oil resources, some commentators have already condemned Southern Sudan to ranks of 'failed state'.

There is no doubt the success of Africa's newest nation will depend upon the support of many — not least of which is a stable and secure North — but if southern Sudan is to succeed as an independent state it first depends upon our vote of confidence.

Since being granted semi-autonomous governance in 2005, Southern Sudan has functioned and developed — albeit tenuously — as an independent state. In five years, the population has grown by 13 per cent, and within metropolitan areas business enterprise is steadily on the rise.

Of course there is still a perilously long course to chart, particularly in marginal communities where education and health indications are abhorrently low.

For more than a decade, Caritas Australia has worked in Sudan to improve water and sanitation, education and livelihood opportunities. As the people of Southern Sudan embark upon a new and challenging journey towards nationhood, the work will continue for aid agencies such as Caritas.

With the region's political stability at the forefront of international dialogue and commentary, we must remain focused on the humanitarian challenges that lie ahead. War in Sudan would threaten the lives of more than one million southerners currently living in the north, and without peace, poverty and hunger will take a firm hold on already vulnerable communities.

At least 70 per cent of Southern Sudan's population is Catholic, a fact that underscores the capacity of the Caritas network, in partnership with local Catholic agencies, to respond effectively to increased needs and to amplify the voice of Sudanese people living in Australia.

Last week Australia's Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd attended the African Union Summit in Ethiopia. While some chose to take a critical view of Australia's increasing engagement in Africa, our nation's growing investment in some of the world's poorest communities is a welcome sign for Sudan.

Sudan's fate may appear all but sealed, and with tensions erupting in neighbouring Egypt it is easy to turn our gaze from Africa's largest nation. But with poverty and prosperity hanging precariously in the balance, there could not be a worse time to forget Sudan.

Father Brennan's jailbreak

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***The Next Three Days* (M). Director: Paul Haggis. Starring: Russell Crowe, Elizabeth Banks, Brian Dennehy, Liam Neeson. Running time: 133 minutes**

Writer-director Paul Haggis' remake of 2007 French film *Pour Elle* (*Anything for Her*) has Russell Crowe portraying father and husband John Brennan, a perennial everyman whose wife Lara (Banks) is serving a life sentence for murder. Innocent or not, the evidence against Lara is compelling: she's not getting out.

Not legally, anyway. After exhausting all avenues offered within the structures of the law, John decides to stage a good old-fashioned prison break. He seeks advice from a veteran prison-escapee, Damon Pennington (Neeson, in a memorable cameo), then sets about laying his scheme.

A mess of maps and photos pinned to the wall of his study reflects the obsessive and meticulous nature of his planning. A series of close calls and violent altercations with underworld figures reveal his rising desperation, and set an assortment of generic coppers on his tail. There's no questioning John's devotion to Lara and to his cause: he puts his life and, it seems, his very soul on the line.

Haggis has done fine work as a screenwriter in the past, notably on the Clint Eastwood-directed *Million Dollar Baby*. The products of his stints in the director's chair (*Crash*, *In the Valley of Elah*), on the other hand, while sporadically powerful, tend to be bogged by self-importance.

The Next Three Days continues this trend. Every glance and utterance is imbued with such a muck of earnestness that chunks of the film are rendered humourless and just plain dull.

There is a heavy-handed allusion to Don Quixote that doesn't really go anywhere. Also a fairly flat attempt at exploring the roots of John's stoicism, by lingering upon the a stonily silent relationship he shares with his father (Dennehy), to no great effect. More affecting is John's warm relationship with his own young son, Luke (Ty Simpkins), which at least seems authentic, if not revelatory.

But there is too much such domestic drama and navel-gazing for what could otherwise have been an effective, if conventional thriller. This is reflected in the film's over-long running time.

The Next Three Days does kick into a higher gear in its final act; the escape is well plotted, and the climactic chase sequence is both tense and surprising, and contains at least one

moment of sheer, cathartic peril. This makes the film worthwhile, although it's a long time coming.

I am not a member of the Russell Crowe fan club, but in this instance Crowe's combination of ordinariness and stoic machismo serves the story and character well. We accept John both as a loving family man and, when the situation demands it, as a gutsy action man.

The former is important as it bolsters his conviction, while allowing him to retain his humanity as he embarks upon his occasionally violent mission. The extent to which his humanity will remain intact beyond the film's final moments is a question Haggis chooses to leave with his audience.

Pope's guide to social networking

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

The internet is not Pope Benedict's natural metier. So his World Day of Social Communications [address](#) last week allowed readers to see how an elderly, intelligent man might reflect on the massive changes in social communication. He was characteristically perceptive in his focus on large questions.



He recognised the importance of the internet for expanding human communication. He measured its value by the extent to which it enhances and deepens human relationships, and was even-handed in his assessment of the advantages and risks it offers.

He urged Christians to take it seriously, and stressed the importance of embodying Gospel values in both the truth that is communicated and in the way in which it is communicated.

The document is interesting for what it reveals of the author as well as of the topic. Benedict retails large theories about the significance of the internet, but the scholar in him refers to them as 'an ever more commonly held opinion'. He prudently reserves judgment on areas outside his expertise.

From Plato's day, older people have seen new ways of communication as a problem primarily for the young. As a result the anxieties they express about new technologies are often more about the development of young people than about the technologies themselves. The fact that 12-year-olds used to play Monopoly for ten hours a day was not an indictment of Monopoly.

Benedict also associates social networking with the young. But his tone is not elegaic. He trusts in their freedom to use it well.

Most striking in his address is his unequivocal endorsement of the internet's possibilities for expanding and deepening human communication. The internet is to be embraced and shaped in such a way that it realises its full possibilities. So, while allowing that the Gospel will challenge some of the ways of thinking that are typical of the web, he encourages Christians to go for it:

'I would like then to invite Christians, confidently and with an informed and responsible creativity, to join the network of relationships which the digital era has made possible. This is not simply to satisfy the desire to be present, but because this network is an integral part of human life. The web is contributing to the development of new and more complex intellectual and spiritual horizons, new forms of shared awareness.'

Endorsements don't come much stronger than this.

The address invites the reader to ask further questions that it does not treat itself. It studies social communication as a personal phenomenon, focusing on the ethics of the way in which individuals use it.

But social networking has also large political and economic dimensions which help shape that use. We need to ask who profits from the internet, how advertising revenue helps shape the images and information we receive, how repressive governments attempt to control the internet and can be undone by it. It would be good to see these public aspects of social communications receive sustained ethical reflection by Catholic thinkers.

For Catholics the Pope's insistence that the human values of the Gospel should be embodied in the form of communication as well as in its content will be challenging. Much that passes for conversation online is characterised by intolerance and disrespect. Catholic online publications are not exempt. It is hard to see how they can endorse respect unless they moderate contributions to discussion, and exclude personal rancour.

One of the most interesting questions raised by the address concerns the distinction made between internet and face to face communication. These are often strongly opposed. Benedict insists that face to face content is central to the church, because it is central also in human life. So he seeks a balance between virtual and face to face communication.

The relationship between different forms of communication, however, is quite complex and worth exploring further.

Take, for example, a weekly exchange of love letters over a long time, with their variously probing, self-reflective, endearing, encouraging and challenging passages. It would be hard to argue persuasively that this kind of communication is necessarily less intimate or deep than face to face communication. Certainly it is different, and the correspondents may long to meet face to face. But the couple may communicate more deeply through their writing than in any meeting.

Online communication can also be intimate. We might expect some forms of social communication, such as Facebook and Twitter, to be less self-revelatory because they address a larger audience. But in that respect, they should not be compared to intimate face to face communication, but to unstructured group conversation. They can encourage a depth of communication they do not achieve.

Ultimately all communication is mediated. It takes place through symbols. In face to face communication, for example, we are always interpreting signs. We read people's faces, compare what we see with the inner image we have of them, and adjust our image by what we learn in the new exchange. The same engagement between image and the encounter takes place in writing and in internet communication.

Perhaps the best contribution of the churches to reflection on the internet might be to explore the rich body of reflection on word, image and symbol they have developed over centuries in speaking of the communication between God and human beings.

Egyptian people's vengeance

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ashlea Scicluna

A nation of 80 million people, Egypt this week reached the cusp of revolutionary change. While the outbreak of mass protests may have been sudden and unforeseen, the grievances at the heart of the movement are far less mysterious.

President Hosni Mubarak has controlled Egypt with authoritarian diligence since 1981. Rampant corruption, particularly nepotism, and economic mismanagement has generated a growing sense of resentment among ordinary Egyptians and perpetuated Egypt's mounting economic ills.

In just one example, Mubarak has long manipulated the government subsidies on food and fuel to maintain his popular support. These subsidies are inefficient and a drain on the Egyptian economy. It is not unusual for policy decisions to be driven by regime maintenance rather than the socio-economic needs of Egyptians.

During three decades of rule, Mubarak has amended constitutional dictates and molded the law to suit his regime. Opposition political parties must be endorsed by his bureaucracy, and presidential candidates need similar approval to run for election. In fact, direct presidential elections were only introduced in 2005.

Opposition groups are routinely harassed, repressed, even imprisoned to maintain the political dominance of Mubarak's National Democratic Party (NDP). The tightness of the political space has limited opposition, and this repression is now being avenged on the streets.

Although the protests have been unprecedented, it is unclear what the result will be. So far Mubarak has offered cosmetic concessions, such as the dismissal of the Egyptian cabinet and appointment of a vice-president. Egyptians are unimpressed and continue to call for Mubarak's departure.

The state police have been withdrawn and lawlessness has taken hold in Cairo and surrounding areas. Widespread looting is prompting individuals to arm themselves. Prison breakouts have occurred. A near freeze on food supplies is forcing Egyptians to queue for bread.

Many of these incidents appear to have been organised by the regime in an attempt to convince Egyptians life was better under Mubarak's rule. But the protestors have not faltered, and what is emerging is a stand-off between Mubarak and the people of Egypt.

Many believe the military is the sole force capable of taking control. It was a relief when the army appeared on the streets this week. Egyptians respect the military, due to its historical

neutrality and the perception that it has Egypt's best interests at heart. This was reinforced this week by statements from the military that they will not fire on peaceful crowds and will uphold freedom of expression.

Any ouster of the current regime will need the support of the military.

In the case of a truly democratic election, another highly influential actor will come into play. As the most popular and most controversial opposition group, the Muslim Brotherhood is often the elephant in the room of Egyptian politics. From its founding in 1928 to today, the group's leading figures have ranged from the politically moderate to the Islamic extreme.

Herein lies, in large part, the reason why Western donors have supported Mubarak. They fear an ascendant Muslim Brotherhood.

Common wisdom in the West holds that the Muslim Brotherhood is an anti-democratic force, hostile to human rights. Yet such statements are driven more by fear than fact. The Brotherhood is not a monolith. While some leading thinkers have espoused a frightening world view, a more recent crop of leaders declared a willingness to participate in the democratic process.

The Egyptian constitution forbids religious political parties, and so the Brotherhood has been outlawed since 1954. Still, the group is popular, and provides the strongest and most organised opposition to Mubarak's NDP.

In the 2005 parliamentary election, responding to pressure from then US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Mubarak loosened the electoral laws. The result was a startling success for the Brotherhood, which captured a record 20 per cent of the 454 parliamentary seats by running as independents. In the aftermath, Mubarak tightened the rules once more, and in the 2010 election the Brotherhood won only a single seat.

The current protests have a distinctly secular flavour and the Brotherhood has not tried to play a controlling role. In fact, together with the other opposition groups they have formed the National Association for Change, led by the apparent spokesman for the protests, Mohamed ElBaradei.

A Brotherhood bureau chief stated that 'what we want is what the people want; right now we should have a completely different regime. We should have freedom and free elections.'

Should they occur in Egypt's future, truly democratic elections would likely deliver a majority share of the government to the Brotherhood. If the Brotherhood were to participate in a unity coalition, with an independent president, such as ElBaradei, and a strong army to guard the integrity of democratic institutions, Egypt may be able to forge a brave new path.

Given the group's popularity, any step toward democracy that arises from the protests must involve the Brotherhood, or else it would be a wasted opportunity. It would extend the

hypocrisy of the democratic rhetoric during the Mubarak years and perpetuate the deprivation of Egyptian rights in favour of foreign interests.

What we are seeing on our television screens is a long overdue expression of democratic sentiment. That sentiment must be allowed to flourish with the support and encouragement of foreign allies.

Feathery fable

NON-FICTION

Fiona Douglas

Among the greens and blues of the grasses and gum trees, her pure white glares through.

She bears no resemblance to the residents of this place, of whom there are six in all, sporting bold lustrous colours with glinting highlights: black and silver, gold and black, red, and yellow ochre. Nor does she resemble other visitors to this place; not the drab unwelcome ones arriving in their great numbers, nor the much celebrated rainbow coloured ones arriving in pairs or threes to perch on the wire fences, a callistemon or melaleuca.

Not only is her presence unusual, but so is her demeanour. She sits still, perfectly still, and not in the safety of a tree but on the grass. It seems she has somehow given up; happy for her end to come via a predator of any calibre. At the very least, she has lost the plot.

Our curiosity piqued, the children and I spy on her from a distance and for some minutes. Then, as if a switch has been flicked, a sickening sinking feeling takes hold inside me.

Like that day at the beach when in the distance the girls and I spotted a seal: a most beautiful black seal, sitting upright in perfect seal form. He was way back on the sand, seemingly transfixed by the great ocean before him. We jogged towards him with excited chatter all the way: *Why is he alone? Where has he come from? Are there any more? What will Dad say?*

Seals are occasionally seen duck diving through the breakers close to shore, but never have we spotted one on land.

His distant contours were exquisite in design, as pen and hand might flow in one smooth stroke. His motionless form was utter beauty. But then, quite close now, our joy turned black: eyes gone, life gone. I think I cried; inside, if not out. Lily took up a stick and drew a big RIP in the sand. We didn't speak, the girls and me. We hovered a bit, and then turned back.

Moving towards the little dove with kids in tow, relief ascends as I see she is alive, although thin and small. She scuttles away from us along the ground, too weak to fly, so we back off. We find some wheat and throw it to her and she pecks at this: excellent. By night she is gone. Someone's escaped pet, we conclude, hopefully on her journey home.

Two weeks later to our great delight, the dove returns. We liberally scatter wheat seed near the house and it contrasts with the terra cotta pavers to make for easy pickings. It seems in no time that Dove's weekly visits turn to daily visits turn to residency.

We joke that one day she will bunk in with our free range bantams. Then, one splendid morning, we see she has! Out of the elevated hutch they parade as usual, strutting and

clucking their way down the gang plank ... but this time with a white dove following at the rear!

I can't stop smiling all day; we are all tickled pink by our little wing-ed family: the acceptance and camaraderie between 'those of another feather'.

Soon Dove takes on more bantam-like characteristics. Namely, she walks everywhere instead of flying, she stays with the group and pecks and scratches at the ground. Clearly she is happy to blend in and adopt the culture of her new home.

Egg collecting is the task of the eight- and nine-year-old humans of the household. It is mid morning, mid spring when I hear muffled shouts and excitement coming from the coop, followed not long after by two animated kiddies with lit up faces blurting out the news as one: 'Dove has laid an egg!' And so she has: a little pale blue dove egg, considerably smaller than the bantam eggs that her room mates lay daily.

We do much research and find out the expected incubation time and learn that doves produce milk to feed their young; quite different from a bantam. Will she cope okay?

Excitement mounts as we tick off the days on the kitchen calendar until the happy event. To our dismay, 'the day' comes and goes. To our disappointment, it then goes some more. It is obvious to all that Dove's egg is infertile. All, that is, except Dove, who sits and sits.

We are nearing the point of intervention — physically ousting her from her nest — when the most miraculous thing happens. Opening the coop door of a morning, out comes Dove ... with her newly hatched baby! Not a dove, like herself, but a bantam! A little yellow bantam, kept close at heel by his solicitous mother as she descends the gang plank.

I cannot describe the elation of the miracle I am witnessing. Or maybe I can: gob smacked joy! And a more proud mother you could not imagine, showing off her little one for all to see.

With the human family soon gathered around we all talk at once, such is our wonder and excitement. When we look into the place where she sat for two months, at the back corner of the hutch, we see the unhatched little pale blue dove egg is surrounded by six or more bantam eggs! It appears the bantams took the opportunity to place their eggs in the nest of a diligent sitter, likely while she was on a food and water break.

Next we wonder how she will manage. After all she will produce milk, but bantams need food — not milk. How will she feed him? And doves fly, but bantams don't ... will she teach him to fly to his peril?

Well. We shouldn't have worried. Dove walked her baby everywhere, plus he thrived so she worked out the food-thing too. Nature has a way; we came to learn first hand. And when that way is different, nature has a way for that too.

King James Bible a masterpiece but not an idol

THEOLOGY

Philip Harvey

The individual today has more choice of English versions of the Bible than at any previous time, most of them translations made last century. An important contributor to this book, the Apostle Paul, liked to talk of *plethora* — that is, magnanimous overabundance — and some would say that we are spoilt for choice when it comes to Bibles: our cup runneth over, there is a *plethora* of interpretations.

This year is the 400th anniversary of that most fabled and revered of all English Bibles, the *King James Version* (1611). The anniversary seems an appropriate time to consider anew what the Bible does and why we need fresh versions.

These questions were on the minds of the 47 scholars brought together to deliver a defining text in the native language of the new United Kingdom. One of the problems was too many Bibles. Catholics, Anglicans of various stripes, and Protestants of every type, had over the previous decades all produced versions, in keeping with the newfound zeal for having Scripture in your own language. The only problem was, which one was best? Which was most accurate? Which one was without ideological influence? Which one reflected reality, and whose reality?

This was not just a matter of personal taste. King James inherited from his godmother Elizabeth a realm divided by religion. Like her, he saw that anything that could bring about national cohesion was certain good. Conflicting opinions about the Word of God were a daily pest, so he commissioned a group of the ablest and most reverend linguists with the task of making an English Bible.

Nowadays we would not want to be seen to be associated with ‘a book written by a committee’, but the authors of the *King James* produced something authoritative.

Even better if you were James, it could become authorised, which had the useful outcome of quietening disputes about conflicting meanings in different versions. Except for a couple of violent interruptions, this and only this version was read in churches for over three centuries, with a resultant shaping of English usage that is inestimable: they were the words everyone heard every week of every year.

The Committee included such anonymous luminaries as Richard Bancroft and Lancelot Andrewes. William Shakespeare probably did Psalm 46 unless you think, as some do, that Shakespeare was a committee. Parts of the Catholic Douai Bible are found there. Nor did they put their candle under a bushel.

But interestingly, 90 per cent of the *King James* was done by someone no longer alive at the time. William Tyndale's earlier translation is the respected main basis, such that there are those who assert that the two greatest writers in English are both Williams.

All the right things will be said in 2011: the *King James* is the soul of our language, it shares pre-eminence (if that is possible) with the Bard, it is the best version made during the coalescence of the language. But all of this talk will be at odds with the actual purpose for which it was created. While readers exalt it as a 'pearl of great price', there are dangers.

One is to make an idol of the *King James*, not just if you say the whole text is inerrant but that its very excellence as literature is inerrant. A mistake made by many devotees is a kind of aesthetic fundamentalism, the fervently held belief that only the *King James* has a claim to be the greatest expression of faith and there has been nothing good like it before or since. Perhaps the simplest way of defining this mistake is that the medium is given priority over the message.

The men (and women?) who worked on the King James would have been dismayed at the idea that their work was read primarily for its lovely poetry and quotable quotes. It may be all rather marvellous, but the whole object is to effect meaning and conversion. Which is why translation keeps on happening, not just because readers want the closest sense of the words, but because of how those words can effect the lived experience of the individual.

Another mistake is to treat the King James as one of those great unread works, shelved between Dostoyevsky's *Idiot* and Joyce's *Ulysses*. As a template for the understanding of the evolution of not just religion but society itself, the *King James* is inimitable. It is a source book, a form of identification, a link to ancient truths. Erasmus and his colleagues in the 16th century agreed that clear translation was decisive for harmony, as well as meaning. While revelation is treated as a way to truth and justice through love, then individuals will want to hear those words in a language they can understand.

No national leader today feels it right and necessary to commission a definitive English Bible, despite the plethora of versions on offer. Finding 47 scholars in one country who could render the Hebrew and Greek into perfect and poetic contemporary English might be seen as quixotic, if it weren't impossible to locate so many experts in one place.

But, while arguments can lead to animosity and even violence over what the sin of Sodom actually is, or what is meant in Corinthians by 'Let your women keep silence in the churches', then engagement with the original texts is crucial. Even just to get close to what the Gospels mean by 'Kingdom of God', as distinct from the Kingdom of James.

Boys will be girls will be boys

POETRY

Stuart Barnes

It's alright

... | it's gonna be alright cos the music plays forever ... |

Paris Brightledge, 'Sterling Void'

Last week I liberated,
west across steel and spires
and crackling desert,
a skein of chromatic CDs:

deep and progress-
ive house compiled
and mixed by John

Digweed, Wally Lopez.

Michelle texted, today:

*Listening to new
music — bloody fantastic! Me*

and Willa are dancing! I

stopped for a moment

to do some dishes

only to feel a little tug

on my short shorts —

her wanting me to rejoin

her on the dance floor.

Five years old, wobbling
in Dad's Blunnies to Dolly
Parton's 'Jolene' with

Mum, draped in frangipani,
both under house arrest.
In the iPhone's screen,
basset hound eyes.

Twisted

liber noctem

batter up the hatcheries
eat, drink, be merry —
do it again, again, again
every Jack has his jackaroo
boys will be girls will be boys ...!
three sheets to the provincial Christmas window
Venus is the root of all evil
a moll's as good as a miss
marriage is a sacred sanatorium
suffer the Prada-wearing Devil or the Deep Blue Sea
adversity makes humdrum bedfellows
better late than pregnant
Heaven knows no beauty like a woman divorced
absence makes the heart grow abscesses
offer your grandmother rotten eggs
only mire fights fire
enough's *never* enough
X marks the death's-head
blood's thinner than affinity
every cloud has a charcoal vinyl

a poet's not recognised in his own land
all good things come to the maître d', never the waiter
troubles shared are troubles doubled
nothing's rare in love and war
tomorrow *always* comes
The Cure's the goddamn disease
Siouxsie should've died a Banshee
Rolling Stones only gather dross
time heals no wound
sola lingua bona est lingua mortua

Artist

Silence,
Silence. The sun runs
Through the great red eye
Of the mountains
Like plasma. From arboreal hooks
The night birds
And the bats
Suspend their dirty cloaks.
Jasmines weep no griefs —
The moon is not corporeal.
Even the slow roses are at peace.
The artist —
Light as sacred papyrus,
Sight restored to his left eye
Like Horus —
Leaps like a leopard

Amongst the willows and white tumuli,
Limbs of low Botticelli clouds
Gracing
His mulatto skin.
Fortunate to have sealed the marbled cracks,
To have faced, to have backed away from his blacks,
He whispers, *Within*,
Within.

Schooling in the classroom without walls

PARENTING

Catherine Marshall



It's an unfair exchange, trading beaches and backyard cricket pitches for boxy classrooms and endless arithmetic lessons. After a languorous summer holiday, there are crisp new uniforms to be donned and lunchboxes to be filled, school buses to be caught and timetables to be followed.

But it doesn't have to be this way. And for a growing number of children, it won't be: for them, January will merge seamlessly into February, and summer will flow on into autumn with nary a mention of tests or assignments, rankings or competitions. They will take their lessons beneath the gum tree, out in the paddock, on the beach or — at a stretch — whilst seated at the dining-room table.

These are the children who are home-schooled, an estimated 26,000 Australians who represent an appealing alternative in a landscape fraught with debate over private versus public education, the virtues of the [My School](#) website and the fairness of education funding models.

It's a daring move, the decision to home-school one's children in an era beset with angst over academic achievement, selective school placement and the perceived superiority of one method of parenting over another.

The furore that erupted recently when Chinese-American mother Amy Chua accused Westerners of being too soft on their children masks a subtle yet pervasive move among middle class parents in Australia towards emulating the high expectations of parents such as Chua. In her book [Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother](#), she writes with pride of the demands she has placed on her two teenage daughters, expecting nothing less than excellence in their academic and extra-curricular pursuits: they were denied sleepovers and play dates and, in one disturbing instance, food and toilet access until a tricky piano piece had been mastered.

Whilst Australian parents are not nearly as authoritarian as this, they do comprehend the increased competition — often from disciplined immigrant students — and the concomitant pressure on their children to maintain their position within the pack. This pressure is absent within the home-schooling community, where parents have deliberately rejected the vulgarity of intensive competition and the hot-housing of children who will achieve predictably high marks in their final exams, but who will often miss out on those quiet moments of abandon, exploration and self-reliance that make for a truly enriching childhood.

And home-schooled children, despite receiving an education a world away from the veritable pressure cooker that is our modern schooling system, will invariably succeed. As far

back as 1990, when educator and writer John Taylor Gatto accepted the New York City Teacher of the Year Award, he noted that children schooled at home were thought to be ‘five or even 10 years ahead of their formally trained peers in their ability to think’.

Moreover, and contrary to the myth that home-schooled children are not well-socialised, they will find it easier to assimilate than their school-going contemporaries. According to a study by the University of Durham in 2002, ‘Children who learn at home appear to develop very different skills from those learning in school. Such children integrate easily into a variety of social settings and are accustomed to taking responsibility within their families and to motivating themselves in their day-to-day activities.’

In the United States, where home-schooling has gradually infiltrated the mainstream, Ivy League universities such as Harvard and Princeton routinely recruit its students. In Australia, however, the ‘graduates’ of this model – and the families which produce them – are still regarded with suspicion, as though they might be hippie throwbacks or have fundamentalist tendencies.

But as with any pioneering movement based on sound principles, home-schooling is bound to gain a foothold in Australia, and its growth will be fortified by an unexpected ally: the Internet. With its limitless provision of information, cyberspace has reinforced the blindingly obvious fact that schools don’t own the copyright on knowledge and skills. And, thanks to Wikileaks, there is no longer such a thing as classified information.

Such freedom of information is invaluable to home-schoolers, a fact I discovered whilst educating my own children before they decided, by degrees, to return to school. I was motivated to home-school in part by the realisation that we don’t really ‘educate’ our children by institutionalising them for 13 years in classrooms occupied solely by same-age, and sometimes same-sex, children, where they are forced to rehash an arbitrary curriculum. Like John Taylor Gatto, I understood that schools are good training grounds for future employees, since the lessons they teach most effectively are peer affiliation, blind obedience and competition for first place.

Home-schooling was a priceless experience for my children, who spent years blooming unselfconsciously, and for myself, given the gift as I was of extended time with them, carving a pathway to the library, constructing timelines that stretched from the Big Bang to the Cold War, making volcanoes on the front lawn. Now, as my firstborn begins her pre-university gap year, and my younger son and daughter ready themselves for another year of formal school, I feel a twinge of melancholy at the freedom and self-determination that are lost in pursuit of a so-called ‘good education’. Our local public high school has won my love and respect, but part of me still yearns to throw in our lot with those free-range children whose school room is delineated not by four walls, but by four hemispheres: the students for whom the whole world is a classroom.

Natural disaster fund could be Gillard's easy path to glory

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

In *Eureka Street* on Friday, UnitingCare National Director Lin Hatfield Dodds [wrote](#) that the Government's proposed flood levy represents precisely the approach social justice principles dictate. But she also described it as a one-off response that won't improve our ability to cope with natural disasters in the long-term.



Being prepared for natural disasters brought on by radical climate fluctuation is part of what former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd called the 'greatest moral challenge of our time'. The fact that he did not have the courage of his conviction, and virtually gave up on it, does not mean that serious preparation for the effects of future climate fluctuation is now beyond us.

There are simple strategies that can go some way to addressing this particular challenge, including making the flood levy a permanent natural disaster fund, as suggested by the Independent MPs who hold the balance of power in the House of Representatives.

In fact the politics of the situation make it much easier for Prime Minister Julia Gillard to make the levy permanent. It could be a rare example of reform that she and her government can be proud of for years to come.

The current government has form in failing to legislate for reforms needed to improve Australia's readiness to face future challenges. The Henry Tax Review was almost totally ignored.

Gillard is not alone. Most prime ministers in recent years have lacked the political courage necessary to legislate for reform. They have focused on government for the short-term, with the aim of being re-elected at the next election. They have considered it politically foolhardy to enact legislation that involves short-term pain for long-term gain.

Part of the problem is caused by the myth that electability is paramount. Contributing to this is the attitude of many Australians, who look askance at leaders who are focused on the long-term, as it's likely they are serving with one eye on their own political legacy. We think of them as deluded by a false sense of their own grandeur.

Yet that is not necessarily a bad thing. A politician wanting to make his or her mark on history will surely do what it takes to pass reform legislation. It doesn't do any real harm to have former prime ministers acting like demigods, but it does a lot of good to have 'courageous' legislation successfully pass through parliament.

The economic reform begun during the Hawke-Keating years is a good example. Hawke and Keating will look good for ever more because of their bold actions. They cut tariffs and instituted other measures to allow the economy to interact more freely with the economies of other countries. In the short term, this killed much of the manufacturing industry and cost jobs. But years later it contributed to the economic robustness that got us through the GFC and saved us from large-scale unemployment. It also cost Keating government, but now he's basking in glory, and most Australians are arguably better off.

By contrast, Kevin Rudd, for all his idealism, dropped the ball on climate change, and cannot even claim too much credit for the Apology to the Stolen Generations, given that it had popular support. His political legacy is shot.

On the face of it, current prime minister Julia Gillard has her hands tied. She does not have any political capital to spend because she presides over a hung parliament. Her focus must be on getting Labor back into majority government at the next election, in 2013 or before.

But the reality is quite different, because her immediate political masters are the Independents, not the electorate. They hold the balance of power, and she has to appease them or face possible rejection of all legislation. The wishes of the 2013 voters are secondary.

Because it's highly unlikely their hold on the balance of power will continue beyond the next election, the Independents have nothing to lose by demanding long-term reform. That is why Independent MP Tony Windsor could afford to tell Labor last week that it must make its flood levy permanent, in order to provide Australia with an ongoing natural disaster recovery fund.

Labor needs the Independents' support, so Gillard cannot reject this demand, at least not out of hand. If she wants the legislation passed, there's a reasonable chance that it may need to include the permanent levy Windsor wants. In that case, it would constitute long-term reform. Despite the involuntary nature of her zeal for reform, this could establish a pattern, and history may credit her with embracing some of the great moral challenges of our time.