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Shariah-compliant swimming in Geert Wilders' world

MULTICULTURALISM

Irfan Yusuf

It was perhaps the greatest line ever in a spy flick. Austen Powers (Mike Myers) stands shoulder to shoulder with his father (Michael Caine), facing the villainous Goldmember (Myers). The father takes the lead: 'There are only two things I can't stand in this world: people who are intolerant of other people's cultures ... and the Dutch!'

Which in a way sums up the sentiments of a certain Dutch MP now visiting our shores. Geert Wilders will have us believe he doesn't hate Muslims. He insists he isn't opposed to multiculturalism. He just doesn't like cultural relativism. In his eyes, the religious culture of one quarter of humanity is inferior and incompatible with freedom.

As Wilders stated at his recent Melbourne Press Conference: 'I call on all the Muslims in the world to leave Islam for Christianity or atheism or whatever they want. This will be good for them and also for our free society.'

Leave Islam? What exactly does he mean? Is there a single room called Islam with a single revolving door above which is an exit sign? If one wanted to leave Islam, what steps should one take to be accepted by Wilders and his followers? What should one do to make Wilders feel safe from impending Islamic takeover?

And just what on earth are these Muslim types doing differently to everyone else now?

Let's see. They send their kids to their own schools. As we all know, no other religious congregation insists on doing the same as this 8–10 per cent of Muslim parents. How many Catholics do you know who send their kids to Catholic schools? It's unheard of. But for these Muslims, it's all about passing on their supremacist ideology.

Look at my parents, so insistent that I grow up with Islamic values that they spent thousands of dollars sending me to St Andrews Cathedral School. (It's true that the school chaplain sometimes told us kids that the prophecy of the '666' in the Book of Revelation referred to the Pope, but you know how some Sydney Anglicans are.)

Also, these Muslims don't follow our laws. They want to impose on us their own Sharia law.

I have witnessed this myself. Have you heard of Sharia-compliant swimming? Come down to my local pool in South Eastern Melbourne where I share the 'slow' lap lane with other serious swimmers.

We are a motley crew of different shapes and sizes and colours. One bearded bloke wraps a white turban around his head, which in some people's eyes might make him the most Sharia-compliant of us. No doubt that would horrify the other turbaned blokes down at his Sikh temple.

Anyway, the other day we were swimming in the lane when some young lads started swimming across us. One even swam under me. I immediately stopped. He had passed and joined his group of scoundrels at the other end of the pool. They were giggling and speaking to each other in Dari.

So exactly who are the Sharia-compliant swimmers? Is it the bloke with the wet turban? Is it the Malaysian-Chinese lady who covers her hair with a rubber hijab? Or is it those nasty children of Islamic asylum seekers who want to set off a chlorinated civilisational war?

In a few weeks, these kids will join other Hazara Australians for a massive festival to celebrate Naurooz. Should Wilders and his friends be afraid of the local council sponsoring the event? Is this creeping Sharia, in the form of a new year's celebration dating back to pre-Islamic Zoroastrian times, evidence of an impending takeover?

I hope Wilders goes on a tour of Indonesia, once a colony of his country and the largest Muslim-majority state on earth. He can visit the ancient Hindu temple in Jogjakarta and watch Muslim dancers perform a traditional opera based on the ancient Hindu epic tale of the Ramayana. He can drink and dance at any one of Jakarta's jazz clubs. He can also visit Interfidei, an activist group that stands up for the rights of religious minorities.

Yes, there are strange and extreme elements in this old Dutch colonial possession. But at election time, the wackos don't often do terribly well. Indonesia's thriving democracy has room for everyone.

And indeed there is much more to the Netherlands than Mr Wilders. Just ask Dutch voters, who in the 2012 elections delivered his Freedom Party a massive blow. They currently hold only 15 out of 150 seats. Yes, it is still 10 per cent. But it seems around 90 per cent aren't buying Wilders' message of fear and loathing.

And it seems hardly any Australians are either. On that note, I'd better go for a swim.

Freewheeling fantasies of European citizenship

EUROPEAN DIARY

Benedict Coleridge

In the middle of the Place Royal, in the centre of Brussels, stands the statue of Godfrey of Bouillon — Duke of Lower Lorraine, one of the leaders of the first crusade in 1099, and the first King of Jerusalem. It was erected in the 19th century as a monument to Belgium's imperial ambitions.

Unlike other attempts at reclaiming a romanticised medieval past (think Richard Cœur de Lion in Westminster), Godfrey speaks to the present in a meaningful way. He is emblematic of Europe's constant historical redrawing of borders and identities. He was a subject of the Holy Roman Empire, a Frank, a King of Jerusalem and, long after his death, a crudely appropriated symbol of Belgian nationalism. He underwent many re-imaginings.

In this way he speaks to an ever-present European debate over the question of citizenship and identity, a debate carried on in Brussels with a particular intensity. The question being debated is whether it is possible to imagine a version of citizenship that transcends national boundaries, that reshapes identities along transnational lines. In short, is a 'European citizenship' possible?

Recently I was at a conference on this rather overwhelming question. One of the speakers was a Lithuanian MEP who also happened to be a political theorist, and something of a renaissance man.

His presentation focused on the cultural foundations for a shared European identity — the history of cross-cultural transmissions between nations and regions. Through a tired haze I latched onto the occasional snippet: 'Rubens was influenced by Caravaggio' ... 'and therefore a pan-European identity is possible'.

On the face of it the question of European identity is today more complex. In the conference rooms of Brussels one often hears the complaint: 'The problem is that there's no *demos*'. That's questionable. There may not be a single *ethnos*, but there is a potential *demos*, a people, a public — to be seen on Brussels' cosmopolitan streets.

On the way home I walked past a mural of a mosque sprayed across a garage door. On the pavement people from North Africa and Eastern and Western Europe congregated, speaking French, Flemish, English and Arabic. It reminded me of the Ottoman traveller Evliya Celebi's description in his *Book of Travels*, of the streets of 17th century Constantinople and the eclectic mix of people who filled them: Armenians, Turks, Greeks, Jews, Italians.

One of the things I like about the *Book of Travels* — apart from its freewheeling fantasies — is that it prompts us to see the regions Celebi describes in a transnational frame. He crosses from region to region, from nation to nation

weaving in his often comical gaze a tapestry image of Europe, the Balkans and the east. `

The enduring impression he leaves is of muddled heterogeneity and idiosyncratic local distinctiveness. ('Now we have honey from Turkey, Athens, Wallachia, Moldavia, each with 70 distinct qualities.')

Does citizenship need to be built upon the close cultural, linguistic and historical ties that are, some say, only at work in a national community? Or can a broader conception of citizenship be formed, one that incorporates both heterogeneity and distinctiveness? There are plenty of sources, ancient and modern, that point in this direction.

Think of St Paul's letter to the Philippians (1:27) where he emphasises to them that they are 'citizens of heaven' first and foremost: 'then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing together with one spirit and one purpose'.

What Paul offered to the Philippians was a new language of citizenship and belonging — of spiritual citizenship in the kingdom of heaven, and of a new earthly, transnational, membership. Whereas ancient Greek political philosophy emphasised the vital importance of belonging to a bounded political community, Paul's language upended that ideal and pointed to something radically new — a form of belonging that went beyond the *polis*.

Of course it was possible to be a subject of a transnational authoritarian empire — but Paul spoke of belonging to a transnational community of citizens exercising agency and 'purpose'.

Today, Jurgen Habermas and Jan-Werner Mueller (Germans both) have articulated theories of 'constitutional patriotism'; that is, of a patriotism directed towards a state's constitution rather than a national mythology or ethnic identity. At the heart of this idea is the belief in a diverse community made cohesive by 'spirit' and 'purpose', in the same way that Paul proposed to the Philippians.

But constitutional patriotism doesn't imply a 'thin' identity based on nothing more than adherence to a document. It values political community and 'shared meanings' grounded in a civic culture. And it sets out a notion of citizenship that requires that we allow room for manifold identities — it means, in Michael Walzer's words, that 'we need to be tolerated and protected as citizens and members and also as strangers'.

Europe has always been rich with transnational affiliations and identities — very strong ones. Only think of the modern Catholic Church or of the mediaeval community of scholars, translating ideas across regional boundaries as part the 'Republic of Letters'. And if strong transnational identities are formed, if 'membership' and 'community' can transcend national borders, then it seems possible to imagine a citizenship that does this too.

Love and euthanasia

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Amour* (M). Director: Michael Haneke. Starring: Jean-Louis Trintignant, Emmanuelle Riva. 127 minutes**

Austrian filmmaker Haneke is known for his at times [didactic ruminations on violence](#) in its various permutations in life and popular culture. *Amour* is his most poignant film to date: the violent event at its core is an act of marital euthanasia, whose sweetly but unsettlingly ritualised aftermath is discovered during the opening scene.

Of course, on the face of it, violence is too bald a term for euthanasia. It belies the complexity of the human responses that underpin such an act. Haneke is fascinated by human motivations more than violence itself. And so after showing us the gruesome aftermath, his film flashes back to the difficult events that led up to the act.

He offers us a carefully detailed dissertation on the experiences of aged musician Anne (Riva) and her adored and adoring husband Georges (Trintignant), during the course of Anne's deterioration from a degenerative illness. Early in the illness, Anne asks Georges to let her die. In the first instance, he staunchly refuses.

There are moments that highlight the misery of Anne's condition, the slights rendered against her dignity. She awakens in a puddle of brown urine; labours excruciatingly over every syllable she speaks, but is misunderstood; howls in pain as she is showered. Georges can do little but tend dutifully to her needs. Is it enough?

Haneke regards his characters with affection, although not intimacy. He sets the camera at a clinical distance. His gaze is anthropological rather than voyeuristic. Watch, he seems to be saying; here are the characters, here is the dynamic of their relationship, here is how her illness unfolds, here is how Georges responds.

This could be an academic exercise if not for the devastating performances. Riva embodies Anne's degeneration from vibrant woman to frustrated invalid. Her agony is tangible as she loses control of her bodily functions and mental faculties. Trintignant's Georges witnesses her decline with a quiet, living grief and weary dignity.

Euthanasia may be at the heart of the film, but Haneke, who can be so didactic, seems uninterested here in an ideological debate. His title may be taken as a question, or as a declamation. Is it love that motivates Georges to prolong Anne's life? Is it love that drives him ultimately to end it? Yes, says Haneke to both. *Look: Love.*

Risks of betting on the papal election

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton



Claud Cockburn, the perceptive British journalist, once remarked with characteristic assurance that Catholics could never run a book on the papal election. It would be blasphemy, he said, because Catholics believe that the Pope is chosen by the Holy Spirit.

I found the comment intriguing. It was factually counter-intuitive because Catholics I knew were prepared to bet on anything, even the chances of an echidna making it across a highway.

Certainly most Catholics would have regarded betting on the papal election as in bad taste. This was family, so betting on the Pope would be like running a book on whom your sister would marry.

But to call it blasphemy is a large claim. It implies that the Spirit alone rides the winner past the post, that all the form the runners have previously shown and all their training are irrelevant, and that the Holy Spirit inspires only those who are on the winner, not those on losing mounts.

It is true some Catholics take this approach to statements by popes and councils, arguing that the Spirit inspires their decisions and acts only through those who favour them. The minority who have reservations about their wisdom are deprived of the Spirit, except when they come to accept the majority decision. The Spirit continues to inspire Church leaders to state authoritatively the meaning of Council texts and define their historical context.

This approach does affirm the Christian belief that the Holy Spirit works within the Church, including through the bishops and Pope. But it effectively puts the Spirit at the disposal of the Church teachers, who can write their slate of winners for the Spirit to sign off on.

Reflection on the lived experience of Catholics suggests the Spirit works in the Church and in all the relationships that make up the daily life of the Church, including those between teachers and hearers. The relationships also include casual and more formal conversations between Catholics about faith, the debates between Catholics of different views, in the response to Church discipline and statements as well as in the making of statements.

So in papal elections the Spirit will be in all the prayers, conversations, cabals, persuasion, self-effacement and self-promotion that are part of any human election, and will be with each of the candidates before and after.

The fact that the Spirit works through so many broadly political human activities suggests that it would be theoretically possible to run an informed book on the

papal election without insulting the Spirit. What remains impossible, however, is to read the working of the Spirit in the making of a pope or in the state of the Church.

This is evident from the tenor of the scriptural stories about the Holy Spirit. They are not about control but about newness and unpredictability. The Spirit is wild.

It drives prophets to speak against anointed kings, is found not in the resounding proclamation but in the shadow of silence, leads Jesus into the desert to confront Satan, picks Philip up by the hair and puts him into a slow chariot with the Ethiopian ambassador, shocks devout Jewish followers of Jesus with the possibility God may be calling the uncircumcised, makes Paul abandon his prudent missionary strategy and go straight for Europe.

The Spirit works within the ordinary processes of the Church, but is never confined or controlled by them.

More radically, the Spirit bears the face of Christ. Its work follows Jesus' trajectory in which life comes out of his execution as a criminal. We are as likely to see the Spirit bring life through exile as through stable government, through disgrace as through good reputation, through diminishment as through growth. Neither exile, disgrace nor diminishment are signs of a dying church; nor are growth, honour and power signs of a living one.

It follows that when a new pope is elected we can say that the Church has been in the good hands of the Spirit, but not that the Spirit has left the Church in good human hands. We can bet on who will be pope. We cannot bet on whether he will be a good or great one. On such things the Spirit is inscrutable. For this reason good taste and generosity of spirit dictate that Catholics have fellow feeling with the newly elected Pope and pray for him.

As for betting on the papal election, that is a mug punter's game. Not because of the intervention of the Holy Spirit. But because, as in the Melbourne Cup, there is little relevant form. If you lock people up to pray and to talk with one another at length about the best candidate, and ensure that there is no stable talk, the market is uninformed. So bolters can emerge and run away with the race.

And that, we might think, would not be displeasing to the Holy Spirit.

'Spend mentality' won't help the new Burma

POLITICS

Duncan MacLaren

'Development is the new name for peace,' said Pope Paul VI in his groundbreaking encyclical on development, *The Progress of Peoples* (*Populorum Progressio*) in 1967.



Well, not in Burma where a war in Kachin State in the north has displaced 90,000 people and where the Rohingya Muslims of Arakan State, rendered stateless by a whim of the regime in 1982, have been caught up in a spiral of violence with Buddhist Arakanese, resulting in killings and displacement of 100,000 people.

Such horror stories don't concern the Western and Chinese business people who have been given the green light by their governments to 'develop' Burma, and sweep, salivating, into Yangon.

They are seemingly oblivious to war and the ongoing human rights abuses over remaining political prisoners, restrictions on those released, land confiscation, forced labour, right of assembly and the failure of so-called reforms to meet international standards. They are there to do business and make money.

I have just returned from teaching a unit on an introduction to international development studies as part of the ACU Diploma in Liberal Studies program offered to Burmese refugees and migrants from camps and villages on the Thai-Burma border. This unit is part of a new ACU Bachelor of International Development Studies degree.

Unlike many other such degrees, its focus isn't on anthropology or economics but on people-centred development — an integral development that covers all aspects of human life but especially the life of the poor. Within that, economic growth is regarded as a means to making the lives of the poor more human not as an end in itself or to encourage the 'Tesco ergo sum' mentality — I spend therefore I am.

Instead, the form of development taught is akin to the 1995 UN definition of community development: 'a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation and the fullest possible reliance on the community's initiative', with an emphasis on human dignity.

One of the first exercises I did with the students was to have them draw a 'mind map' where the word 'development' was placed in the centre of a sheet and connections made from their knowledge and experience.

What they presented was a development that addressed the appalling health statistics and child mortality rates, gender inequality, lack of proper education and

social welfare as well as the need for democratic and devolved governance that might lift the Burmese people from being 149th in the UN's global Human Development Index.

The students also feared that the kind of 'development' to be ushered in by the foreign business people streaming into the 'new' Burma of reforms was not going to benefit their people.

Only two months after President's Obama visit to the former pariah state, a US-Myanmar Business Council endorsed by 70 executives from 38 companies, the first in 27 years, has been formed. Special economic zones are being planned where the daily wage, according to one minister, will be 200 baht (\$6.45) a day as opposed to the Thais' 300 baht (\$9.60) a day to ensure they undercut their neighbour in low wages. Those are official figures but, in reality, the wages paid will likely be much less.

The new foreign investment law passed in November 2012 by the Burmese Parliament will allow foreigners to own 100 per cent of their operations and are guaranteed 'tax holidays' for at least five years. The director of the Myanmar Investment Commission, Aung Naing Oo, assuaged Western concerns about labour unrest by stating that Myanmar had banned labour unions in the past and that 'Unions in our country would not be so active because we are in an early stage'.

The dollars paid by Thailand for natural gas from Burma have not resulted in health or education budgets being increased. The new gas pipeline from Arakan State to Yunnan in China which becomes operational later this year has led to the forced displacement of Kachin and Shan people, and civil society is not free or equipped enough to advocate for the vast profits from this to be channelled into development projects that will benefit Burma's poor.

It looks as if the fears of our students in discussing 'development' in Burma — that it will be business as usual with exploitation of the poor but under the guise of 'democratic' capitalism — are well founded.

The lost art of posting a letter

NON-FICTION

Gillian Bouras

Letters have always had a mixed press. It can't have been very encouraging or entertaining to receive the instruction *Kill the Messenger*, for example. Much later, writer Paul Scott warned that a letter never smiles, while gloomy Kafka asserted that letter-writing produces 'a terrible disintegration of souls'. But for decades I agreed with Cyril Connolly, who wrote that the essence of country life was waiting for the post.

Whereas the first email was sent a mere 40 years ago, letters have always been with us. Well, nearly always. And were associated with power and control in times when few people were literate.

Britain's Royal Mail can trace its existence back to 1516. In 1603, James I of England, who also happened to be James VI of Scotland, established a postal service between his court in London and Edinburgh, in an attempt to retain control of the Scottish Privy Council.

The US Postal Service owes its existence to Benjamin Franklin and the infant revolutionary movement; the Turks had scarcely been defeated in 1828 before the nascent Greek state set up the body that would become Hellenic Post, with which institution I (as an Aussie living in Greece) have had a love-hate relationship lasting 30 years.

Australia Post probably had the most practical start of all, when in 1809 ex-convict Isaac Nichols was given the job of boarding ships, collecting the mail, and then distributing it from his home in George Street: thus the pandemonium of the general public rushing newly-arrived ships was avoided.

The post seems to have defined my life. One of my great-grandfathers was a postmaster, and I have been writing letters since I was seven, when children were taught to write letters. There were rules. Both my teacher father and grandfather knew, for example, that when writing to the Education Department they had to sign off with the unvarying: *I remain, Sir, your obedient servant ...*

My children were not surprised to learn their parents met at the Melbourne Mail Exchange, where we swore on specially supplied Bibles that we would do our best to expedite Her Majesty's mail. We learned the post offices of Victoria and their districts: I can still tell you that Drik Drik was in SW 9 (Country). Our work consisted of poking envelopes in the relevant slots, after which said letters were borne away on conveyor belts to waiting bags.

In Australian country townships the post office was a community centre and meeting place comparable with church. In rural Greece nothing could supplant the church, but my local post office was still vital: pension day was a regular

nightmare, with little mountain men wanting their cheques immediately, if not sooner, and jostling, pummelling and yelling to great effect. There was often a donkey or two tethered outside, and postman Panayioti was once mightily affronted when a chook made its way inside.

The only public phone was in a corner booth, so there I occasionally stood, talking at vast expense to my parents, with an audience gazing through the glass and wondering at *ta xenna*, the foreign language. Sending a parcel was another ordeal, as the contents of the box had to be inspected, and then the receptacle itself had to be sewn into a cloth cover supplied by the sender: the village *yiayathes* were often critical of my needlework. Unsurprisingly. And it was a dark day when I had no letters from Australia.

How times and practices have changed. Last year a Melburnian friend told me she was about to post some letters in the box near her house when a car drew up: a man leaned out and asked if he could watch, he'd never seen anyone post a letter before. 'How many?' he asked. When she said, 'Six,' he drove away, shaking his head.

The switch to email has meant a huge cultural shift. Email has affected our modes of expression and use of language; it has meant different notions of records and permanence. For how long will biographers be able to ask: Have you got the letters? And I cannot imagine that lovers print out their emails and tie them in blue-ribboned bundles. Some American states have even given up the teaching of handwriting in schools.

Me, I'm still waiting for the post, but these days I eye my inbox in the hope I have not been totally abandoned.

Clarifying the anti-discrimination muddle

POLITICS

Frank Brennan



There has been some very confused debate about the Government's proposed consolidation of anti-discrimination laws. Nicola Roxon left the job unfinished and confused. Simon Crean tried to still concerns in January, saying 'the intent was never to change the laws, simply to consolidate them'.

Since then the Government has agreed to drop some of the more controversial, novel suggestions in the Exposure Draft. There is still debate about the extent to which churches discriminate, and are entitled to discriminate, in employment and service provision. There is also debate within the Catholic Church leadership about the extent to which it is desirable that religion be listed as a ground for legal objection to discrimination.

David Marr on ABC *Insiders* on 3 February 2013 spoke of the challenges confronting the new Attorney General Mark Dreyfus with this legislation. He said:

There are lots of things to be tidied up. The big one now is to get out of that bill the charter that some of the most conservative leaders in some of the most conservative faiths in this country are being given ... to kick poofers, lesbians, single mothers, people living in de facto relationships ... kick 'em around in employment and do it with public money. This is not medieval Spain; this is Australia in 2013.

Marr was conflating two issues: employment and service delivery in education, and employment and service delivery in health and aged care.

Church schools are entitled to adopt employment practices requiring teachers not to flaunt or ridicule Church teachings to their students.

The Church continues to teach that sexual relations should be confined to marriage and open to procreation. This is not a teaching that commands broad compliance even within the Catholic community. It would be wrong for a Catholic school to dismiss a homosexual teacher for public non-compliance with Church teaching unless a heterosexual teacher was also liable to dismissal for the same public flaunting of that teaching.

Everyone knows there are teachers in Catholic schools who are homosexual, not married, practise contraception, have had abortions or used IVF. State intervention to prohibit discriminating employment practices informed by adherence, silence or respectful questioning of Church teaching would be an unwarranted interference with freedom of religion. Why not leave the law as it is, as Crean said the Government was committed to doing?

The issue in relation to Church health and aged care services is much simpler. It

is a bureaucratic beat-up. Catholic Health Australia (CHA) has made it clear that Catholic health providers pride themselves on non-discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender, in both employment and service delivery.

A week after Marr's call to arms, I visited Gorman House at St Vincent's in Darlinghurst, a live-in facility for alcohol and drug dependent persons. The manager showed us some new single rooms with the observation: 'At last we are able to accord transgender people the dignity and respect they deserve.' That sentence summed up for me the tenor of health care informed by gospel values — without intervention by the nanny state.

CHA has recommended to its constituent members seeking any written policy on these matters:

Catholic hospitals and aged care services do not discriminate in who they employ, provide care to, or accommodate as residents within their facilities. People who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or people of indeterminate gender will be cared for within Catholic hospitals and aged care services with respect, compassion, and sensitivity.

The Attorney General's Department has focused on the provision of Church aged care services, prohibiting any discrimination in services that receive Commonwealth funding, making the unfounded observation: 'There was significant feedback during the consultations of the discrimination faced by older same-sex couples in accessing aged care services run by religious organisations, particularly when seeking to be recognised as a couple.'

Fr Brian Lucas, Secretary of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) gave evidence to the Senate Committee this month, making it clear that this was not an issue in Catholic facilities but for a couple of sensible exceptions to which the drafters had not adverted.

For example the Church conducts some aged care facilities exclusively for aged religious sisters. A non-discriminatory admissions policy would preclude the exclusion of men from such facilities. The Church also conducts some facilities for old, alcoholic men. Why would you use the blunt instrument of a universal anti-discrimination law to insist that women be admissible to such facilities?

The Australian Catholic bishops have been in a muddle about the issue of religious freedom for the last 25 years. In 1988, the Hawke Government proposed a referendum which would have extended constitutional protection of religious freedom such that it could not be impacted by state governments nor the Commonwealth government, and would be preserved from adverse impact by policies and actions as well as by laws made by the parliaments.

The bishops' primary concern was that any amendment of the existing limited constitutional provision might result in a renewed challenge to state aid to church schools. Rather than enlarging the scope of judicial review of government actions

impacting on religious freedom, the bishops said that 'freedom of religion ... is best protected through the democratic process in the Federal Parliament'.

They rejected the proposed amendment put forward by the Constitutional Commission chaired by Sir Maurice Byers. The Commission noted:

The values that underlie our political tradition demand that every individual be free to hold and to manifest whatever beliefs and opinions that person's conscience dictates. So long as an individual doesn't transgress the reasonable limits established in a free and democratic society, his or her freedom of religious belief and practice should not be fettered. Religious freedom is the paradigm freedom of conscience.

The Commission intended to extend the freedom from state as well as Commonwealth actions, and from governmental actions of an executive and administrative kind as well as enacted laws of the Parliaments. The ACBC opposed such an extension of religious freedom. In the present debate, it has continued to argue that religion should not be listed as a protected attribute in the new anti-discrimination law.

It is pleasing to note that Cardinal Pell and Bishop Fisher have broken ranks and acknowledged the need for religion to be so listed. Unless we insist on further legal and even constitutional protection of religious freedom, it will continue to be classed simply as an exception in discrimination law, rather than a human right.

Religious freedom is a primary human right. In the Catholic tradition, we have held this to be true since the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom. It's time for all our bishops to affirm this, and for David Marr to take a cold shower.

Vegemite interrogation on the Prague night train

POETRY

Anne M. Carson

The librarian witnesses the burning (Berlin, 1933)

'Wherever books are burned, human beings are destined to be burned too.'

Heinrich Heine, 1821

The room offers sanctuary, holds her while adrenaline
palsies her limbs. At the back of her eyes flames flare.
Singed skin, the reek of burn as if bodily doused.
Images repeat — spiralling smoke, black and acrid.
Violence pulls a soldier's mouth out of shape, his arms
lob handfuls of hate. Thousands of flimsy pages
ascend on updrafts like spirits departing. Her arms
reach, desperate to catch charred paper. Momentary heat,
text lit like a negative, a few seconds to decipher
script before pages collapse into dust on her palm.

*

All day charred odour clings to hair, clothes. All day griefs
gather, tugging hem, hand. All day — relentless rain
of once-were-words, falling black like sorrowful snow.
The city's loss reverberates, a dirge repeated.
A city without library, a library without books? And she
guardian. So visceral the memories — thick pages,
the must of old volumes. She grieves for the sheer
physicality of books — bodies you can hold in your hand.
Mourns the loss of sparks within — tolerance, peace
between peoples, cherished values under siege.

*

A blanketing dark falls at last. She collapses, drifts,
dreams she's peering out her window. Wind stirs ash

into billows; beauty in the sweep and stoop of floating cinders. She watches, incredulous. Book-souls rise from the ruins, ideas and meanings liberated from the bodies of books, the chastity of words. Released from the confinement of shelves, stacks, free to roam at large in the world. People rush into the street with upturned, hopeful faces. Some who have never known the reach of ideas, are touched for the first time, others come running for renewal. A soldier staggers into her field of vision, stung into awareness. His mouth forms the 'ohhh' of amazement, his eyes wide with illumination, limp arms by his side. She dreams deeper into him, through his covering to the core, watches thought unfurl banners of meaning in his mind, more potent than hate or flame.

Milk: Michael Frank

*'Black milk of daybreak we drink it at sundown
we drink it at noon in the morning we drink it at night
drink it and drink it.'* From *'Todesfuge' ('Death Fugue')* by Paul Celan

I once was Adonis, slim, lithe, my faultless Aryan body
 toned to perfection. Now I make up in volume
 what I had then in looks. Two hundred kilos and not finished yet.
 I don't know whether to stand proud or head-down ashamed.
I can't stomach what the country's come to — overrun
 by foreigners, worse now than in the thirties.
 After all the lies they told about the Nazis
 these days no-one's got the guts to lead.
Even the NDP — we've been meeting for years,
 talking, talking, talking but mein Gott, what I'd give to act
 some bold step there's no coming back from.
 Instead we tongue-flap, scrabbling

like a bunch of chicken-livered losers!

I churn all the should-haves, could-have-beens. My vitals roil
like kittens in a drowning-sack,
howling, scratching, desperate to escape —
turning belly-juice to bile.

The only thing that soothes all the red and black acid
is milk, only ever milk. Others like a stein or two —
I can't get enough of the cool white glide down the gullet.
A coat of calm, covers drawn, baby to bed
mother's rhythmic hand on forehead, belly.

White milk of comfort — I drink it and drink it.

If I start early I can down ten litres, pacing myself through my daily dose.
The doctor says my innards are packing up.
Bed like an invalid — fifty-three years old
and I can't walk unaided.

At least my father did something — his lot had balls!
How snug I would have fit — a hand into the perfect,
waiting glove —
into my father's Reich.

Michael Frank died aged 53, weighing over 200kg from organ failure due to drinking ten litres of milk a day. He was ultra right wing and defended his father's politics and actions as Governor General of occupied Poland. His father was hanged as a war criminal at Nuremberg.

The limits of goodwill

'In pretty Berlin you're never not asking why.' Robert Haas
Cash-strapped, post midnight arrival on the Prague
night train. The doss-house dorm vibrates with snores
chronically homeless men and women, possible
ex Nazis and resistance together. Huddled in the bathroom
for a final cigarette, perched on the hand basin's rim,
we take in courage with illicit nicotine, exhale fear

through louvred windows, into the Berlin *nacht*
like so many before us. My breath still catches.
Czech transport politzi had pricked Prague's romance.
They rifled our rucksacks, suspicious of backpackers,
unescorted women. One prises open my Kodak canister,
sniffs, says *ach!* fires staccato Czech questions at me.
Vegemite fã¼r frã¼stuck, I say, *am der brot* trying to convince
Vegemite is not hash resin, wanting them to share the joke.
Schoolgirl German and humour plummet down the ravine
between us. My fingers mime breakfast, a knife scraping
spread onto my other hand; open, wholesome as a slice
of bread, an Aussie backpacker. I smile the smile of someone
who doesn't know how bad it can get. The leader plants
himself opposite, interrogation position. A short-strapped
briefcase hangs from his bull neck, over his barrel chest.
His colleague flicks the cabin light switch, plunges us
into instant darkness. In perfect accord, the leader snaps
the case's clasp, the drop-down lid opens towards me.
A spotlight inside blasts a beam so bright I gasp, shield
my eyes. He barks commands, demands papers, passport.
The light pins me to the seat, rakes my eyes for fear, for
Capitalist lies. Already cast as drug smuggler.
The third soldier touches his firearm like some men touch
their balls. They hold us for a long time but, let us go
in the end. The encounter sears my nervous system,
an imprint I carry to the doss house, under the *Capitan's*
stern gaze, past creepy eyes, into my basic bed. Too cold
and distrustful to undress, I twist myself into knots under
two thin blankets, all my clothes, inside a narrow sleeping
sheet. I shudder from danger's aftermath. All night people

grunt gutturals, shift phlegm up and down windpipes. *This is nothing, I tell myself, don't you dare complain, about any of it.*

A pope for hard seasons

RELIGION

Neil Ormerod

Benedict's announcement that he would resign from the papacy came two days before Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent and a day on which many Catholics go to mass to be anointed with ashes as a sign of repentance. How providential that the new pope will be elected in the midst of this Lenten season, born in ashes but looking forward to resurrection.



And there are plenty of ashes to go around, not least of which are the 'ashes' of the pain and humiliation of the survivors of clergy sexual abuse. While the Church is currently in the midst of a sexual abuse 'crisis', the issue is decades old. It will be one of the major challenges for the new pope to find creative and compassionate ways of addressing this issue.

We saw some of this creativity at work with the move by Pope John Paul II to publicly seek forgiveness for the sins of the Church, including sins against 'minors who are victims of abuse'. Many local bishops conferences echoed this act of repentance. But words are cheap, and actions speak louder.

There is a world of difference between a global apology to 'victims' and how an individual cleric faces the pain of a survivor standing in front of him. The entrance into that world is through conversion, a change in heart and mind, to begin to see the world through the eyes of the poor, the suffering, the humiliated.

This should not be unfamiliar territory for any priest or bishop. A regular reading in the priest's breviary is taken from St Paul's Letter to the Philippians. Paul reminds his readers that Christ did not cling to his equality to God, but emptied himself to become a slave, to the point of accepting a humiliating death on the cross. To begin to see the world through the eyes of its victims is to take on the heart and mind of Christ.

Can we expect this from the next pope? Can we expect anything less?

One of those considered papabile, Cardinal Tagle of the Philippines, has called for greater humility, respectfulness and silence on the part of the Church so that it can become more credible among its followers. Perhaps there is some wisdom in Benedict's humble decision to resign and to withdraw into a life of monastic silence and prayer.

Think how different the response of the Church would have been to survivors of clergy sexual abuse if it had been based on humility, respectfulness and silence.

The humility to accept that the Church has failed, without the knee-jerk response of seeking to protect the Church's interests. The respectfulness of listening to the survivor, without contradiction or blame. The silence of sitting with

a survivor in his or her suffering without making excuses or offering trite pious words of 'comfort'.

Of course there are those who will say the problem in the Church is no worse than it is in the rest of society, and that its handling is mirrored by that of other similar institutions like the Boy Scouts or the BBC. This may well be true but it vitiates any claim the Church may make to being a source of healing grace or an expert in humanity.

I also acknowledge that most sexual abuse occurs in the hallowed walls of the family. But the Church can have no credible response to this larger and often hidden problem while its own failures are so patent.

Others seem to think I have some axe to grind on this issue. Indeed my life has been touched not directly but indirectly by both clergy abuse and incest. I have witnessed the damage close up and personal. It has affected the way I do my theology, but in fact my direct output on this matter is relatively small.

However, when I venture outside the cloistered walls of Church journals and magazines into the secular media I know that there are few issues as disempowering when attempting to project a Catholic profile into a public arena as the Church's handling of this matter. It must do better.

Can the next pope make a difference? Can he take the spirit of Lenten penance into the heart of the Church, taking it in the direction of greater humility, respectfulness and silence? We wait in prayerful anticipation.

Radical Benedict

THE AGENDA

Michael Mullins

Pope Benedict's resignation shocked the Church and the world. A papal resignation has not occurred in almost 600 years. Benedict did something that was considered 'not done'. It was not against the rules, but it has changed the institution of the Church.

It makes him look like a radical in the tradition of Christian radicalism. Biblical [commentators](#) note that the term radical 'is derived from the Latin word *radix* meaning 'root', referring to the need for perpetual re-orientation towards the root truths of Christian discipleship', and that 'one way Christians achieve this is to revisit the Sermon on the Mount or the Gospel of Mark, the earliest of the canonical gospels'.

Such re-orientation is informed by conscience. Accordingly, Benedict [wrote](#) in his statement last week: 'After having repeatedly examined my conscience before God, I have come to the certainty that my strengths, due to an advanced age, are no longer suited to an adequate exercise of the Petrine ministry ... In order to govern the barque of Saint Peter and proclaim the Gospel, both strength of mind and body are necessary.'

The logic of what Benedict did implies that his successor could choose to overlook practices that are arguably no longer suited to an adequate exercise of the ministry of Jesus Christ in general, such as priestly celibacy.

It is true that relaxing the celibacy requirement would involve revising laws in addition to overturning modern tradition. But Benedict has established the principle of the Pope 'examin[ing his] conscience before God', in order to promote the primacy of the exercise of the ministry for which the Church was founded. Accordingly, laws that fail to uphold primary principles can and should be changed.

The upshot of Benedict's resignation is that the Church has grounds for hope that did not exist a week ago. As the blogger Andrew Sullivan [put it](#) :

Those of us who have hung in must now pray for a new direction, a return to the spirit of the Second Council, a Pope of reform after an era of often irrational reaction and concealment of some of the worst evil imaginable. It can happen. Perhaps Benedict XVI finally grasped that. And finally did what he was never ever capable of doing before: let go and let God take over.

Moreover it would do no harm for the reverberations of Benedict's radical and conscientious action to be felt beyond the Church, inside institutions such as political parties and unions, where more attention is often given to particular rules and conventions than the purposes for which they were founded.

To kiss or kill a feral cat

THE SAVAGE MIND

Ellena Savage

Last night I was awoken by violent thumps from the ceiling above my bed. It was not Rodents Of Unusual Size that were causing the disturbance. It was a lithe mottled feral cat I sometimes see lurking behind our pumpkins.

Whenever I catch a glimpse of the cat, I have to fight bipolar animal-lover urges. The sentimental kitty-lover in me wants to domesticate the animal: lure it in with milk and sardines, then trap it into a co-dependent relationship where I rub its velvety chin and weep to it about my romantic follies.

My other urge is the environmentally responsible one: to take it to the vet and have it put down humanely.

I don't come to this particular mindset lightly. Until I was 12, the centre of my world was a long-haired tabby called Katie.

She was everything that I was not: elegant, discriminate and, despite her fluffy exterior, tough to the core. She was also slightly brain-damaged, to the effect that she attacked people's ankles without warning. But that's neither here nor there. I am a human being, and so my base inclination is to project my desire onto other species, and to believe that all other species exist to serve me.

Katie probably wasn't the elegant sass-talker I believed she was — it's more likely she was just a cold-blooded killer who was lucky to have her lifestyle subsidised by a small human being dispensing food and hugs.

When she died I was devastated, but I never replaced her. A few years later, I stopped eating meat for ethical and environmental reasons, and for the ensuing decade, I haven't been able to justify the resources and the cruelty of factory farming that goes into nourishing domestic carnivores.

In 2009, a New Zealand study published in *New Scientist* found that over the course of their lives, medium-sized dogs leave a carbon footprint 2.1 times that of an SUV. Cats leave a footprint the same as a VW Golf.

Cats are also responsible for 33 avian extinctions worldwide, and cause the greatest number of avian deaths every year: one billion birds are killed by cats each year in the US alone (the Gulf of Mexico oil spill killed 'only' 225,000). New Zealand entrepreneur and philanthropist Garath Morgan recently pushed for New Zealanders to [pledge](#) to neuter their cats and not replace them when they die in order to replenish native bird populations.

His pledge made international headlines, and sparked controversy among pet owners, as well as providing hours of reading, if you can stand to read internet comments: 'I feel no pity for birds since ... I've had to pick up the pitiful corpses

of their babies after they have been ejected from their nest by their parents ...'; 'Hunters actually keep deer populations in check'; 'Cat owners are more selfish and thoughtless than dog owners'.

The problem is not our adorable animal companions — they didn't choose to be both carnivorous and cute, and they aren't responsible for factory farming or their own basic instincts. It's we who are responsible. In sentimentalising cats and dogs, we neglect our own disturbing role in the environmental destruction they cause.

Domestic cats have no natural habitat, and because their food stocks are supplemented by humans, they can reach densities of more than 100 times that of native carnivores. In terms of carbon output, not owning a dog is one of the most significant contributions you can make to reduce your long-term environmental damage.

So how does pet ownership slip under the environmentalist radar, when driving, flying, and meat consumption are central talking points?

The existence of domestic pets is predicated on the sentimentalisation of speciesism: the idea that we are inherently different from, and superior to, all other animal species, and that we consequently have the right to exploit them to our own ends. In the case of pets, the end is companionship. We identify with our pets, and in doing so, prevent them from living according to their instincts, and put other animal species at risk.

I'm not proposing pets be outlawed, but rather that pet owners take the time to consider the impact of pets on their own welfare, other animals, and the environment. A change of heart is urgent. How many cat and dog owners 'love animals' enough to condemn animal slaughter?

Public schools' charity case

EDUCATION

Dean Ashenden



Should public schools go out looking for private philanthropy? The question was sharply posed by the release earlier in the week of a survey of giving to and receiving by schools. It [found](#), unsurprisingly, that the lion's share goes to non-government schools, the independents particularly.

The survey, sponsored by LLEAP (Leading Learning in Education and Philanthropy), is just one sign that the push is on to get public schools into the philanthropic game. Another is Gonski, who devoted an entire chapter to the question of whether and how private effort — in kind as well as in cash — can be got to where need is greatest.

Gonski listed a range of philanthropic activities as well as agencies set up by or with the support of governments to encourage them, and to get business involved. The report recommended that the federal government set up a new body — itself to be philanthropic — to help schools find their way into this new and unfamiliar landscape.

This is all small beer by comparison with developments in the US and, particularly, the UK, seen by some as a warning that the philanthropy push, by intention or incomprehension, will encourage privatisation of public systems and the gradual shrinking of public effort based on a progressive taxation system.

Much seems to depend on the form of philanthropy involved. Some of the big UK partnerships of business, schools, government and philanthropy are a long way from Lady Bountiful and tax-deductible bequests. They can [claim](#) what appear to be spectacular successes in resurrecting failing schools in disadvantaged regions by building 'social capital' and triggering a 'multiplier effect'.

But these ventures come with risks too. What happens if a partner runs out of capacity or patience? Do these partnerships suffer from that old familiar in schools, innovation fatigue? Do they take more in energy and focus than they return in better schooling and better outcomes?

As well, some partners turn out to want more control or kudos than the schools are willing to cede. The government might be a pain to work for but at least it's a known quantity, and it's in there for the long haul.

There is also the risk of communicable diseases. Some years ago a performing arts school was set up with grants of \$1 million from the Victorian government and \$300,000 from the Pratt Foundation. It was not long before Richard Pratt was disgraced by revelations of price fixing on a grand scale. In his own defence Pratt often appealed to his record of giving to the community, without pointing out that

he gave a lot less than he took.

Bond University could tell the same tale. Not too many people in schools want to be complicit in that kind of stratagem, or cop the collateral damage when things go wrong.

More difficult is understanding what might be the overall impact of localised initiatives. It is easier to dwell on glowing examples than to anticipate effects on the whole system. Are the schools that attract philanthropic support the ones that already have imaginative and energetic leadership? And what happens to the schools that don't or can't get out there and compete for energy and attention? Does their relative disadvantage increase?

Here arise several dilemmas. Should public money and policy help those who can't help themselves, reward those who do, or simply let events take their course? Will additional funding and support that starts out as a supplement end up as a substitution, allowing governments to weasel out of their responsibilities?

Then there's the problem of the left hand of government not knowing what the right hand is doing. Serious donors almost always want serious tax deductions, so to the extent that they give to schools already well off, the taxation arm of government may push public money toward the advantaged while the education policy and funding arm tries to push it in the opposite direction.

Much will depend on governments' ability to both encourage private involvement and set rules to ensure that it tackles need and benefits the whole system, not just some schools in it.

The Federal Government's recent [guiding principles](#) for school-business partnerships are not encouraging. They read like the work of an accountant, concentrating on machinery and sustainability to the exclusion of guidance about priorities and how to get private effort and public policy to pull in the same direction.

The Government is still 'considering' Gonski's proposal for a new organisation to facilitate philanthropy in public schools. It should act on the recommendation, but not before beefing it up to include a kind of triage service to encourage those who want to contribute to public schools to go where need is greatest, to groups of schools (ideally cross-sectoral) rather than individual schools, and in ways that do more good than harm.

At the same time, it could review the ATO's rules about eligible donations.

Ugly face of a self-help monster

TELEVISION

Tim Kroenert

***Enlightened* (MA). Creators: Mike White, Laura Dern. Starring: Laura Dern, Diane Ladd, Sarah Burns, Luke Wilson, Mike White. 20 episodes, 30 minutes**

In the opening scene of this gloriously squirmy HBO comedy, health and beauty executive Amy Jellicoe (Dern) undergoes a humiliating emotional breakdown on the open floor of her company's luxurious corporate offices. Flash forward, and she has just returned from a stint at a new-age treatment clinic called Open Air. She is a changed woman. The extent to which this change amounts to a transformation is an open question.

Enlightened explores Amy's attempts to integrate back into her old life, with her newly acquired positivity intact. Her resolve is tested by her emotionally distant mother, Helen (Ladd); by her employers who don't want anything to do with her, and shunt her off to a tedious data-entry job in the basement; and by her drug-and-alcohol abusing ex-husband Levi (Wilson), with whom she shares a painful past.

The series fits the oeuvre of 'comedy of discomfort' (e.g. *The Office*) in which the humour stems from characters' lack of self-awareness, and elicits a response that sits agonisingly between laughter and pity. It parodies the self-focused philosophies of the cult of self-help and reveals how they can turn a person like Amy into a monster. Amy's obliviousness to the complexity and hidden pains of others is at the heart of *Enlightened's* discomforts.

Dern's performance is a tour-de-force. Her ingratiating, girlish mannerisms reveal her 'recovery' as something more like a regression. Everything from her flirty manipulation of her sweetly geeky colleague Tyler (played by the show's co-creator and head writer White) to the looks of excruciating pity she throws at those who are not lucky enough to be as enlightened as she is reflect the character's utter self-absorption.

At times Amy's naivety is comical. She joins Twitter, gleefully types 'this is my first twit!', then stares glumly at the unmoving '0' that designates the number of people following her. But it also manifests itself as awful delusions of grandeur. Series two concerns her attempts to turn whistleblower against her unethical employers. She sees herself as a moral crusader and is seemingly unaware of the extent to which she is motivated by revenge.

She compares this task — with utmost sincerity, and to a pregnant colleague no less — to childbirth. The recipient of this inanity is Krista (Burns), Amy's former assistant who is now making her own way up the ladder. Krista is the victim of Amy's most severe emotional abuse (just watch Amy use the word 'friend' as a

weapon). Here even Krista's natal complications are reduced to an allegory designed to sustain Amy's ego.

Amy is the star of the show, yet two of the best episodes barely feature her. During the early episodes of season one we are given reason to sympathise with Amy's sense of Helen as a toxic influence. But in the episode 'Consider Helen' we see Helen as a virtual recluse who spends her days with the ghosts of the past. The episode highlights the extent to which Amy's 'enlightenment' misses the depth of the lives of those around her.

The season two episode 'Higher Power' portrays Levi's own treatment experience at Open Air, which he attends on Amy's insistence. He has an illicit 'big night out' with two younger residents, whose behaviour reflects his own, and alerts him to the ripple effect of consequences his actions have. This, along with a simple act of grace and self-effacement from another resident, cracks his cynicism more neatly than Amy's affected positivity could.

Ratzinger and Rowan Williams side by side

RELIGION

Andrew McGowan

When Joseph Ratzinger was elected Pope as Benedict XVI in 2005, the western Christian world found itself in the remarkable position of having both the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches led by men viewed by many as their leading theologians. Rowan Williams and Ratzinger, although a generation apart in age, had more in common than academic credentials when they came to office.

Both are steeped in the theology of the early Christian writers known as the Church Fathers, and although Williams focused his Oxford doctoral studies on eastern Christianity, he also has a deep and sympathetic engagement with Augustine of Hippo, on whom Ratzinger had written at Munich, before going on to his second doctoral thesis (as is normal in Germany) on Bonaventure.

Both have also used this training in the depths of Christian tradition to do theology in a way that involved new insights and potential controversy. This is reasonably well-known on Williams' part; his famous essay 'The Body's Grace' remains one of the most important starting points for a revised assessment of homosexuality that is more than lazy indifference to sexual morality in the name of inclusion.

It may seem a more surprising assessment of Ratzinger, who had a reputation for being a guardian of orthodoxy rather than an explorer of its frontiers. His Bonaventure thesis had however been savaged by an examiner for alleged traces of 'modernism', and he was one of the theological advisers at the Second Vatican Council.

If he subsequently leaned towards tradition more clearly, it is fair to say that Ratzinger has, like Williams, always written and acted with a deep commitment to the truth as well as to his perceptions of the needs of the Church.

Yet Ratzinger came to the papacy, as far as many in the West were concerned at least, as threat more than promise. Having headed the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for most of John Paul II's papacy he had a reputation as a watchdog, who had acted against theologians such as Leonardo Boff and Anthony de Mello as well as seeming to slow or reverse the momentum for change initiated at the Council.

Williams on the other hand was a figure greeted with hope by Anglicans and others who anticipated that his grounding in tradition and openness to change would be reflected in his role as Archbishop of Canterbury. He had not, however, had to exercise comparable authority, or at least to occupy a role relevant to the whole Anglican Communion, before that.

Now that Williams has returned to academic life and Ratzinger's retirement has

been announced, it is tempting to commit both their reigns to the category of failure, and debate mostly the nobility or otherwise of their inability (or unwillingness) to bend lurching structures or less gifted minds to their own wills. This would not, however, be the whole picture in either case.

Their shortcomings, real or perceived, have tended to cluster around the Church as institution and the way it treats its members. Williams struggled to hold together the disparate views of the various national Anglican groups, on human sexuality in particular. Ratzinger's Church and its challenges were altogether different, but he struggled to master a Vatican bureaucracy whose disarray has become more apparent with time.

Opinion is divided about whether the increased attention he paid to the reality of clergy sexual abuse has made sufficient difference to be a matter of great credit to him.

There will be those who see this real or perceived failure of the theologians as implying a need for a different kind of leadership; Justin Welby's elevation to the see of Canterbury arguably reflects not only his personal virtues, but a shift towards managerialism, given his previous corporate experience.

If the Cardinals perceive what the faithful in general and the world at large do, they too will surely respond to the present needs of the Roman Catholic Church in terms that allow for some sort of new broom.

This may do the departing prelates some injustice. The deepest problems faced by these churches have to do with the changing environment in which they find themselves, and the growing secularism of the West in particular. Both Williams and Ratzinger have made important contributions of an 'apologetic' nature — that is, related to the defence of faith as possible and powerful.

Williams' dialogues with such as Philip Pullman and Richard Dawkins have been important and public examples. The outgoing Pope has not been willing or able to contend on similar ground — his important Regensburg lecture in 2006, which was a thoughtful reflection on religion and power among other things, caused an outcry after a misleadingly-excerpted quote from a Byzantine emperor was attributed to the pontiff himself.

His encyclicals and other writings deserve more attention than sound bites or mainstream media have allowed, and will continue to get it from the thoughtful among Catholics and others. His books on Jesus have been popular, but while they involve an important critique of reductionist interpretive methods, it is hard to see them going beyond mere traditional piety in the actual working out of a picture of Jesus.

Ratzinger's powerful defence of reason and critique of relativism are more important than his own quick jump from these to intractable positions about a set of difficult moral questions allows many to see. Like Williams, he is capable of

defending and promoting a Christianity which is intellectually plausible and challenging not only to obvious forms of moral relativism but also to injustice and environmental irresponsibility.

His pontificate has not been a time when many beyond the Roman Catholic Church took him seriously in this regard — we could hope that relinquishing the burden of office may free him to be read, and heard, again.

Resignation of a teacher-Pope

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

Pope Benedict's resignation may be the most significant act of his papacy. It draws attention away from the mystique of popes and bishops, and focuses it firmly on their call to serve the Church.

His resignation allows us to reflect on his time as Pope. When the Cardinals elected Joseph Ratzinger many Catholics were surprised, and some alarmed at the choice. They identified him with the stern disciplinary actions and doctrinal intransigence of the Congregation for the Defence of the Faith. They assumed he would bring the same narrow focus to his leadership of the Catholic Church.

The reality has been rather different. Certainly, in his approach to the liturgy and in his different attitudes to reactionary and liberal groups on the margins of the Catholic Church, the continuity between the Cardinal and the Pope has been noticeable. But most notable has been the continuing depth and breadth of his reflection.

He has been above all a teacher who can draw richly on Catholic spiritual and theological tradition to illuminate the large social and cultural issues of our day. Over the last decade the Christian world has been blessed by having such reflective and knowledgeable leaders as Pope Benedict and Rowan Williams. For Catholics his resignation will be an opportunity to say thank you to a man who has served the Church faithfully as Pope.

He was a scholar, and to adjust to the constraints and expectations of a public person clearly was not easy for him. His scholarly musings got him into trouble from time to time, but he learned from his mistakes, and finally seemed to derive wry enjoyment from his public engagements, particularly with young people, who responded to his humanity. In his retirement he will surely be looked on with affection and good will.

It is too soon to sum up his achievements and the challenges he leaves to the Church and so to his successor. He grasped the extent and the evil of clerical sexual abuse; dealing with it, and with the aspects of clerical culture that have contributed to it, will occupy the Catholic Church and his successors for the next generation.

Benedict was an acute observer of contemporary culture, particularly of how the focus on technological solutions to problems has pushed aside human values. But his critical analysis in terms of secularism has sometimes encouraged the image of a church in mortal conflict with modern society. Christian engagement with modernity is a continuing and complex story, and we may expect Benedict's successor to bring fresh insights to it.



For the Catholic Church, perhaps Benedict's best gift will turn out to be his resignation. I confess that I had given up on my initial hope after his election as an elderly man that he would resign from his position rather than die in office. He seemed to have the historical grasp and theological breadth required to make this precedent-setting decision, but time was passing.

Given the importance of the papacy in the Catholic Church, the expectation that popes would continue to hold office until death was quite destructive. The increase in life expectancy meant that the cardinals would tend to elect only elderly men because this would be the only way to guarantee change within a reasonable time.

The expectation also meant that during a pope's long decline the principles of good church governance would yield to spiritual snake oil. So John Paul II's suffering during his last years was justified as the heroic acceptance of weakness and a demonstration of the value of the frail and elderly in a society that depreciated them.

The Pope's personal courage and endurance were admirable, and the value of the elderly undeniable. But Popes exist for the good of the Church, and it is difficult to see how the Church's interests are best served by men unable to give full attention to their duties.

So Pope Benedict's resignation is good because it will now allow a circuit breaker for an ageing pope. It will also take the focus away from the mystique of the Pope to his responsibilities to the church, and will lead to a consideration of what length of tenure by other office holders in the church best serves the church.

What it is to be a woman in India

NON-FICTION

Catherine Marshall

'Have the men in India been staring at you?' Audrey asks as we queue up for a flight from Varanasi to Delhi. We're newly acquainted and each of us is at the tail-end of our first visit to this captivating, perplexing country. Neither of us is ready to leave it. Audrey poses a pertinent question, but before I can respond to it she delivers her own, unequivocal answer: 'They've been staring at me, and I'm 84!'

A week from now, when I've returned to Sydney and Audrey to Guadalajara, Mexico, those penetrating stares — sometimes menacing, sometimes judgmental, occasionally jocular and friendly — will turn away from foreign women travellers and look inwards, to the five men who are on trial for the gang rape and murder of a young Delhi woman in December last year, and to the culture that allowed it to happen.

The trial will prompt India to examine its collective conscience, and to analyse the links between entrenched anti-female practices of the past and the way in which women are valued today.

'Here, girls have always been brought up to believe what their fathers and brothers say is God's word,' says my guide, Varsha, as she leads me around the Amer Fort in Jaipur. 'Now, in the cities at least, they are becoming more educated. Things are changing, but until they do, many young women will have to pay the price.'

It's a chilling thought, but one that's borne out by articles tucked deep inside the major newspapers, stories that somehow don't evoke the same public outrage as that afforded the Delhi victim: a four-year-old is raped and murdered; a 22-year-old is gang-raped so brutally her uterus must be removed; a woman is set alight by her husband; a UN report finds that 570,000 girls are 'not born' in India each year due to female foeticide.

Varsha takes me to the main entrance of the Amer Palace; above it are the delicately-wrought gates behind which the maharanis would sit in purdah, waiting for the king to return from battle. From here they would scatter upon him bright garlands of roses and marigolds, their joy manifested not necessarily by his survival but by the relief that came from knowing they would not have to sacrifice themselves on a funeral pyre beside him.

Such exquisitely-crafted palaces and forts seem to embody in their architecture the strangely dichotomous treatment of women in centuries past: the tightly-latticed purdah gates which concealed their visages, as though they were at once repellent and alluring; the marble-floored harems brimming with the king's concubines and guarded by eunuchs rather than sexually potent men; the palace

compounds in which the king's wives would live, each shackled for life to a single man who himself could demand sex from almost any woman he desired.

Polygamy is no longer common in India, but other signs of gender inequality become apparent as I travel around Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, in the villages and towns where locals seem to live out their lives in public, in the crowded marketplaces that hem the narrow streets.

Men sit in congenial circles, smoking and drinking masala tea, squat on their haunches observing the passers-by, or recline on plastic chairs set out alongside snack stalls. But the women are seldom at rest: they toil in the fields, scrub clothes against slabs of concrete, walk long distances carrying pots of water or basins of buffalo dung on their heads, and fashion the dung into patties to be used as fuel.

In city hotels educated young women work as guest advisors and public relations managers, but in rural areas the women are conspicuously absent; it is men who sit behind reception desks, serve in the restaurants, deliver room service, make up the rooms. Female empowerment seems to have been halted at the cities' boundaries.

And it's here in the city that locals are fuelling debate about a crime they hadn't expected to touch them.

'What shocked Delhiites was not just the brutality, but the location,' says my guide, Arjun, as we drive from central to south Delhi, a pleasant, tree-lined area considered to be safe. This is where the unspeakable crime took place; it is where India was forced to sit up and acknowledge, as Shombit Sengupta does in *The Sunday Express*, that 'Men's barbaric ways are tormenting women in India.'

There are signs that efforts are being made to redress this imbalance: two headmen are recognised by the state government for improving the skewed gender ratio in their villages through the promotion of girls' education; girls, who are often killed at birth in rural villages or aborted by more affluent women who can afford ultrasound scans, are celebrated by India's Minister for Women and Child Development during National Girl Child Day.

A university announces it will introduce a night transport facility and 24-hour helpline for female students, and a panel headed by one of India's justices recommends that laws be updated to include crimes such as voyeurism and stalking, and that 'Eve-teasing' (sexual harassment that implies that women, like Eve in the Bible, are responsible for men's behaviour) be stamped out.

There's a hint of optimism from the past, too, a bright portent contained in India's most iconic memorial, the Taj Mahal. Embedded beads of cornelian stone give the edifice an orange glow in the early morning sunshine as I visit this symbol of love, dedication and respect for a woman. The main gate represents a veil; the Taj, the body itself. But it's the body that rises up, breaking free of the veil,

confident in all its strength and sublime beauty.

Thoughts on the Apology from a Stolen Generations child

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mellisa Brickell



It is now five years since the historic National Apology to the Stolen Generations by the Australian government. When it happened the Stolen Generations (of which my mother was a member), their families, friends and supporters wept. It was a moment we never thought would happen. I felt I finally mattered, and that it mattered what happened to my family and community. We needed to hear that Apology.

We never expected the Apology would resolve all the ills of colonial takeover and oppression, nor the intergenerational grief and pain that impacts present day Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. But the words of the Apology gave a sense of expectation that greater justices, and the implementation of the full recommendations of the *Bringing Them Home* report, are still possible for Stolen Generations.

Yet the grief and sadness remain despite the best intentions of the government at the time. The government refuses to offer compensation and reparations as per the recommendations of *Bringing Them Home*. The suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act, the Intervention and income management policies add further pressure on our community and push the ongoing issues of the Stolen Generations further down the line.

Fortunately there are small groups quietly advocating for full justice for the Stolen Generations. Generally, these are the same groups that drove the people's movement towards the Apology. These groups are choosing practical ways to seek justice. This includes the push for Stolen Generations history to be taught in all Australian schools, and the pursuit of memorials as culturally appropriate places to remember and pay respect.

The government built the national reconciliation memorial, with a significant tribute to Stolen Generations. The river of tears at the memorial site is fitting: the grief and trauma of Stolen Generations, their families and their communities, is present and very real. The memorial was a first step which moved beyond the denial in Australian history that anything wrong or evil ever happened to Aboriginal people.

The Australian government should also consider a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander memorial day, to validate the pain and suffering of Stolen Generations and recognise the historical crimes of massacres, black wars, genocide and gross violation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander human rights. It already funds the Healing Foundation for retributive programs.

The Apology itself suggests the possibility of healing for Stolen Generations and

other Australians with saddened hearts. Stolen Generations and their families and many other Australians continue to come together to celebrate the Apology, and to put pressure on the government to fully realise justice for Stolen Generations peoples. Some organisations are still offering programs, and their work continues to support the Stolen Generations.

But we should not dwell on the Apology and glorify it while there is still much-needed support and greater justice to be achieved for Stolen Generations and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia.

The denial of natural justice through compensation for genocide is a selfish decision with moral implications. This chapter in Australia's history is not yet complete. The reparations and compensation to Stolen Generations by government would be a truer reflection of the recognition of our human rights, but alas this basic legal right to justice is denied. Until all the gaps for Stolen Generations are filled, the grief and trauma will continue.

Failure to implement the 54 recommendations of *Bringing Them Home* and to fully address Stolen Generations issues is simply a continuation of the mistakes of the past. There needs to be cultural restoration and full reparations accorded the Stolen Generations, with full human rights restored to bring about a just human co-existence for Aboriginal people and all who live in this country. This is what matters now.

Learning to sail both ways

POETRY

Graham Kershaw

Philosophy

Don't you seek a centre,
an object of devotion?
Don't you seek a primal source of light?
In the evening, on verandahs,
in the dark, in the rain,
don't you gawp like a fool
at the moon on the grass?
Don't you think of your lover,
don't you think of your home?
Don't you go inside quickly
and drink yourself blind?
Don't you?
Don't you?

Northern song

If ever I drove north again
It would be to find my father
I'd have to hear his voice up there
To justify the miles
I'm losing him in measures
He doesn't know my name
Doesn't know the life we lived
Just winks at me and smiles
I lose a little weight each day
My voice is not my own
I do not know the face I shave
Its blemishes and wiles

So if I drove back north again
And pulled up in that street
I'd want to hear the old man's name
To justify the miles
I was born up there by accident
Now he's going the same way
I feel like going north again
To justify the miles

Whistling woman

I passed a woman on the moors
walking into a frantic wind,
thin inside her lacquered mac,
carrying plastic shopping bags
which rattled, manic, as I passed.
Above this racket, I thought
I heard her whistling. The wind
was lightening her step, not
holding her back; the harder
it blew, the more it lifted her.
She'd learnt to do that, somewhere
it was written plain in the history
of her narrow face and frame:
the method in crazy grace.
She'd learnt to sail both ways.

Wheatbelt trinity

On the wrong side of the street,
too far from shops and shade,
three yellow benches bake on concrete plinths.
On a Sunday morning you can hear silence
sleeping there, between the trucks and crows,

floating flocks of pink and greys,
maybe the squeaking sneakers of a shopper or two,
silence is snoring on a hot metal bed,
homeless again.

The railway station is a museum these days
and there's an old neon star stranded
on a tower outside like a high-water mark,
but no-one remembers why and it never lights up.
No-one would notice if it did.

Everything's lonely: the fences, paths,
lampposts and bins lining the long way to All Saints'.
The heat, the light and the silence
are our trinity now.

Something like a threatened species
lurks amongst rocks and hard-leaved trees;
it'll blow us all away one day, the tourists say,
that's the smell they like, flirting with despair
on cut-price holidays, that's what's in the hearts
of all those lost city types: the stench of infinity
drowning a failed experiment.

That's the scent they follow.

Nothing they like better.

Well, they can buy it, if they like.

We'll take their money.

We know the land's power to hurt us is fading,
every summer, every drought. This is our secret now,
and we're not afraid to feel the power inside,
this harmony with the land's own artesian purpose
rising under us, stronger, darker,
longer, every summer, blossoming

into salt, every time we surrender.

Easter Sunday

Merredin

Does mining cost more than it's worth?

ENVIRONMENT

Justin Glyn

While mining is a source of great wealth for Australia, its socio-ecological benefits are mixed. Yet the power of the industry means a balanced conversation on these issues is yet to start. Debate about the efficacy of the [existing](#) Minerals Resource Rent Tax (MRRT) notwithstanding, a broader discussion about the industry is unlikely, especially in an election year.

The role of mining in Australia is complex. Western Australia is rich in iron ore and there are significant deposits of natural gas, gold, coal, uranium, opals, lead and zinc across the country. Mining and exporting these minerals has proved extremely lucrative: according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, mining has grown to just under 10 per cent of GDP, nearly doubling in the years between 2003 and 2008.

The industry is widely credited with allowing Australia to maintain its economy in surplus while similar European and North American economies adopt ever-tightening austerity measures to counteract the fallout from the banking collapses in 2008. Mining has made fortunes. Australia hosts the world's richest woman, mining tycoon Gina Rinehart. Mining magnates Clive Palmer and Andrew Forrest have spent millions on philanthropic causes.

Mining's status as a mainstay of the economy has its disadvantages. Both major political parties are beholden to the industry and fear the advertising power its money can buy. Two brief examples demonstrate the problem.

The Labor Government under Kevin Rudd announced a plan to overhaul the outdated royalties system which allowed miners virtually untaxed access to what are, by law, largely government assets. Australian Election Commission figures show that the mining companies spent AUD\$22 million campaigning against the new tax until Rudd was removed as leader by the Labor Party.

After Rudd was replaced by Julia Gillard, the mining tax was reconsidered. Gillard entered into negotiations with three of the major mining companies (BHP Billiton, Xtrata and Rio Tinto) for a limitation of the tax and confinement of its effects to miners' extraordinary profits. Perhaps it's not surprising that revenue raised from this watered down version of the MRRT has fallen well short of expectations.

The Coalition, on the other hand, is now the major recipient of mining company donations: just over AUD\$3 million in 2010–11 according to Australian Election Commission figures. It has promised to repeal even the current, weakened MRRT, along with the carbon tax (which was introduced by the Labor Government as the price of support from its junior coalition partner, the Greens).

All of this, not surprisingly, has implications in the socio-environmental sphere. The National Radioactive Waste Management Act 2012 (Cth), which allows for the dumping of radioactive waste, limits the ability of affected parties to challenge the Minister's decision to nominate a waste dump (although a challenge to the nomination of a site on Muckaty Station as a radioactive waste dump is currently before the courts).

Also, while mining in remote areas has undoubtedly created jobs for Indigenous peoples, there are claims of increased cancer rates in those living near uranium mines.

Government regulatory responses to mining pollution have been the subject of criticism. A 2012 *Sunday Times* investigation claimed that Western Australian authorities have failed to investigate dangerous levels of arsenic, cyanide, mercury and sulphur dioxide pollution in that state.

Meanwhile, in Mt Isa in Queensland, where Xstrata runs a lead mine, a [medical survey](#) in 2010 headed by Professor Mark Taylor of Macquarie University discovered that 11.3 per cent of children aged between 1–4 years in Mount Isa have dangerously high blood lead levels.

The outcomes of this study revealed clearly that not only are the policy approaches inadequate in Mount Isa [because they deal with secondary rather than primary prevention] but that the emerging evidence shows that current national policy guidelines for acceptable maximum levels of lead exposure are too high.

Significantly, the report attributed these levels directly to the mine. The Government's National Health and Medical Research Council maintains that the existing maximum level is appropriate as a '[level at which exposure to lead should be investigated](#)' although it does go on to state that this is currently under review.

On the other hand, the mining lobby is increasingly competing with another important feature of Australian political life: agriculture. The hydraulic fracturing ('fracking') of rock to syphon off natural gas is particularly sensitive, with [increased competition](#) between farmers and miners over land, and the extraction process implicated in contamination of the water table and increased risk of seismic activity.

While there is no doubt that the mining industry offers great benefit to Australia, questions about the costs of those benefits (and not just the revenues from the MRRT) are long overdue.

Philanthropy should be a condition of tax relief

THE AGENDA

Michael Mullins

Prime Minister Julia Gillard ruled it out last week, but there's no denying that the Federal Government would like to reduce tax concessions for the wealthy when they access their superannuation. Last year the concessions cost \$30 billion in forgone revenue, and Treasury [estimates](#) the figure will increase to \$45 billion by 2015–16.



The concessions are designed to encourage more Australians to fund their own retirement, and not burden the public purse by taking the age pension. But in reality, it would be much more cost effective to remove the means test from the age pension and have the rich receive the same [\\$712](#) per fortnight as the poor.

Australia Institute research fellow David Richardson [says](#) that in his last six budgets, former treasurer Peter Costello took the cost of super tax concessions from 1.3 per cent of GDP to 3.3 per cent. Meanwhile, the cost of the age pension was at just over 2 per cent of GDP. In 2009, the Australia Institute produced a report titled [The great superannuation tax concession rort](#), which showed how the concessions redistribute scarce resources away from low-income earners towards the secure and privileged well-off.

The scarce resources are required to fund important but expensive projects such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme, which will improve the lives of countless needy Australians. By contrast, the concessions secure the sometimes obscene lifestyles of wealthy Australians, who believe they are entitled to tax relief.

Business Council of Australia president Tony Shepherd [told](#) a round table meeting last Thursday: 'Philosophically, I object to the term 'concessions' ... We go to work, we get paid. The money is ours.'

Shepherd speaks on behalf of a section of the population whose members have often worked hard to get where they are. They feel it is unfair that they are expected to share their reward with those who may not have worked as hard, or been as lucky in the lottery of life.

Such an attitude belongs more to the USA, the land of the self-made man, and not to the Commonwealth of Australia, where we have always been more mindful of the *common* good.

But it has to be noted that respectable self-made men in the US give generously to their favourite charities and foundations. In Australia, respectable citizens pay their taxes, and welfare and other public needs tend to be government funded. Philanthropy has never taken root. This was confirmed in an Australian Council for

Educational Research survey [reported](#) in the media today.

The case for tax concessions for wealthy Australians would be more convincing if there was evidence of large-scale philanthropy here. If philanthropists funded welfare and other public service organisations, governments would not need to raise taxes for this purpose. If wealthy Australians would like tax relief, they should think about emulating the self-made men of the USA.

Asylum seekers stiffed by election year spin

POLITICS

Kerry Murphy

The rushed and ad hoc nature of arrangements for asylum seekers in Nauru and PNG reveal an eye on election dates rather than respect for human dignity and an adherence to international human rights laws.

While 5000 died in Syria last month, and tens of thousands of Syrians fled to Turkey and other neighbouring countries, Australian politics is dominated by the comparatively small number of arrivals on our coastline of people fleeing countries usually identified as producing large numbers of refugees.

UNHCR released the second of its reports into the processing centres last week. The first on Nauru was critical of conditions, delays and uncertainty for asylum seekers. The latest [report on Manus Island](#) is also highly critical.

Last august, the expert panel on asylum seekers [report](#) outlined a number of criteria that it said were required if Nauru and Manus Island were to be reopened. These included:

- treatment consistent with human rights standards (including no arbitrary detention);

- appropriate accommodation;

- appropriate physical and mental health services;

- access to educational and vocational training programs;

- application assistance during the preparation of asylum claims;

- an appeal mechanism against negative decisions on asylum applications that would enable merits review by more senior officials and NGO representatives with specific expertise;

- monitoring of care and protection arrangements by a representative group drawn from government and civil society in Australia and Nauru; and

- case management assistance for individual applicants being processed in Nauru.

UNHCR notes that none of these has been met. Asylum seekers are languishing in inappropriate accommodation, without any information about what will happen with their cases. No law let alone legal process exists in either Nauru or PNG to assess asylum claims. Even the minimum safeguards of the Expert Panel have not been met.

The major parties show little concern for adherence to international human rights protection, let alone treating people with dignity. The ALP policy of 'no advantage' is based on myth. There are no average processing times for cases and

the idea of setting up a fictional queue is ludicrous. The movement of refugees around the world is a complex issue that cannot be solved by simple slogans or subcontracting our obligations to poor Pacific states.

The policies of the main parties are now similar, but a few difference remain. The Coalition favours reintroducing Temporary Protection Visas, though there was never any evidence these had an impact as deterrence. The ALP opposes TPVs but releases people on bridging visas with limited rights to await processing. The 'no advantage' myth means they have no idea how long they'll be in this processing limbo. At least TPVs had a three year limit.

The Coalition would also reduce the resettlement program from 20,000 a year to 13,750. The increase in the resettlement program is one of the few positive developments for refugees since 2010. A decrease in places just puts more pressure on people to try and come by boat.

The Coalition policy of a presumption against refugee status if someone destroys their documents is ill-considered and irresponsible. Sending people to their home countries without determining their claims for protection is a potential breach of the prohibition on non-refoulement provided for in article 33 of the Refugee Convention and similar prohibitions in international human rights law.

It seems that such bedrock provisions are of little interest in the political debate in Australia.

The latest Coalition idea is to interdict boats from Sri Lanka outside our territorial waters and send them back to Sri Lanka. The Shadow Minister for Immigration Scott Morrison (pictured) says he has been assured by the Sri Lankan Government that the war is over and these people will be safe. He clearly has not read the December 2012 UNHCR Sri Lankan guidelines which identified eight risk profile categories including political opposition and human rights workers as well witnesses to human rights violations.

Such a policy is wrong regardless of the spin. The focus of both major parties is on the ill-informed fears of the community, rather than looking at the well-founded fears of asylum seekers.

Reconciliation in Australia and East Timor

POLITICS

Mark Green

I was in Dili, Timor-Leste on Apology Day, 13 February 2008. I listened on the radio to the Apology offered by Kevin Rudd. Tears welled in my eyes.

The previous year, I had arrived in Dili to take up my post as Country Director of Caritas Australia's aid and development program in Timor-Leste. Early on I received an uncomfortable message from a very angry young man. 'What are you doing here, Malai? Have you come to make us like your Aboriginal people?'

I had no response for that young man. He and many of his compatriots were frustrated and hungry, and faced the prospect of perpetual unemployment. Their new country was again embroiled in conflict. The fabric of hope that bought these young Timorese together as a nation was, like many hearts at that time, broken.

I was representative of a country that was working for reconciliation. I was representative of an organisation that means compassion. Or so I thought.

In the space of a couple of sentences, a young man had challenged all of this. How could I be an ambassador of reconciliation and hope, coming from a nation that had not been big enough or aware enough to begin to seek reconciliation with its own First Peoples?

We could not say sorry until 13 February 2008.

'To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry.' I wept as Kevin Rudd spoke.

Last Monday, I had tears in my eyes again — twice. In the late afternoon I read a report from our partner, Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation (KBHAC), a group of survivors from the notorious Kinchela Boys Home (KBH). I was looking at the photograph posted above. A tear fell onto my keyboard.

These are Kinchela men, Stolen Generations men, with Victor, representing the next generation, and the missing gate, now found, from their once oppressive home.

Why the tears? I looked again.

The gate is broken, off its hinges, separated from the fence which had once supported it. It is weathered, torn, bent. This gate hasn't been cared for.

Once the gate was strong; once it had the power to keep boys imprisoned, broken and beaten down. Now it has more in common with the boys grown into men than with their persecutors. An oppressive gate, broken, has become the gate of repossession, of restoration, of reconnection, of reconciliation — a Lenten gate.

Up to 600 boys were incarcerated at Kinchela between 1924 and 1970. One man, 'John', told a little of the story to the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families:

This is where we learnt we weren't White. First of all they took you in through these iron gates and took our little ports (suitcases) off us. Stick it in the fire with your little Bible inside. They then took us around to a room and shaved our hair off.

They gave you your clothes and stamped a number on them. They never called you by your name, they called you by your number. That number was stamped on everything.

If we answered an attendant back we were sent 'up the line'. I don't know if you can imagine, 79 boys punching the hell out of you, just knuckling you, even your brother, your cousin. They had to, if they didn't do it, they were sent up the line. When the boys who had broken ribs or broken noses, they'd have to pick you up and carry you right through to the last bloke. Now that didn't happen once, it happened every day.

Kinchela was a place where they thought you were animals. You know it was like a place where they go around and kick us like a dog. It was just like a prison ... Even today they have our file number so we were still prisoners you know and we'll always be prisoners while our files are in archives.

At lunchtime on the same Monday, Caritas Australia launched [Project Compassion](#) 2013 at Parliament House NSW, the very place where the policies were conceived to establish places like Kinchela Boys Home and to rip children from their families.

During the lunch, I heard the call of Pope Benedict XVI, which is the theme of this year's Project Compassion: 'We work towards a brighter and more humane world so as to open doors into the future.' By midnight, this same man had announced he would resign. Tears flowed again as I witnessed the story unfold. An old man's truthful self-reflection before God has opened doors into a brighter future for the Church.

A dispossessed young man in Timor-Leste, a deposed prime minister, six men from Kinchela Boys Home, one of their children and an 85-year-old pontiff, whose health is failing, has each moved me deeply. These people and their stories all seemed so unconnected until they came together for me at the beginning of this Lent.

They are ambassadors of our reconciliation with God and with one another.

