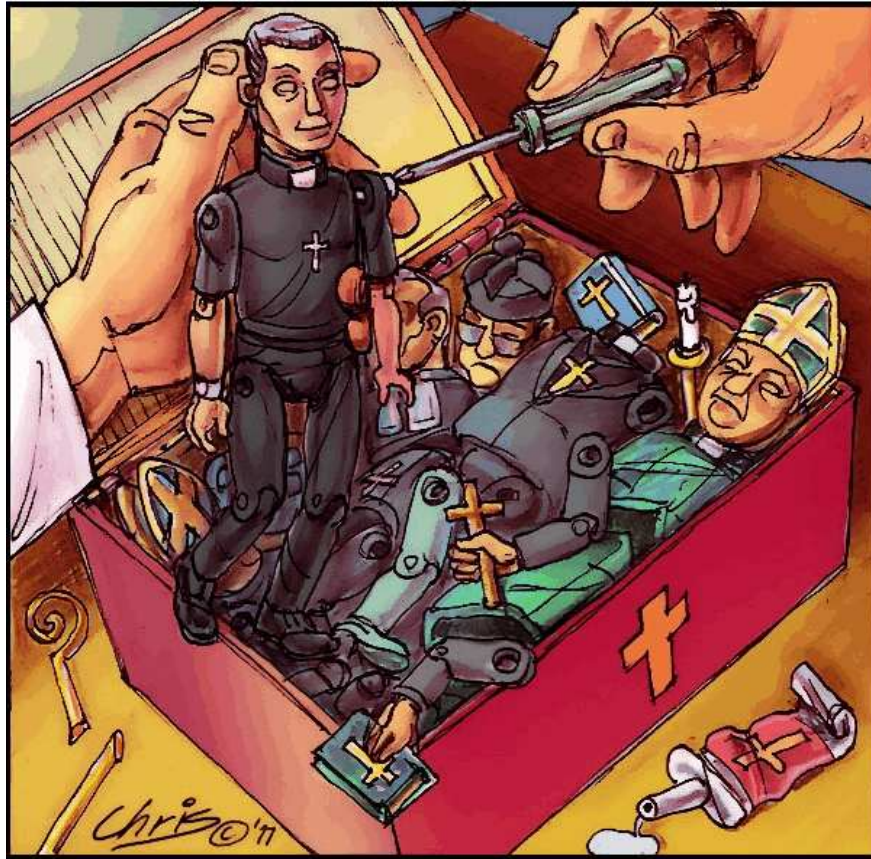


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Refugee warrior's voice of reason

VIDEO

Peter Kirkwood

Government policy regarding refugees and asylum seekers is rarely out of the headlines. In a vicious circle, this issue seems to evoke the most ungenerous, and even racist reactions in sectors of the Australian community, which in turn brings out the worst in politicians as they maintain a draconian stance towards those seeking refuge here, particularly people arriving by boat.

Most recently it's been debate about taxpayer funding for detainees on Christmas Island to attend the funerals of family members who drowned in the SIEV-221 tragedy in December. Fortunately generosity won the day on that one. This became another episode in the ongoing culture wars about asylum seekers, migration and multiculturalism, and the place of Islam and Muslims in Australia.

Over many years, Kerry Murphy has been a voice of reason and compassion in this area. He's spent most of his working life as a solicitor specialising in immigration and refugee law, and is a longtime contributor to *Eureka Street* on issues to do with refugees and asylum seekers.

He spoke with Eureka Street TV in his office in Sydney. His interview forms part of a series marking the 20th anniversary of the journal. He talks about changes in government refugee policy since the 1980s, and reflects on why this is strongly coloured by community fears about migrants and refugees.

Murphy first became interested in this field in the mid-1980s when he was finishing an Arts Law degree. As a volunteer with the St Vincent de Paul Society he began visiting Vietnamese migrants and refugees at the Villawood Migrant Hostel in south-west Sydney before it became a detention centre.

After finishing his degree, for the first five years he worked as a solicitor in general practice. In 1991 he moved to the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs. He left there in 1993 to coordinate the Australian office of the Jesuit Refugee Service, where he remained until 1997.

He spent the next decade working in a number of law firms in immigration and refugee law, and in 2006 he and his wife Lisa founded their own [firm](#) specialising in the field.

He has presented lectures and seminars on immigration and refugee law at the Australian National University, the University of New South Wales, and the Immigration Advice and Rights Centre training courses. He was recognised in 2008, 2009 and 2010 as one of this country's leading immigration lawyers in the 'Best Lawyers Australia' survey published by the *Australian Financial Review*.

He has completed a Master of Arts in Medieval Studies and a Master of International Social Development. He has a keen interest in languages, and, as well as French, Italian and Mandarin, most recently has started learning Arabic. A large part of the motivation for his language study is to gain a better understanding of his clients.

He has written extensively on immigration, refugee and human rights issues for a number of publications, and is one of the authors of [*The Immigration Kit*](#), a book designed to be a step-by-step, plain language guide to Australia's immigration, refugee and citizenship laws.

In defence of people-smuggling

HUMAN RIGHTS

Andrew Hamilton



During the brief storm caused by Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Scott Morrison's remarks on the recent asylum seeker funerals, another senior Liberal praised his compassion, claiming he was deeply affected by the sufferings people smugglers had caused asylum seekers.

I am delighted to accept this testimony to Morrison's compassion for asylum seekers. But, even if this compassion is sincere, the implicit argument that asylum seekers merit sympathy because they are the passive victims of people smugglers is pernicious.

It is usually put in this form. Credulous asylum seekers are lured by avaricious people smugglers to travel on unsafe boats to Australian territory. Fellow-feeling with asylum seekers demands that this risk to life and health must therefore be stopped by preventing and penalising travel by boat.

This argument assumes that death at sea in an unsafe boat is the greatest peril that asylum seekers have to fear, that they are the passive and deluded victims of people smugglers, and that their lives will benefit if people smugglers are neutered. None of these assumptions is true.

Asylum seekers walk with death as their shadow. Persecution in your homeland and surrounding nations means living among people who will rejoice in your death, others who will not lift a finger to keep you or your family alive, and a society in which your humanity is valued less than animals.

If you pray with a group of asylum seekers, they will ask you to remember their dead relatives and friends and those who risk death along the way.

The story of asylum seekers has always been of fortunate and determined survivors and the unknown dead. Many Jews died trying to leave Germany. Some estimate that more than a third of the hundreds of thousands who fled from Vietnam after 1975 were killed by pirates or sank while at sea. Many Cambodians died in minefields or were shot by paramilitary when escaping into Thailand.

Villagers from El Salvador, harried by their armed forces and hunted out of their homes, died at the guns trained on them from both sides of the Rio Lempa. And yet they all continued to flee.

Asylum seekers have also always needed help to make their journey to safety. Even Joseph

and Mary are often depicted with a young guide as they flee into Egypt. Many Jewish asylum seekers were given shelter and helped to cross borders by ordinary families and by religious communities.

Our people smugglers may be seen as distinctive in that they charge high prices for their troubles. But asylum seekers have always relied on people who exploited them. Chances are that even the legendary donkey on which Mary and Jesus rode to Egypt was hired at an extortionate rate.

Certainly, asylum seekers from behind the Iron Curtain, Cambodians fleeing into Thailand, Afghans escaping the Taliban and Vietnamese fleeing from Vietnam all needed help to escape. They often feared their helpers, but had no other options. They were prepared to pay over the odds for the opportunity to save their lives and retain their dignity as human beings.

In Australia most on-shore asylum seekers have been found to be refugees. This is testimony that they had the courage and inner resource to escape persecution in their own countries, to risk their lives and those of their families by setting out on a long journey, including on an overcrowded boat, in order to find protection. For them people smugglers are minor attendants in death's court.

If we are to sympathise with asylum seekers we owe it to them to listen to their story, to be moved to anger at the conditions that forced them from their own country, to admire their courage and freedom of spirit, to grieve for those who died at each point of the journey, and to ensure that those who need protection are offered it without need of people smugglers.

Measures like pushing boats away, keeping people in detention and dumping them on Nauru don't flow naturally from sympathy for asylum seekers. They are the natural expressions of fear and antipathy. Of course, like the legendary headmaster who caned boys savagely while feeling more hurt than they were, it is possible in good conscience to feel sympathy and to support barbarous deeds. But in the case of asylum seekers, this attitude is condescending. It pretends that we can know their predicament better than they know it themselves, and that we can address the ills they suffer by further unmerited assault on their dignity.

In a fallen world and so, mercifully, not in Australia, it is also conceivable that people might feign sympathy for the suffering of asylum seekers at the hands of people smugglers in order to win support for their proposal to prevent asylum seekers from coming to Australia by boat, come what may. In that case the expression of sympathy would be canting humbug, a grimace to mask the brutality of one's attitudes and actions.

Either way, neither asylum seekers nor the rest of us should have to put up with this nonsense.

Songs of England at war

MUSIC

Philip Harvey

Wilfred Owen, the Englishman now famous for being a war poet, set the standard when in 1918 he denounced 'the old lie: *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*' ('It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country').

Our thinking about war was changed by the experience of the First World War, men in trenches for years having to unlearn the Horatian motto, that it is not sweet and proper to die for one's country. Owen himself nevertheless went on to die bravely, unavoidably, in the last days of the War.

War and love of country are the subjects of a new collection of songs, *Let England Shake* by chanteuse P. J. Harvey. The album title is a warning of what is coming, the worn out language of rock music ('shake, rattle, and roll') finding new life in the dark double meaning of England at war.

As the songs progress we see that she could be singing about any war, before or after the Great War, and the present itself is very present when she sings about 'People throwing dinars / at the belly-dancers, / in a sad circus / beside a trench of burning oil.'

The title song utilises the 1950s novelty tune 'Istanbul (Not Constantinople)'. The jaunty melody does not obscure the fact that Constantinople is Istanbul because of wars over many centuries, the crucial juncture of East and West.

Harvey makes the connections with minimal artistic fuss. The original lyrics draw effortlessly from sayings, verse and popular music, as when she asks 'Smile, smile Bobby, with your lovely mouth. / Pack up your troubles, let's head out / to the fountain of death.' The singer sets up a relationship with those who have gone to war: 'some of us returned, / and some of us did not'.

It is an imaginative act that any of us makes when starting to meditate on those who are caught, and who die, in the irrational circumstances of battle, whether now or in the past. Historically this relationship was commemorated by the tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Meditation, like art, is usually a good deal removed from the world of official statements and political gestures. We are talking necessarily about personal loss and grief, about individual decisions made, and futility endured.

Rock music is not renowned for such extended meditations on war. We are used to the anti-war protest of slogan songs like 'Give Peace a Chance' or bravura pieces like 'Khe Sanh'. The challenge has always been the same since Wilfred Owen, how to avoid jingoism, how to avoid sentimentality, how to say it straight without becoming morbid, how to get at the truth

without making righteous speeches. Expression can collapse in pathos.

Harvey has found her own means of dealing with the subject. The words are unremitting: 'I have seen and done things I want to forget / coming from an unearthly place.'

The music though is among the most melodic, even catchy, she has ever composed, with a huge array of instruments. Muted and discordant, driving and then fractured, it acts as a soundscape enhancement of the words, but is also subversive and ironic. Her sampling ridicules triumphalism. The form is at odds with the solemnity of a requiem, but we are made to reflect.

Istanbul was the improbable objective of Winston Churchill's Dardanelles Campaign of 1915 and three of the songs are about Gallipoli. Bolton's Ridge, Battleship Hill and other landmarks of the Anzac attack are named, but Harvey is not interested in the language of selfless heroics or the birth of young nations. Gallipoli is described as 'Death's anchorage'.

In one song an Australian remembers his dearest friend, killed in action, in terms that are realistic and laconic. The process of remembering is critical, about the only thing the soldier can take with him. Elsewhere a Gallipoli veteran tells how 'a hateful feeling still lingers / even now, 80 years later. Cruel nature has won again', while in another song there are only the small comforts 'where you rolled a smoke / or told a joke', but death was everywhere, 'in the laughter / and drinking water'.

The experience of war degrades everyone: you reach for any kind of simple self-respect. It is a process that continues today, a process that we live with and come to terms with, whether directly or indirectly.

The Dardanelles was a disaster and a minor conflict, in relative terms, to the events of the Western Front, but it is upon such 'minor' conflicts that Empires are built and sustained. For Harvey, this is very much the issue. The closure of Empire has been one of the main tasks overseen by our current monarch. Memory of past glories lives on inside the English today and these songs are also about this sense both of achievement and loss.

The songs go to the heart of a contradictory dilemma: the dichotomy of love of country on the one hand and the ugly extremes of patriotism it can engender, on the other. 'Goddam Europeans!' she sings at the start of 'The Last Living Rose', 'Take me back to beautiful England.' But the English don't fare much better than the Europeans in these songs and England, for all Harvey's love of the place, is full of 'grey, damp filthiness of ages and battered books'. She continues:

Let me walk through the stinking alleys
to the music of drunken beatings,
past the Thames River, glistening like gold

hastily sold for nothing.

It is a place of 'graveyards and dead sea-captains', the same sea-captains who opened up the Empire. The voice could be that of a soldier or sailor from any era in English history, lonely and far from home. Or we can hear it as someone now, craving the absurd contradictions of their own homeland. For ultimately contradiction is the reality these songs try to contain in their fragile words and sounds.

Christchurch's reasonable hope

COMMUNITY

Sande Ramage

Christchurch Cathedral stood proud on the square that carries its name. Sitting at the heart of the city, this Kiwi icon has developed a tradition of welcoming all comers, religious or not.



When the tower of this beloved, gothic church crumbled in the 6.3 magnitude earthquake that rocked Christchurch this week, it was more than just another building down. Without that distinctive spire to connect to, Cantabrians lost one of their traditional points of reference in a world that is becoming, as one of my friends said, 'absolute hell'.

Christchurch has experienced nearly 5000 quakes since the 7.1 shake that raced through the city in the dead of night last September. Although there were injuries and significant damage to buildings and infrastructure, that night, there were no deaths.

This time it was different. The quake struck at lunchtime when pedestrians were in full stride and schools back in full swing after the holidays. So far, 75 people have been confirmed dead and Christchurch hospital is overflowing with casualties, which are transferred to other centres as needed.

Buildings have collapsed and emergency services are progressively freeing those trapped inside, while others wait for news of loved ones. The long haul of recovery beckons.

Living with uncertainty is the reality of existence. We pretend otherwise by constructing systems and traditions that look reliable, until we are stopped in our tracks by a disaster such as that which has struck Christchurch. At times like this, when all our usual reference points have disintegrated, people can react in unusual ways.

Trawling the blogs, Facebook, media reports and tweets I've been interested by how many times the phrase 'Our thoughts and prayers are with you' pops up. This from people, including New Zealand's Prime Minister, who claim no religion, though appear to be edging towards some form of spirituality.

When trouble overwhelms us it is instinctive to call out to God. It matters little what your theology is, or if you believe in God or not. What matters is the ability and freedom to express powerlessness in the face of tragedy and ongoing uncertainty. It's like yelling to the universe, *I have no hope. Help!*

Kaethe Weingarten, an associate clinical professor in the Department of Psychology at Harvard Medical School, [distinguishes](#) between 'reasonable' and 'unreasonable' hope.

Hopelessness thrives, says Weingarten, when the future is known, certain and bleak. Expressing hopelessness in the midst of rolling earthquakes is normal, because hope requires ready access to the prefrontal cortex of the brain, which trauma and stress diminish. Somehow, enough quiet has to penetrate the limbic system to stem the chemical cascades that set off hyperarousal and fear.

Great cathedrals, their magnificent processions and choirs, come into their own at times of community chaos. They unfold rituals that promote stillness, and which suggest a way of holding the untenable, the overwhelming and the incomprehensible. This is their *raison d'être*.

This is why the people of Christchurch love their cathedral, even if they'd never dream of hanging out there. Sometimes, as we get on with coming to terms with our despair, it is enough to know that there's a place that has been prepared for people to sit in the mystery and hold a space as sacred.

Despite our best efforts, hope can remain elusive unless we downsize expectations. As Weingarten explains it, reasonable hope is a smaller but more attainable version of the impossible dream.

Unreasonable hope is when we think God will save Christchurch, or that anything is going to be the same again after thousands of quakes. Reasonable hope means we become realistic, sensible and moderate, directing our attention to what is within reach instead of what is desired but unattainable.

Bob Parker, Christchurch's mayor, is operating with reasonable hope when he acknowledges that more deaths are likely, that he is worried about his folks just like you may be, and that while life is so disrupted it's important to stay where you are to care for yourself, your family and neighbours.

Be as still as possible in a quaking world, downsize expectations, narrow down geographically and take smaller steps while still giving of your best. In this way, says Weingarten, we practice reasonable hope, a profoundly creative process through which the future emerges.

Germaine Greer's Catholic education

EDUCATION

Gregory Day

For the last three years my 15-year-old goddaughter Louella and I have been sharing novels, music, and having long coast to city phone conversations in which we debate the merits of the post-religious zeitgeist to which she subscribes.

I remember her as a young kid of six or seven: a sepia-eyed cherub with Quattrocento ringlets who loved nothing better than spending an hour in a church amidst the ceremonial hush and slightly breathcatching air of spent frankincense. She also liked to pray in earnest back then, and seemed to pull a sanctuary about her like an extra blankey at the mere mention of a thing called a god.

These days when I remind her of this she sounds fond of her younger self, like a poet who knows her juvenilia is both embarrassing and the first evidence of herself as a creature of talent. For her that religious infancy perhaps represents the credulous first steps on her journey to the higher truth of political responsibility and existential freedom.

If only the church could grow up like I have, I hear her say. We could solve half the problems of the world with that one long overdue coming of age.

Implied in all this — and remember that Lelly finds science as genuinely awesome as drums and bass — is that her own intellectual growth has been merely a Darwinian thing, that her tendency towards the beauty of passionate enquiry has evolved to its only plausible conclusion: atheism.

The big problem with this, however, and she'd be the very first to admit it, is that five days a week, and sometimes in her dreams and nightmares, she attends a 137 year old Catholic girls school, in which the razor-tongue of Jesus, and the ardent reportage of his four most widely read offsidiers, gets every bit as much of a look-in as Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Voltaire, or Don Draper.

She has been angling, or should I say, sardonically demanding, to be freed from what she perceives as the fossilised superstition and ritualised sexism of this salubrious Irish Catholic institution pretty much since the first day she arrived there.

But as her third year at the school wound to a close last year, and just as she'd pressed her point home persistently enough to warrant emergency meetings between her parents and the staff, she agreed to go around again for one last time, mainly because the prospect of waiting a year before moving to the school of her choice — north of the city, green leaning, with Whitlamish roots — for the stressy apotheosis of years 11 and 12, made more evolutionary sense than changing streams for the sake of the rather less important travails of year 10.

After devouring Kate Holden's *In My Skin* on the couch at her mother's house, or texting delighted imprecations to friends from her father's flat about how she is Paloma, the 13-year-old Parisian narrator from *The Elegance Of The Hedgehog*, the theological assumptions upon which her school is based can easily seem just that: assumptions.

Not having been raised to respect demure conversational acquiescence or to see the curtsy as in any way fashionably retro, sparks flew from her on day one in the rather all-pervasive college uniform.

With hand perpetually raised, mainly to extol the follies of monotheism, which, as any *Twilight*-loving 12-year-old of 2008 could have told you are embarrassing, she moved quickly through The Creed, which was not to be found on Rage but rather in real life as a neurotic liturgical hangover from the admittedly cinematic days of the crusades and which she still had to chant in bad faith beside her Muslim best friend every time she was required to attend mass.

A loquacious bullet-list of religious hypocrisies followed until ultimately she felt the need, no, the obligation, to declare in class, with all the pluck of Mary MacKillop, that she was, despite the anachronistic cloud of purity hanging over their heads as students of the Catholic college, a very proud atheist.

She rang me that week to debrief, knowing that I would both sympathise and loathe what she had done, and it was then that I chanced upon what I thought was a master stroke.

After months of telling her that her so-called 'loony nunnery' was giving her a solid point of difference among the future mandarins of her generation, as well as an invaluable immersion in the admittedly stagnating traditions which nevertheless still formed the core of the European model of society in which we lived; and that she may decide one day that cavorting with the urbane herd on the headlong tram of abandon had not set her up after all for anything other than anti-depressants; also that she got all the well meaning atheism and unaffected altruism she needed in her two loving post-slacker homes of a morning, night, and weekend; in short, after almost convincing even myself to find faith in the vaguely Buddhist values of balance, I finally struck on the less soporific inspiration, which I like to think has helped her view her decision to stay on for another year as, in fact, very cool.

Over the course of our many droll phone conversations I'd tried various role models on her: Joan of Arc, MacKillop, and also the apocryphally ordained Celtic Priestess, Sinead O'Connor, who didn't help the cause simply because my goddaughter didn't rate the music (such rigour!).

But recently, and for a completely unrelated purpose, I had been surveying some of the more bombastic performances of our own convent-educated Germaine Greer on YouTube and the lightbulb went on. Here was the trump card par excellence for the struggling godfather of our times, a woman with all the qualities my young spiritual charge admired: intellectual

brilliance, an insatiable appetite for social justice, reckless courage, a natural gift for the spotlight, an incurable case of martyr allergy, a sassy style, and, importantly, a reliably contradictory streak of anti-totalitarian self righteousness.

Greer was the weapon I'd been looking for all along and I hadn't realised it, only because I'd never thought of her as a chip off the old block of a convent education. But now, as I watched her explosive interviewee style time and again on the screen, I realised, with delicious feelings of post-religious irony, that that's exactly what she was.

And, dovetailing a bit further, I found she was also self proclaimed as a 'Catholic Atheist', which of course made perfect sense. For where else did she get that contrarian confidence, that relish for a fight, and that belief in the importance of challenging dodgy and repressive paradigms?

I decided to look no further in fulfilling my traditional duties, i.e. to help equip my goddaughter's boat for the piranha infested seas of spiritual life. Here, I realised, was the example that would keep her away from the clutches of generic liberalism, and I resolved to explain to her the conundrum.

So in the last week of the holidays I got on the phone. Yes, I said, you are destined for the cuttingest of edges, for the feistiest of causes and the most volcanic of love affairs and it is for that very reason that you have made the right decision to stay in the harness of the school you hate.

And no, not as a Dan Brown-ish penitential rite or sacrificial bride-of-christ type of thing but because you can rest assured, as the famous Catholic Atheist taught by your very same Presentation Sisters has proven, that an early induction into the sympathies and miracle-allowing symbolism on which the western world's wisdoms and prejudices are based, will better allow you to scoff with substance and to soar therefore into the stratosphere of your ambitious plans for a socially just future.

She listened as I wound up excitedly on my own case for the defence. Of course it occurred to me that perhaps Germaine herself wouldn't appreciate being enlisted so enthusiastically by a male on behalf of an institution that has oppressed women for centuries, but I'm on a roll.

As the silence on the other end of the line begins to feel like traction, I hear myself saying: 'Who knows, one day you may even find yourself on the New York subway, in a spare moment from looking after your kids, thumb-dancing for the right app to give you the grounding you feel you now need in Latin.'

A familiar snort comes back down the line. 'Sure,' she drawls back, 'and when Germaine Greer becomes Pope, I'll buy you a free ticket to Rome.'

Apart from the fact that I'd love one day to spend some time in Rome with Lelly I have to admit that okay, touche, she wins again. We say goodbye laughing, and I promise to email her

a pic of her godbrother, my seven-year-old son, with the tadpoles he'd just scooped from the sheeny surfeit of loose water near our house.

As I'm cutting and pasting the pic of my gappy-toothed naturalist later that night I remember the old Jesuit adage that the age of seven is the age of divine reason. But now, inspired by my goddaughter, and by her potential mentor Greer, I find myself manipulating this traditional wisdom to better suit my taste.

By simply watching creatures grow, helping them shimmy into the world, find their legs, and then make the tortuous transitions into the skins they can live comfortably within, we experience every day the divinest reason of all. To be alive that is.

So I write this by way of saying good luck this year Lelly, you know my number and you know you can call anytime, to continue the godfather-goddaughter debates, 2011-style.

A tale of two funerals

HUMAN RIGHTS

Arnold Zable



The funerals last week of eight victims from the boat that sank off Christmas Island in December brought to mind the sinking of the SIEV X.

The boat went down on 19 October 2001 at 3.10pm, en route to Australia. Not one funeral could be held for the 353 asylum seekers who drowned that day. The bodies were lost at sea. No one, apart from the survivors, witnessed the tragedy.

After the initial flurry of media interest, the tragedy disappeared from public consciousness. It was astonishing how quickly amnesia developed about the largest maritime disaster off Australian waters since World War II.

Unlike the SIEV X sinking, the more recent tragedy was witnessed by many people. It took place close to shore, while the other took place on the open seas: out of sight, and eventually out of mind.

The victims were not entirely forgotten. A week after the SIEV X sinking, Melbourne's asylum seeker community gathered in a hall in Preston, Vic., to commemorate the event. The mourners included close relatives of the deceased.

The grief was palpable. I have rarely seen so many distressed people in one gathering. Their distress was compounded because, as holders of temporary protection visas, they could not visit survivors of the tragedy.

The Howard Government did not organise memorial services. More telling was its treatment of survivors who were taken to Jakarta. Seven of the 45 survivors arrived in Australia months later. Those who were accepted by Finland, Sweden, Norway, New Zealand and Canada, received immediate permanent protection in recognition of their trauma. They were able to begin rebuilding their lives.

In contrast, those who came to Australia received five-year protection visas. Their trauma was compounded.

Iraqi survivor Amal Basry, who arrived in Melbourne eight months after the sinking, told me that when she became aware of the kinder treatment being received by those being sent elsewhere, she had pleaded to be allowed to go with them, even though her husband had preceded her to Australia.

Basry survived by clinging to a corpse for over 20 hours. When she was rescued, she pleaded that the corpse be taken on board so the young woman could have a dignified burial.

The captain pointed out that the limited space on the Indonesian fishing boat would better serve survivors.

In a cruel irony, Basry died from cancer in March 2006.

By then she had received her permanent visa. 'I am a free woman in a free country,' she proclaimed upon hearing the news. She was able to return to see her two children, grandchildren and ageing father in the Middle East, one more time. When she arrived back in Melbourne, she expressed a wish to be buried in Australian soil. When she died she was accorded a dignified burial.

The hearse entered the forecourt mid morning. The coffin was lifted onto the shoulders of the pallbearers, and the crowd followed them into the mosque, chanting. They placed the coffin on the carpeted floor and performed the prayers. Behind the partition wall could be heard the sound of women weeping.

A mud lark flew through the open door and swooped over the mourners. It perched on the chandeliers, and darted onto the ceiling fans.

The coffin was driven to the Islamic section of the Fawkner cemetery. The children ran about in the sun, the women squatted by the coffin, Koran in hand, chanting, while the men crowded around the grave to tend to the burial.

Basry's body, clothed in a white shroud, was lowered into the grave to her son, Amjed, who had climbed down to receive it. He arranged his mother's body in accordance with ritual, cheek resting on the earth, head facing Mecca. The men standing at the lip of the grave mixed earth and water, and lowered the mixture to Amjed to fix the body in the correct position.

Amal was buried to the chatter of birds and children, the murmur of prayers and conversation, in the intimacy of a village setting. This was how she wished it.

And this is how it should have been last Tuesday.

After the funeral, the detainees who attended should have been allowed to stay on and receive their permanent visas. This simple, common sense gesture would have been a true expression of support and compassion for what had occurred off the shores of Christmas Island, and given the distraught survivors a chance to begin rebuilding their lives.

Pressure should be brought to bear on the government to hasten their release. It is the very least that we can do to ease their unbearable grief.

Saints and cats

POETRY

Various

King Street cat

Ears back, he steps through
our fence's jagged hole
then freezes in the sun
seeing my head move
back-tracking to the limestone
baking in our winter garden.

Over heavy, glossy lawn
that rockpile floats
like a ragged cloud.

Cat waits inside.

No-one else knows.

No-one hears his heart tick
under that hot stone.

—*Graham Kershaw*

Given

The cat stretched in the sun.
The olive dappled light on his coat.
The tail black, a spot of white at the tip.
Under the gum, the spitfires
seasonal. Bees
in the lavender. The scent
rubbed between fingers. A tennis ball
in the seaside daisy. The thyme

dying. The liquid amber
by the tap and the water meter ticking.
The suckers cut back at the base
of the olive. The sudden sky
that looks back from behind
a day moon, like a lover.
The memory of salt. The hand of the soil in
my hand. Gritty with gumnuts.
The pollen in my breathing. The matter
lingers.

—*Anne Elvey*

Cat poem

While in the thickness of dreams
Plush sleep,
There was a screeching of wheels
Which turned,
Skidded.
A skull
Only made for mice and mewing
Was crushed under the blow.
You had been found curled up
Along the road
Tongue protruding
Eyes rolled,
Blood trespassing from your mouth
To chest
I stretched,

Embellished the sumptuousness of sleep
You writhed, struggled
As if respite lay in shifting the pain
From one place to another,
As the sky turned purple,
Orange
And then a bright white.

—*Kerry Ridgway*

The muse

Adjusting the seat simply by sitting,
the brooch on her breast, a butterfly flitting,
a rhyme scheme too pretty,
but scarcely without meaning,
when she speaks of cats and dogs,
suddenly, it's teeming.
Each day now, dressed in autumn's hues,
is met with an umbrella, yet never shoes.

—*Michael Crotty*

Saints belt Cats

The very first footy game I saw up close and personal with my own naked holy eyeballs
Was just after the twentieth century after the birth of the thin dusty Jewish guy shuffled
To a close at last; people were still gaping at the smoking century like it was a car crash,
And the new one had opened with murder as well, thugs crowing in a cave over the kids
They roasted by sending other older kids to be roasted. The normal ever it has been thus.
We walked to the arena in a burbling seethe of red and black and blue and white scarves.

I didn't have much hope. Soon I would be fifty. Love was fitful and glorious and painful.
Ever it has been thus. I had no concept of the game at all. We were near the St Kilda end.
Generous friends explained the game to me as best they could but I saw only mere chaos
Until a moment in the second quarter, when a slight player, not one of the vast karri trees
In the belly of the field, dove through the arms and legs of a pack of men, snared the ball,
Leapt to his feet, started to kick it, somehow with an eye in his shoulders sensed mayhem
Arriving, ever it has been thus, faked his kick, spun around, and punched the brilliant ball
Over his shoulder without even a glance. Of course it was caught in full sweet wild stride
By a teammate who sailed into the goalmouth and scored easily, and the crowd went nuts,
And there was a seethe of whipping scarves and etc., ever it has been thus, but it was right
Then, I think, that not only did I understand something deep about footy but about how an
Irrepressible seed keeps rising in us despite certain knowledge that hope will be murdered.
We make too much of sport as theater of the soul, as arena for national character, as a play
That can be willed this way and that by the tall children in the middle of it, but an absolute
Certainty came over me that evening and that ship has never since left my muddled harbor.
There will always be thugs in caves murdering children and crowing; ever it has been thus.
But we are capable of creating wonders beyond our imagination every second of the game.
—*Brian Doyle, bowing to Martin Flanagan*

Non Anglo-Saxon Australians deserve an apology

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

Last week the Federal Government re-embraced multiculturalism. Meanwhile the Opposition was dealing with a leak from Shadow Cabinet which suggested some support for a modern form of the White Australia Policy. The White Australia Policy refers to legislation that intentionally restricted 'non-white' immigration to Australia from 1901 to 1973, when it was replaced by multiculturalism.

Around a decade ago, both sides of politics lost interest in, or departed from multiculturalism. A range of factors, including John Howard's 'One Australia' policy, Hansonism, and post 9/11 security fears, had all but defeated multiculturalism.

But on Wednesday evening, Immigration Minister Chris Bowen delivered a key [speech](#) at The Sydney Institute that coincided with the release of Labor's surprise new multiculturalism policy.

Using the word 'respect' to capture the essence of multiculturalism, Bowen acknowledged this was lacking in the excesses of the post 9/11 attitudes towards Muslims in Australia. He said it is counter-intuitive to assume migrants want to change Australia, and also 'to cast all Islamic migrants [as extremists and therefore] unworthy of their place in our national community'.

Hazaras, who make up a large percentage of asylum-seeker boat arrivals, have fled religious extremism in Afghanistan, and 'like previous groups of migrants' are attracted by Australia's values.

His speech could be seen to be laying the ground for a formal apology to Australians of non Anglo-Saxon background whose dignity was eroded by disrespect from fellow Australians who took their cue from official government policy, or from the discriminatory attitudes of political leaders.

The obvious models for such an apology would be the Apology to the Stolen Generations of February 2008, and the Apology to the Forgotten Australians of November 2009. The parallels are striking.

As with indignities suffered by the Stolen Generations and the Forgotten Australians, policy and attitudes offensive to non-white Australians have a long history. They have been well documented in the recent SBS TV series *Immigration Nation*, currently being rescreened on SBS Two and [online](#).

The summary of the first episode notes that monoculturalism — disrespect for non-white

Australians, and the cruel treatment that implies — was enshrined in the White Australia Policy, which was virtually an article of faith for the new nation.

When the Commonwealth of Australia was founded in 1901, the very last thing the nation wanted to be was multicultural. The measures taken to ensure this would be the case ... | caused great human suffering.

Subsequent episodes dealing with post-war migration show how disrespect for those identifying with non Anglo-Saxon cultures was encouraged and fostered by the policy of assimilation that continued until the mid 1970s. Many white Australians up to and including the present generation have acted in a way that offends the dignity of 'ethnic' Australians.

Bowen's speech should be taken as a wake up call to all white Australians, that they have wronged their fellow Australians of a different ethnic background, and that a formal national apology might be a fitting acknowledgement of past wrongs and a help towards securing a fair go for all Australians.

Vatican targets Caritas

RELIGION

Duncan MacLaren

In an extraordinary move, Lesley-Anne Knight, my successor as Secretary General of Caritas Internationalis (CI, the Church's international relief agency), has not been granted the *nihil obstat* (basically, official approval) by the Vatican's Secretariat of State to stand for another four-year term.



There is outrage in the Confederation.

According to the statutes, a list of candidates must be presented timeously to the Holy See which then rings the secretary of the applicant's bishops' conference to ascertain whether the candidate is 'in good standing' with the Church.

The list is sent to all members of the Caritas Internationalis Confederation (165 members globally, serving 24 million poor people and supporting projects worth US\$5.5 billion). The Executive Committee then elects from that list and the successful candidate is presented to the General Assembly for ratification.

It is completely within the statutory right of the Holy See to refuse even an incumbent candidate, but not to judge how that candidate has fared in his/her job in terms of management, carrying out the Assembly-approved strategic plan, even serving the poor.

That is the task of the members of the Confederation according to its democratic constitution – and according to the members' greater knowledge of the services rendered by the Secretary General. If it were otherwise, the winning candidate would be an appointee of the Secretariat of State, not someone elected by the membership.

It seems to me that, in this instance, the Holy See is making a judgment call on the work of the incumbent which is the task of the Caritas membership. If Knight was in good standing with the Church four years ago, what has changed?

The reasons given for not granting Knight the *nihil obstat* (to my knowledge, the first time this has been done to an incumbent in the history of the Confederation) are outlined in a rather oblique way in a letter signed by Cardinal Bertone (the Pope's right-hand man) to all bishops' conferences.

It includes a reference to [*Durante L'Ultima Cena*](#) ('During the Last Supper'), a letter signed by Pope John Paul II in 2004, awarding CI 'public, juridical and canonical personality'.

This was negotiated and signed during my tenure as we all wished to make our special status with the Holy See clearer so that we could work in a more dynamic, cooperative manner with the social and political structure of the Church throughout the world while

maintaining the freedom of action that was an integral part of our Catholic identity.

The Pontifical Council [Cor Unum](#), as the Pope's organisation for 'charity', was given a special place — in the original Italian to *seguire ed accompagnare*, 'follow and accompany' (not 'supervise and guide' as the English translation on the Vatican website erroneously states), the activities of CI.

Cor Unum's staff, though not qualified, with one exception, in Caritas' work, were invited to all meetings where they could make a contribution. They attended occasionally and were usually silent as they seemed to regard their task as inquisitorial not collegial.

Cardinal Cordes, their then President, was invited to a special Confederation meeting concerning its Catholic identity and mission, held in Poland. He came for a few hours, gave a puzzling speech and then left, citing important work in Warsaw.

He in fact spent three days at a meeting of Communion and Liberation (one of the favoured lay movements within the Church) and missed the session on how Caritas regions throughout the world expressed their Catholic identity.

By contrast, when Archbishop Diarmuid Martin was Secretary to the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, we combined forces to train African and Latin bishops in involving the Church in the World Bank's poverty strategy papers and in peace-building and reconciliation. That unfortunately ended when he was transferred, first to Geneva and then to Dublin.

We worked with Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, the Holy See's permanent Observer to the UN in Geneva, in organising a global meeting of grassroots Catholic organisations working with people living with HIV/AIDS. This changed positively the relationship between the Church and UNAIDS.

There are many other examples which deny any kind of rift between Caritas Internationalis and the structure of the Church, especially over advocacy positions, and it was Caritas which sought more cooperation, not less. Lesley-Anne Knight, to my knowledge, tried to follow that tradition. Yet the opposite view seems to be the nub of the *nihil obstat* in Cardinal Bertone's letter.

I have no doubt that Christ is at the heart of the work carried out by Caritas in the Church's name, and that is recognised by the people the agency serves — the poor.

In Bam in Iran after the earthquake, Caritas Iran together with other Confederation members ran (and still run) a large program to alleviate the sufferings of the people affected. One old lady, a Moslem like everyone in that area, asked one of the Caritas workers for a Bible.

The worker said that wasn't possible as it was not the task of Caritas to proselytise (as Pope Benedict wrote in his first encyclical, [Deus Caritas Est](#), 'God is Love') and if she gave her a Bible

the authorities would close down the program anyway.

She asked 'You're Moslem. Why do you want one?'

The old lady replied 'There are many people helping us here but you people are different. I want to understand why you treat us with such respect and love.'

'Respect and love' — two elements perhaps lacking in the current brouhaha.

Fixing the priesthood

RELIGION

Michael Kelly



For several weeks in late January and early February, I spent a lot of time at the bedside of a strapping 19-year-old athlete who was unconscious after a swimming mishap at a resort in Thailand. He never regained consciousness and died as a result of multiple organ failure.

A great deal of my time was spent accompanying the boy's family through this agony. Eventually I returned to Australia with his body for the Requiem.

It was an exhausting experience.

The funeral attracted 2000 mourners. Most of them seemed to be younger than 20 — an age where death has no palpable reality to it and when the myth of indestructibility is alive and well. Here was its firm rebuttal: *Our lives spin on sixpence*, as the boy's mother told me during our watch in Bangkok.

After the ceremony, I scarpered. I couldn't take it any more and we still had the burial ahead. But as I fled, an old friend — a senior Federal politician with whom I've crossed swords on occasion — came up and gave me a hug.

'Mick, that was just the best: you did a wonderful job for Joe and his family,' said my generous friend.

He added: 'You've gone up in my estimation.'

Struck dumb, I said thanks and continued my escape. I thought to myself that there is only one profession with lower social esteem these days than a Catholic priest and that is a politician. And here is one telling me I've risen in his estimation! With examiners like him, who needs to sit for the test?

Further thought on the melancholy state of the clergy and their public evaluation produced a fruitful and consoling insight. Being seen as an outsider is, in fact, a liberation. Swallowing flattery and exaggerated respect as if it's an entitlement is the one and certain path to self delusion.

In earlier generations in Australia, and perhaps till quite recently in Ireland and the United States, priests were treated as tribal heroes, a superior and exclusive caste, perhaps better educated and so much more awesome because of their involvement in the mysteries of meaning and purpose, life and death, good and evil.

But the sexual abuse scandals and their inept management by Church authorities have dealt lethal blows to that culture. Entries to seminaries and annual rates of ordination have plummeted.

And that's just the last 20 years. In fact, the numbers of priests and candidates for the priesthood have been in consistent decline since the 1960s.

It doesn't just stop at priests. The mother of a recently ordained bishop explained to me her misgivings about what had happened to her son: 'I told him no one listens to bishops anymore, son. You're going to live a very isolated life.'

All of which poses a question: what do we make of it all and where do we go from here? I'd like to take a leaf out of the book of life of the boy I buried — Joe Welch. He was a mountain of a lad, a successful representative footballer whom everyone expected to play front row for the Wallabies.

Joe wore his achievements with great humility. No trophy carrier was our Joe, no collector of emblems of success. He felt a faint pity for those who had to rely on reciting their achievements.

This was of piece with the way his family faced the loss of their cherished boy: face the facts, it's happened, didn't we have a wonderful life with him, aren't we lucky to have many friends to support us, aren't we grateful for the hope we have for Joe now, coming from the faith we shared with him.

Likewise with the state of the clergy; face the facts, it's had a good go in its present form which has had a life for 500 years. But it's over. It can't last because the numbers mean present requirements simply can't be met in the foreseeable future.

And no amount of importing clergy from the few places where there is an over supply — as Europe, North America and Australia have imported priests from India and Nigeria — will meet the need. They will run out too, as is clear from falling numbers of seminarians and ordinations in South India, previously the cradle of vocations.

The paradigm needs a full review. It's broken and no amount of plaster will hold it together.

And I have hope it will be reviewed. Why? Because it just can't go on. The numbers aren't there and reality will dawn even for those scurrying about with short term solutions.

What's more, the sexual abuse scandal and the ineptitude with which it's been handled by Church leadership are two factors concentrating the attention of anyone who cares to look: the present arrangements don't work and need a radical review.

So my friend, the politician, has done me a favor. Owning how bad things are, understanding the way you're seen by others, adopting a humble approach to deciding what

to do next — unencumbered by the esteem in which you may want to be held — is the first step towards change.

Bothersome buskers and Twitter twits

BY THE WAY

Brian Matthews

Busking is a very ancient art, the blogging and tweeting of another age. Like the blogger and the tweeter, the busker can unselfconsciously, and regardless of ability, command a certain amount of public attention.

You can sing in tune or sing flat, hit the note or miss it, forget the words or make them up. Just as bloggers can turn a stylish paragraph or churn out self regarding rubbish and tweeters can report every breath they draw on the assumption that the world is waiting for the news.



Some buskers, however, are bloggers in disguise, bloggers without the technology. I wouldn't have minded hearing Emma Ayres busking for Queensland flood relief and perhaps it was her talented example that caused me to exhibit a fatal moment of hesitation the other day in Rundle Mall.

'My grandfather,' said the nearest busker, latching on to my indecisive groping for some coins, 'my grandfather used to walk the 'susso' tracks during the Depression.'

He was taking a break from his song. I use the singular advisedly because his repertoire was basically 'Goodnight Irene'. He sang it straight, hummed it, whistled bits of it, yodelled it. But it was always 'Goodnight Irene'.

His voice, honed and gravelled by a lifetime's unfiltered tobacco and strong drink, rasped by age and disappointment, edged with the cynicism of a thousand defeats, had unique, ear-assaulting qualities beyond the reach of metaphor or comparison.

'The 'susso' was sort of like the dole is now,' he said, 'it was short for sustenation or somethin' like that. What they'd do, they'd walk from place to place in the bush takin' on whatever jobs were available. Sometimes they'd cut wood, sometimes dig postholes, sometimes they'd be dunny men. You know about the dunny men?' I did, but I could feel a refresher course coming up.

'In the bush townships they'd have the old thunderboxes and the dunny men would come along and take away the full one and leave an empty. My granddad swore he whipped one right out from under some woman up around the mallee somewhere. Her natural reaction was to get away as quick as she could and so out she comes into the light of day ...'

I assembled some coins from several pockets.

'Dangerous work of course. See, they used to get corroded. The welds at the bottom of the can would rust out. Well, me granddad reckons one day he saw a bloke hoist a full one on to

his shoulder — they had special pads, like, for the weight and everything. And just as he got it settled, the whole bloody bottom drops out. The woman from the house had to come out and hose him down.

‘He was never the same again apparently. Well, you wouldn’t be, would you?’ I dropped my coins into the dark, greasy innards of his inverted hat but he transfixed me with a beady eye.

‘Mind you,’ he said, ‘by the same token is, I reckon it wasn’t as tough as those old codgers made out. Take my granddad. He had five kids and a wife who’d won a few quid in the ring. Those women boxer troupes would take on the blokes in the bush and hammer the shit out of ‘em as often as not and she was a champ. Anyway, as you can imagine, the old granddad knew which he rathered when it came down to bein’ home or on the track. Even the dunny run was better, accordin’ to him.’

A young woman hurrying past flipped a 20c piece into the hat. ‘Thanks, luv,’ he said. Since he wasn’t singing at the time, perhaps she was buying his silence.

‘By the same token is,’ he went on relentlessly, ‘I reckon it’s just as hard here makin’ a fool of yourself singin’ for a crust as it was for them blokes in the old days carryin’ a swag. Healthier, of course out on the track. Fresh air, sunlight and all that sort of bullshit. But, as me granddad used to say, I’ve never had a gulp of fresh air that I wouldn’t swop for a bloody lamb chop.’

‘By the same token is, at least they actually got jobs. I lost mine when this global financial bullshit set in. So I dusted off me guitar and here I am, comfortable enough, though the super’s not too flash and you wouldn’t want to get crook.’

He picked up his guitar, strummed a couple of discords that somehow jarred all the way to your back teeth and said, ‘Well, mate, gotta get on. No rest for the wicked.’ I left, waving goodbye.

‘Now me and my wife are parrrrting ...’

I’m with you, Irene. He’s a good bloke, but you couldn’t stick with that voice.

The Church and the workplace

POLITICS

Brian Lawrence



I was recently given a copy of *The Dignity and Rights of Labour* by Cardinal Henry Edward Manning. It contained a handwritten note:

1942

Sixth Grade

First Place Christian Doctrine

Barry Fitzpatrick

Cardinal Manning (pictured) was a dominant figure in the 19th century English Church, partly because of his support for the poor and his commitment to social justice. His mediation of a successful conclusion to the famous London Dock Strike of 1889 demonstrated his practical touch.

The fact that his book was given to a grade six student reflected a time when the Catholic Church in Australia was a prominent advocate for social justice and, in particular, the rights of workers and their families. It was based on a deep conviction about the dignity and rights of labour.

Cardinal Manning also influenced the drafting of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical [*Rerum Novarum*](#), promulgated on 15 May 1891. The Encyclical was the origin of modern Catholic social teaching, articulating clearly the importance of work and of workers' rights.

At the time the Australian colonies were debating key issues about the powers of the proposed Commonwealth. The Encyclical influenced, and bolstered the arguments of, Henry Bourne Higgins, a leading proponent of federal power to settle industrial disputes by conciliation and arbitration. Higgins was the judge who later decided the Harvester Case that established the concept of the Living Wage.

The 120th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* occurs the day before the hearing of final submissions in [Fair Work Australia's Annual Wage Review 2011](#). It is timely to ask what its principles might mean in a century that could never have been imagined by Leo XIII and Cardinal Manning.

Poor and vulnerable workers are still with us, and in increasing numbers. Wage-setting has failed low income workers and their families. By any accepted measure of poverty, a family with children that is dependent on the National Minimum Wage (now \$569.90 per week) is living in poverty. Family payments do not cover the poverty gap.

We also have an underclass of people who are not employed in any substantial work. Irregular casual and part time work is not a way out of poverty. Many are young, often with children, in dysfunctional domestic arrangements. They will never enter the mainstream of society through engagement in work which pays a decent wage and recognises their innate dignity.

The road, if any, to a decent life for the unemployed and workers who have a marginal connection with work will be complex and expensive. Neither side of politics shows any commitment to the task or to the resources necessary to support them in their transition to productive work.

Much is spoken about social inclusion, but little is done if it costs more than the expenses of policy advisors, bureaucrats and publicists. A pre-condition for social inclusion is a decent wage. That should be a major priority of any program concerned with social inclusion.

It is particularly worrying that marginal and vulnerable people are not considered relevant to the economic process or to the economic wellbeing of most Australians. Full employment is now seen as something above four per cent and a significant level of unemployment is seen as a means of macroeconomic management.

This level of institutionalised unemployment necessarily carries huge personal and social costs, which are exacerbated by the fact that entrenched and long term unemployed families are paid poverty benefits. The children are most unlikely to find their way out of poverty.

Catholics in Australia generally lack conviction that Catholic social teaching can add to the debate and provide direction. This is ignorance. Its relevance can be seen in the statement of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, which drew on Catholic social teaching, in opposition to parts of the then Work Choices legislation. The statement [declared](#) :

Workers are entitled to a wage that allows them to live a fulfilling life and to meet their family obligations. We are concerned that the legislation does not give sufficient emphasis to the objective of fairness in the setting of wages; the provision of a fair safety net by reference to the living standards generally prevailing in Australia; the needs of employees and their families; and the proper assessment of the impact of taxes and welfare support payments.

In our view, changes should be made to the proposed legislation to take into account these concerns.

The Bishops' statement was vindicated by subsequent events.

Despite the extensive welfare activities by many Catholic organisations, Catholics have made only a modest contribution to public debate about the economic foundations of family life. This is curious because the Australian institution that is most associated in the public mind with 'pro-family' policies is the Catholic Church.

A modern and effective campaign for policies that promote the economic foundations of family life and the dignity and rights of labour requires rigorous advocacy, drawing on aspects of social research, public finance (taxation and transfer payments), macroeconomics, microeconomics and industrial relations. Unfortunately, too little has been done.

The Church's perceived position has changed since Barry Fitzpatrick received Cardinal Manning's book. The social mobility of Catholics may explain some of this change. Many Catholics have lost touch with the realities of life for the poor and vulnerable. Catholics are also more politically diverse.

The Church's social teaching extends well beyond workplace relations and minimum wages. But if there is any basis for common ground among Catholics of diverse political affiliations (and Catholic politicians on both sides of Parliament), it must be on the fundamental principles and values articulated in *Rerum Novarum*.

If we there is no commitment on these issues from Catholics across the political spectrum, we are most unlikely to see a consensus and action in other areas.

Testing marriage

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Rabbit Hole* (M). Director: John Cameron Mithcell. Starring: Nicole Kidman, Aaron Eckhart, Diane Wiest, Sandra Oh, Miles Teller. 91 minutes**

Rabbit Hole contains a most apt analogy for grief; in particular, of a parent's grief for a lost child.

It never goes away, explains aging matriarch Nat (Weist). But the weight of it changes. It becomes so that you can crawl out from underneath it, and carry it around like a brick in your pocket. Sometimes, you forget about it, temporarily. Then one day you put your hand in your pocket, and you remember: 'Oh yeah. That.' It's still heavy, but it's bearable. Familiar.

For the most part, *Rabbit Hole* is a reflective account of the earlier stages of bereavement, when grief is still a monolith. It's likely that such hulking obelisk grief can only be fully appraised by [those who have experienced it](#). But *Rabbit Hole* does a fine job of exploring through domestic drama the obelisk's chapped and spindle-cracked surface, and of evoking a sense of its imposing weight.

The film allows the viewer to share intimate space with Becca (Kidman) and her husband Howie (Eckhart) who, less than a year ago, lost their son Danny beneath the wheels of a passing car on their suburban street. The obelisk sits where the boy once did, at the heart of the family and their cavernous home, displacing affection and oppressing the parents.

Becca's and Howie's methods of coping contrast and clash. Becca attempts to chip away at the obelisk by removing reminders of their son from sight — family photos, grubby fingerprints, the family pet — as if obscuring memory can obscure grief. Howie, on the other hand, pores over an old iPhone video, trying to resurrect the boy through memory. These opposing methods cause tension and conflict.

Becca and Howie attend a support group for parents who have lost children. Here they encounter Gaby (Oh) and her husband, eight-year veterans of the group, and are astonished by the reality of the longevity of grief, and of the road to recovery that stretches interminably before them.

During the session, Becca is appalled by the insufficiency of religious platitudes; many viewers will sympathise with this, though less so with her insensitivity to another couple, for whom these platitudes constitute an attempt to understand and to imbue meaning upon tragedy. To Howie's chagrin, Becca decides that the group is not for her.

Her closedness and Howie's openness to the group's method reflect their contrasting

natures. Becca feigns stoicism, though her writhing emotions are revealed in the fabulous contortions of Kidman's plasticine face. Howie's emotions are unbridled and barely tempered; they emerge as a lunging stallion roar. Communication and intimacy suffer.

Separated by the obelisk, Howie and Becca seek solace individually. Howie bonds with Gaby over a hash pipe; their budding closeness provides a test for his love and faithfulness to his wife. Becca, meanwhile, connects with Jason (Teller), the teenage driver of the car that killed Danny. This is potentially destructive, but opens the prospect of the gift and receipt of confessions and forgiveness.

Grief's weight changes, but never leaves, says Nat — Becca's mother, whose grief for the death of her own, adult son years previous gives her some authority. Director Mitchell, known for his frank considerations of sexuality and gender in his films *Shortbus* and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, imbues *Rabbit Hole*'s reflections on the permanence and changeability of grief with honesty and authenticity.

Ultimately, the best he can offer his characters and audience is hope. That's not an insignificant gift.

Beyond asylum seeker funerals

HUMAN RIGHTS

Andrew Hamilton

The two Sydney funerals for the asylum seekers who died trying to reach Christmas Island was heartrending. That some of their relatives were able to gather to mourn them was some small consolation for them. From ancient times to today so many other asylum seekers have died and have lain unburied.

Ordinarily the best response to such grief would be one of silent compassion. But even in death asylum seekers open a faultline in Australian culture and society. Scott Morrison and Tony Abbott wondered aloud at the expense of bringing people from Christmas Island to an Australian funeral. They later [backed down](#) on the timing — but not the substance — of their comments.



Psychologists who work closely with asylum seekers were appalled that bereaved children should be returned to Christmas Island. They again emphasised the harm done by detention.

It would be indecent in a time of grief to speculate about what individual politicians might have meant by what they said. But the larger considerations that affect asylum seekers' lives deserve comment. Three points stand out.

First, despite all the evidence of how destructive life in detention is for children, and despite the decision of the Howard Government not to detain children, large numbers of children remain incarcerated. That is shameful. No Australian should be able to contemplate with equanimity the conscription of children, the enslavement of children, the detaining of children and other forms of child abuse.

Second, it is evident that the system of mandatory detention for adults as well as for children is unreasonable. Professor Pat McGorry's famous description of detention centres as factories for manufacturing mental illness was modest and exact.

Yet detention centres, particularly those set in remote parts of Australia with a harsh climate which are known to be most destructive, have multiplied. They come at a huge cost. Detention is a swelling economic folly. If money is an issue, it would be far more rational economically, as well as more humane, to allow asylum seekers to live in the community while their cases are being processed.

Third, the fact that arrangements involving such barbarity and such economic nonsense continue without public outcry suggests that there is strong political opposition to change. That politicians cannot agree on better arrangements suggests that the resistance to change is located deeply in Australian society.

A recent conversation with a woman whose work had taken her to Christmas Island confirmed these impressions. She struck me as a decent person. On Christmas Island she had warmed to many of the asylum seekers whom she met. But she returned from the island even more convinced that they should not be admitted into Australia.

Her arguments were that Australia already had too many people, that asylum seekers would overrun the nation, that Australia was broke and could not afford to support them, and that, once admitted, even asylum seekers found not to be refugees would never leave.

She half-apologised for her views, perhaps recognising that they stood in some tension with her habitual generosity of spirit. But she continued to argue firmly against making any concessions to children or to adults.

The most thought-provoking aspect of this conversation was to recognise that even personal contact with asylum seekers and with incarcerated children does not necessarily soften people's views. Even seeing the faces of distressed people and hearing their stories could not shake the power over the imagination exerted by the vision of a threatened, overpopulated and bankrupt nation.

It is easy to see why politicians who wish to move to a more rational and humane policy should find it so difficult, and why those who wish to further mire the murky waters should find encouragement.

If we are concerned at the way Australia treats asylum seekers, this conversation suggests that we must focus on what matters. The funerals of the asylum seekers should be the starting place, and the faces and stories of those who died and who grieve. Their humanity is salient to us.

It is also important to keep meeting arguments such as those proposed by the woman against treating asylum seekers humanely. They may be weak arguments, but they continue to attract adherents.

But the central challenge is to change the way Australians imagine asylum seekers as an obstacle to our comfort and to our wellbeing. As long as our imagination remains untouched, there will be little outrage at the suffering of children or adults. People will avert their eyes, wishing all this was not necessary, but prepared to allow others to pay the price for our comfort.

To change the public imagination is a long task, but it begins by personal conversion. There is no better place to begin than in contemplation of lonely funerals far from home.

Bilingual parenting

NON-FICTION

Gillian Bouras

As a young teacher in charge of a class of unruly teenage boys, I occasionally lost my voice: an occupational hazard and inconvenience. But 30 years ago, I lost the voice I had always taken for granted; I lost it, even though I could still speak.

With the move to a Peloponnesian village, my language skills were reduced to those of a three-year-old, for my Modern Greek was rudimentary, and so I was effectively silenced.

The pain of that reduction was immense, and was exacerbated when six months to the day after our arrival, my six and eight-year-old sons started speaking to each other in Greek. I am sure I heard my heart crack that day, but I suppose the wonder is that they had held on to English for so long.

It was then that I began writing; in effect, I was calling out and pleading: *Listen to me. Please listen.*

I have now spent 45 years listening to a language, which though it eventually became familiar, will always be foreign. My three children are truly bilingual. To those of us who are not so blessed, this capacity seems a miracle, as we observe the fortunate ones apparently just flipping a switch or pressing a button in the appropriate part of the brain.

But even now, my sons still seem different people to me when they are using their Greek voices. Noise levels, for example, vary from culture to culture, and many's the time I have instructed, through gritted teeth: Tone it down; you're not on stage.

Voices are as individual as fingerprints, or so it has always seemed to me, and I had apparent confirmation of this notion when I met my elder grandson for the first time. He was four months old, and I spoke English, not Greek, to him, as I still do, nearly five years later.

He cocked his head, giving me such a wise look that I am sure he was thinking along the lines of *This funny old chook is making noises different from everybody else's noises.*

Because of the unique quality of voices, I bitterly regret that I have no recording of my mother's and sister's voices.

I hear my grandparents calling down a longer avenue of memory, and I register the differences there, too, for the Australian accent has changed so much even in my lifetime that I do not believe anybody now speaks the way they did. They never used the rising inflection, never swore or blasphemed, and indeed considered swearing evidence of an impoverished mind and vocabulary.

My grandfather used to take me to the football, to watch the Mighty Cats, quite regularly, but was always the soul of dignity and decorum. *Goodness me, what a sausage of a kick. Do better myself,* was the strongest reaction I ever heard.

This conduct was in sharp contrast to that of my volatile father, whose full-throated bellow sounded throughout four quarters every Saturday. But he didn't swear, either. *Open the other eye, Umpy. Go home and get your little dog. Ya oughta be shot.* The messages were much the same at cricket matches.

While the women in the family were people of spirit, they took their example from Cordelia, whose voice was ever soft, gentle, and low, an excellent thing in a woman. A real lady — and, way back then, this was what girls and women usually aimed to be — was never, ever loud.

But there was always a lot of play with language: puns, riddles, parodies, and I am still convinced that I heard my mother speak at her own funeral, for as the minister solemnly intoned *Ashes to ashes, dust to dust,* I swear I heard that irrepressible laugh and the familiar voice adding *And if God doesn't get you, the Devil must!*

I started writing all those years ago in order to be heard: now I have the voices of my departed people speaking to me through the letters that I have never thrown away. I can hear the voices as I read, although not always very clearly.

Mostly, as the great Greek poet Konstantine Kavafis wrote, those lost voices are heard in dreams and imagination, their sounds faint, 'like far-off music in the night, which dies away'.

Scatterbrained God

POETRY

Aileen Kelly

Blessing

Sunlight broken over pebbles
a wash of reflected light between cool walls:
stone built as a shaped welcome
where day or night can wander in.
When you have packed and walked
with my mother-blessing
and the rip of apron strings
when you walk with your lover
a loved child at each concrete-gritted hand
I turn back within these walls
and link fingers with an old silence.

Lunch

Elegant young man
lunching munch on chips
from paper at the bus stop
no doubt it's in your lease
on Adam's higher ground
to smile snake-eyed
down your nose
quirk your greasy lip
to set aside
some fat old bag
indulging in an apple.

Lacunae

There are edges:

day's end, the tram road broken

by a street laid across

all mapped

by the appointment grid ruled off

or the local area directory.

These taunt him with

spaces between their hard

damaged certainties.

He scratches whether really

he remembers. Walked up a street

over some day's end, over tram tracks

crossed into running downslope

almost his swung arms and breath recall:

wasn't there someone something

Chorale

A heavenly choir

some individual faces at the front

and all the rest in the careful fuzz of distance

computer-generated to a full infinity

is not the blest world that ripens its harvest of God:

each fern frond fractally patterned

on the DNA of all, thereby most

its simple intricate self, each and all

in everything the same difference: self,

the tentative crooklet, green out of the tan stalk

enquiring outwards, 'So is this
me?' Charged with the boundless burden of God's
scatterbrained focused invention, each
is yes myself. No replications.
An infinity of front row faces.

Thousands of men and no groping

POLITICS

Trish Madigan



A striking aspect of the Egyptian revolution which led to the resignation of its president Hosni Mubarak on Friday 11 February was the participation of youth and women.

Although the cameras focused, especially in the early days, primarily on the men standing up for their rights in Tahrir Square, plenty of women also joined the crowds.

Women, young and old, were on the frontlines, organising security and braving tear gas and gunfire as they called for Mubarak's unseating. Women volunteers monitored the entrance to the Square, checking identification and searching bags to make sure no one brought in weapons. Women were in the Square when men on camels and horseback charged into the crowd beating them with whips.

Women doctors cared for the wounded and bleeding people who were taken to a makeshift hospital in a nearby mosque, after clashes broke out between pro-Mubarak and pro-democracy supporters.

And as women joined men in the square and on the streets, calling for an end to the Mubarak regime, they brought their children, including young girls. Some even camped out in the cold.

These women joined a long history of women who struggled for recognition of their human rights and for freedom in Egypt. They included women such as Malak Hifni Nassef (1886–1918), an Islamic modernist reformer, and Nabaweya Moussa (1886–1951), a pioneer of women's education in Egypt.

Then there was Hoda Sharawi (1879–1947), a writer and political activist who helped lead the first women's street demonstration during the Egyptian Revolution of 1919. She became an icon of the Egyptian women's liberation movement.

As the West continued to occupy and exploit Egypt, and an Islamist backlash occurred from the 1930s, most of the gains made by these women in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were obstructed and almost vanished.

It was fitting that Nawal el-Saadawi, Egyptian psychiatrist, activist and former director general of public health education, was there to celebrate Mubarak's departure. She spent time in prison for opposing the Anwar al-Sadat regime. In 1982 she founded the Arab Women's Solidarity Association to promote women's participation in social, economic, cultural and

political life. It was later banned by Mubarak.

Ruheya, a 21-year-old university student who had travelled from the town of Sharqeya, 160 km north of Cairo said, 'There are Christian girls here, there are girls with their hair uncovered. We're all volunteers. We're all Egyptians, whether we're Christians or Muslims, whether we're religious or not, we're all good people. We're all sacrificing for our country.'

When some Christian women were asked about Western fears concerning the Muslim Brotherhood and whether a democratic Egypt might end up a more oppressive country, they countered: 'If there is a democracy, we will not allow our rights to be taken away from us. We do not worry about the Muslim Brotherhood. If they do not perform then they will not get votes the next time.'

The women say that their presence has earned them unaccustomed respect from Egyptian men. Sexual harassment has long been a major headache for women. In a 2008 study, 86 per cent of women said they had experienced harassment on Egypt's streets.

But in the square, crammed shoulder-to-shoulder, as one woman described it, 'men apologised if they so much as bumped into you'. 'Thousands of Men and No Groping!' read the heading on one website which described Egypt's protests as a safe space for women. Another woman commented, 'It's because we're all so focused on one goal, we're a family here.'

To ensure that the contribution made by women will not be overlooked, Leil-Zahra Mortada has placed a collection of photos of women in the Egypt protests on her [website](#). She calls it a 'homage to all those women out there fighting, and whose voices and faces are hidden from the public eye!'

As the people of Egypt struggle to build a new democratic order of peace and economic wellbeing, it is essential that women do not lose the visibility and the voice which they reclaimed in the 18 days of revolution. They must be full and active participants in the reforms to come.

Assange receives Hicks treatment

MEDIA

Tony Kevin

The UK judge who is deciding the Swedish Government request to extradite Julian Assange from the UK to Sweden to answer police questions about rape allegations has retired to consider his verdict. It will be announced on 24 February.

The issue now has taken on an independent public and political dynamic of its own, regardless of whether the prime mover was a genuine, coincidentally arising 'Swedish rape' allegation, or an outcome of a US intelligence-fomented provocation.

Swedish national pride is now firmly engaged. The Swedish prime minister resents Assange's defence team's vocal scepticism about Assange's chances of fair legal process in Sweden.

EU extradition values and conventional practice, which favour extradition irrespective of the merits of particular cases, out of respect for the integrity of fellow EU member countries' legal systems, are also engaged.

On the other side, the case has mobilised formidably skilled and well resourced UK human rights groups. It has also engaged British national sovereignty lobbies.

So whatever the judge's decision on 24 February, there are likely to be appeals — probably to more than one level. The case could now go on of its own volition for years, because it is bigger than Assange now.

If there are covert US forces out to discredit and silence Assange, they would be satisfied at the prospect of a long and morale-sapping legal process now facing Assange. They could sit back and watch the court process unfold, while hoping he will lose public standing and political momentum.

Hoping, too, that he may make errors of judgement under the stress of house arrest, exacerbated by an increasing flow of [hostile books](#) by disgruntled persons from within his own original Wikileaks group, and by an expanding and very nasty internet traffic about his alleged destructive personality, manipulativeness and disloyalty to friends, improper sexual conduct, business corruption and so on.

The man must be under huge pressure now from all the mud being slung at him.

Perhaps worst of all, we see now a cynical distancing from him by editors of major newspapers which have already profited from his best Wikileaks scoops (e.g. [Guardian](#), [New York Times](#)) and now seem to be pleased to be damning him with condescension, faint praise, or worse.

All intelligence agencies are expert at designing and running complex dirt files on targeted individuals who have challenged the power of national security states. Agencies are skilled at exploiting known human weaknesses or traits of character, to build and circulate tissues of believable lies around kernels of verifiable truths.

What is happening now to Assange bears the hallmarks of a successful dirt file operation, whose unattributable poisoned fruits are starting to ripen. Such tactics are corrosive of the morale of any but the very strongest human rights warriors: they know that they finally must stand alone, having few if any real friends they can trust. This is the way the world is.

In this finely balanced political context, Kevin Rudd's cold rebuttal of Assange's mother's appeal to him on Friday is most unworthy. To say that Assange has been offered normal consular assistance, which he has so far refused, does not answer her at all.

[David Hicks](#) and [Mamdouh Habib](#) received similarly worthless consular access from Howard and Ruddock at the times they were rendered with Australian Government consent to years of torture in Guantanamo. Both men were being abusively treated in Pakistan and Egypt while on their way to Guantanamo, as Australian consular officers looked on impotently.

Christine Assange knows that the case has been so politicised in the EU that it has escaped the bounds of normal legal process.

For the sake of argument, suppose the UK judge rules in Assange's favour, and Sweden appeals, or vice versa, and she then appeals to our foreign minister to start offering Assange real public and private support. For Rudd to continue to refuse her plea could only be because he and the prime minister put their interpretation of alliance solidarity ahead of an embattled Australian citizen's rights.

This would be cowardly of them. It would confirm Obama and Clinton in the view that Australians are US lackeys rather than self-respecting allies who defend their own citizens' rights: as the UK Government defended the rights of its citizens incarcerated in Guantanamo, while Howard and Ruddock did nothing at all for Hicks and Habib.

I hope Rudd and Julia Gillard may reconsider their positions. If not, who will make these points in the Australian Parliament? Not the Coalition under Abbott. Maybe the Greens or Andrew Wilkie? I hope someone does, because we should not be casting any Australian fellow citizen adrift in this way.

Interminable Intervention

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan

Three years on since Kevin Rudd introduced to Parliament the motion of Apology to the Stolen Generations, many aspects of John Howard's Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), known as the Intervention, are still in place – to the consternation of many human rights advocates.



The Intervention was first instituted without any meaningful consultation with the Aboriginal people affected. Various aspects of that response were racially discriminatory.

Last year, the Australian Parliament passed amendments to that response – in part minimising the discriminatory effect of the law by extending compulsory provisions about income management of welfare payments to all Territorians and not just those living on nominated Aboriginal communities.

Most of the peak national bodies in the welfare sector have expressed principled objections to compulsory income management except for proven cases of recipients failing to discharge parental obligations. For example, Catholic Social Services argue that:

Adequate income support is an entitlement. It should not be a tool for governments or public sector managers to grant, withhold or modify in an effort to achieve 'outcomes'.

The government provided this rationale to Parliament, claiming to have conducted adequate consultation with those affected by these measures:

The Northern Territory Emergency Response Redesign consultations identified that income management had delivered discernible benefits. While there was a divergence of views, the majority of comments said that income management should continue. In the tier two meetings, people frequently said that income management should apply to all welfare recipients across Australia.

Critics of the legislation have been wary of government assurances about consultation. I have heard a variety of views in the Northern Territory. Some say their shopping trollies have never been so full, others that they must endure the shame of producing a welfare card in the supermarket checkout.

The Government explained to Parliament the other ongoing, discriminatory aspects of the Northern Territory intervention:

Apart from the income management scheme, which is designed to apply in a

non-discriminatory fashion to any citizen in the Northern Territory within the specified categories, the Government has redesigned a number of the other measures dealt with by this bill so they are more sustainable and more clearly special measures under the Racial Discrimination Act.

The Government concedes that the new law still discriminates in four ways against Aborigines living on nominated communities. The new law states Parliament's view that the ongoing discrimination is justified as 'special measures' taken:

to reduce alcohol-related harm in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory, to protect children living in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory from being exposed to prohibited material, to improve the delivery of services in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory and to promote economic and social development in those communities, and for the purpose of promoting food security for certain Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory.

I am prepared to concede the need for special measures in relation to alcohol and pornography, provided such restrictions are sought by local community leaders and are workable.

The other special measures are more questionable, especially given the compulsory acquisition of land that is the birthright of Aboriginal people. This is how the Government attempted to justify to Parliament the beneficial effect of government continuing compulsorily to lease 64 Aboriginal community living areas without the consent of the owners until August 2012:

This bill confirms the beneficial intent of the five-year leases to improve the delivery of services and promote economic and social development. The Government is committed to the progressive transition of the five-year leases to voluntary leases and the bill obliges the Commonwealth, at the request of land owners, to negotiate voluntary leases in good faith. The leases have already been improved by a substantial reduction in lease boundaries and the payment of rent has commenced, based on independent valuations undertaken by the Northern Territory Valuer-General.

Imagine if government had tried this approach with miners.

This is an instance of Indigenous Australians being denied the opportunity to speak for country and for themselves. If it is a good idea for government to lease land so as to provide greater services to a community, surely the community should be invited to negotiate freely the lease. If compulsion is required, you would think the government investment would be a case of good money after bad.

When this new law was passed, Jenny Macklin and Warren Snowden, the two Labor Ministers with the longest term commitment to Aboriginal policy reform, issued a joint

statement saying:

The suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act (RDA) left Indigenous people feeling hurt, betrayed and less worthy than other Australians. Re-instating the RDA restores dignity and helps Indigenous Australians to take ownership of their lives and to drive change in the Northern Territory.

But not everyone thought this reform went far enough. There are still some Indigenous people and many of their supporters who feel hurt and betrayed by a Labor Government unwilling to take a principled stand, faithful to the letter and spirit of the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) which was ratified by the Whitlam Government in 1975 and then legislated for Australian domestic purposes through the RDA.

Each time Parliament has debated native title (post-Mabo and post-Wik), there has been an esoteric debate about 'special measures' which affect only Aboriginal persons. Under the Convention, special measures should be temporary and taken 'for the sole purpose of securing adequate advancement' of the affected Aborigines, and they should 'not be continued after the objectives for which they were taken have been achieved'.

Back in 1985, Justice Brennan in the High Court of Australia insisted on the need for government to consult meaningfully with those persons to be affected by any 'special measure'. He said:

The purpose of securing advancement for a racial group is not established by showing that the branch of government or the person who takes the measure does so for the purpose of conferring what it or he regards as a benefit for the group if the group does not seek or wish to have the benefit. The wishes of the beneficiaries for the measure are of great importance (perhaps essential) in determining whether a measure is taken for the purpose of securing their advancement.

Let's hope that by the fourth anniversary of the Apology, our statute books are stripped of measures which single out Aborigines for special treatment except in those instances where that treatment is voluntarily sought if not by the overwhelming majority of persons affected, then at least by community leaders speaking for their communities plagued by the abuses of pornography and excessive alcohol consumption.

Cancelling Valentine's Day

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



St Valentine's Day is always painful for frustrated lovers. It cruelly reminds them of what they want but have not got, and may never get.

Some go to great lengths to attempt a partnership with the person who is the object of their unrequited desire. Others work at rekindling a relationship which their impulsive actions may have ended.

An example of the latter is actor Matthew Newton. The Murdoch tabloids [reported](#) last week that 'a forlorn hope of rekindling his destroyed relationship with actress Rachael Taylor allegedly led Matt Newton to bombard her with dozens of text messages'.

Impulsive behaviour that disrupts or ends a relationship frequently does not extinguish the love that was its binding agent, at least from one side. The one whose behaviour was recognised as impulsive often goes away to 'deal with his (or her) demons', with a view to re-establishing the relationship, or not making the same 'mistakes' next time.

'Demons' is a convenient catch-all term that is often used by those reluctant to venture into what is dangerous and largely unknown territory. It is nevertheless quite apt. It does not carry a stigma, and it implicitly recognises the role of mental illness in the break up of some relationships (and indeed the inability to form them, if that's the case). It leaves intact the image of fundamental goodness that attaches to each human person.

Moreover 'dealing with demons' suggests courage, rather than the cowardice that has most likely been linked to the impulsive behaviour that has killed the relationship. Some people 'fall' in love, and this leads to a relationship that sustains the rest of their lives. Others must climb a mountain, stumbling along the way, before reaching the right combination of love and relationship that will give them what they want out of life.

Such courage is more worthy of celebration than the idealised and commercialised version of love associated with the day. As it has evolved, St Valentine's Day has it that those who are 'in love' are winners, while those 'out of love' are losers.

We need to cancel St Valentine's Day and find a 'real' saint, one whom we know dealt effectively with the demons that were getting in the way of his or her object of desire. There are many candidates, and this rationale has a genuine Christian ring to it. Much more than the vapourous Valentine, who does not even exist on the [Calendar of Saints](#).

