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Homeless wonder on Victoria's plains

REVIEWS

Barry Gittins and Jen Vuk

Tree Palace, by Craig Sherborne. Text Publishing, March 2014. [Website](#)

Jen:

Buffeted by the winds of social and economic change, the beaten path of the archetypal itinerant can be traced across Europe and America (think *The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp*, by W. H. Davies, Alexander Masters's *Stuart: A Life Backwards* and, of course, the American classic, Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*).

In his new novel *Tree Palace*, Melbourne writer and poet Craig Sherborne offers a fresh, affecting and genuinely antipodean view of the peripatetic life in the dusty plains of north-west Victoria.

Moira, her kids Zara and Rory, her partner Shane and his brother Midge are the kind of people you wouldn't think to look twice at. And that's just the way they like it.

Living on welfare and on the constant lookout for abandoned houses to either live in or raid (what they take away they can sell) they're known colloquially as 'trants' (short for itinerants). A disused house outside the fictitious town of Barleyville offers them something new. Stability. But when the 15-year-old Zara falls pregnant and Shane finds himself under the suspicion of the local police, things begin to once again look uncertain.

Here the detail falls as sparsely as rain. Language is metered out with care: 'It was late enough in the day for a carpet of sun to spread out in front of the porch, squeezing through a gap between the L of the house and caravan. Clouds took it away and put it back again like sleight of hand.'

Against this obdurate backdrop, the characters arrive on the page somehow fully realised. Moira, the wallflower-turned-undisputed-matriarch, is the epitome of adaptation and survival. Unable to read or write, Moira instead puts on her 'cunning hat' to get ahead — often to humorous affect, but never at the expense of her humanity.

Sherborne breathes life not just into a narrative, but a cause. These otherwise overlooked and forgotten people might be parochial, but they're never parodied. They might be uneducated, but they have a voice. A voice carried onward by the errant breeze, perfectly in tune with the diurnal struggle of this strange, indifferent land.

I don't know about you, Barry, but Sherborne had me at chapter one. Yes this comes down to the writing, which is, quite simply, sublime, but it goes further

than that. There's such feeling; such heart that it's impossible not to fall for Moira, Shane & co. *Tree Palace* is a reminder that even inside the smallest of stories there's room enough for the stirring of universal themes.

Barry:

That's an astute placing of Sherborne's second novel, Jen; I'll see your Steinbeck etc. and raise you the antipodean wanderers of Henry Lawson.

Sherborne does capture the dynamics of these iconic trants with humour, artistry and decided warmth. And while Moira and Shane's wobbly family has a willful crack at flying under the radar, the stakes are genuinely and engagingly high.

There is much to wish for if society's dubbed you as losers (the author affectingly dubs his characters 'the last of their kind'), and the quest for a home is at the heart of *Tree Palace*.

My sympathies are engaged early in the piece, especially by womanchild Zara and the reduced figure of Midge. But they are all up against it. Shane and Midge in their enterprises, pushing against the weight of hypocrisies and barriers of respectable trades. Moira's selfless schemes. The frantic fears and hopes (often inseparable) of the kids young and old, who roil the mud and muck they mistake for bedrock.

The wallowing's intermingled with raw majesty; Midge, as he holds Zara's child, finding himself 'connected to the world's holy scheme'. Shane connecting with Rory in a fatherhood lived beyond blood and obligation. Moira adhering to the mantras that losing is better and 'we take care of our own'. These are gracenotes in a blues symphony.

And, yes Jen, while they are indeed doled out with care, Sherborne has a genius for conceiving and depicting the novel's 'joists' — the lines and lengths that tie character and plot.

The sweat painting circles on a copper's shirt. The newborn's rooting and squirming for a nipple. Dry winds 'that pushed you back like a hand pushes'; squatters' fanciful home renovations that would 'stick out like dog's balls'.

You feel the pressures of limited cash and fewer options; the shame and stigma of illiteracy and poverty; the whiplash of judgment. But all's far from bleak.

Endurance and hope thrive: Moira is going to be there for her man and the rest of their clan, come what may. Shops may well be boarded up, with 'mail blackening the doorways like rot', but that can help trants.

The heat may well suck the will from spirits and dried-out waterways like 'Curdle Creek, which was only a creek in name'. But this mob are stayers; patching up what they need so 'all they had to do was wait for rain'.

This is timeless, universal storytelling that is nonetheless quintessentially Australian. The best yarns can walk small but go a longish way, and Sherborne continues to leave sizeable footprints.

Church abuse crisis and the law

RELIGION

Carmel Ross

Reports from the Royal Commission this week have focused on the efforts of John Ellis to have his experience of sexual abuse as a teenage boy, perpetrated by a Catholic priest, acknowledged and adequately addressed by the Church. The Royal Commission hearing has heard a litany of factors involving legal issues and the internal workings of the Archdiocese of Sydney that must have had a profound impact on Ellis. His courage to continue to fight for justice is admirable.

The finding by the High Court that Australian law as it stands does not allow an individual to sue the Catholic Church is an untenable situation if our nation believes justice for individuals is important. The law will always have its limits, but the Ellis defence implies that no single part of the organisation to which the perpetrator Fr Duggan belonged — which conferred upon him the status and duty of a priest and to which he was bound by vows to obey and serve — is able to be held accountable in law for his illegal and immoral behaviour.

The complexity of the Church as an organisation often defies understanding, even by many who have spent their lives in religious vows or on the Church payroll. Canon Law provides mechanisms for separation into smaller organisations such as parishes and dioceses, and often these establish a civil legal identity by incorporating as an association or company. Yet all remain part of the Church. This legal separation of so many entities within the Church sometimes allows issues of justice and accountability to fall through the cracks.

Laws relating to incorporated bodies strive to protect the interests of those bodies, but may not pay much attention to the achievement of justice. Certainly the legal representatives acting on behalf of the Archdiocese of Sydney appear to have conducted themselves during the court process as if their sole purpose was to avoid any prospect of the Church being held accountable for the abuse suffered by Ellis.

Legal personnel are bound to work with the law as it is, yet they, like all people, must be endowed with an inner moral compass that reacts to obvious injustice unfolding before their eyes. How unfortunate not only for Ellis and the Church that the focus was on protecting the Church's resources rather than striving to achieve justice.

The comment to the Royal Commission by Ellis after his meeting in 2009 with Cardinal Pell that the internal processes of the Archdiocese of Sydney seemed like 'a runaway train with nobody at the wheel' reveals some deep and serious failings in the administration of justice within the Archdiocese.

That Pell and the trustees were unaware of the details of the legal action underway is difficult to fathom and equally difficult to justify. It still remains

relatively uncommon for legal proceedings to be instituted by those who have experienced abuse via church personnel. Regardless of the considerable size of the Archdiocese of Sydney, one would hope that matters relating to abuse and legal issues taking place outside the Towards Healing process would be reported to the archbishop.

Equally, as the trustees are similar to a board of directors, if the Archdiocese is involved in legal proceedings that stem from an abuse claim, one would hope the reporting processes to them would draw this to their attention. It might also be expected that when a legal case involves the level of expenditure this one did and relates to an individual abuse claim, someone in the Archdiocese would hold responsibility for informing the archbishop and trustees.

If none of this was happening then there are many internal reporting improvements that will need to be addressed by Pell's successor. Yet anyone experienced in organisational culture will know that it is about more than the internal procedures — it's about internal culture too, and in a Christian organisation justice and pastoral care should be core elements of internal culture.

Pell's subsequent efforts to deliver pastoral and financial support to Ellis are appropriate and commendable as is his courage in stating on the public record that he believes it should be possible for the Church to be sued in abuse cases. Psychological research on the impact of trauma is clear that one of the first, essential steps to facilitate healing is that the victim has the opportunity to share their account of what happened with another person who accepts and believes their account. Much as it is possible for someone to make a false allegation, this seems to be relatively uncommon in practice.

More important is to listen in humility to those who have been wronged, and to take steps to protect them and others from the risk of harm in the future. Abuse claims do not belong in the civil courts, because an adversarial approach is likely to further harm the victim as they strive to convince others of the truth of their account, usually in a context where there were no other witnesses.

Hopefully an outcome of the Royal Commission will be for the Church to reconsider its practices in the Towards Healing process, because Ellis is not the first for whom this process has failed to deliver any positive outcome. Healing, reconciliation and inner peace rely on the quality of relationships that are formed when a victim comes forward, in particular the pastoral care and apology that is offered when harm has been done.

The celebrity Pope

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

Pope Francis' first year in office has been crowned by the appearance of Sergio Berlusconi's new magazine, *Il Mio Papa*. Berlusconi has never lost money getting his audience wrong. His magazine is testimony that the Pope is now mythical, a celebrity, and that the myth can be manipulated, marketed and monetised.

It is difficult to give an accounting for celebrities. They demand absolutes: each one is utterly new; what they replace is out of date. But merely popping their balloon also misses what in them attracts popular attention.

So it is with evaluating what is distinctive about Pope Francis and what he has already contributed to the Catholic Church. It is hard to move beyond such self-evident banalities as that he takes his Catholic doctrine and ethical teaching seriously, that he is approachable, that he is not a liberal theologian, and that he is free in his approach to security and liturgy.

More thoughtful analyses have explored opposites. His distinctive contribution is said to have lain not in substance but in style, not in theological exploration but in pastoral reach, and not to have touched the essentials of faith but accidentals.

Each of these sets of paired phrases is useful for fixing what Pope Francis is not. But they do not explore the coherence between the gestures that constantly surprise. Nor do they explain the enchantment of so many people, within and without the Catholic Church, reflective and unreflective, many of whom have been disappointed and disillusioned by the Catholic Church.

It may be more helpful to explore what Pope Francis transparently shares with previous popes, namely the strength of the faith in Christ that animates them all, and seek to identify his distinctive perspective.

At the core of Christian faith is the conviction that in Christ God has joined humanity, and that the Incarnation changes the world. The Christmas story, which brings together the immensity of God and the vulnerability of the newborn child, embodies this.

The belief that God has joined us in a human life, that Christ is divine and human, can be imagined in two ways. The first perspective emphasises the contrast between the greatness of God and the nothingness of humanity, and so focuses on the value that God adds in Christ.

When we see the world from this perspective we naturally imagine boundaries between the church and the world outside, Christians and non-believers, church teaching and secular wisdom. We emphasise the sacredness of language, ministry and ritual in liturgy as bearers of transcendence. The business of the church is to draw others into its holiness.

The second perspective on the Incarnation is one of wonder that in Christ humanity with its sinfulness and weakness could be intimately linked to God. That a human being can be united to God shows the value that God sees and loves in each human being and in the world.

From this perspective God reaches out to the whole world, emphasising the humanity Christians share with others. In liturgy the preciousness of apparently ordinary people, words and household utensils is revealed when illuminated in prayer. The business of the Church is to go out to people embodying God's love for them.

These imaginative perspectives are different but complementary. Each can be woven into a theology that brings together the key Christian themes of creation, sin, grace, salvation through Christ, church and sacraments.

The way in which Pope Francis acts and speaks suggests that he sees the world from the second perspective. He instinctively looks for connections with people inside and outside the Catholic Church rather than differences. So he lives in a guest house, dresses simply, washes the feet of a Muslim woman on Holy Thursday, at Lampedusa does penance for the deaths of asylum seekers at an altar constructed from the wood of their boats, goes to slums as well as churches, does unconstrained interviews with atheists, and consistently uses popular idiom to speak to people about Christ. He surprises by testing boundaries on behalf of the excluded.

When he imagines the church and ministry, it is as a military hospital serving the world at its edges. Bishops and priests are to live simply as their people, to go out to them and to smell like the sheep.

In this perspective and in Francis' gestures, going out compassionately to the excluded, whether they be prisoners, asylum seekers or slum dwellers embodies most strikingly the value of each human being whom God loves. Their exclusion and devaluing are also evidence of a world out of joint, in which compassion is lacking. This is why Francis speaks so bluntly about the greed and liberal economics that put profit before people.

Francis has been so attractive because the vision of a church that would attract people to its holiness by marking out boundaries had become incredible. The church of sexual abuse, of internal squabbling and of prissiness simply did not look holy. The air had grown foetid. But many people still looked to churches to nurture the possibility that they might ultimately be loveable and valued in all their weakness. Francis has encouraged that hope.

How might we expect to be surprised in future? We should expect Francis to go outside the usual structures to build resources. We should expect him to continue to cross boundaries to reach out to people who are excluded. We should expect him to continue to speak trenchantly of unjust economic systems. We should expect him to try to make church structures work and encourage a church that

goes out in compassion. But we should not expect him to take structures with enormous seriousness. They are not the main game.

Berlusconi's *Il Mio Papa* will need to be a censored version.

Chords of community in a country church protest song

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

When local churches are sold or demolished by outside authorities there is always local opposition. It is stronger when the local community does not believe it has been consulted. And the conflict is especially bitter when a village church is sold by a town congregation. A recent book about the struggle to save a Victorian Western District church from decommissioning and alienation illustrates what is at stake.

In [*Saving St Brigid's*](#) Regina Lane tells the story from the point of view of those who fought to save St Brigid's Catholic Church in Crossley for the local community. Its members are descendants of the Irish immigrants who over generations built and supported the church. It has been the heart of their community.

The conflict began with falling church attendances and a decision by the Koroit parish priest to rationalise resources. This involved decommissioning the Crossley church, a decision taken without proper consultation of the Crossley community. This led to representations and abrupt rebuff, appeals to the Bishop, promises not kept, the formation of a Save St Brigid's group, local and national publicity, the placing of the church on the market, and almost miraculously the purchase at market value by the group as a community centre.

Although the book describes in detail the battles to save the church, it is far more than a protest song against the power of the Catholic Church. It is really a passionate celebration of the community built by Irish potato farmers who fled famine in Ireland, and of the church at its centre. Standing on red volcanic soil and looking towards the pines of distant Port Fairy the church evokes a richly peopled land, its ties with Indigenous Australia and with Ireland, and the precious gift its power to connect people is to a more individually focused age.

Above all Lane invites the reader into her own journey. It takes her from a country life lived in the shadow of St Brigid's to the city where she seeks to find her place in a broader world, working in social organisations in Australia and overseas. When she committed herself to save St Brigid's she found herself building personal and community identity out of apparently inadequate materials. At the book's end she is able to own in her own way the values of family and community she had earlier found constricting.

She gives herself so generously in her writing that her book becomes a love story, touching all the moments of self-doubt, of ecstasy, of despair, of friendship, of the transfiguration of faces and places, and of exacting ordinariness that are the grammar of love.

For a Catholic reader the charm and sadness of the book lie in the fact that she could enter imaginatively the heart of Catholic life only by rejecting the values she

saw in the Catholic Church she had to deal with. So why did it have to come to this?

Simply, the protagonists on each side of the dispute, many of whom I know and respect deeply, had different understandings of church buildings. One side saw them as church property for which the local priest is responsible to administer for the good of stakeholders. These are the Catholics currently involved in parish life.

The other side saw church building as a living centre of the relationships between time and space that shape the community. The community extends far beyond the boundaries of practising Catholics to embrace those for whom the church is part of their identity.

These views of church buildings are complementary, but in conflict were seen as incompatible. It was then easily forgotten that the relationship of churches to the families that compose the local community and their history in the district is fundamental to understanding the church. Their importance is implied in the belief in the communion of saints, a much neglected phrase in the Creed.

In the communion of saints, which links Christians who have lived with those still living, bodily connections are important. The people who have built their local church, prayed in it all their lives and cared for it, matter. Their associations with place and community, through the church hall that was the centre of social life, the stained glass windows that coloured their childhood, matter. The larger stories embodied there, the immigrant groups who formed the first congregation and their relationship to the first Australians, have continuing importance.

Nor is the communion of saints confined to the virtuous and church-going. It comprises all the baptised, and reaches out to many others. It includes the 'church dormant': tribal Catholics whose families belonged to a congregation, and who may attend church occasionally for baptisms, marriages, funerals, and major feast days.

Because these concrete relationships to church buildings matter, Catholics in a parish composed of a central church and outlying congregations are not simply individuals in a homogeneous group. When they meet they carry their local connections with them.

Had the importance of place and history been given their proper religious value, the community would have been consulted in depth and the fight would not have become so personal. Perhaps the parish may then have seen the outcome of the struggle — the development of church property as a community centre — as central to its own outreach to the wider community.

But in that case the energies that inspired a community to fight for the church and led to so much self-discovery may not have been released. Ultimately, like Adam's biting the apple, the actions that precipitated the saving of the church may have been a happy fault.

Radical Pope's gender flaws

RELIGION

Megan Graham

Last year I experienced firsthand the hospitality of the Catholic Church in its incredible country of origin. During my holiday in Italy I stayed at two convents: one in the south, halfway up a mountain overlooking the coastal town of Sorrento; the other, right in the centre of Rome, a stone's throw from the Colosseum.

At both I was warmly welcomed, fed free breakfasts, and communicated with using whatever English the sweet, serene nuns could muster. Any problems I had were addressed with a true willingness to serve. The times I managed to communicate my gluten-free requirement (an interesting challenge in a country synonymous with pizza and pasta) they went to whatever lengths necessary to provide for me.

I mention this to demonstrate that although I am not a Catholic, I don't easily write off the positives of the Catholic Church. After all, a worldwide membership of over one billion undeniably represents a broad cross-section of good people.

And when Pope Francis was first elected a year ago, I was excited. Like a lot of people, I felt change in the air. Here was a Pope who seemed to have a real focus on alleviating poverty, and who cared more about speaking out in love rather than toeing the line in fear. A Pope who did not too easily alienate the LGBT community or people of other faiths, or use his platform to push contentious arguments about the use of condoms and AIDS.

My Christian friends became enamoured with the man, and my Facebook feed filled with Pope-pushing platitudes and odes of love to the new leader who some christened 'the change the Church needs'. I shared their enthusiasm — at least at first.

The shine started to wear off when the Pope opened up about his position on the role of women in the Church. In a well-publicised Q&A with journalists during a flight back to Rome after World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro, Francis [stated](#) , 'With regards to the ordination of women, the Church has spoken and says no.'

It seems the malleability he calls for on select issues doesn't apply to fundamental beliefs on gender roles.

He is quick to give a tick of approval for the increased participation of women in the Church (just not as leaders), while keeping in mind 'the irreplaceable role of women in the family'.

But, he has [asked](#) , 'How is it possible to expand an effective presence in so many areas in the public sphere, in the world of work and in the places where the most important decisions are made, and at the same time maintain a special presence in, and preferred attention for, the family?'

Well, men have managed this for centuries. Or is the male presence in the family less important than that of women, their attention to their children less valuable? Beyond the ability to lactate, are men unqualified to love, care for and attend to their children? Why can't this be their 'preferred attention' and why *must* it be women's?

Perhaps I am most disappointed not with Francis himself but with the general lack of response to these views. The broad support Francis receives from progressives, despite his unwillingness to even consider female ordination, demonstrates how marginalised women's issues really are in our society. He may have changed the game in terms of the Church's engagement with the poor, but this does not diminish the significance of his oppressive and outdated views on gender roles.

Consider it from another angle. Imagine a global institution of a billion members, led by an old white man the world has extolled, which unequivocally banned all non-white people from leadership. Would we overlook the obvious racism and say, 'Well, just look at all the other great things he has said. He's really come a long way'?

I grew up in the Uniting Church where women can be ordained as ministers (not only deacons but ministers of the word); serve as moderator of a synod (state body) or president of the Assembly (national body). I have no doubt that the presence of women as ministers and leaders has enriched and strengthened the Uniting Church immensely. While I have no plans to become a minister, I place a high value on having that option.

The fact that 'progressives' seem willing to overlook Francis' position on women shows how far we have to go when it comes to taking women's rights seriously. He should be commended for the compassionate leadership he has shown when it comes to the Church's engagement with the poor and powerless — but it is high time he led by example and addressed the powerlessness of women within the structures of his own Church.

Dumb dealings in Nazi art war

REVIEWS

Tim Kroenert

***The Monuments Men (M)*. Director: George Clooney. Starring: George Clooney, Matt Damon, Cate Blanchett, Bill Murray, John Goodman, Bob Balaban. 118 minutes**

A dilemma. The Monuments Men have discovered a stash of stolen artworks, secreted by the Nazis in an old copper mine. But the locals have sealed the mine, fearful that the departing Germans will destroy the works as their erstwhile empire crumbles. There's no time to *dig* their way in; the Russians will be here soon, and will claim the stash for themselves. What's a Monuments Man to do?

The camera pans slowly to Matt Damon, who is deep in thought. Then, a lightbulb moment: addressing the officer in charge, he deadpans, 'Do we have any explosives?'

It's a dumb moment, in a film replete with dumb moments. Clooney has done fine work as a filmmaker, but *The Monuments Men* is misjudged at almost every step.

It tells the story of a squad of American and British academics and artisans, the so-called Monuments Men, led by Clooney's and Damon's art scholars, who are charged with locating, identifying and preserving important buildings and works of art in Europe during the final days of the Second World War. An intriguing premise, but Clooney's execution is intermittently goofy and cloying and rarely compelling.

Mostly it is disappointing, because on paper this sounds like a gem. In addition to Clooney and Damon, the ensemble cast includes Goodman, Murray and Balaban, comedic actors who are also capable of tremendous gravitas. And there is a certain satisfaction to be had from seeing these actors in frame together.

But only Murray's abilities are capitalised on. As aged architect Richard Campbell he features in two of the film's scarce good scenes: a tense-comedic one in which he affably defuses a potentially fatal encounter with a scared young German soldier; and the film's only genuinely touching scene, in which Campbell weeps in the shower while listening to a recording of his grandchildren singing a Christmas carol.

Goodman and Balaban, like the rest of the cast, are mostly left to spout dumb and unfunny dialogue — Grant Heslov and Clooney's screenplay is a big part of the problem, as it really contains some of the clunkiest dialogue you are likely to hear this year.

It makes an unintentional joke, for example, of a sort-of romance between Damon's James Granger, and Cate Blanchett's Claire Simone, a French national

who holds the key to the *Monuments Men's* mission. Blanchett's measured, deeply-felt performance (Claire served as secretary to an odious German officer, and her brother was murdered by the Nazis) is wasted in this corny, unconvincing romantic subplot.

The film's biggest problem — more than the bad dialogue, more than the lack of tension and plot momentum, more than the heavy-handed exposition that sees garishly annotated maps projected onto walls to explain just where things are at in this pesky war — is its patent failure to sell the importance of the mission.

To be truly engaged, we must be persuaded that the mission is worth the risk to life that it entails. But rather than *showing* the beauty of art, its power to move and inspire and document and critique a culture, and the great tragedy if it is lost or destroyed, we are treated to lectures from Clooney and his earnest eyebrows, saturated by Alexandre Desplat's saccharine score.

'If you destroy their history, you destroy their achievements and it's as if they never existed,' Clooney's Frank Stokes implores, in one of numerous such speeches. That's probably true, but *The Monuments Men* would carry this message far more convincingly if it had succeeded in showing, rather than repeatedly telling, us of the invaluable place of art in our collective history and culture.

Winds of theological change at the Vatican

RELIGION

Neil Ormerod

Since the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI and the election of Pope Francis, there has been an ongoing debate about the aspects of continuity and discontinuity between them. Both men have been respectful and even deferential in their relationships with one another. Still no one can deny the impact Francis has had both internally in the Church and internationally where it seems the media cannot get enough of him.

The question remains whether this is a difference in style or in substance. Is he saying the same things but in a more communicative style, or is he actually saying different things?

Francis himself has downplayed the prospects of major doctrinal changes. However there have always been competing theological approaches within Catholicism. Some are more world-denying and pessimistic, viewing the world as a place of temptation and corruption. Others are world-affirming, humanistic, viewing the world as the arena of salvation requiring engagement and transformation. Broadly speaking, with a risk of oversimplification, one could speak of these two camps as [Augustinian](#) and [Thomistic](#) respectively.

Pope John Paul II had a foot in both camps. Philosophically he claimed a Thomistic lineage and his great social encyclicals, together with his missiological epistle, *Redemptoris Missio*, bear witness to a church open to engagement with and transformation of the world. However, particularly as he got older, a more combative stance against the world emerged, a battering down of the hatches within the Church.

Benedict on the other hand was more thoroughly Augustinian in approach, pessimistic about the possibilities of transforming the world, hence more focused on spiritual and liturgical issues. Benedict was also closely aligned with the *Communio* school which included vocal critics of [liberation theology](#), notably Hans Urs von Balthasar.

Francis on the other hand has an approach which seeks to engage the world and through that engagement to transform it to more closely resemble God's kingdom. In his pre-conclave speech he warned of the danger of the Church becoming 'self-referential' and 'sick', and of a 'theological narcissism'. He referred to the Gospel image of Jesus knocking on the door wanting to enter our lives: 'But think of the times when Jesus knocks from within to let himself out. The self-referential Church seeks Jesus Christ within and does not let him out.'

There have been two indications of this shift in recent time.

The first has been the rehabilitation of liberation theology. Emerging out of the

political and social turmoil in Latin America in the '60s and '70s, liberation theology directly addressed issues of social and economic transformation, taking its stand on the preferential option for the poor.

In 1983 under the leadership of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and with the approval of John Paul II, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a doctrinal instruction spelling out the various 'errors' of liberation theology: too worldly, too Marxist, too sloppy in its categories, a tendency 'to misunderstand or to eliminate [certain aspects], namely: God and true man; the sovereignty of grace; and the true nature of the means of salvation, especially of the Church and the sacraments'.

Now the new head of the CDF, Cardinal Gerhard Müller, has declared an end to hostilities towards liberation theology. At the launch of his recent book, *Poor for the Poor: The Mission of the Church*, which includes a preface by Francis, Müller's old friend Gustavo Gutierrez, the grandfather of liberation theology, gave a brief address. Previously Müller had offered unreserved support for liberation theology.

It is ironic that Müller was appointed by Benedict prior to his resignation. Clearly Müller does not agree with the earlier assessment of liberation theology by then Cardinal Ratzinger, and is closer to Francis on this issue.

The other shift relates to the bringing in from the cold of Cardinal Walter Kasper. Kasper has famously been described as a theologian of the 'extreme centre', always seeking to find the middle ground. As Bishop of Rottenburg-Stuttgart, Kasper had signed a proposal with a number of other German bishops which would have allowed divorced and remarried Catholics to return to sacramental practice. This proposal received a reprimand from the then head of the CDF, Ratzinger.

Kasper also had a very public, if friendly, disagreement with Ratzinger over the ecclesiology of the local church. At that time Kasper noted that the root of their difference lay in their foundations — Ratzinger adopted an idealist Platonic approach (in line with his Augustinian background) while Kasper adopted a realist Aristotelian approach (more oriented to Thomism).

As president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Kasper was sidelined by the CDF under Ratzinger on a number of occasions, notably with the issuing of the document [*Dominus Iesus*](#). This document noted that other churches, apart from the Orthodox ones, were not properly churches, merely ecclesial communities, which of course upset most of the Church's ecumenical dialogue partners. Kasper was publically very critical of *Dominus Iesus*.

Now Kasper has been praised by Francis for his latest book on divine mercy and was chosen by him to address the gathering of bishops for the synod on the family. In his address to the synod participants he returned to the type of solution to the problem of divorced and remarried Catholics that he had previously

supported.

Perhaps not tectonic shifts, but shifts nonetheless. They complement the much greater focus on the Church's mission that we can find in Francis' approach. As he has noted in his pre-conclave speech:

The Church is called to come out of herself and to go to the peripheries, not only in the geographical sense but also to go to the existential peripheries: those of the mysteries of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and of religious indifference, of thought, of all misery.

Jury still out on Francis the game-changer

RELIGION

Paul Collins

March is a wet month in Rome. It was raining when Pope Francis was elected on 13 March 2013, and it was pouring raining again when I was back there last week in preparation for his first anniversary.

But nothing seems to dampen media enthusiasm for Francis and his approach to what he calls his role as Bishop of Rome. Catholics committed to the renewal initiated by Vatican II feel that he has given them a new lease of life, and the well-informed, Rome-based journalist Robert Mickens, who writes for *The Tablet*, told me that Francis has already come 'too far' to retreat now to a more cautious stance.

Certainly he has already decisively changed the pattern established by his predecessors. No longer is the emphasis on the dangers of secularism and relativism; he has also shifted the focus of the Church away from the ridiculous 'culture wars' between false dichotomies which saw Vatican II either as a 'rupture' with the past, or as eternally unchanged 'continuity'.

Francis' emphases are in tune with the genuine Catholic tradition focusing on God's mercy, the love of Jesus, conscience, and the Church's pastoral care for the vulnerabilities and sins embedded in the human condition. He is humble, benign, pastorally concerned, committed to social justice and media friendly. He has embraced an inclusive, small 'c' catholic approach that includes everyone. That is no mean achievement in just one year.

Nevertheless amid all the enthusiasm for Francis' approach, we need to keep ourselves grounded. The key mistake of post-Vatican II Catholics was to fail to insist that the Council's theological insights be enshrined in ecclesiastical structures. Progressives think that you change things by talking a lot. And while endless gab-fests went on, shrewd conservatives were shoring up the old structures so that they could be cemented into place during the long John Paul II papacy.

While the Council called for a new vision of the people of God, lay participation, collegiality, and emphasis on the local church, Pope Wojtyla used his globe-trotting media super-stardom to introduce a centralisation that was unprecedented in church history.

The lesson here is that Francis will be nothing more than a flash in the pan if church structures are not changed. Sure, he has set up his 'Gang of Eight' cardinals to advise him on reform of the Vatican. But so far they have focused on cleaning up the Vatican Bank and the financial structures of the curia. While financial accountability is important, this is scarcely central to the proclamation of the Gospel, or a realisation of Vatican II ecclesiology.

I certainly wish Cardinal George Pell the best of British luck in his appointment as Prefect for the Economy of the Holy See. His direct style might give him the edge in tackling the byzantine administrative structures and arcane financial dealings of what is essentially the court of a 17th century absolute monarchy.

But don't underestimate the Italians; Pell will face a tough fight as long-entrenched interests fight a rear-guard action to protect their turf. It is significant that there is no word in Italian for 'accountability' in the sense of having to answer for one's actions, or being liable to stakeholders. And no, the Italian word *responsibilit * doesn't mean 'accountability' in the English sense.

The greatest danger we face is that we expect too much from Francis. Never forget that he is an Argentinean male. Sure, as Paul Vallely's excellent book *Pope Francis: Untying the Knots* shows he has undergone a genuine conversion to humility, a kind of simplicity, human warmth, directness, honest speech and 'looking at reality from the point of view of the poor' as Vatican-watcher Alessandro Speciale describes it.

But Francis is neither a progressive nor a reactionary. Essentially he brings a new perspective that has little to do with the preoccupations of the developed world. We shouldn't kid ourselves that he is a closet progressive.

The other danger is that he turns out to be all show and no substance. As I said, Vatican II has never really been implemented because church structures have not been changed to reflect the Council's theology.

His 'Gang of Eight' has not even begun to address the diabolically difficult problems embedded in reforming the curial structures of the Vatican, let alone tackling issues like episcopal appointments.

Even after consulting the laity on the forthcoming synod on the family, bishops' conferences were instructed to keep the results secret because the Vatican doesn't want to publicise unpalatable truths on issues involving gender, contraception, sexual relations, homosexuality, divorce, and women's ordination.

So the jury is still out on Francis, Bishop of Rome. However, I always live in hope.

Unwinding the Coalition's economic pantomime

ECONOMICS

David James

On the surface, the Abbott Government is returning the country to economic rationalism — the notion, motivated by a deep suspicion of government and its capacity to pick winners, that sound government policy is a case of: 'Don't just do something, stand there.' Any government interference in the price mechanism is deemed to be inevitably counterproductive and to reflect the capture of vested interests.

The view that the price mechanism is sacrosanct, and that any interference in it from government is sacrilegious, is the biggest circular argument in economics, a discipline riddled with circular arguments. How do we know the value of something? The price mechanism. What is most valuable? The price mechanism.

It produces some amusing political pantomime. The Government is on the one hand arguing — most notably with the SPC Ardmona case, the exit of the car manufacturers and Qantas — that it will not get involved in supporting Australia's industry base. But then it argues that its policies will boost Australia's industry base. Lower unemployment will inevitably follow. For the first time ever it is apparently possible to have it both ways. 'We are not going to do anything because that would be wrong, but at the same time we are doing something quite brilliant that will save the economy.' War is peace.

Such nonsense has become the norm in this era of deregulation and neo-liberal economic thought. Australian treasurers have been reduced to mere marketers of their bureaucrats' policies, trying to put the best spin on the fact that they don't do much. Interest rates are set independently by the Reserve Bank, and treasurers are simply required to balance the Budget as best they can.

They do not have much room to move. Fluctuations in tax receipts are largely out of their control and they cannot slash government spending without doing excessive harm. Any budget deficit was characterised as evilly irresponsible before the last election; now it is just something we all have to accept.

The other important element in the economy, the level of the currency, is also outside their control. It is set by forces far larger than the Australian Government (the Australian dollar is the fifth most traded currency in the world, far out of proportion to the size of the Australian economy). So governments tinker and try to make out that they have a great vision for the nation's future. Small wonder politicians are held in less and less esteem.

If it really were the case that governments could do nothing about the industry base, then that would be where the matter ends. But it is not the case. In fact it is an outright lie, albeit a common one in this era of 'deregulation'. Just as one cannot 'deregulate' financial markets because financial markets are by definition

systems of rules, governments cannot adopt a hands off approach to an economy. They can perhaps reduce regulations in certain sectors of the economy, but that is all.

When the Government refused to spend \$25 million on SPC Ardmona or help Qantas with debt guarantees, this was presented as a disciplined refusal to distort the price mechanism. Yet negatively geared properties last year cost the Australian taxpayer over \$13 billion. Surely that amounts to a pretty decent interference in the price mechanism. Housing construction is a major part of our industry base. Australia has one of the most inflated property markets in the world, precisely because of those distortions in the price mechanism.

No Australian government is about to change the tax break because it would be electoral suicide, but to argue purity on the one hand and be so obviously impure on the other does damage the argument.

That is only one instance where government 'interferes' in the price mechanism. Much of Australia's mining infrastructure, for example, was paid for by governments after World War II, although they are more reluctant to do that now. The decisions made by governments over decades shape how an industry base develops.

Mark Latham, displaying his economic rationalist credentials, [argues](#) that the demise of the car industry is a sign that after 23 years of continuous economic growth and wealth creation, the consumption side of the economy has become more powerful than the production side. 'Cashed-up shoppers are exercising greater purchasing muscle than the feeble industry plans of union hand-maidens like [opposition industry spokesman Kim] Carr.'

This is either circularity or a statement of the obvious. The demand side of an economy is always more 'powerful' than the production side. Demand, or peoples' willingness to transact, always comes first. The decision not to support the car manufacturers may have been justified, but not for that reason.

By using such ideologically-driven, simplistic analyses — customers versus producers, corporate welfare versus pure markets — governments subtly avoid responsibility. In fact, government is inevitably a vital actor in shaping a nation's industry base, and the choices it makes have complex consequences, many of which are hard to track in advance. 'Don't just do something, stand there' is simply not an option.

But it is a convenient escape route when you are not willing to do the hard work to understand how a nation's industry base should be positioned in the global economy.

When the black lady sang

REVIEWS

Maureen O'Brien

Early this year I booked tickets for a concert featuring Deborah Cheetham. I knew that Cheetham was an Indigenous soprano, composer and educator and recognised her photo on the flyer advertising the event, even though I had never seen her perform live on stage.

The program for the concert, 'Til the Black Lady Sings', included works by Vaughan Williams, Puccini, Dvorak, Richard Strauss, Lehar and Gershwin, as well as an aria from Cheetham's opera, *Pecan Summer*. I noted, in passing, that it was the opening event of the 2014 Melbourne Indigenous Arts Festival.

The evening turned out to be a unique, personal journey, portrayed through music by Cheetham of her life to date. She began by recalling her first memories of hearing, as a three-year-old, her adoptive mother singing a hymn in a Baptist church. There was a haunting quality of times past when Cheetham sang some of the verses.

Twelve years later in 1979 she heard Dame Joan Sutherland in *The Merry Widow* at the Sydney Opera House and was swept away, not only by the magnificence of Sutherland's voice but also by a dream of singing opera. It was only later, however, that this seemingly unreachable goal became grounded in the realm of possibility when she saw Afro-American soprano, Leona Mitchell, singing *Tosca*. Mitchell became the role model Cheetham clung to from that point when she realised that being black was no barrier to singing any number of roles.

This awakening was still evident in Cheetham's splendid rendition of Tosca's 'Vissi d'Arte', and the audience was aware of the perfection she achieved. But just when it seemed nothing could surpass the height of emotion in this work, the next aria she sang, 'Senza Mamma' from Puccini's *Suor Angelica*, did just that.

The aria describes Angelica's grief when she learns that the child she was forced to give up as a young unmarried woman has died. It was Cheetham's first performance of this heart-wrenching work and she dedicated it to both of her mothers — her birth mother, Monica, and her adoptive mother, Marjorie. Cheetham is a member of the Stolen Generations, taken from her mother when she was three weeks old by the Salvation Army. Her adoptive mother was unaware of this, believing that the baby she chose had been abandoned.

The tragic nature of this story was a stark reminder of a shameful period in Australian history, justified at the time by the misguided belief of those in authority that what they were doing was for the best. Six of Monica's nine children were taken from her, and Marjorie lived in fear of being rejected by her adopted daughter if she ever made contact with her Aboriginal mother.

Cheetham was in her 30s when she was reunited with her birth mother. This was not only a profound moment for her but also the beginning of her understanding of herself as a Yorta Yorta woman. She also met extended family members, including her uncle, iconic Indigenous musician Jimmy Little and an aunt, Frances Matheson. It was this aunt who helped her piece together more of her family history.

At the time she was in the throes of composing her opera, *Pecan Summer*, based on the 1939 walkout by Aboriginals from the Cummeragunja Mission protesting the loss of their land, language and children. Matheson informed her that her grandparents, James and Sissy Little, took part in this exodus and the crossing of the Dhungala (Murray River) from New South Wales into Victoria.

Pecan Summer premiered in 2010 and its success led to the creation of the Short Black Opera Company, which fosters the development of Indigenous opera singers. A member of that company, bass baritone Triki Onus, was a guest artist at the concert and sang an aria, 'Biemi Creation Story', from the work. A new production is scheduled for July in Adelaide.

The final act of *Pecan Summer* includes a recording of former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's National Apology to the Stolen Generations. Cheetham recalled going to Melbourne's Federation Square with her partner in music and life, pianist Toni Lalich, to witness the apology. She described it as having the truth of her existence recognised: 'It was no small thing for me.' Cheetham's next project is the composition of a choral work in the style of a war requiem in honour of Aboriginal people who died fighting for their land.

Ten days after the concert I went to hear two compositions performed on the Federation Bells in Birrarung Marr as part of the Indigenous Arts Festival — 'Eternal Birrarung' by Cheetham and 'All Bells That Ends Well' by James Henry. Coincidentally, the Sustainable Living Festival was also on that day and Reconciliation Victoria had a stand promoting recognition of Aboriginal people and their history in the Australian Constitution. I signed up for their newsletter and I suspect that hearing Cheetham sing and tell her story influenced me to do so.

What Minister Morrison is giving up for Lent

AUSTRALIA

Kerry Murphy

When I was young, I remember being encouraged to give up lollies or chocolate for Lent. Always a good idea, until Easter Sunday ruined the diet. Later the focus was on doing something positive in Lent, rather than giving up something relatively trivial. It seems the focus of the Immigration Minister is to give up granting Protection visas and doing nothing positive for refugees. On 4 March, he made a decision [limiting](#) the number of protection visas (those granted to refugees onshore only) to 2773. It is likely this limit has already been reached, so no more protection visas will be granted before 1 July 2014.

The Minister did this once before, on 2 December 2013, when the limit was 1650. That was at the same time as a Senate disallowance motion against the reintroduction of the Temporary Protection Visa (TPV). The TPV regulation was disallowed in the Senate, then the Minister retaliated by limiting the number of protection visa grants to 1650. Some time later he removed the limitation and visas were granted again after a new regulation was introduced to prevent the granting of protection visas to those who arrive by boat.

The stated justification is that the quota of onshore visa grants has been, or will very soon be reached. As the new Government reduced the total of the refugee and humanitarian program from 20,000 back to 13,750, this means that there are less visas available. The increase in the program to 20,000 was one of the few good things to come from the Expert panel Report of August 2012, so the reduction of over 6000 visas is an extremely retrograde step, especially as the lack of visas was one of the reasons encouraging people to get on boats in the first place.

Probably the new limitation was introduced before the Senate could vote on this new regulation as the second disallowance vote was scheduled for this week but it has been adjourned to the end of the month. The Minister decided to get in first, probably as part of the pressure on the ALP not to support the new disallowance motion.

In the meantime, the High Court is also considering the regulation that prevents the grant of any protection visa for those arriving by boat. Currently, protection visas are available if someone meets the refugee or complementary protection criteria (protection criteria), provided they did not come by boat. If they meet the protection criteria but came by boat, they cannot get a protection visa.

The visa the Minister has been [offering](#) is the old visa used for the Kosovars back in 2000. This is a temporary visa, with no family reunion, and a legislative bar preventing a person with the visa from applying for any other type of visa, unless the Minister personally intervenes in their case. You can guess the

likelihood of this Minister personally intervening to allow someone who arrived by boat applying for another type of visa. There is a number of cases of people who have married or formed long term relationships with refugees who arrived by boat, but legislatively they are prevented from lodging an onshore partner visa because their beloved came on a boat.

The Minister is determined to get the TPV reintroduced in some form. This is despite all the academic literature [criticising](#) the long term detrimental affects of the TPV on the mental health of refugees. This is despite the likelihood they may already have some anxiety, stress or PTSD from the experiences in their home country which gave rise to their refugee case.

More recently there has been serious criticism of the long term mental deterioration of people on bridging visas without permission to work, a policy of the former ALP Government. The [report](#) by Curtin University researchers Lisa Hartley and Caroline Fray is succinctly entitled 'Policy as Punishment'.

They conclude that the policy of the former Government to issue bridging visas with a no work restriction to those who arrived by boat after 13 August 2012, is extremely detrimental and is causing serious harm to people who may yet be granted protection in Australia. Asylum seekers are given the choice of payments below the poverty level, or to work for cash. We should be encouraging people to work and pay tax, not to force them into the black economy out of necessity, and then further punish them by cancelling their bridging visas

This no work restriction, like the reopening of Nauru and Manus Island, is presented as deterrence, but in reality is, as the authors state — punishment. The current Government supports the 'Policy as Punishment' and the ongoing [vilification](#) of asylum seekers by the Government is part of that policy.

This latest punishment — no more visas until July — is cruel. The people affected by this are those awaiting the grant of a visa because Australia accepts they meet the protection criteria but were just awaiting final checks such as a police clearance for Australia.

These refugees are living with us in the community, and many are contributing to the economy and well-being of Australia. They came seeking protection, and when their cases were accepted by the Government as requiring protection, we should be encouraging them to be part of our community, not vilifying them and punishing them. Maybe we should change the second verse of the national anthem — because we have nothing to share for those who've come across the seas and sought our protection. The cruel consequences of these policies will haunt us for years to come.

Performance review

CREATIVE

N. N. Trakakis

The Single Individual

'My sorrow is my castle,' you said,
Built like an eagle's nest upon the peak of a mountain,

A mountain lost in the clouds.'

Always inside your cabin

always beside yourself

writing the words

of a widowed soul

expensively tailored suits, cigars, top hats, dyed hair...|

all disappeared

after the surprise of 'an indescribable joy'

wearing only black now

like a mourner camouflaged in the night:

bent over the page

in the flickering candlelight

trembling with fear

that time has run out.

Above your desk, still hanging on the wall

a fading Bucket List

that begins, from the top:

1. To believe.

2. To dig down beyond the foundations, and put the question-marks there.

3. To repent.

4. To recover that word, ancient and buried

whose dead letters are never spoken or heard

a word silent and unknown: ineffable, incomprehensible

heretofore mispronounced and poorly translated
muffled by the bustle of the streets
to redeem it and finally utter it, with *parrhesia*
for 'purity of heart is to will one thing,' you often said
to beget a single new word, the password,
that makes life worth dying for
for you know well that even God
has only one Word to say, the Only-begotten, before all ages
through whom all things were made,
one word only to rescue from oblivion.
'But,' you asked,
What if everything in the world were a misunderstanding?'

Note:

*The poem refers to Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855).
Passages in quotation marks are from Kierkegaard's works; 'an indescribable joy'
is from a journal entry on his conversion experience of 1838.*

Performance Review

After being shown in by the girly secretary into his spacious office
you were invited to sit in a corner chair
from where you stared at his polished black shoes
and his new brown cardigan.
For some reason he kept talking excitedly,
not about your recent abysmal performance
(which you feared would result in a stern warning at least,
or perhaps a cut in wages, if not outright dismissal)
but about his injury playing sport with his kids yesterday
and the disruption this may cause to his upcoming vacation
with his wife to Barbados.
And you could see the whole family huddled together
within the picture frame on his desk
and you could see him returning home this afternoon

greeted with kiss and hug from wife and daughter
as soon as he came through the door
then heading to the backyard to play ball with his son
until his wife calls them in for roast chicken
(you could almost smell the lemon and herbs)
then he takes care of the washing-up
helps the kids with their homework
complains to his wife about his job, as she does the same with him
until wearied, they lounge on the couch beside the fireplace
watching television and eating icecream
before tucking the kids into bed, then jumping into bed themselves
with a contentment that asks for little and is troubled by even less:
As he rattled off some numbers and displayed various charts
(no doubt proving your inefficiency and below-par output)
you wondered:
Is that what families are like? Is that what it's like to have wife and children?
You left the office, dazed and confused
not even sure if you have a job anymore
becoming colder than ashes, deader than the deceased
though the beaming sun was beating your face
as if to mock you
as if to say
Tertium non datur
(there is no third way).

Letter to 'Her', Unsent

You and I
know the future well
but nobody believes us
or comprehends our state of our sin:
we are from strong fathers; cardboard mothers.

So go now

glue a smile to your face

and look away from me

contemplate instead these snow-covered buildings, with their sad rhetoric
and those barren women, with their brown-paper breasts.

'The next day I saw that I had made a mistake.'

You too knew that day will come

regardless of these li(n)es I write
to ridiculize them, to apostrophize us, to liberate you

engulfed by torrents of sound

I am only translating words unheard (and unheeded)

as you throw your heart away,

I sought the same

and I cannot help but think of you every day:

I think of what you said to me once

that murky night, weary of living any longer

you decided to throw yourself into

the river from the bridge

but at the crucial moment

it began to rain

and your heart came alive,

as did mine.

I remember you asked me once,

Who is the ideal person to love?

and I immediately replied,

Who else, but the one who makes you unhappy!

and you smiled.

But I could not stay...|

*'I went to Berlin. I suffered exceedingly. I was reminded of her every day. To
this day without exception I have kept my resolve to pray for her at least*

once a day, often twice, apart from thinking of her.'
Now I live in a spirit world, haunted, hunted.
I check the name-tag on my shirt.
I go to bed, afraid to wake up.
And I recall that twilight swoon
when we were sitting under a cherry tree in full bloom
I was staring at the peaceful lake
you turned to me and said: 'I can tell you're writing a poem'
and I went along with you
though I was only thinking of how to leave.

Note:

*The poem refers to Kierkegaard and his broken engagement with Regine Olsen.
The italicised quotations are taken from Kierkegaard's journals.*

Empowered shock jocks must also be accountable

AUSTRALIA

Michael Mullins

There is currently debate over whether free speech is a more important human right than freedom from racial discrimination. This follows the Federal Government's election promise to eliminate the 'hurt feelings' test from the vilification grounds of Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act. The pledge before the election was prompted by a court finding that journalist Andrew Bolt broke the law when he caused offence with his questioning of the ethnicity of particular fair-skinned Aboriginal persons.

Aside from discussion of the fate of Section 18C, there is no question that news media are becoming more powerful as players in our democracy and that they will continue to act as staunch free speech advocates. That is not surprising because free speech principles enshrined in law give investigative reporters and shock jocks alike the legislative freedom they need to do their job.

However if media organisations are arguing for a change to the Racial Discrimination Act, they need to match their free speech demands with rock solid accountability in regard to accuracy in reporting. Currently it's largely traditions of professional practice such as journalists' fact checking that is holding them to account. These are mirrored in the codes of the government and industry regulators such as ACMA and the Press Council, which offending media often treat with derision.

In this context, it is regrettable that there are demands for less — rather than more — accountability for accuracy in reporting. During the week, the *Australian Financial Review* [covered](#) demands for a weakening of accuracy codes, by a lobby group representing the half Murdoch owned pay TV operator Foxtel.

The Australian Subscription Television and Radio Association (ASTRA) made the demands in a submission to the Contemporary Community Safeguards Inquiry that is being [undertaken](#) by the government media regulator ACMA. ASTRA claimed that it is often difficult for 24 hour news channels such as Sky News Australia to assess the reliability of information in a fast-moving rolling news coverage.

The old days of verifying information through several sources before publishing are gone. This calls for a new form of accuracy, including transparency about the state of knowledge, the nature of any source being relied on, as well as the capacity to clarify information as a story develops.

ASTRA is correct. Unverified YouTube video of atrocities in Syria may be all a news channel has to go on. However it only misleads viewers if an apparent atrocity is reported as fact, or even probable fact, when the video may have been planted on YouTube by one side of a conflict bent on manipulating international

public perception in its favour.

ASTRA's proposal is that unverified reporting can be done with qualifiers such as a statement that the video is from an unverified source. This is common practice already and it doesn't work because visuals — verified or not — speak more loudly than words.

With regard to changing Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act, there's a strong argument for the status quo, in order to protect the right of individuals and groups from vilification. But if the Federal Government insists upon changing the law to give preference to free speech, it must include robust legislation to penalise journalists and media organisations who get their facts wrong.

Fence-sitters key to asylum seeker success

AUSTRALIA

Fatima Measham

Since [writing](#) last January about the need to rethink pro-asylum seeker campaigns, I have had people from both sides of politics share their frustration over the status quo. There is a consensus that nothing has worked, if the polls and government resolve are anything to go by. But it's hard to work out what a disruptive campaign looks like, other than getting non partisan figures as your spokespersons (say, sportsfolk and media personalities).

The complexity of the issue makes it difficult to prescribe policy outcomes. A push for a significant increase in humanitarian intake heightens [anxieties](#) around unemployment, infrastructure and 'special treatment' for 'illegal' migrants. A push for humane treatment of detainees gets entangled in arguments around deterrence, including that softening conditions would again increase the likelihood of deaths at sea.

Every proposal potentially hardens resistance. Even [boycotts](#) of companies that have profited from mandatory detention — though a legitimate, destabilising tactic — face the inertia of a disengaged public.

We are also at the point of this issue where consequent scenarios are difficult to resolve. If, for instance, the detention facilities on Manus Island were to be shut down as many have urged in the wake of the violence there, what is the feasible alternative? Where could detainees be housed and how would that affect the way their claims are processed, if they are to be processed at all? What exactly happens when no one — not PNG, Australia, a third country or even the country of origin — will provide settlement or protection?

Such questions make it difficult to mount a campaign. Pointing out that the irregular movement of people is an international issue or that Australia has humanitarian obligations have been shown to have limited appeal.

In fact it has constituted something of an efficiency problem for campaigns. After more than a decade of refugee advocacy, campaigns still cater to small 'l' liberals and progressives. They are of course critical to consolidating support for asylum seekers and sustaining political pressure. But they are inefficient in the sense that they appeal to those who are already receptive. This is far from adequate.

Change requires critical mass, momentum, tipping points. Targeting those who are natural supporters is as inefficient as trying to change the minds of hardliners. The relevant question is: how can a campaign reach out to the ambivalent middle, the superficially resistant? How can we engage them without alienating them?

In the January poll run by Essential regarding treatment of asylum seekers, 18

per cent [responded](#) 'Don't know' to whether the Federal Government was too soft or too tough. In the same poll, 10 per cent [picked](#) 'Don't know' as closest to their view among different settlement scenarios for boat arrivals.

Most poll readers skip past these figures, focusing instead on how Labor, Liberal/National and Greens voters viewed genuine refugee claims. But if the 10 per cent represents real uncertainty rather than reticence, then it is a potential tipping point. Given that 46 per cent believe that asylum seekers arriving by boat should be allowed to stay in Australia if they are found to be genuine refugees, then 10 per cent could be a game-changer.

This involves more than political engagement via rallies, letters to your local MP, petitions and op-eds. It requires accommodating everyone who shares the same concern, regardless of disagreement on other issues.

Yet the debate has become so polarised that it would seem as if the left has a monopoly on compassion. This is a serious campaign problem because it makes the space hostile to those who might otherwise be allies. I have heard first, second and third-hand accounts of Liberal Party members, conservatives and libertarians feeling the spectrum from discomfort to outrage. They are culturally resistant to traditional forms of protest such as 'not in my name' rallies, but this does not mean they are not trying to find ways to temper the Government's approach.

It seems to me that the tipping point will not be the Labor Party showing remorse for closing the books on seaborne asylum seekers. It will be consolidation of dissent on the right, with conservative figures in politics, business and the media emerging from the backrooms. It will go a long way toward 'socialising' dissent, giving others permission to speak out and — crucially — making the ten-per-centers think twice.

There is continuity when it comes to harsh asylum seeker policy and it demands disruption. We need a circuit-breaker. A campaign that targets the 'undecideds' in a sophisticated way and accommodates supporters across the political spectrum may be the start. Cathartic one-off campaigns have their place in this discourse, but we also need to consider what a long-haul movement looks like.

My guess is that it will require building relationships with unlikely allies.

Gifts of blood follow Kunming horror

INTERNATIONAL

Evan Ellis



They call Kunming the city of eternal spring. The climate, like the surrounding plantations of tea and tobacco, is a source of regional pride. Perched at a heady 6234 feet but geographically closer to Bangkok than Beijing, the effect is a near endless string of warm, golden days and cold, crisp nights. Cherry blossoms in full bloom complete the idyll.

The city is more of a waypoint for Western travellers than a destination though. Downright sleepy compared to other Chinese metropolises, it remains the logical jumping off point for trains north to ancient Dali, with its curled roofs and cobbled streets, or Lijiang and the eastern-most point of the Himalayas.

The Chinese themselves are no strangers to travelling these parts. They enter Kunming like pragmatic pilgrims seeking work, transit through it to reach their universities and schools scattered across the country, and return home in a great tidal movement for major Chinese celebrations. For many, train travel is the most affordable and reliable means of travel.

This regular pulse of modern China makes the attack at Kunming's train station, apart from the alleged political motives, an attempt to slash one the great arteries of China's contemporary existence.

The first my wife and I heard about the attack was a cryptic text message from my tutor. She warned us against going outside because of violence the previous night. Violence of any sort, let alone the Manichean carnage that made international headlines, is not easily associated with Kunming.

We had come to the city two weeks earlier for a university semester abroad. The mild climate, clean air and low cost of living were an attractive trifecta for a couple with a seven-month-old son.

When my tutor mentioned that separatists were being blamed (looking at the casualty rates I assumed it was a bombing), I was confused. This confusion was partly geographical. China is home to approximately 10 million Uighurs, a Muslim minority who live predominantly in Xinjiang. The capital of Xinjiang, Urumqi, is some 2400km away from Kunming. Nor is there any close association between Uighur separatism and Kunming.

Xinjiang is part of China's restive, western-most territory. It shares borders with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Kazakhstan among others. It is resource rich and strategically important. Security here is tight and visible. My Lonely Planet says the people here are closer to Borat than Beijing. It's a silly line but not without a point; Beijing is distant in more ways than one.

The Uighurs who call Xinjiang home belong to one of China's officially recognised 56 ethnic minorities. A Turkic people that embraced Islam from the tenth century, their language has much in common with the languages of central Asia. During the tumultuous 19th and early 20th century, sovereign states have been proclaimed, created, crushed and bargained out of existence in this region.

In recent decades Uighurs, under state organised migration, have gone from making up 90 per cent of Xinjiang's population to less than 50 per cent. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) understands better than most the old line that 'demographics is destiny'. Reports of discrimination and abuse against Uighurs are common. I planned to link to an Amnesty International report to illustrate this but the site is blocked from here. [[Here it is](#) — Ed.]

The above strategy was always going to be inflammatory. As the demographics have changed so violence has increased. In 2008 Xinjiang was rocked by street protests and bomb attacks. In July 2009 riots allegedly killed 200 people. Xinjiang police claim there were 190 violent attacks in 2012 alone.

When police pegged Xinjiang separatists for crashing a jeep through Tiananmen Square last year that left five dead, it seemed that separatist violence would no longer be localised in Xinjiang. The knifings at Kunming continue this worrying trend.

My tutor, a young woman of inexhaustible patience and charity, was deeply shaken by recent events. Her response however was instructive. Chinese authorities put out a request for blood donors in the city. Giving blood was all she wanted to do.

The city's blood banks have struggled to accommodate the throng of willing donors. The upturned arms of ordinary citizens have replaced some of the blood spilt by the long knives. Their response strikes me as profoundly Eucharistic.

This is not a side point. It hints at the necessary first step for any tangible solution. The Han majority and Uighur communities remain deeply estranged. Saturday's event proves that if nothing else.

However we should look less at the perpetrators and more to those who saved lives through their generosity. If this spirit of generosity can be extended beyond respective ethnic and cultural loyalties to embrace the Other, all parties may be able to see not only their shared humanity but also the legitimate points of difference.

If this occurs then some solution, hitherto only guessed at, might be able to be hammered out.

Abbott-whacking Greens senator's emotional politics

AUSTRALIA

Benedict Coleridge

In a speech this week to the almost empty Australian Senate, the Greens Senator Scott Ludlam [excoriated](#) Tony Abbott. It was by no means the stirring speech that the headlines suggested, but it was forthright.

Ludlam homed in on Abbott's politics of fear: 'your determined campaign to provoke fear in our community — fear of innocent families fleeing war and violence in our region — in the hope that it would bring out the worst in Australians is instead bringing out the best in us'. Whatever you think of Ludlam's speech, its implication was that politics includes a struggle over the cultivation, control and directing of public emotions, a struggle to 'bring out' in people emotions that are politically powerful.

We tend to think of our liberal political discourse as a neutral framework accommodating all perspectives and conceptions of the good life that don't impinge upon the rights of others. Our instinct is to think of our politics in terms of discussion and consensus — 'democracy as public reasoning'.

This may be because our sense of emotion, shaped by a regnant liberalism, is that it should be confined to the realm of the 'private', that public collective emotion is dangerous, easily associated with threatening and 'radical' politics. 'Public emotion' conjures up images of rallies and marching, the kind of ominous display crafted by Leni Reifenstahl in *The Triumph of the Will*.

That's why displays of public emotion are often met by calls for 'rationality', for a collective calm after which public reasoning can resume. Social 'calm' is the historical liberal antidote to the destructive public emotions of the early 20th century. As Pope Francis [put it](#) : 'we are a society which has forgotten how to weep.'

But there's a problem here — our liberal democratic framework requires the cultivation and sustenance of certain emotions, just as any extremist political ideology might. There are base and not-so-base emotions, emotions that flicker for a moment, and emotions that linger.

In a recently published book the philosopher Martha Nussbaum argues that certain political philosophies and their attendant institutional arrangements rely on corresponding public emotions: liberalism's being the capacity for an imaginative extension of sympathy to the other. This is the emotional capacity that political liberalism rests on — a sympathetic recognition of other interests.

Technically, political liberalism does not rule out a role or political contribution for 'bleeding hearts', though — as Andrew Hamilton [noted](#) earlier this week — some political liberals assume that it does, and the cost is to the ethical content of

political activity.

Ludlam's speech was a very long way from being a radical call to attention. It was a fairly standard political challenge. It caught headlines because it conveyed some sense of a moral and ethical struggle, a struggle over not only how best to realise 'the national interest', but how Australians conceive of that interest.

As David Marr has [noted](#) , and as I've [noted](#) in a previous article, a sense of 'decency' or 'reasonableness' sits easily enough in the psyche alongside cruelty.

I wonder whether our sense of our liberal-democracy as a forum for public reasoning directed towards consensus inhibits the possibility of disruption, of voices of dissent sounding from outside the now evidently conventional way of speaking. Cornel West, the idiosyncratic Princeton philosopher, refers to the voice of 'prophetic religion' as a voice that is not directed towards consensus building; rather it is a performative mode that calls people to attention, that jolts them out of the realm of the 'reasonable'.

The death of Reza Berati, for example, required such voices speaking with emotion, not with the aim of developing consensus but of calling us to attention, of showing us that, even in 'reasonable' Australia, our public schemes can be filled with violence.

One of the striking elements of the Australian public response to Berati's death was the holding of candlelit vigils in capital cities. This was powerful in its movement beyond the language of 'civility' that we think of as appropriate for the public sphere. It recognised that the public sphere is a realm of cultural formation, in which public emotions are expressed, and which includes forms of expression beyond speech, such as ritual, recognition and mourning. It was a moment in which Australians remembered how to weep.

We need to ask: What spaces are there from which people can offer a deeply challenging critique of our political culture? Are we receptive to these 'calls to attention', these challenges to the boundaries of the accepted? Given the kind of religious, ethical and cultural pluralism we live with, they may be made in languages that don't fit with our notion of 'public reasonableness', languages that may be disruptive to our sense of public 'reason'.

The only choice we have is to go on speaking those languages, getting that vocabulary out there in the public sphere, insisting that public reasonableness take into account these dialects. That's why Catholic Religious Australia's [call](#) for a National Lament is worth supporting.

Transcendent ordeal of an outback pilgrim

REVIEWS

Tim Kroenert

***Tracks* (M). Director: John Curran. Starring: Mia Wasikowska, Adam Driver, Roly Mintuma. 113 minutes**

I had my 'perfect Kimberley moment' on the last day of my trip. After a few days at Broome, a sojourn at the idyllic headlands of Cape Leveque, and an inland bus tour to the immense, nuggety Purnululu, I landed on the white sand in the gullet of Windjana Gorge. The place is infested by crocs, freshies who are harmless to wary humans yet fearsome as they bob ubiquitously in the crystal lagoon or warm their razor teeth in the sun. I crouched beside one slate-coloured beast who lay at full stretch parallel to the shore, rapt by its ragged beauty.

This was not the first gorge I'd visited, nor the most awesome (that honour goes to the massive sandstone cleft of Cathedral Gorge at Purnululu). But surrounded by limestone cliffs and staring that croc in the eye, I glanced up to find myself tangibly alone. The babble of fellow tourists had escaped the heat of the gorge to the shade of the distant picnic area. My private outback universe grew so still that I could hear the water murmur and the shift of sand beneath my soles. It was surely the kind of moment that people probe the desert to discover.

Robyn Davidson's trek in 1978, 2700km overland from Alice Springs to the Indian Ocean, is the stuff of legend. In the new film adapted from her memoir, *Tracks*, Robyn (Wasikowska) appears as an enigma, the motivations behind her odyssey oblique at best. Yet it is hard to miss her resentment towards friends who add noise to her final preparations, and towards the *National Geographic* photographer Rick (Driver) who intrudes intermittently on her trek in return for sponsorship from the magazine. Solitude, clearly, is largely the point.

As a meditation on the mythical 'outback experience' *Tracks* is sublime. By mythical I don't mean 'inauthentic'. Anyone who has had moments like my 'perfect Kimberley moment' will feel the mystical dimensions of Robyn's journey. Watch this film on the big screen and absorb cinematographer Mandy Walker's rendering of vast, claustrophobic space; of yellow sand and grey-green scrub and white-hot sun; of the degradation of Robyn's own skin by the elements as she traverses that sparse, living landscape. Cinematically, *Tracks* is stunning.

For the most part, Robyn is accompanied only by a team of camels, and a dog who plays a key role in Robyn's emotional arc. Robyn's interactions with the tame animals are easy and natural; likewise, with an Aboriginal elder, Eddie (Mintuma), who by necessity becomes her guide for part of the journey. By contrast, among her friends at the start of the film, and during her grudging friendship and sort-of romance (biographically accurate but unconvincing) with the intrusive Rick, she appears almost alien. Little wonder the outback calls to her.

Robyn's physical ordeal takes her also to the jagged ends of her emotional and mental being. She is pestered by tourists, for whom 'the camel lady' is already a living legend, and by paparazzi, who assail her at her most frayed. Rick proves to be an ally at such times, testing her determination to go it alone, without undermining it. Although the film's pensive tone tends towards aloofness, Wasikowska is captivating, her intense quietness capturing the spiritual dimensions of a personal endeavour that transcends ordinary human limitations.

Encouragement for bleeding hearts

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

Just as the song of the turtle dove is heard in spring, so the call of bleeding hearts is heard at times when resistance to brutality is gaining traction. The asylum seeker advocates who are now being called bleeding hearts won't be upset, because up to now popular support for the government policies has made protest unavailing. Cracks may now be opening. At all events the epithet is an interesting one and rewards reflection.

To call someone a bleeding heart is an insult, not a description. It has no meaning but does have connotations. It implies that its recipients are driven by sympathy for people who do not deserve sympathy, and are guided by emotion, not by reason. Apart from being weak minded they are also effete and ineffectual. They lack ticker. The phrase evokes popular images of Jesus associated with the Catholic devotion to the Sacred Heart. They often represent Jesus as an effete young man pointing appealingly to his wounded heart.

So, all in all, to be a bleeding heart is to be an apology for a virile human being. But for all that most people accused of being bleeding hearts would not want to disown the phrase but to explore its use in order to illuminate the differences between themselves and their critics.

The first point of difference lies in the idea of undeserved sympathy. Critics believe sympathy is something that people must deserve and be worthy of. 'Bleeding hearts' see it as something that we owe to our fellow human beings by virtue of the fact that they are human and in pain. It is a natural expression of a shared humanity.

So it would be proper to feel sympathy for a dishevelled and bloodied dictator after his capture, for example. Sympathy does not imply that we minimise the suffering of his victims or diminish the sympathy we feel with them and our outrage at his deeds. But it does lead us to curb our anger and to ask how it would be right to treat him. Just as it does when we see the sufferings of the asylum seekers on Manus Island and in Australia.

The second point of difference lies in the intellectual rigour we demand of ourselves and of others in considering what it is right for us and our representatives to do. For 'bleeding hearts' the ethical question has precedence over other questions.

In the case of asylum seekers, the ethical question emerges clearly from the shape of Australian policy. This policy rests on deterring people from making a claim on Australia for protection from persecution. Among other things the deterrence involves placing people who have come to make a claim in Australia in camps in nations that will not or cannot offer effective protection. This treatment

predictably involves severe harm through mental illness and inevitably leads to deaths.

To inflict suffering on one group of people in order to deter others is a clear case of appealing to a doubtful end to justify evil means. It is ethically wrong because it treats persons as things, subjects as objects. To do this is wrong no matter whether a government or an individual is acting.

That argument is hard-edged because it commits those who accept it to do what they can to remedy the wrong done to asylum seekers. They find the same kind of ethical claim laid upon them (although not the danger) as did the Dutch citizens who harboured Jews illegally during the Nazi occupation.

Those who call advocates for asylum seekers bleeding hearts usually dismiss ethical arguments. Although they may accept in the case of personal relationships that it would be wrong to inflict pain on people in order to deter others, they usually claim without supporting argument that governments are not bound by this or other ethical principles. Nor do they explore the consequences for society of allowing governments to do whatever they like to people as long as they claim it is in the national interest. The rigour of their recommendations to government rests on the lack of rigour in their argument.

For Catholics to be identified with Jesus as bleeding hearts is a badge of honour, especially if the identification is made by way of criticism. But few would see Jesus as the 'pale Galilean' or as effete. Certainly, when he was being executed he seemed ineffective. But the effects of his life and of his association with outcasts outlasted the Empire under which he was put to death. Now, there is encouragement for bleeding hearts ...

Traipsing Derry after the Troubles

INTERNATIONAL

Tony Thompson

I stumble over the name while buying a train ticket. 'One way to Derry, err Londonderry.' The ticket seller at Botanic Station in Belfast chuckles as he takes my money. 'Platform 1' he says.

I'll call it Derry for brevity's sake. The BBC starts with Londonderry then uses the shorter form for the remainder of the story. The whole issue strikes me as the ultimate riposte to any idea of 'what's in a name?'

It isn't my first trip to Derry. In the summer of 1990, my cousin Tim and I took a bus there from nearby Ballymena where we had been visiting distant relatives. We explored the city, mainly from the relative safety of the famous walls that surround its old centre. There was barbed wire everywhere and when we looked out over the famously republican Bogside neighborhood we saw smoke rising from an unseen fire and heard sirens. It may have just been a house fire but the rush of armoured vehicles and soldiers suggested otherwise.

We wanted a photograph of the famous 'You Are Now Entering Free Derry' sign that had first appeared in 1969 as the civil rights movement was quickly giving way to the 'Troubles'. We made our way down from the old city, passing British soldiers on the way. We were two solidly built, long haired young men with faces that could have been — and had been, generations earlier — local. There were watching us very closely. I tried to smile at one of them reassuringly. He was about my age and when our eyes met I saw nothing but raw terror.

Tim and I took our photos and retreated back into the old city for a pint. We asked the barman where we might see some music that evening and he laughed, ruefully. We were on the first bus out the next morning.

This time I arrived two weeks before Christmas in the midst of what the locals were calling a 'heat wave'. Ten degrees with occasional drizzle isn't a heat wave in Sydney but I took the opportunity to walk the streets of a town that I barely recognised. The barbed wire was gone, replaced by art galleries, theatres, and the appealing sounding Verbal Arts Centre. I had a plate of paella in front of the wondrous Guildhall and listened to the happy buzz of Christmas shoppers. It was difficult to believe that I was in the same city.

Did I mention that my B&B was in the Bogside? To find it (after getting slightly lost) I had to pass by the very same Free Derry sign that Tim and I, as far as we were concerned, had taken a considerable risk to photograph. I looked at my map and discovered that my lodgings were just around the corner. This time I was more concerned about getting across the busy street than being mistaken for a paramilitary.

One of my goals on my trip to Ireland, I decided, was to see either a band or a play every night. The folks at the B&B directed me to a flashy ticketing office just outside of the city walls. It appeared I had arrived at a good time. There was a play on that evening at the Playhouse Theatre involving three monologues by Jennifer Johnston. The following night's offering was equally appealing. The Undertones were playing. The members of the band that gave the world 'Teenage Kicks', John Peel's 'perfect song', are Derry natives.

The concert was sold out but the ticket sellers seemed confident that they could find a ticket for me. After a few phone calls and some discussion, I was issued with one. They seemed eager for me to get to the concert. I was so surprised that I barely knew what to say.

The play that night was subtle and disturbing. The monologues dealt with the 'Troubles' but the voices were so vivid and resonant that the impression left was more personal than political. It was also very poignant. As I walked out among the local theatre goers, it occurred to me that many of them likely had similar stories.

The concert the following night was less subtle, of course, but equally moving as a glorious celebration of old school punk rock fun. I knew that live music had been a rare commodity in Derry when most of the crowd was in their early 20s. I found myself standing beside a former Derry Mod before the show. He had dusted off his fishtail parka for the evening. We chatted about music, clothes, kids, and life. When the band appeared he sang every word to every song and danced with utter joy.

I understand, of course, that this didn't happen overnight and the wheels of change were turning even on my first visit. On my last day, I visited the Museum of Free Derry in the Bogside. As its name suggests, it presents a particular view of Derry's recent past. But the story is told in a compelling and moving manner that steers away from overtly republican messages while making it clear where the responsibility lies.

It is often forgotten that the modern troubles were, in part, sparked by a basic lack of housing for the Catholic community in Derry. The museum traces the civil rights protests from their beginnings in the early '60s to the Bloody Sunday killings that changed the game so dramatically in 1972.

As I was looking at the photographs of the terrible day, a man who worked at the museum stood beside me and asked if I recognised the building. I shook my head but looked again to realise that it was the museum itself. 'That was my brother,' he said, pointing to the badly injured young man in the photo. It was difficult to know how to respond. His brother had died ten feet from where we were standing. I asked if it wasn't difficult for him to come here. He smiled and said, 'No, it's okay', before wandering away and leaving me with tears in my eyes.

There is a sculpture at the city end of the main bridge that brings visitors into Derry. Two figures stand reaching towards each other with outstretched arms.

Their hands are not quite touching but there is every indication that soon they will. There is, as the sculpture suggests, still some work to be done and some wounds that will be a long time in healing. Nevertheless, in the places where grim visaged war stubbornly refuses to unwrinkle its front, those who seek peace should find inspiration in a tough little town with two names and one big heart.

West wasting breath huffing and puffing over Crimea

AUSTRALIA

Tony Kevin

This week's Crimean crisis is more than a storm in a teacup, but it won't threaten world peace. In a tense and diplomatically fascinating week, Russian, US and EU statements have so far been carefully measured to stay well short of any danger zone, and Putin's de facto re-incorporation of Crimea back into Russia is now pretty much complete. The new Ukrainian government and its Western supporters will huff and puff, but they can forget about Crimea: it is Russian again now.

The mountainous Crimean peninsula is virtually an island in the Black Sea. It is joined to the mainland by a narrow swampy neck of land. It is about half the size of Tasmania with a population of around 2 million mostly living in several large coastal cities and resort towns. Its warm climate and beautiful scenery attracted many Russians to visit and live during the 19th century. Crimea ('Krim') became Russia's Riviera. Its original Tartar population is now a 12 per cent minority. Ethnic Russians are 58 per cent and ethnic Ukrainians 24 per cent. The local language is Russian.

Crimea, originally part of the declining Turkish Empire, was annexed by expansionist Tsarist Russia in 1783. It has been of huge military significance to Russia ever since.

The ice-free port of Sevastopol soon became Russia's main naval base and strategic window into the Mediterranean. Britain's disastrous attack on Russia in 1854 was through Crimea. The White Russian forces' final capitulation to the Red Army in the Civil War was in Crimea. It was the scene of bitter fighting in WW2. Armed resistance continued in the Crimean mountains throughout that war. Yalta was the site of Stalin's dacha, and the crucial 1945 conference that decided the boundaries of postwar Europe.

In 1954, at a time when Ukraine was firmly part of the seemingly permanent Soviet Union, Khrushchev rashly redrew Soviet internal boundaries to make Crimea part of Ukraine. When the SU broke up and Ukraine became independent, a special status was negotiated for Crimea as an autonomous republic within Ukraine, with special protections for its Russian majority and unimpeded shared occupancy of the naval base: an uneasy compromise that lasted as long as pro-Russian governments ruled in the Ukraine.

Now, with the forced removal of pro-Russian President Yanukovich in Kiev in what Moscow has condemned as an illegal coup, and with anti-Russian elements now in the ascendant in Kiev, Putin moved quickly to reassert Russian control of Crimea. With overwhelming local public support in Crimea, small Ukrainian army and naval units were confined to quarters and Russian forces quickly dug in across

the peninsula. Russians are now talking of building a new bridge across the Strait of Kerch to join Crimea to the nearest Russian mainland region.

The West has given strong diplomatic support to Kiev, penalising Putin by boycotting a forthcoming G8 meeting in Russia. There is talk of trade sanctions, but high-level exchanges continue. At worst, Russia's continued membership of the G8 may be a casualty. There is a UN Security Council meeting on Tuesday. But outside the circle of loyal Western allies, global reaction is muted to say the least. Crimea's history and strongly Russian character are well understood.

Could Russia use Crimean events as a beach-head to try and break up Ukraine, reincorporating the historically Russian-leaning eastern half (with its major Russian-speaking industrial cities like Kharkov and Donetsk) and leaving Kiev with the historically Polish-leaning Western half?

Possible, but unlikely. Putin is not reckless, however much this radical agenda might appeal to some Russian geo-politicians. He would prefer to try to keep Ukraine united, with whatever government it elects, as long as that government retains good-neighbourly relations and strong economic links with Russia.

Russia has learned to live with the three fully independent Baltic nations. Its relations with Poland are cautiously cordial. Russia has accepted that these four nations are now firmly in the EU. But it won't be happy if Ukraine tries to join the EU, because of that country's proximity, huge size and natural resources, and substantial Russian-speaking populations in the East. Post-Soviet Union Russian-Ukrainian relations will always require careful handling, and outsiders also need to tread carefully here.

Tony Abbott's 'We warn the Czar' statements were ludicrously over-the-top. Clearly he was responding to a Washington appeal to friendly allies to say something; he said far more than was necessary. I hope Australia will not continue to overplay its hand in the Security Council: there is no point in gratuitously offending Moscow on an issue that is outside our strategic area of interest and raises no human rights concerns whatsoever.

In the half-light of insider politics

AUSTRALIA

John Warhurst

The general lessons from the conflict of interest that claimed Alastair Furnival, chief of staff to Assistant Health Minister Senator Fiona Nash, are about the often-hidden world of political insiders.

Furnival still held shares in the lobbying company, Australian Public Affairs (APA), which lobbies for the Australian Beverages Council (a pressure group) and corporate brands such as Kraft peanut butter and Cadbury chocolates. According to the ministerial code of conduct he should have divested himself of such shares when he took up the senior head of staff role, in which he acts directly for the minister. In another twist Furnival's wife, Tracey Cain, still heads APA, described by Nash as a 'family business'.

The focus on insiders is more often on the many former ministers, MPs and ministerial staffers who are now working as commercial lobbyists (like APA) or as corporate lobbyists (for companies like Kraft) or as pressure group lobbyists (like the Australian Beverages Council).

There have been several recent developments in this sub-field. The numbers of Coalition aligned lobbyists has grown greatly. Among their number are many former senior Howard Government ministers. The overlap between Liberal Party office-holders and commercial lobbyists led the Prime Minister to declare a veto on wearing these two hats. Several lobbyists promptly resigned from Liberal Party positions in New South Wales.

The world of insiders is permeable. Individual career paths, Labor and Coalition, often involve moving between work as staffers, commercial lobbyists, corporate lobbyists and pressure group lobbyists. Several of my former students, on both sides of politics, have worked successfully in two or three of these sub-fields. The skills include analysis, briefing, report-writing, political awareness and relationship-building.

The Furnival case directs attention not to those who have become lobbyists but to those who have once been lobbyists but are now ministerial staffers. This is another avenue of potential influence over policy and administration, as Furnival's apparent role in the removal of the Federal Government's healthy food ratings website demonstrates.

It is not surprising that ministerial advisers sometimes have lobbying backgrounds, because ministers are looking for the sort of expertise and experience that lobbyists often have. It is part of their tools of trade when they have been working for an industry or a social movement.

Labor supporters should not feel smug. There are plenty of examples on the

Labor side, given the relationship between the trade union movement and the party. The social movements have also supplied many Labor political advisers. The move from environmental group lobbyist to environment minister's office isn't uncommon.

On the Coalition side the examples are more likely to come from the corporate lobbying area given close business-Coalition relations.

It is possible to argue forcefully that former lobbyists have just the background that we should be looking for in a ministerial adviser or even an MP and/or minister. Their long 'insider' experience means they know their stuff (both subject content and political processes) even if their life experience may look narrow and one-sided.

On the other hand democrats argue that it all makes political influence more than usually lopsided. These political insiders bring into the inner sanctum of politics all their past connections, biases and relationships. Even if Furnival had divested himself of the shares in question his background raises questions about whether he could really ever be even-handed in the health portfolio as far as the food industry is concerned. At the very least there is a substantial trade-off between experience and objectivity.

Politics is a small world and this controversy raises bigger issues. Many insiders now work in the half-light just outside Parliament and government, while former political operatives have made the reverse move into ministerial offices. Despite the existence of codes of conduct many ministers and their staff remain startlingly indifferent to real and perceived conflicts of interest.

Luckier man's lessons in grace

CREATIVE

Brian Doyle

Song to hum while opening mail from a friend

O the very fact that there are friends who write with their hands
Even if just the forefingers hammering away on keyboards, and
Also then print out the resulting muddle and scrawl and scribble
And pop it in the post-box! The lickable areas on the envelopes!
The Return Address Just in Case! The choice of stamps, and we
All blessedly have friends who carefully choose their stamps, and
Stand in line at the post office asking for the ones with Authors,
Or members of the Simpson family, or stamps with Polar Bears!
And the fact that there are fifty addresses in your memory, some
Of them no longer inhabited by the people you loved to write to;
Much like your mind retains past phone numbers and exchanges,
Like Mayfair and Ludlow and Allegheny and Cypress and Tulip!
And the fact that you can draw all morning on an envelope or by
God paint it flagrantly with horses and angels, and your postman
Will deliver it anyway! Probably grinning at the nut who mailed
It to you! And you can put a few grains of sand inside your note,
From the beach we went to as children, or a feather from a hawk
Who glared in the window like an insurance adjuster with talons,
Or a painting by a child, or a photograph of four of the names of
That which we call God for lack of a better label. Even the folds
Of the paper, and the paperiness of the paper, and the fact that it's
All about miracles and affection, which is to say, of course, love!
Sure it is. All the good parts are about love, in all its many masks.

The blue room

I was in a library in Utah the other night when
A small boy asked me to help him find a book.

The boy was perhaps four years old and intent.
I said what book would you like, little brother?
And he said 'One with blue in it. A lot of blues.
One I can smell the blue. I love that blue. Mom
Says people can like other colors too, but why?
Is there a shelf for blue books? If lots of people
Read the book does the blue wear out? Is there
A blue bank where you have to get a new blue?'
You know, many times I have sighed that I am
Not able to help people who ask me for advice,
Or directions, or counsel about this or that. But
I don't think I ever wanted so much to say, hey,
Little brother, come with me to the room where
All the books are so blue that you have to laugh
At the seethe and soar of it; books about oceans
And herons and jays and the sky and Vida Blue,
Books about how blue used to be and might yet
Become, books brimming with azure and cobalt
And cornflower and iris and periwinkle and teal,
Books so blue that you dream in blue for days ...

Fluid mechanics

Sitting in a chapel high in the golden sculpted hills of California
A few minutes before Mass I reach down to a small wooden box
By my chair, where missals and songbooks are stored, and I find
A set of ancient eyeglasses folded into an old cloth case, so worn
That it feels like a pelt, and I realize that my chair must belong to
A certain sister here at the old mission. Maybe she's here at Mass,
Trying not to be annoyed that I snagged her seat. After Mass I ask
Around and a sweet sister with a cane says o no, dear, that's Sister
Maureen Mary's seat. She passed over two years ago. She was tall

And hilarious and subject to fits of darkness. She'd been a student Of engineering, a really brilliant girl, when she decided to join our Community. Her parents were appalled, or as Sister Maureen liked To say, aghast. She became a wonderful teacher with us. When she Died we got hundreds of letters from her former students. Teachers Have to cultivate the long view, as Sister said herself. You haven't Much immediate evidence of your labours. But you get flashes, here And there, and hugs at the end of the year, she would say. She was Still an engineer, she said, still working in fluid mechanics of a sort. Her parents began to come visit once a year, and then once a month. Her sister never visited even once although she sent money. Sister's Parents died and willed us the truck in which they came to visit their Daughter. We use it all over the place. You'll see it go by today, for Certain. When Sister died we left her glasses there just for moments Like this, when someone discovers her. Often it is us, of course, and We laugh, but then you spend the rest of the day remembering Sister Maureen Mary, who was a most remarkable soul, one we miss terribly.

When stuff is tough

One thing I hardly ever manage the grace to say
To my children when they are struggling is how
Proud I am about them when they are struggling.
I just can't find easy ways to slip it into the fray,
But I feel it enormously. Sounds condescending
And trite and boringly paternal when I articulate
It, though, or try to. Sounds like a smug old guy
Lecturing the muddled young, and what a cliché
That is, you know? But I feel it so deeply I can't
Stop thinking about it: thus this miniscule poem.
A lot of the ways you love is when stuff is tough.
There's not even a way to say that easily and we

All know what I mean. A lot of love is attending
To how people you love stand up again defiantly
After being rattled and rocked. A lot of daditude
Is watching, and wincing, and feeling something
Like joyous rage that they refuse to quit. Lots of
Being a dad, it turns out, is being reminded what
To remember. I always thought it would be great
If I could take all their pain on me, but that turns
Out to be exactly wrong. Poor brave Jesus Christ.

The luckier man

In memory of the late great Dick Hayward

I knew a man once who taught me a sweet lesson without a word:
He sent me a wedding present. It was an umbrella. This is Oregon,
So it was a particularly apt and suitable and thoughtful gift. Here's
The thing, though: he was the father of my lovely bride's longtime
Boyfriend, the guy she almost married but didn't. So let us review:

A man sent me a deft wedding gift even though I was the man who
Was marrying the girl his son had loved for years, and sure the dad
Loved her too, she's that kind of woman, the dad was sad when the
Young couple broke up. But he was delighted that she was married
To someone she loved, he told me years later, and of course he sent
Me a present, out of affection for her and respect for me, the luckier
Man. So it was that yet again I learned about grace, and about being
An actual man, not just being the size of a man, or dressing like one.

Ugly nationalism in support for Qantas bailout

AUSTRALIA

Michael Mullins

The Federal Government is correct in its determination to be unsentimental in its attitude to financial assistance for Qantas. At the time of writing, it appears to have discarded earlier ideas of assisting the struggling airline by means of a debt guarantee. Instead it is pushing for Senate support to level the playing field through an amendment to the 1992 Qantas Sale Act to allow substantial foreign ownership.

The level playing field is certainly the only way to go if we cannot articulate and justify why we need a national carrier. So far Labor's attempt to do this has been quite fatuous, with shadow transport spokesperson Anthony Albanese focusing on the idea of Qantas planes in the sky being an advertisement for Australian tourism. His leader Bill Shorten has simply criticised the Government for the loss of 5000 jobs and made the facile [suggestion](#) that 'we would be the bunnies if we just waved goodbye to an Australian icon'.

It's time that defenders of the need for a national carrier produced substantial arguments to counter the growing acceptance that its time has passed.

The idea of a national (or 'flag') carrier is a legacy of the time when governments took the lead in establishing airlines to serve their populations because the high capital cost of doing this was not attractive to business. Now we have large overseas carriers such as Emirates that are much better equipped to take the financial risk and provide affordable air travel because of their economies of scale. They can provide comfortable and efficient international flights to Australia, and offer extensive domestic services through their equity in Virgin Australia.

It is also important to disentangle talk of a national carrier serving the national interest from the often ugly phenomenon of nationalism. Underlying mention of Qantas as an 'Australian icon' could be the sentiment associated with the 1990s resurgence of nationalism and its racist undertones.

We had Pauline Hanson's warning that Australia was 'in danger of being swamped by Asians'. A few years later there was John Howard's 'Fortress Australia' response to refugee arrivals and his popular vow that 'we will decide who comes into this country and the circumstances in which they come'. Now both sides of politics talk about nationalism in terms of sovereignty and border protection.

We can possibly interpret the results of an Essential Media poll [released](#) last Monday as an indication that the large number of Australians who want the Government to 'stop the boats' would also like to see Qantas re-nationalised, at least in part. It is true that the timing and execution of the re-nationalisation

strategy worked for Air New Zealand after it nearly went out of business in 2001. But times have changed, with the rise of the airlines from the Arab Emirates. An amendment to the Qantas Sale Act would be Qantas' best hope for survival.

If, on the other hand, a foreign owned Qantas is not palatable, we need to move beyond the current jingoistic (and arguably racist) arguments for proper government support.

How to cope with climate change grief

ENVIRONMENT

Lyn Bender

At first I was afraid, I was petrified. Then I became determined to put up a fight to survive.

The truth can be terrifying, so terrifying that often we prefer avoidance or lies.

So it is with the reality of climate change. Like a diagnosis of terminal cancer, how I wish it wasn't so. If only we could go on and on, with the dream of endless abundance and growing prosperity. The problems of disease, poverty, and even war, seem dwarfed and solvable, compared to global warming.

The psyche has many defence mechanisms, to protect itself from unbearable truths. These can help us to go on against the odds. We step out the door each day, presuming we will survive to return home. We make simple plans assuming we will be around to carry them through. Every time we hit the road, we deny the dangers. We subdue our incipient fears, by telling ourselves 'It won't happen to me and mine.'

This is an effective emotional survival tactic, provided we take reasonable care, and remain vigilant. But it becomes total folly when a life-threatening danger is clearly demonstrated to follow from our actions — or failure to act — and we ignore this reality.

I am a psychologist, trained to help others with anxiety, depression, and despair, but I too wrestle with these demons. I have worried about the past and the ills that may befall my loved ones. Worries and doubts have kept me awake at night, and reduced my enjoyment of life.

I used to worry about financial ruin, an ageing body, my weight and insomnia. Yet paradoxically as I age, with little super, no retirement plan, fatter, and with still less youth and beauty, I find reality more bearable, even tranquil. I feel freer to experience a less encumbered joy.

But confronting the doom of the planet is quite another proposition.

Our relationship with fear is complex. Fear is a necessary instinct. It sets in train a reaction to imminent danger. We share our fight, flight, and freeze response with many species. It is a fantastic mind-and-body mechanism that can turn us into a champion sprinter or give us the strength to drag others to safety. In other situations we may lay low, in an induced stillness, to hide from a predator, or shelter from the terror of a fire or storm.

These mechanisms can save our lives when faced with immediate, obvious danger. We perceive a threat, our brain sends signals and the body instantly gears



up.

More and more evidence emerges about the onslaught of human induced climate change. Yet like a person with emphysema, the world goes on smoking. Scientists measure the rising emissions, the melting polar ice, the rising temperatures and lost species and eco-systems. We experience droughts, floods, fires and heat waves, with increasing intensity and frequency.

I first realised how we were careening towards our doom nine years ago. I read *The Weather Makers* by Tim Flannery and viewed Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*. I felt traumatised. Still more horrendous was the sea of denial surrounding these revelations. An academic friend from Canada laughingly declared, 'I'm not worried, we need the warmth in Canada.'

These days I feel less alienated. The sceptics are looking more and more absurd as they cling to their denial. Unfortunately, big coal remains powerful and intractable, clinging to its ill gotten fossil fuel gains.

We also have a government of climate deniers, who seem hell bent on speeding up our dying in the anthropocene. This is the period since the beginning of the industrial revolution, when our benighted species changed the world. Or rather ruined our own habitat through pitiful moral ignorance.

Doug Hendrie [writes](#) that only upon the recent birth of his son did the emotional reality sink in. He found himself seeing the future as an oncoming war and hoping, in that self-focused way that we all share, that his son won't be doing the dying. My own deep awakening coincided with the birth of my grandchildren.

I grew up in the shadow of the holocaust and have spent years in therapy coming to terms with the murder of my relatives and the destruction my parents' world. I now find myself confronting a future potential holocaust of gigantic proportions. Gore has warned us of the danger of moving from denial to despair, while omitting hopeful or determined action. Our only hope is to face the reality.

This may unleash sadness and precipitate a grieving process. Having traversed this, I have come as one does to a new place of hope, and a desire to fight for life.