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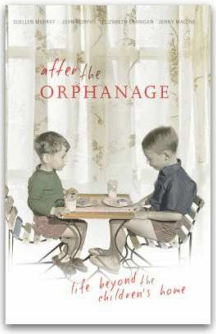
On orphans in Catholic care

BOOKS

Philip Mendes



Murray, Suellen et al: *After the Orphanage*. UNSW Press , 2009. ISBN

Over the past decade, a number of government reports, including most notably the 2004 Forgotten Australians study, have brought the experiences of Australians who experienced institutional or out of home care to public attention. This book by four Victorian academics builds on these earlier reports by documenting the specific experiences of 40 people who grew up in Catholic orphanages in Victoria and left care between 1945 and 1983.

Twenty-one were men and 19 were women, with their ages varying from 42 to 75 years. Some were in care from birth until they left at 14 years of age; others were in care for shorter periods. But all spent at least three years in care, and over half were in care for at least ten years.

In contrast to the Forgotten Australians study, which painted an overwhelmingly negative picture of out-of-home care, the experiences of this group appear to have been diverse. Some enjoyed supportive placements and moved successfully into mainstream employment, social networks and loving relationships. Others were disempowered and even traumatised by their time in care, and left with serious health and emotional deficits.

The book begins with a discussion of the first day they left care. Some experienced an abrupt departure from a large, regimented institution to a liberating but scary outside world, with little or no safety net. Others were given more planned and caring transitions, and moved into structured apprenticeships or domestic service positions.

Then we are informed of the range of reasons why they entered care in the first place. None were orphans. One contributing factor was the death or serious ill-health of the mother. Another factor was illegitimacy, given the stigma of unmarried motherhood, and the absence of financial support. A third factor was family breakdown and/or desertion. A fourth was neglect, generally associated with alcoholism, family violence and/or poverty.

Most of the children had some contact with members of their family while in care, but often contact with unmarried or allegedly 'immoral' mothers was discouraged by the nuns. Contact with other siblings in care was also often discouraged, although many strong relationships were nevertheless maintained.

The care leavers also described diverse experiences around forming and

maintaining intimate relationships and a family of their own. Some experienced negative relationships marked by physical, emotional or sexual abuse. But the majority appear to have found positive relationships that provided relative happiness and contentment.

Fortunately none of the care leavers lost their own children to the care system.

There were also diverse encounters with education and work. Most had received a basic education in care, and many had later undertaken further study to expand their skills and qualifications. Most had retained paid work across their adult lives, and only a small number had relied on income security. Some remained in unskilled work, but others moved into professional careers.

The care leavers related diverse experiences in 'returning' to family members or the institution. Some had successful reunions with parents and siblings, others remained estranged. Some were interested in retaining or re-establishing friendships with other children or even former staff from the homes, while others had negative memories and wanted no further contact.

The authors remind us that their interviewees may not be representative of all care leavers of that period. They were recruited via contact with three welfare or advocacy organisations. Hence it is possible that the study missed two groups of people: those who moved on to lead successful lives and cut all contact with their childhood, and those who were so traumatised by their 'care' experiences that they ended up homeless, incarcerated or dead.

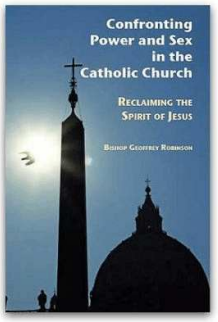
Nevertheless, the study provides a compelling picture of the stories of those who grew up in the institutional care system. It reminds us that the sole purpose of out-of-home care is to provide better life opportunities for children and young people than those offered by their natural parents.

We need to ensure that our contemporary care systems learn from the positives and negatives of the past, and particularly that the 'corporate' parents of today continue to provide ongoing support for young people after they have left the 'state parent' home.

St Mary's, Bishop Robinson and the value of dialogue

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan



On Monday I passed St Mary's Church South Brisbane, en route to a national human rights consultation at the local Convention Centre. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags were flying outside the church as were proclamations of Aboriginal treaty and the protest chant, 'We shall not be moved'.

I had seen and heard Fr Peter Kennedy in the media. His interview on Richard Fidler's ABC *Conversation Hour* was one of the most moving presentations about priestly pastoral ministry I have heard on the national airwaves. He wept openly as he recalled the death of an Aboriginal man in jail. His *Q&A* appearance with Tony Jones left me a little perplexed about what he actually believed about Jesus and the Church.

Knowing him and Archbishop Bathersby I was saddened that the standoff between such a pastoral bishop and a pastoral priest had come to this. Talk of mediation by retired High Court judge Ian Callinan has done nothing to lift my sadness. These disputes are not about property rights, and they are not resolved by assertion of property rights or conflicting claims of orthodoxy and pastoral practice.

The mainstream media has now canonised Kennedy and demonised Bathersby. The former may be justified, but the latter is not. Bathersby and Kennedy are both very pastoral, down to earth, no nonsense men. And yet it has come to this.

On Saturday I will participate in a public seminar in Sydney with over 300 Catholics gathering to discuss Bishop Geoffrey Robinson's book *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church*.

This is a pastoral book, which does not purport to be a learned theological text. It is a broad sweeping tome which highlights the concerns of a pastoral bishop reflecting on his years as a teacher and administrator. He devoted most of his later years as a bishop to improving the exercise of authority in shaping policies and practices appropriate for dealing with the curse of sexual abuse within the Church.

Bishop Geoffrey will be in attendance. Unsurprisingly Cardinal Pell declined the invitation to speak at the seminar. But he went one step further and prohibited the use of church property for such a discussion.

Last year the Australian Catholic Bishops provided Bishop Geoffrey's publisher with a bonanza when they issued their brief, simplistic statement claiming that 'the Church's Magisterium teaches the truth authoritatively in the name of Christ. The book casts doubt upon these teachings.'

Though Robinson's fellow bishops conceded that 'the authority entrusted by Christ to his Church may at times be poorly exercised, especially in shaping policy and practice in complex areas of pastoral and human concern', they went on to claim: 'This does not invalidate the Church's authority to teach particular truths of faith and morals.'

The condemnation of the book without detailed argument but with the bald invocation of episcopal authority guaranteed sales which would otherwise have eluded the author and publisher.

The Church cannot thrive when its bishops feel constrained by fear, seeing no need to explain how and why they differ even from one of their own number who is game enough to express dissent from the Vatican's position. In his general acknowledgement of thanks to the unnamed persons who helped him with the book, Robinson writes, 'It says much about the need for change that, in the atmosphere that prevails within the church, I would be creating difficulties for them if I gave their names.'

Robinson expresses doubts about the Church's prudence and wisdom in making infallible declarations about Mary. He questions papal and Vatican declarations prohibiting discussion about the ordination of women. He asserts that the Church has locked itself in 'the prison of not being able to be wrong'. He nails the danger for church authorities who deny the primacy of the formed and informed conscience of the individual, and who purport to teach and rule authoritatively with power which is neither transparent nor publicly reasoned.

The recent PR disasters out of Rome, with the reception of the holocaust denying bishop and with the public's genuinely misinterpreted reading of the Pope's prescription for solving the AIDS crisis in Africa, highlight that hierarchical and secretive management of debate and dissent is no longer a prudent option for a Church committed to proclaiming the gospel as good news for all.

It is time for dialogue under sponsorship of our bishops. We all know that the majority of our bishops agree with many of Bishop Robinson's assertions. They might not choose his arguments or mode of public expression. But the time has long passed for the landowners to deny the peasants an opportunity to reflect conscientiously on the truth and on good pastoral practice. Were the bishops to participate more openly in the dialogue we would all be able to appreciate their human, pastoral presence and not just that of the Kennedys and Robinsons.

If there had been more open dialogue between John Bathersby and Peter Kennedy and between George Pell and Geoffrey Robinson, the Catholic Church would be more the Church that Jesus would want it to be.

The community roundtables in the national human rights consultation provide a public space where people of wildly divergent views can respectfully speak and be heard. Why can't we provide such spaces in the Church which, as John Paul II said in *Veritatis Splendor*, 'puts herself always and only at the service of conscience'?

Gangsters are people too

TELEVISION

Tim Kroenert

We are now past the halfway point of Series Two of 'true crime' drama *Underbelly*, and it's clear that something is missing. Like its predecessor, Series Two is still a ratings champion. But viewers of both series could be forgiven for noticing its lack of something more than controversy.

Series One thrived on controversy. Banned from broadcast in Victoria, the stylised series about Melbourne's gangsters saw that state's pirates go mainstream. Internet download software burgeoned and burnt DVD copies were passed between mates like race tips.

In all likelihood, Channel 9's much vaunted series would have slain its ratings rivals anyway, especially in Melbourne, where the slayings it portrayed took place. The voyeuristic appeal was strong. It was trashy in its own stylish way, and exploited sex and violence and the excesses of its characters' world.

Yes, the series banked on voyeurism. But it banked on something else too. Strong scripts and performances evoked the humanity of its characters, both the good and the seedy. It was this that was its greatest strength.

Think of the thoughts of redemption that dogged, but couldn't save, Alphonse Gangitano (Vince Colosimo). The duality of Andrew 'Benji' Veniaman (Damian Walshe-Howling), all warmth and charm in his home and social life, but coldly murderous when he went to work. Carl Williams (Gyton Grantley), the affable underdog, cheerily pursuing wealth and power. His wife Roberta (Kat Stewart), a loud-mouthed scrubber unable to keep her passions in check.

The series made no excuses for their corrupt ambitions. It didn't ask for our sympathies. But it did demand our emotional involvement.

Series Two has by comparison been insipid. It too contains graphic bursts of violence and sex. So gratuitous was the nudity in one episode that some vulgar commentators quipped that instead of *A Tale of Two Cities*, the series should be subtitled *A Tale of Two Titties*.

Yet the prequel series lacks the thematic resonance and strength of character to counterbalance its excesses. It portrays the rise of drug empires in Sydney and Melbourne during the 1970s and '80s, centring on New Zealand expat 'Kiwi Terry' Clark (Matthew Newton), his affair with naÃ¯ve but corruptible Allison Dine (Anna Hutchison), and his criminal alliance with Robert 'Aussie Bob' Trimbole (Roy Billing).

These central characters are underdeveloped and unmemorable. Notably, even after seven episodes we know little about Clark, other than that he has a head for

the drug trade, is a philanderer, has a homicidal streak and occasionally likes to paint in the nude. Newton has the gift of a piercing glare. But a glare does not a character make.

In addition to the criminal elements, the series portrays the rampant corruption of NSW police at the time. But even the coppers are given short shrift. There is nothing to rival the Series One heroics of super-cop Steve Owen (Roger Corser) and the eternal cool of his partner Jacqui James (Caroline Craig, who also narrates both series).

Instead we get caricatures of seedy, suited coppers passing out bribes in sandwich bags. The series tries to capitalise on the goodwill of longtime viewers, by revealing that one of the rare good cops (Asher Keddie) is the mother of Jacqui James. Sorry, folks, it will take more than that.

Let's face it, caricature is easy. Think of the media rhetoric surrounding bikie gangs this week, that links bikies as a whole with terrorism and organised crime. Demonic caricatures are effective for sensationalising news, but good journalism demands more than that. And so does compelling storytelling.

It goes without saying that well-drawn characters make or break a drama series. For my money, a very different show, Channel 7's domestic drama *Packed To the Rafters*has likeable and multi-dimensional characters in spades, and without the sex and violence. It's carried it off for two whole series in a row now (the series two finale aired this week).

Six episodes remain for *Underbelly: A Tale of Two Cities*, so there is still time for it to redeem itself. If it doesn't, it has some ground to make up, if it comes back for a third season.

The Pope, condoms and AIDS

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton


guardian.co.uk
Pope claims condoms could make African Aids crisis worse

Pope Benedict's remarks about the use of condoms to address AIDS in Africa last week caused predictable controversy. They should be set in two different contexts: the West and Africa.

When AIDS first spread in the West it affected particularly the homosexual community. The response was tightly focused. It aimed to win the trust of the gay community, refrained from making any judgments about lifestyle and sexual orientation, educated people about the nature and the spread of the disease, and encouraged them to use condoms in all casual sexual encounters.

Together with the development of retroviral drugs, this strategy has been markedly effective in reducing the incidence and mortality from AIDS.

Within the Catholic Church there was little initial institutional response to AIDS. But like other churches, it has had to deal with the consequences of fear of AIDS. This intensified antipathy to and discrimination against homosexuals. It also led many Catholics and others to assert that discrimination would not be overcome until the churches recognised the equivalence of gay and heterosexual relationships. The same argument was made for the legalisation of gay marriage.

In the face of these pressures Catholic Church leaders insisted that the institution of faithful heterosexual marriage was central to health of society, and that it should be uniquely privileged. They also defended the Catholic understanding of sexuality and the transmission of life in strong and general terms. They believed that discussion of borderline cases, such as the use of condoms where the life of one partner was at stake, was used by critics to undermine Catholic teaching as a whole.

So within the Catholic Church the question of AIDS was linked to homosexuality. The plight of those exposed to AIDS and living with the disease was set within a broader context where the church's teaching on sexuality was felt to be under threat.

The African context was different. Because AIDS there was transmitted mainly through heterosexual intercourse, it affected many women and children. Widows left without income often left their villages, and were faced with the choice of turning to prostitution or of their own and their children's deaths. Without condoms, they would die either way.

In contrast to the Western world, religious congregations and parishes were extensively involved from the beginning in caring for infected and rejected women and children. The local Catholic sisters, priests and many bishops generally

recognised the dilemma and some have spoken against an absolute interdiction of condoms.

But they also recognise that the instrumental and value free programs imported from the West were less effective in Africa. The spread of AIDS had cultural roots that also needed to be addressed. A view of marriage in which the woman was more than an object, the eradication of magical views of the causes and protections against AIDS, and a culture of mutual respect and of faithfulness within marriage, were required if AIDS was to be checked. These touched the consideration of human sexuality enshrined in church teaching.

The Pope's criticism of condoms should be seen within both these contexts. It was forged in a Western context, arguing against a view that saw the response to AIDS as simply a technological issue stripped of its moral components. This view suggested that human sexuality is purely a matter of individual choice with no ramifications for human flourishing or for human society. Within this context, to admit any use of condoms would be seen to endorse this instrumental approach and weaken the integrity of church teaching on sexuality.

But the Pope's words also reflect an aspect of the African experience of AIDS. There a value-free Western strategy has been inadequate because it does not deal with important cultural factors. These call for educational programs that touch the human values within sexuality. When the Pope says that condoms may make things worse, he could argue that to provide condoms without a moral framework will encourage complacency, will not guarantee their use, and will leave untouched the conditions that leave women and children infected.

Many in Africa who care directly for victims of AIDS will regard the Pope's comments as one-sided. They too recognise the need for a holistic approach to AIDS in Africa. But they believe that an unqualified opposition to condoms fails to take seriously the situation of the wives of infected husbands and of women forced into prostitution. Although the use of condoms does not offer a solution to AIDS in Africa, it can save some women and children from living and dying with the disease. They argue, too, that the use can be justified by traditional Catholic moral principles.

The Pope's words exemplify a paradox facing Catholic teaching on this, as on many other issues. The more that Church leaders propound in broad terms a Gospel ethic of generous and full living, the more they and the ethic are seen as narrow and uncompassionate.

The African context suggests that it may be better to leave the concerns of the West behind for a while, and to enter imaginatively the life of the African women and children and men infected by AIDS. Reflection from that perspective may suggest a way through ethical complexities and generate words that ring both true and compassionate.

St Mary's quite contrary

RELIGION

Neil Ormerod

It is now over 40 years since the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council. Those of us who lived through its years can attest to the immediate impact it had on our lives. Changes in liturgical and sacramental practice spread through the church like wild fire.

For some it was liberating, for some aggravating and for all disorienting. We would often hear appeals to the 'spirit of the Council' as justification for the wide variety of changes we faced. Few who lived though that period would doubt the epochal significance of the Council.

Yet increasingly the significance of the changes produced by the council has been subject to debate. On one side there is the Bologna school of church history which emphasises the 'rupture' of the council. On the other side is a more official interpretation which so emphasises continuity as to rule out any possibility of discontinuity. John Paul II said in 2000 that 'to read the council as if it marked a break with the past ... is decidedly unacceptable'.

It is not difficult to see these divergent positions in operation in the Australian Church. We need only witness the recent events in the St Mary's parish in South Brisbane . While Archbishop John Bathersby calls the parish to return full communion with the archdiocese, the people of the parish proclaim that it is a 'Vatican II parish'.

At the core of that conflict lies an understanding of the significance of the Council, the changes it introduced into Church life, and the limits of those changes. Indeed it is very difficult to conceive of such a conflict arising prior to the event of the Council. The solidity of the pre-Vatican II Church bordered on immobility.

Change when it was introduced was rapid and generally poorly handled. Many of the changes went beyond those envisaged by the Council. Any reading of the document on the liturgy makes it clear that the council Fathers expected Latin to continue as a liturgical language, yet in quick time it was replaced by the vernacular.

The process of change created an expectation of further change in a range of issues: birth control, ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, women in ministry and so on. Are there limits to such change? Much energy from the Vatican since the Council has been expended in clarifying the boundaries of change, on what is acceptable and what is beyond the pale.

It has been reported that Fr Peter Kennedy, parish priest of St Mary's Parish,

has publicly called into question the divinity of Jesus. Such a 'change' is not just something the bishops of Vatican II didn't get around to suggesting, it is something they would have rejected root and branch as a violation of the very meaning of Christianity.

Fr Kennedy is of course entitled to believe what he likes, but he is not entitled to give it the name 'Catholic' or to suggest that those who disagree are just being conservative or not operating in the 'spirit of Vatican II'.

Of course Vatican II said many things, including statements on the role of the Bishop, such as:

Among the principal duties of bishops the preaching of the Gospel occupies an eminent place. For bishops are preachers of the faith, who lead new disciples to Christ, and they are authentic teachers, that is, teachers endowed with the authority of Christ, who preach to the people committed to them the faith they must believe and put into practice, and by the light of the Holy Spirit illustrate that faith.

I can feel nothing but empathy for Archbishop John Bathersby, a truly decent and generous person, who now finds himself caught between a rock and a hard place. If he acts to remove Fr Kennedy he will be attacked as a conservative or a puppet of the Vatican; if he fails to act he knows he will not be fulfilling his responsibility as a bishop to teach 'the faith they must believe'. He deserves better than this.

By all accounts the parish of St Mary's has a strong record in the area of social justice and inclusion. It is hard to see why this can only be maintained with liturgical anomalies and doctrinal errors. Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker Movement managed to marry strong social activism with a conservative religious life.

The parish attracts large numbers of parishioners, but then so does Hillsong. In the end the issue is whether the parish is still operating as a Catholic parish. The responsibility to decide in this matter lies with the bishop, for that Catholic identity is not the preserve of any single parish.

There is some irony that Fr Kennedy is now appealing to Rome, to a higher level Church authority given his disregard of the local bishop. It is unlikely to provide a different decision.

Grand Prix: anniversary for a meaningless death

NON-FICTION

Roger Trowbridge

Everyone knew Dennis. It was his dogs: waist height, deep chests, slobbering jowls, docked tails and testicles. Old Max and Wally. Dennis loved those dogs. He would stride through the neighbourhood, calling cheerily to all, while Max and Wally ranged far and wide in search of cats and scraps.

Dennis was the neighbourhood character. Full of good humour, he had an indefatigable capacity for quipping his way through life, always at our expense. No one out-quipped Dennis.

Dennis may well have been a character, but beyond all that there was a problem. You see, we do small dogs; those that would be defined as hand luggage. And there's a lot of them. Small, mainly white and fluffy, and most with attitude that far outweighs their stature.

What's more we've established something of a local territory. Small dog owners cluster on the school oval most afternoons, with plastic bags a-pocket, just to pass the time in congenial company while waiting for our dogs to run themselves ragged. I've seen parents of small children do much the same, albeit without the plastic bag!

On Friday evenings an even stronger claim is made. We retrieve a folding table from a neighbour's front verandah and set it on the oval. One of our group is deputed to bring a 'plate' and wine and, with dogs swirling at our feet, we have a jolly good time as the sun sets over suburbia.

Big dogs go to the park; we go to the school oval. It's always been that way.

But not for Dennis. On Friday night, of all nights, he'd appear along the path with trademark grin and dogs unleashed and bowl right up to our table, helping himself to a generous glass of red and whatever was left on the plate. Meanwhile our lot would go berserk. A barking blur of fluff and fur, while the short-haired pointers stood, aloof and motionless.

Dennis loved to cause a stir. In our more generous moments we'd consider him a loveable larrikin, courtesy no doubt of his Irish Catholic farming family background on the swamp at Bunyip.

He'd left the farm, married Cathy and fathered three fine children. He took hold of our little community in so many ways: from running the river tracks in early morning, coaching kids' basketball, life and soul of the street party, and willing hand at anything from blocked drains to chook raffles. He was in the prime of life ...

... and then he died.

All we know is this: Dennis went to the Grand Prix. That evening he did not come home as expected. The dark closed in and still no word. Anxiety gave way to choking panic. The police knew nothing. That longest night was spent in aching silence and muffled, agonising cries.

Saturday passed, and wild explanations forced themselves on unwilling minds: amnesia, accident, mugging, suicide, just ... disappeared. Nothing but wild explanations. On Sunday the body of a man in the prime of life was found against a reedy river bank.

I stood at the back of the church, with 500 others in stunned disbelief, while Dennis' friends and Dennis' family rose and spoke or played a song and tried to make sense of it all. But there was no sense to be made. None at all. We wept hot tears of despair and longed for an explanation.

There is no doubt that the living of this man enriched our lives as people do who laugh a lot and take great pleasure in the joy of others. And there is no doubt that the dying of this man took part of all our lives, as does every death that comes too soon, whether in war or accident or illness, or by the merest stroke of misfortune.

As I grow old I'm sure it is awareness of the death that comes unfairly and too soon to others that forms in me what Inga Clendinnen calls 'the melancholy of ageing'.

We occasionally still see Dennis's dogs in the distance, and call our fluffies to the Friday table, just in case. Young Tom is with them now, in his father's footsteps. He knows what goes down and gives us a wide berth. We wave our thanks. Dennis would stir him for that, but also would be mighty proud of his boy.

*****

It's five years on and the Grand Prix again. All hype and noise and excitement — and another sorrowing anniversary. Time helps, but life is just not long enough to forget the loss of a good man.

El Salvador: rise of the left

POLITICS

Rodrigo Acuna

During the 1980s, the small Central American country of El Salvador often made the news as a civil war raged between a brutal US-backed regime and a leftist insurgency headed by the Farabundo MartÃ- National Liberation Front (FMLN). Ã'

When Catholic Archbishop Ã"scar Romero was assassinated in 1980, followed by the murder of three North American nuns and one lay missionary, international attention on the government's poor human rights record began to take place.

The following year, when up to 1000 civilians were slaughtered in the village of Mozote by the army's Atlacatl Battalion, further questions were raised about how the Salvadorian government was fighting the insurgency.

Between 1981 and 1987, Ronald Reagan's administration provided the country with $US 2.7 billion in military and economic aid making El Salvador at the time the key recipient of US aid in Latin America.

During the past week, El Salvador has once again received international media attention as the FMLN's Mauricio Funes won the presidential elections. Defeating his rival Rodrigo Ã vila of the ruling Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) by 51.2 to 48.7 per cent of the vote, the FMLN's victory marks a historic occasion.

Since its independence from Spain in 1821, El Salvador has been ruled by right-wing governments — generally all military dictatorships until the early 1990s.

The ARENA party, 'whose leaders were linked to death squads in the 1980s' according to a recent editorial in the *Washington Post*, has been in power since 1989, and defeated the FMLN in three presidential elections after it became a legal party in 1993.

However, with Funes running as the FMLN's candidate, the 2009 elections saw the party's fortunes turn. A former TV host of the show *The Interview with Mauricio Funes*, and ex-correspondent for CNN news channel, the 49-year old Funes is 'arguably El Salvador's most respected journalist', according to one observer .

In September 2007, Funes was nominated as the FMLN's preferred presidential candidate and soon joined the party. Funes promised to maintain good relations with the United States, and to restore full diplomatic relations with Cuba. He also promised to put a stop to government complacency with big businesses that evade taxes.

Originally a coalition of five left-wing political parties that unified in 1995, the FMLN has so far avoided the type of controversies and divisions surrounding the Sandinistas in neighbouring Nicaragua; in particular, the shameful deals the incumbent President Daniel Ortega made with the political right during the mid-1990s.

On a personal level, Funes has preferred to ideologically ally himself with Brazil's current centre-left President Luiz InÃicio 'Lula' da Silva (pictured, right, with Funes) in contrast to Venezuela's Hugo ChÃivez. While Funes' own wife Vanda Pignato, who is Brazilian, was a founding member of Silva's Workers' Party, it is no secret the FMLN has strong ties to Caracas.

In 2006, FMLN mayors across the country set up ENEPASA, a joint venture energy company designed to provide Salvadorians with cheap fuel. While cities have 90 days to repay 60 per cent of their fuel bills, as noted by Nikolas Kozloff — an observer of Latin America — the remaining debt may be 'paid in barter for agricultural and other locally made products or in cash over a 25-year period'.

The ENEPASA agreement between El Salvador and Venezuela stands in sharp contrast to the neoliberal trade deals Washington and former Salvadorian governments have pursued, including scarping of the national currency in exchange for the US dollar in 2004.

In fact, since the end of the civil war in 1992, the ARENA party has had few accomplishments. Although a 1993 Truth Commission by the United Nations found that 95 per cent of the killings investigated were committed by government-supported death squads, the country's judicial system has been slow to put anyone on trial. During the civil war, a total of 75 thousand people were killed.

On the economic front, in recent years the country has witnessed mass migrations abroad with some $US 4 billion in remittences sent home by Salvadorians living in the US — roughly 17 per cent of the country's GDP.

With cheap US goods flooding local agricultural markets, countless farmers have sold off their lands and become unemployed. According to RaÃºl GutiÃ©rrez, writing for the Inter Press Service, the last official statistics published in 2006 put unemployment at 6.6 per cent with over 40 per cent of the population classified as poor.

Add to these problems El Salvador's situation with street gangs — more than 14,000 people were killed during the last four years of Antonio Saca's government — and Funes will certainly face huge challenges as president.

A few days before the election, a political storm broke out in El Salvador. Forty six Republican congressmen lobbied US President Barack Obama to enforce restrictions on financial remittances being forwarded home by Salvadoran nationals living in the United States should the FMLN triumph.

To its credit, the Obama administration so far has taken no such actions and in fact congratulated the FMLN on its victory. Time will tell if such good will from Washington will continue.

How poets encounter God

POETRY

Charlotte Clutterbuck

Complex Horizons

At Varuna

Dawkins would say I am deluded
in collaborating with you on a book about God
two in cahoots
French: *cahute*, hut, cabin
in a world unhoused, split between
those who think they know everything
those who think they know there is nothing.
How, in this combative weather, are those who stumble
willingly on to navigate between
godlessness and overgodliness, beyond
preaching, blasphemy, debate
into conversation where two so different
voices might resolve
domination into cadence?
* * *
At the same time I'm wrestling with form
how to write my father's life seven years after his death
without the pen's brutal incisions
how to shape a narrative whose submarine-combat
climax peaked too early
how to list his too-many talents without listing
steer between hagiography and warts-and-all.
Is that why, since he died, I have been inflicted with warts
every poem stuck
in the doldrums

the marriage of form and content needing counselling?

* * *

I walk in a fog at Katoomba
pleased with myself
for not being disappointed
not to see sunrise on cliffs
for being able to perceive
shifts of water and light
how various and clear
sounds drip and splash
how rich the green-bice
and vermillion when
vision is quietened
by absence of sunlight
noticing how observant I am
of black-chinned
honeyeaters and limandra
I slip on the wet-metal steps
to the Three Sisters
wrench my shoulders
and the experience
into regular stanzas.

* * *

I'm looking over the rails at an idiot
on a ledge half-way down Katoomba Falls
looking over the drop
decide to rewrite a bad poem backwards
open a box you sent me
words clipped from newspapers
juxtapose at random

surprise yourself.
When I lose weigh
in my backwards journey
to convey how it feels
to exchange postcards
with a vision
four dark hands
saying what mattered
while Helmut and I
translated only the words
that were unnecessary
from the moment when
I and the Walpeyankere woman
stood in a breezeway in Alice Springs
and saw the tall German husband
with his cloud of angel hair
overshadowed by the six-foot-two
African dancer descending the stairs
with him to hook us with her smile
I sift words from the box
complex horizons
but still beat
the lines into regularity.
Yet I tell you I got
nothing from juxtaposing
Buenos Aires and *bread*
You snort and suggest that if my sentences
all start the same, I should steal openings.
Should I pirate the Thieving Magpie
onto a disc for your birthday?

* * *

Next morning, I take a young journalist walking
she's been to a barbecue
in Libya, but never walked in the bush
she's intrepid in Baghdad
and Beirut, but her shoes
are white and soft
she says, *Someone is lost*
in the mountains
I say, *This is a fire-trail*
if you want to step off
and get lost, I suppose you could
shoulder my Tintin pack with the food
water, space blanket
we'd need if we did get lost.
She asks too many questions
I give far too many answers
including that my doctorate
was about how poets encounter God.
She asks if I am religious and I babble
but I never pray for anyone to be converted
am gobsmacked when she says, *I do*
turns out to be a sweet fundamentalist, shocked
by Islamic fundamentalism.
She gives me Popper's critique
of scientific positivism
to use in the God-Book
her jaw is stiff, her throat
from the strain
of her complex horizons.

* * *

Afterwards, stiff and scattered
from too many steps and words
I ring a healer at random
she says, *If you can come right now*
knees indicate problems with direction.
Energies realign her hands feel like yours
I take the afternoon slowly
waiting to be directed
tinker at the edges of poems
fling seven years' worth onto the floor
trashing them would cut a limb
from my narrative
but the evidence is there on the carpet
form strangling content.

* * *

Happy to see the problem even if I can't
work out the answer
I ring — you sound so bleak
Twenty years' work, forcing myself through, I just want it off my desk.
In our different towns we light candles
ask the work what it wants
go for a walk, a swim
let what happens, happen
sweet, bright dreams
I let go the wing's strut
without a parachute
a bumpy, painless landing.
In the morning, something I've never done
a long bath

perfect shape, perfect heat
leaving the poems spreadeagled
on the floor until they call
eating breakfast in the sunny autumn garden
I remember my father
surprised me into stanzas
about the lacks and love in him
if he led me into form, he could
(despite his jibes at chopped up prose)
lead me out of it
* * *
Stepping across the garden, I'm stopped
at the door, so strong
his presence, so him, so changed
raised a spiritual body
that night I light a bonfire of lyrics
sacrifice form, rest content.

Eyewitness to Pakistan turmoil

POLITICS

Reuben Brand

Rawalpindi, Pakistan. In the waking hours of Monday morning I watched as the Zardari Government was bought to its knees. Intense political pressure had forced Prime Minister Gilani to reinstate Chief Justice Chaudhry.

The lead-up to this came as Nawaz Sharif, leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and his brother Shahbaz Sharif, Chief Minister of the Punjab, were simultaneously dismissed from office by the Supreme Court on 25 February, effectively barring them both from holding public office.

I was in Rawalpindi the day after Sharif's dismissal. I saw groups of young men roaming the streets, breaking shop fronts and destroying public property. The hotel I was planning to stay in was attacked and had its windows smashed. Groups of men on motorbikes, waving flags and sticks, sped by, shouting political slogans.

'Welcome to Pakistan,' I thought to myself.

In the weeks that followed, Pakistan plunged further into political instability, with an increase in civil disobedience, the uprise of anti government rallies and the threat of a political coup. The Long March intensified and aimed for the heart of Islamabad, a city that was in total lockdown.

Defying his house arrest, Nawaz Sharif broke through several police barricades and led the Long March into the streets of Lahore.

Violent clashes began between protestors and riot police, who, under strict orders to stop the march at all costs, began shelling the crowds with tear gas. Reports of a journalist being run over by police caused a backlash and protestors immediately turned on the authorities, setting an armoured police bus ablaze.

Arrest warrants were issued for Imran Khan and Shahbaz Sharif, but both evaded capture and made it to Rawalpindi, where they remained in hiding until news of Chief Justice Chaudhry's reinstatement was broadcast. Dozens of other political figures were also arrested and detained during the lead up to the march to Islamabad.

The streets of Rawalpindi were now relatively empty, an eerie feeling in a usually bustling city. Shipping containers and large trucks blocked off every major road to and from the city.

But after slipping past several police checkpoints and entering the centre of town I noticed that the city had not come to a complete standstill. Large groups of

men once again roamed the streets, only this time they were patiently waiting for the call to action. A call that has now been answered by the current government.

Sharif has been fighting to reinstate Chief Justice Chaudhry, who, before his suspension in 2007, opened up the 'missing persons' case and began to dig into the dark recesses of the government's dealings with its secret agencies. As a consequence, the US was implicated in hundreds of cases of innocent people disappearing due to US led interrogation techniques in the fight to curb the war on terror.

Chaudhry is considered to be politically dangerous to a lot of people, so the thought of him now being reinstated and having the power of an independent judiciary will have many people feeling nervous.

The Pakistani establishment has been split into two camps: Zardari and Sharif.

Zardari, whose popularity as president is plummeting, represents the US backed Pakistan, a country that is content ruling and being ruled as it is.

Sharif is backed by the Pakistani elite, a movement of people who are questioning the status quo, who are sick of seeing their money disappear as bribes for feudal Lords, ministers and police, sick of a country riddled with corruption and incompetent people in positions of power, and who largely want Pakistan to grow and prosper.

Of course it reeks of having capitalist motives, and Sharif is no saint when it comes to corruption allegations. But it is a grassroots democratic movement based loosely around the principles of Western democracy. If implemented it could do wonders for the country.

Outsourcing care

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

The economic crisis has presented us with many known unknowns. One of these is that the business models sustaining the care professions in our society are unlikely to hold up.

We have already seen the collapse of ABC Learning Centres, Australia's largest child care provider. The costs associated with aged care are so high that it is certain many of the businesses running aged care services will be subject to intense financial pressure, and some may go under.

The Victorian bushfires forced people to think about the costs and values associated with living in the bush. It has become obvious that changes are necessary, and that perhaps humans should not live in areas prone to fires. The financial meltdown will in turn make us consider how we provide care for those close to us, at vulnerable stages of their lives, and how, and indeed whether, we should pay for it.

In this month's *Faith Doing Justice* newsletter, Sandie Cornish asks what happens to us when we commodify solidarity and respect for human dignity by outsourcing care. Her assumption is that care is something that is best done at home, but that various mitigating factors often require us to purchase human care as products and services in the marketplace.

She suggests that delegating our commitment to protecting and promoting the wellbeing of others 'flies in the face of the principle of solidarity, which ... encourages us to imagine ourselves in the place of others'.

Her point is that the very humanity of those 'excused' from caring is diminished. Many of us go to work in battery hen style so that we can afford to have our children cared for in child care centres, which also commodify them. That is a caricature, but it does make us wonder whether life is passing us by.

Correspondingly, many of us consider our lives incomplete if our professional lives are disrupted or cut short by the duty of care for family members. Work is invariably an important part of who we are.

The principle that causes us to scrutinise the outsourcing of care could be used as an excuse for the Federal Government to do nothing in the wake of the ABC Learning Centres collapse, and to ignore the need for adequate funds for professional aged care, especially with the impending retirement of baby boomers.

However the opposite is true. What human dignity requires more than anything else is the freedom for individuals and their loved ones to choose what together

makes them more human.

Afghanistan's media explosion

MEDIA

Jan Forrester

Before 2001 Afghans had only the Taliban's Radio Sharia. So they depended on transistor radios tuned to external services, primarily the BBC Persian service, for independent information.

In that light the explosion of media in Afghanistan following the end of Taliban rule in 2001 is a success story. But Afghan journalists are being killed on the security frontline, jailed or silenced. The government and parliament are in conflict over the country's media law, and journalistic professionalism is in its infancy.

The current diverse clutch of Afghan media owners include the Australian-Afghan Mohseni brothers, wannabe politicians who lives overseas, mullahs with links to Iran and powerful provincial warLords who were cashed up by the US during the 1980s civil war. But they also notably include more than 35 independent, community radio stations across the country. Two are owned and managed by women.

In a country with high illiteracy rates, especially in rural areas, newspapers are struggling but radio is strong. Network and local television are growing, particularly in those regions, like Herat, which have electricity.

Measuring audiences is still an infant science and quantitative and qualitative research is bedevilled by demography and security. But the Mohseni brothers' Tolo TV is probably the most popular television network in Afghanistan. An overwhelmingly young population enjoys its Indian soap operas, racy by conservative Afghan mores. So it is popular with advertisers.

The Government has tried to censor Tolo and another leading network. The latter bowed to pressure. Tolo refused, more out of respect for its bottom line than for media freedom.

Financial viability is crucial in an industry which has expanded so rapidly, with networks and stations vying for a share of the advertising market which in 2006 was worth up to AUD $31 million.

The International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) is a dominant advertiser. As part of its psychological operations to win hearts and minds, it produces and pays stations to broadcast a range of messages on human rights, health, agriculture and Western development assistance. In some regions military advertising is considerably greater than commercial advertising. This calls into question Afghan media's long-term financial viability.

From ISAF's strategic perspective, to rely on one-way messages in an era of

multi-platform, interactive media is curiously old-hat. Mobile phones have leapfrogged the internet as a communications channel. Phone-in audience participation — from discussion forums to music requests — is clearly popular.

Television is fine for broadcasting community messages or warnings such as 'don't approach military convoys: you run the risk of being shot'. But its use to persuade locals that Western Coalition forces are in Afghanistan to protect Afghans is problematic. The Afghan rumour mill tells people of the increasing number of civilians being wrongly targetted and killed. So many locals believe foreigners are in Afghanistan to promote their own interests.

Remarkably, the greatest fuss in post-conflict Afghanistan has arguably been the government's resistance to a media law which was ratified by parliament. In September 2008 the parliament ratified a media law which the President refused to have published. Although the law was based on recommendations by an Afghan group, the Government argued that it was influenced by foreigners.

Journalists are left unclear whether they should follow the outdated restrictions of the 2006 law or the new, ratified but not official law. They are also under many other pressures: death on assignment in an insecure area, jailing, or a late-night phone call at home where an unidentified voice suggests they drop a story.

In February this year the daily newspaper, *Payman*, was closed after its editor was briefly jailed for alleged blasphemy. It had carried a contentious article, downloaded from an Afghan website. The article carried the predictions of a Bulgarian woman which cast doubt on all prophesies, including those of Jesus Christ and the Prophet Mohamed. The Ulema issued a fatwa against the paper.

Despite *Payman* acknowledging that it had printed the article in error and frequently apologising for it it, the Ulema threatened national action. The government caved in. The Attorney General stated: 'Our society cannot tolerate anti-Islamic propaganda.'

President Karzai was also under pressure. After his term expires in April, he plans to contend for the position of interim President until national elections are held in August.

Despite the difficulties in developing a professional journalistic culture many heartening stories can be told. At a training course in Kabul, where the journalists came from Taliban country, young men talked about a close shave outside Kandahar.

They had taken a route through dangerous country in their eagerness to do training, 'because we must'. They were stopped and interrogated at a roadside checkpoint by Taliban who, luckily, did not search and discover their journalist ID cards.

If they had the story might have had a different ending: some of their names were on anti-Taliban stories in the local media.

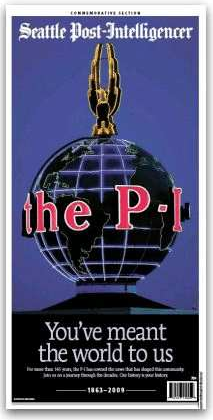
I pin my hopes for an independent Afghan media on this simple story, because I must.

Journalism's life after death

BOOKS

John Cokley

Atton, Chris and Hamilton, James F: *Alternative Journalism*. Sage , UK, 2008. ISBN 9781412947039



Like a choc-top at the movies, traditional 'Big Media' journalism is having its head ripped off at the moment. Thousands of newspaper reporters and editors in the United States and the UK have lost their permanent jobs in the past year.

In the United States, subscribers to venerable printed newspapers such as the 100-year-old Christian Science Monitor and the 146-year-old Hearst regional, the Seattle Post-Intelligencer (pictured), now have to settle for daily online delivery instead.

And even in Brisbane, newsprint addicts who also like Fairfax products have become accustomed to reading their version of the daily news online at The Brisbane Times.

Question is: as the choc-top is ripped off, is there anything other than lily-white ice-cream under there, or is there something of substance perhaps, like those no-boring bits products on the tele?

Newspaper circulations have been sinking (i.e. not keeping pace with population growth) for the past 30 years, but since the global financial crisis heated up, thousands of journalists have actually been sacked.

The comparative few from Fairfax in Australia late last year have been dwarfed by those thousands overseas. The rot might yet still spread deeper here. Murdoch's News Corporation last month announced comparatively huge losses, and Fairfax bosses have hinted strongly at more adjustments.

Of course, there is a big 'so what?' factor here. Thousands of miners, manufacturing workers and retail staff have gotten the bump since June and the numbers say layoffs are only going to get worse. Why should we feel any sadder just because journalists are feeling the pinch?

Perhaps it's because journalists — at least those worth bothering about — are the canaries in our national mine. You might get a build up of lethal gases but unless the canaries are there in the first place to tweet, you'll never know. Then everyone dies, including the canary. Unless journalists are there to help us stay in touch with the problems and issues of our society, the gas can close in without warning.

So it's reassuring to see a book which offers an alternative to the

canary-shaped journalism which seems to be keeling over right now.

Two academic researchers, Chris Atton and James F Hamilton , have combined to show us that, despite what the Big Media bigwigs of the establishment say, there is an alternative to the journalism of Murdoch, Fairfax and the ABC, and internationally of the BBC, CNN and Reuters. In fact there are many alternatives. This is apparently also news to many journalists themselves, judging by the industry moaning now.

Atton and Hamilton demonstrate, step by careful step, what these alternatives to the existing media look and sound like. They point out the successful business models which allow them to continue and become successful.

Their essential message is: the mere fact that established media journalists say 'journalism is dying', doesn't make it so.

Traditional journalists today and last year have been worrying that the world as they know it — employed journalism beneath the roofs of Murdoch, Packer, Stokes, Fairfax and even Aunty ABC — is changing.

Well, it is, but Atton and Hamilton demonstrate that the move to alternative journalism, which, admittedly, includes amateur as well as professional citizen journalism , blogging , YouTube and Flikr , along with many others, has a long history which predates the Internet, the BBC, and the famous big-name newspapers of the 19th and 20th enturies.

For instance, the 'new journalism' of the 1960s and 70s and the bloggers of the 21st century might be more accurately described as 'newer versions' of the Industrial Revolution phenomenon of popular presses challenging political journalism of the day.

I enjoyed seeing what my mates and I did for 20 years in the Murdoch Empire being described as 'bourgeois journalism' …| it is exactly that, of course, although we would have been horrified to hear it so described.

And if the mainstream journos of today reckon they're taking the fight up to their various governments, they might consider what Atton and Hamilton call 'oppositional journalism' and get real about the task of criticism.

There are serious and gritty topics in *Alternative Journalism* and some questions are raised but not solved …| a nice contemporary interactive touch, since we the readers are left to write the answers on the blank pages of our lives.

Issues such as professionalization and epistemology: is something correct because a trained journalist writes it, and equally incorrect because an amateur citizen journalism writes it? Are activist/advocate journalists stepping over an ethical line, or is the line even there?

The authors collect information on who these alternative journalists are, and what they do. They look at what are called 'participatory forms' and fanzines

(online magazines run by fans of various artists and subcultures).

And the big issue of commercial models for journalism: who will pay for it? At the Future of Journalism conference in Sydney last year, I sat on the stage and squirmed as old hands asked who would pay them and what would they do next as employers desperately sought to save struggling enterprises.

My response was that we journalists should look to ourselves for the answer and find our own business models , rather than wait for investors and other capital-rich types to find it and tell us when it's ready.

Big Media is beginning to respond. For example, the *New York Times* has moved explicitly to incorporate citizen journalism into its sections.

I liked reading *Alternative Journalism* for another reason: these guys are teachers and they carefully signpost their work. The introduction tells you what's coming in the book, and the start of each chapter tells you what's coming next.

But heed this other signpost on our road: you'll have to be keen to get the message, or be in a very intellectual frame of mind, because *Alternative Journalism* is a typical textbook: densely written and chock full of academic terminology. This is a good thing in my world, of course, but I breathe university air. Perhaps Atton and Hamilton will follow up with a Twitter version of their book, published in single sentences.

Exposure: a fable in three parts

MUSIC

Tim Kroenert

Part one: Coldplay vs Mercury Rev

Rod Laver Arena is a vast cavern. Yet the stage, with its flanking walkways, is an embrace, and we are the lucky few hundred, who have endured hours of waiting and jostling to earn the privilege of nestling therein.

The mood is generally upbeat. But support acts at major concerts are anathema at the best of times, and tonight's, eccentric, veteran Buffalo rockers Mercury Rev , quickly loses the crowd's good will.

It's a shame. These guys are the reason I'm here. I had pondered and rejected the prospect of paying $140 to see Coldplay live. Then Mercury Rev were announced as the support act. What had seemed like a steep price was now a bargain: two bands for the price of one.

Musically, the match makes sense. The ethereally saccharine, atmospheric kook of Mercury Rev is surely a good fit with the experimental, melodic pop-rock of Coldplay's latest album, *Viva la Vida*. They are compatriots in the land of sound and melody.

Still, muppet-voiced lead singer Jonathan Donahue (pictured) is an oddball. During the crashing, closing chords of one big ballad, he stands for a full minute, grimacing, biceps flexed in a mock strongman pose. The crowd is disinterested and derisive. They titter and chatter.

I feel self-conscious as I bop my head and sing along — resentful. I'm probably not the only one enjoying their music, but it feels like it. 'Show some respect,' I want to scream. 'These guys have been around since before most of you were born.'

Of course, you can't hold others' tastes against them. Besides, it is the nature of playing support that you will usually fade out in the glare of the headliners. And when it comes to Coldplay, a ubiquitous and accessible band, the glare is indeed bright.

Part (U)2

A lot of people like U2, although it's some years since it was respectable to do so. Discerning music fans might identify their music as a 'secret pleasure'. 'Yeah, I like them,' they'll admit, wincing as if from an unpleasant odour.

That bad smell is Bono, or, more specifically, the front man's public persona. During the past decade Bono has erected a benevolent twin alongside his towering ego. He's cast himself as the would-be saviour of the world's poor.

You can't begrudge the man his ubiquitous spruiking on their behalf. Still, even the most diehard U2 fan must sometimes wish he'd just shut up for a while. For goodness sake, you're one of the world's richest men. Don't preach to me about loving my neighbour.

I've always considered myself an unconventional U2 fan. My favourite album is their misunderstood 1997 flop, *Pop*. Dismissed as a frivolous and failed experimental album, to me it finds Bono at his most open and angry. 'Jesus help me,' he drones on 'Wake Up Dead Man'. 'I'm alone in this world/And a f****d up world it is, too.'

By contrast, the band's latest album, *No Line on the Horizon*, has me stumped. It seems to lie somewhere between the dense, tribal sounds of 1985's *The Unforgettable Fire* and their 1995 experimental side project, *Passengers: Original Soundtracks Volume 1*.

It's nice to hear the band taking risks again. Fleeing the safety of 2004's U2-by-numbers *How To Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*. Eschewing the pretention and preachiness of 2000's overrated *All That You Can't Leave Behind*.

Still, after half a dozen rotations, I can't make up my mind. Do I like it? Something is keeping me distant. Perhaps it's the smell of public Bono.

Part 3: Pauline Hanson exposed

We don't even read the *Herald Sun*at my house. Yet an apparent mix-up with our paper delivery saw me, on Sunday morning, munching my Weet-Bix over a front page photo purported to depict a 19-year-old Pauline Hanson in the buff.

Of course, it's probably not her. The former One Nation leader has denied it, and experts have come forward to reinforce her denial.

It may not matter. Two truisms apply here. One is that mud sticks. The photos have been widely exposed. Whether or not it is Hanson, the association is likely to endure. Should the reckless deeds of one's teenage years influence how one's adult career is viewed by the public? Probably not. Do they? Yes, unfortunately.

Still, it's not all bad news for Hanson. To paraphrase another applicable truism, sometimes any exposure is good exposure. That's not to suggest, as some have, that the photos were leaked by Hanson herself, for publicity's sake, as she revives her political career. But there's no doubt that vices and rebellion humanise our politicians.

Think of Obama the pot-smoker, Dubya the drunk, K-Rudd dragged along to a strip joint by his inebriated mates or, later, as PM, dropping the s-bomb on national television.

Be it fact or fable, the notion of young Pauline the temptress, exposing her not-so-innocence to her then boyfriend's camera, contains a sense of humanity that can only help the image of a woman once famously caricatured by a drag

queen satirist dubbed 'Pauline Pantsdown'.

Epilogue: Coldplay vs U2

Bono recently described Colplay's Chris Martin as a 'wanker'. Martin received the jibe graciously — in fact, with deference to U2's place in the pop pantheon: 'They are the Manchester United of rock, so they must be doing something right.'

In contrast to Donahue, Chris Martin is an endearing front man, energetic, affable and charming. Self-deprecating, too. *Help us be as big as U2!*, he implores with the Rod Laver audience, flashing a cheeky grin.

Martin best take care. Exposure is a powerful but precarious weapon. It can be a force for evil as well as good. It should be yielded with caution.

Why Good Friday should not be gambled

COMMUNITY

Andrew Hamilton


THE AUSTRALIAN
It's a Good Friday for Easter punters

Good Friday seems perpetually under siege. First from shopping, then footy in New South Wales, and now in Victoria from gambling .

This progressive encroachment suggests two questions: What protection, if any, should Governments and business give Good Friday? How will the public marginalisation of Good Friday lead Christians to see and celebrate the day?

Changes in the public celebration of Good Friday have been significant. Sixty years ago shops did not open, few people worked, trains and buses hardly ran, there was no public entertainment. It was a long, quiet, heavy day. It reflected the historically large attendance at Christian churches and the place of Christian faith in the public space.

Now Good Friday is still largely a day free of work. But in a mobile Australia where Christian allegiance and practice are no longer taken for granted, it is a day for shopping, still restricted, and diversion. But when businesses like football, gaming and supermarkets test the waters of public response as they seek to exploit Good Friday, they now find their toes nibbled rather than bitten off.

The arguments for maintaining the exclusions associated with Good Friday are generally based on one of two considerations: respect for Christians to whom the day is sacred, and the benefits to society of maintaining a day free from pressure to work and to spend.

Neither argument is conclusive. The decline in meaningful Christian allegiance, and the growing number of Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim Australians may lead us to ask why a Christian holy day should be especially protected. Even conceding the public benefit of days free from pressure, too, we may ask why Good Friday should continue to be such a day.

Perhaps it is helpful to ask the more radical question: why should there be any stable public holidays at all? Public holidays constantly forget or embroider their origins. They recall events which were significant to different groups in Australian society, even after the significance is no longer shared.

For many Australians the anniversary of the arrival of the first English settlers in Australia is no longer an occasion for joy, but it remains important to remember for its influence on Australia. Similarly, few remember the stonemasons' strike that in Victoria gives the date to Labour Day, but it rightly enshrines the importance of workers' struggle.

Anzac Day, too, has changed its character but like the other public holidays, its

celebration prevents forgetfulness. Holidays recall the experience of particular groups of Australians, but can be celebrated by all as shaping the nation.

From this perspective the preservation of Good Friday marks the importance of Christian faith in Australian settlement and culture. This faith and its varying practices formed one of the factors that helped shape Australian institutions for better or worse. To lose it as a holiday would be to forget something significant.

As a public celebration, however, Good Friday can be expected to change as Australian culture and habits evolve. All holidays do. We should ask, then, whether the non-commercial aspects of the holiday are important in preserving its character and its relationship to the religious traditions that it recalls.

This kind of argument has been made with some success for the celebration of Anzac Day. It could also be made for Good Friday. But it would need to take into account the way in which Australians generally wish to celebrate holidays.

The changing face of Good Friday will surely change the way Christians see and celebrate it. Even if it is a holiday, it will no longer be a de facto public religious feast.

That could be helpful for Christians if it returns them to the nature of the event they recall. Jesus was put to death on a weekday. The soldiers who did the job gambled their time away. He was killed shortly after he challenged the commercialisation of the Temple and the corporatisation of religious faith. His trial and executions were the day's public entertainment.

Being exposed to Australian public values is quite a good context for entering the events that Good Friday remembers.

Identity theft: a cautionary tale

NON-FICTION

Roger Trowbridge

Just a day or two after Christmas we swung cheerily into the drive, holiday music blaring its last. Our disbelieving eyes fixed instantly on the open window. Then the open door. We'd been robbed!

Hearts pounded. We crept towards the house. Music still blaring.

Never has there been such a mess as this. In every room the floor was strewn. Every drawer, every cupboard, every cabinet had been emptied. Even the shoe box we kept Band-Aids and Aspros in. Stuff everywhere.

Touch nothing, we were told. Leave everything as it is. So we trod gingerly through the wreckage, then sat stunned, and waited. The laptop was gone ... and coins from the Salvos dish ... and a red coral necklace ...

The sergeant had been 'on burglaries for three years', he said, but it had been only in the last few months that he had come across so many cases of identity theft. We qualified as victims of identity theft because our personal documents had been taken. All swept up with assorted hardware and carried away in our own green pillow case.

Identity starts, as it always has done, with the name by which one shall be known in the community. From there it grows exponentially. To that certificate of our birth we may add, as we grow and age, a credit card, driver's license, Medicare card, citizenship certificate, passport, electoral enrolment, property title, Council ratepayer notice, certificates to practise trade or profession, certificate of marriage, will, power of attorney, Seniors Card, Commonwealth Health Card.

About the only one we didn't have in our life-time collection was a death certificate. It will come.

In this complex world personal identity has become thoroughly bureaucratised and cross-referenced. For every component there is an identity number; for most there is also a password. The identity system for each of us is cumulative and comprehensive. It gate-keeps our entire lives and mandates our passage physically, geographically, socially, and in terms of status, rights and responsibilities.

The system may be comprehensive but it is not coherent. A new ID number comes with every card, and each needs a password of varying configuration. For most of us there is no easy way to rationalise this plethora and commit it to memory. We need a record. And records make us vulnerable, however cleverly we disguise them.

We maintained sufficient composure that first afternoon to make three calls: to the police, to the bank and to the insurance company. Beyond that our grasp of the implications of loss of our documentary identity quickly diminished to zero.

It was only after a night of sleepless anxiety that the potential for mischief at our expense started to become clear. In short, from the day of the theft, 'they' had assumed control of our identities; our lives.

It's now a month later and, gradually, we are becoming whole. We have — in fact, we are — a brand new set of numbers and passwords. Our old selves have been bureaucratically buried, as each document is either recovered or replaced.

But there has been one glitch. Just one. The insurance industry does not appear to acknowledge identity theft as an emerging category of crime. Nor does it adequately recognise the implications of identity loss within its reimbursement policies. Our company allows just $1000 for document replacement. So far for us that sum has been fully absorbed by new passports and by the caveat on property title.

Our estimate is that remaining basic legal costs and bureaucratic fees will total a further $1500—$2000. Our policy allows fur coats to be listed as valuable items for additional cover (update needed here for global warming and for 21st century clothing style!), but not personal documents. It allows a maximum of $3000 for any one item of sporting equipment, but only $1000 for all identity papers.

Over the coming weeks insurance companies will be confronted with identical requests to ours from the victims of Victorian fires. Surely for those who have lost everything some urgent policy flexibility must be introduced and reimbursement adjusted to reflect the true cost of document replacement.

Finally, my attention has returned to the window through which our 'person of interest' entered. The best advice for future security came from the very skillful tradesman whose job was to make good damage from break-and-enters. 'Bolt your window through the side rail of the sash,' he said. 'And you'll need locking security doors — if they can't get the window open they'll kick a door in. After that they'll try the roof.' At that point my eyes swam.

But it was good advice; and we've done it. Maybe a very small man can still come down the chimney. And here I'm not referring to Santa ...

Dialogue with the enemy

POLITICS

Peter Kirkwood

This past fortnight there has been an amazing development in international relations that would have seemed impossible six months ago. The US president said dialogue with moderate elements of the Taliban 'should be explored'. In response the leader of the Taliban reportedly approved entering into peace negotiations.

During an extended interview with journalists on Airforce One on 6 March, Barack Obama, when asked if America was winning the war in Afghanistan, answered with a resounding 'No'. He went on to say that dialogue and reconciliation could be part of new initiatives in that troubled country.

He referred to successful strategies in Iraq that might be extended to Afghanistan: 'If you talk to General Petraeus, I think he would argue that part of the success in Iraq involved reaching out to people that we would consider to be Islamic fundamentalists, but who were willing to work with us.'

This comes in the context of a major overhaul of US foreign policy by the Obama administration. 'Afpak' (its shortening for Afghanistan-Pakistan) is at the top of its agenda.

Views are far from unanimous. The attitude of the Pentagon can be gauged from the response of its press secretary, Geoff Morell, to news that the Taliban were open to dialogue. He said he did not believe 'anybody in this building would support the notion of reconciling with people with that kind of blood on their hands'.

So who are the people on the other side? The Taliban leader who gave the green light to negotiations is the shadowy Mullah Mohammed Omar. He became battle hardened as part of the mujahideen resistance to Soviet occupation. When the Taliban came to power in 1996, he was made leader, and given the title 'commander of the faithful'.

When Taliban rule was brought to an end by the American-led invasion in 2001, he fled to the border regions of Pakistan. Always a recluse, he has never been seen, let alone interviewed by Western journalists. Perhaps Mullah Omar is not the person to be negotiating with. With his history of defiantly harbouring Osama bin Laden and other terrorists, and as leader of the harsh and repressive Taliban regime, it is well to be cautious.

That is the sharp end of debate. However perhaps there are lessons to be learnt from the softer end of town — from inter-religious dialogue.

Over the 30 years or so that this has been going in earnest, there has been a

marked shift away from a universalist 'lovey-dovey' approach which argued that underneath we are all the same, and the way to peace and harmony is to uncover and recognise the similarities.

Now the emphasis is on what Dirk Ficca, Director of the Parliament of the World's Religions, calls a 'particularist' approach. This recognises what is particular in each tradition, that there are deep differences between religions and cultures, and aims to build productive dialogue between difference. Further than this, it recognises that binding and creative solutions can only be found by incorporating all the polarities in dialogue.

Philosopher and theologian, Raimon Panikkar, a veteran of inter-religious dialogue, is perhaps the most articulate and passionate proponent of this view.

'We have a tendency to construct for ourselves an increasingly uninhabitable world broken into combat zones between 'us' and 'them',' Panikkar writes. 'It is the cross-cultural challenge of our times that unless the barbarian, the mleccha, goy, infidel, nigger, kaffir, foreigner, and stranger are invited to be my thou, beyond those of my clan, tribe, race, church, or ideology, there is not much hope left for the planet.'

Perhaps this outreach by both sides in the Afghan conflict is the first tentative sign of breaking down the combat zone between 'us' and 'them'. Afghan president Hamid Karzai certainly sees this as the way forward, and has courted Mullah Omar. In November last year, Karzai said, 'If I hear from him that he is willing to come to Afghanistan or to negotiate for peace, I as president will go to any length to provide protection.'

President Karzai has appointed his brother, Qayim, as envoy to the Taliban, and Qayim Karzai is remarkably sanguine about the possibilities opened up over the last week. 'I can tell you President Obama's words have created enormous optimism. There is no other way left but talks. All sides know more fighting is not the way.'

Black Saturday

POETRY

Tony London

Black Saturday five days on

Before I was called out, we had been watching the conflagration
for several days, ears glued to the News Radio for further stories
in the dark. Ours was no Black Saturday which had engulfed
the mountains of my adolescent heartland, but a mere 9000 ha
of forest in Redmond over here in the West. 'Bornholm Fast Attack 1
to Bornholm Fast Attack 2, stick to the right down Hennings Road,
too many widow makers falling out of that forest, over.' The tall
jarrah forest was roaring at itself as we hovered and patrolled
in the thinly grassed paddock and the blanket of smoke, as the
back burn met the fire head and two towering walls of flame stood
high and face to face, whilst red tongues of fire burst out around us.
Near a derelict house a farmer stood on his round bales, bucket in
hand, etched out against the evening sun now red above the horizon,
whilst our pump motors on the trucks stood by, growling quietly
in the wait. It was a fire we could eventually leave to the next shift,
one that responded to the rules in the training manual. Back at home
the next morning, my lungs still stiff with smoke, my dirty uniform
hanging on the back veranda airing, hanging limply like a dead man,
I looked at my library, and the house fire breaks in need of a shave.
Should I do the fire plan, take a photograph of every shelf, or start
up the tractor? Victorian survivors had spoken of the guilt of living,
I felt the guilt of distance. Pioneer Oval at Marysville, where many
had gathered for security and safety, was where I had kicked a goal
against the stout mountain men in my youth, shared a beer afterwards
with the vanquished. How now the feeling of defeat? I kicked my
tractor into life and set the slasher to work, giving whole paddocks

a crew-cut, trying to keep busy to flatten the roaring images that crashed into my mind, with the cutting blades and the seeming anger of the motor. 'It sounded like ten Jumbo Jets taking off through the forest above us.' This searing that killed simply by stealing the light and burning up the air they needed. 'This here is where the windscreen melted.' 'It was like they had been cremated in embrace.' From my tractor I can see the nearby ocean clear and blue, but I could not see it.

You can't go back

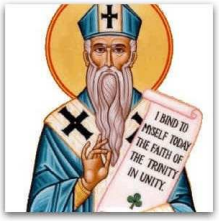
Yesterday it was Woori-Yallock and Millgrove and Warburton and Silvan. Driving through newly established housing and increased civic pride. We cruised past muddy football ovals where once I had played for my life, the water oozing into my dry boots, the ball coming at different angles past awkward angular bodies. Goals I stopped quite a few, kicked far fewer and some thought me totally uncompromising on my day. But now I have disappeared from the local newspapers, the team sheet in Howden's Newsagent window, along with all of the others who have crossed back over the boundary. Memory is a powerful thing, selecting the great spoil and the run down field, forgetting the full forward from North Melbourne with speed and flair who responded to fists and sledging with a couple more well kicked goals. One day in a hurry, on the approach to Monbulk township, Robbie Jack flattened a dog with his Simca, it groaned in the gutter whilst we knew we should already be lacing up our boots. We both started badly that day and we went on to win, but not before the coach gave us a piece of his mind and then took out his teeth. Nowadays those places are extended suburbia and clubs forage and seek far and wide

for players for next season's stars instead of simply digging deeper into their own tribe.

Irish, prisoners of a sacred past

COMMUNITY

Frank O'Shea



It has been said that we Irish are prisoners of our history, an expression usually employed to explain those acts of barbarism performed in the name of distorted nationalism on one side or perverse loyalism on the other.

In fact, it goes much deeper than that. We are children of an ancient culture. There are well-preserved Irish archaeological sites which date back more than 6000 years. Ornate jewellery and weaponry from the Iron Age tell of a civilisation which pre-dates the Christian era.

When St Patrick challenged the pagan tribes of the fifth century, he was dealing with a disparate grouping who had a common language, a common code of law (the Brehon law) and who referred to themselves as 'men of Ireland'. When the Dark Ages descended on Europe, the lamp of learning was kept alive in Irish monasteries.

This is the heritage which today's Irish claim. It has more importance than the bloody and mostly futile attempts at self determination which followed the Viking and Norman and finally the English occupations. We are prisoners of our history, but that history goes back much farther than 1916 or the Great Famine or the Battle of the Boyne.

Many people today insist on seeing in the Irish, traits which owe more to wishful fancy than to mundane fact. They like to paint us as quaint, amusing, perhaps more than a little irrational; harmless enough characteristics. And can you blame us if we play to the gallery? After all, they paid their money to kiss the Blarney Stone and to buy the shillelaghs and to savour the cream-topped pint that has made a feature of its unattractiveness.

There will be parades in cities all over the world this week to honour the Welsh-born missionary who brought Christianity to Ireland more than 1500 years ago. That these parades are allowed, with their attendant disruption of commerce and trade, is a tribute to subtle Irish colonialism.

It is a colonialism not characterised by greed or rapine, armies or plunder, but by good humour, good company and what the Irish called, long before the word achieved a sinister meaning, good *craic*.

It is a colonialism found in the imagery of a Heaney poem, celebrated in the dancing feet of a Riverdance troupe, voiced in the soft dialogue of a Friel play, personified in the charm and erudition of the two women most recently chosen by the people as First Citizen. Would that all colonialism was as benign.

St Patrick holds the Irish in a powerful emotional thrall. As schoolchildren we

were told that he refused to come down from a bleak mountain in County Mayo which still bears his name, until the Almighty promised him that the Irish would always be faithful to his message.

Never mind the theology in that. Take a moment to admire the propaganda, providing justification for Ireland's adherence to Rome through centuries of persecution while warning the modern generation of a sacred trust.

It is a matter of regret that this trust is no longer taken seriously. Events in recent years have shown churchmen to be as susceptible to human failings as the rest of us, with preaching too often contradicted by example. So the churchmen ceded the field to the money men, and the growl of the Celtic tiger replaced the peal of the angelus bell as a symbol of modern Ireland.

It was a bad bargain. In the past six months, with banks kept afloat by the public purse, only fortuitous membership of the euro zone keeps Ireland from joining the same club as Iceland. Even still, it is a close call whether Ireland Inc. will survive.

And the events of last week have shown how tenuous a hold peace has in some parts of the island. The saintly ghosts of the heroic past — Tone, Pearse, Collins — have been called upon to bless murder, to sanctify words that justify acts without sense or meaning. That Tone was a Presbyterian, that Pearse surrendered to prevent further civilian death, that Collins preached compromise — these have no relevance where only bitterness exists.

Those of us who live overseas may cease to be Irish in the strict geographical or political sense, but it is much more difficult to slough off our cultural Irishness. Many of us answered the appeal of a coiffed former prime minister so that when we now cross international borders, our passports identify us as Australian. But we carry in our head another book which no amount of absence can overwrite.

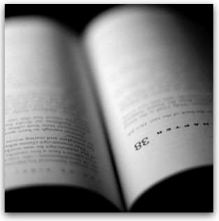
You won't find me wearing a green tie or, heaven help me, drinking green beer this week. But I know that I only have to open my mouth to murder that Saxon 'th' and I am clearly identified as Irish.

And dat's de trute.

Resurrecting the book

ARTS

John Bartlett



It's that niggling voice in the ear, the *bÃªte noire*of most writers as they grind away, inscribing their words on to a page or keyboard and asking whether anybody will ever get to read what they write. The barriers to publishing often seem insurmountable. To the low-profile, unpublished writer they seem practically impossible.

Even writers with a substantial publishing history must continually confront that bogyman Bookdata, where statistics about sales of previous books may often predict for a publisher whether a writer is still a commercial commodity or not. The unforgiving market is always breathing down writers' necks.

Financial or economic justification for the role of the arts and creativity in society has long relied on an old economic-rationalist paradigm. Bureaucrats had to invent labels like 'cultural capital' to justify financial support for the arts and to ascribe dollar figures to creativity.

In these early years of the 21st century, amid market collapse, this economic theory may be losing support and in need of overhaul, despite the fact that most major publishing houses have long been tied to it.

The contemporary publishing landscape is changing in other ways too. Recently there has been a string of downsizing operations in many big publishing houses, notably Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, as well as lay-offs in Simon & Schuster, Random House, Thomas Nelson and Macmillan.

Jason Boog in salon.com maintains that this is because some publishing houses are run by people who don't understand books. Many corporate owners of major publishing houses, he argues, expect 15 to 20 per cent profit margins in an industry with traditional margins of 3 to 4 per cent.

Such expectations are unrealistic. Since the 1990s the advent of new technologies saw the markets of the big publishers already being eroded by smaller independents. Now the high returns demanded by shareholders could further work against them.

The current review of the Copyright Act law that restricts the parallel importation of books into Australia may signal other challenges for the publishing industry. It is not clear what effects this law will have. Books may be cheaper for the reading public, but publishers could also face competition from foreign publishers for editions of their own books.

Peter Carey has recently drawn attention to the limitations of a model of

book-making that seemed so attractive in the late 20th century. He says: 'Executives, newly arrived in publishing from finance or "content control entities", have one abiding interest in literature — it is their product. Their job is to save their corporation.'

Enter the small, independent publishers who have a love affair with books and, with low overheads and the time to lavish care on the books they produce, appear to be making some inroads into the market.

SPUNC (Small Press Underground Networking Community) is a recently formed community of small publishers with 52 Australian members. Its principal mission, according to Zoe Dattner, their publicity agent, is 'to assist in raising the profile of Australia's small publishers, so that they might enjoy a relatively similar amount of media, bookseller and individual reader attention as the larger players do'.

She believes that these publishers will publish exactly what they want and that their simple business model is less affected by the ups and downs in the economy.

Keith Stevenson of Coeur de Lion , which specialises in Australian speculative fiction, maintains that 'small publishers are well connected within the writing community and more prepared (and able) to take risks on what we think has artistic merit without having to convince the marketing guys'. He says that if you want the 'edgy new frontier stuff' you should go with the independent publishers.

Dattner says that dramatic changes in an economy can mean 'a renaissance-like cultural and artistic boom' and perhaps micro-publishing is one sign of these changes.

Of course distribution is a perennial problem for publishers large and small. Many distribution companies, according to Stevenson, won't even give the time of day to independent presses. However, the advent of the internet and email and the relative cheapness of setting up good-looking websites to direct marketing and sell online with a paypal driven storefront has been a boon for small publishers.

As SPUNC's name indicates, its vision is all about networking and collaboration with joint marketing and awareness-raising activities for members. Here may lie the strength of micropublishing. Stevenson says: 'What's exciting ... is the continued willingness of independent presses to work collaboratively rather than competitively'.

'With social networking and blogs, if you have something to say, it will get heard', says Boog. 'It just might not look like the traditional publishing model you are used to.'

Towards a carbon dictatorship

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

The recent plastic bag levy trial in Victoria has demonstrated that the draconian measure of forcing supermarkets to charge 10 cents for plastic bags reduces their use by 79 per cent. The difference education campaigns made to plastic bag use had been negligible.

We might ask ourselves whether the Federal Government's proposed carbon pollution reduction scheme can hope for a similar 79 per cent reduction in carbon dioxide emissions. That's hardly likely. In fact it's almost certain that the result will be closer to the negligible end of the scale.

The Victorian trial shows that draconian measures work. If the problem of climate change is as serious as the consensus of scientific opinion would have us believe, we should be looking upon climate change as an emergency, and not merely a serious problem.

That implies that the Government would have emergency powers to force industry to act to significantly curtail carbon dioxide emissions, and to prepare the community for the social and economic consequences. We may have been scornful of China's dictatorial requirement for industry to shut down and for cars to stay off the road, in order to lessen pollution ahead of last year's Olympic Games. But it appeared to work.

Australia's proposed carbon pollution reduction scheme is hampered by its heavy reliance on market mechanisms at a time when there has been a widespread loss of confidence in the market. It creates incentives for business to invest in projects that are carbon-neutral, and avoid those that pollute.

But if business is disinclined to invest in any new projects, which is the case at present, we can expect little or no change to carbon dioxide emissions.

It gets worse than that. Under the scheme, individuals and small businesses might spend tens of thousands of dollars on voluntary initiatives such as solar power. The carbon saving will be passed to the electricity utility, which will then use these emission savings in selling more coal-generated electricitiy to others. The same amount of carbon dioxide will be emitted as before.

It's becoming clear that a business-friendly carbon emissions reduction scheme is an oxymoron. The draconian action which the Government must take to reduce carbon dioxide emissions may penalise particular sectors of the economy (e.g. the coal-based electricity industry). But if we accept that the climate science is right, there is no choice but to endure such a transition to non-emitting industry energy generation.

Emergency powers were used extensively to aid reconstruction after World War II, and the result was more than half a century of relative prosperity for the citizens of many countries. Similarly, after we get through this radical change to the way in which industry operates, we will have reasonable grounds for hoping the planet will sustain human life into the future.