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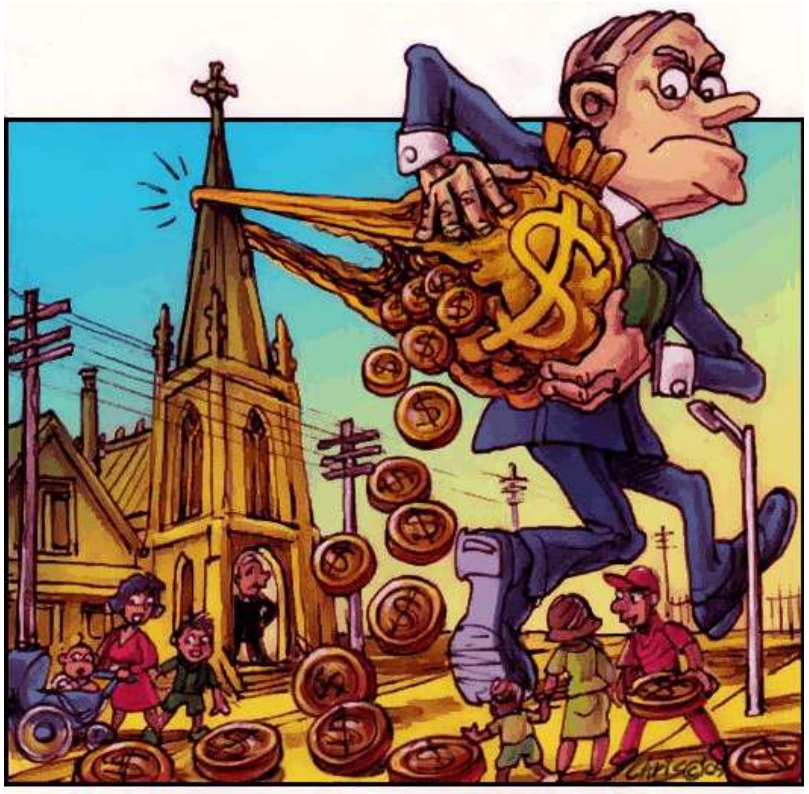

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Greedy Easter story

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

This Easter is a time of mistrust. It is hard to escape the prevailing economic gloom, the impression that our future has been handed over to those who have proved themselves venal and untrustworthy in managing our past, and the signs that the world our children will inherit is being despoiled so that we can live on undisturbed.

If trust is the one thing that is required, it is also the one thing that we give most grudgingly. And if it is not given, cynicism and apathy rule.

Mistrust is not a great spirit in which to celebrate Easter. Easter is about new beginnings, dawn, clarity and trust. Mistrust is corrosive of all that. So this Easter it might be worth looking at the more sinister players in the drama Easter, especially Judas and the chief priests. Their story is one of how mistrust is bred by greed and locked in by power.

Judas' personal story has always fascinated readers of the Gospels. But Matthew's Gospel, which provides the most dramatic picture of Judas, is more interested in its public significance. He tells us of the 30 pieces of silver Judas receives for his betrayal, his remorse, his rejected attempt to return the money, his hanging, and the use of his money to fund a graveyard for foreigners.

Matthew's account is a fireworks display of symbols and allusions to Old Testament stories, mostly about dodgy transactions. In particular he draws on a parable of Zechariah which presents the leaders of Israel as exploiting the people and finally selling them out for 30 silver pieces. This was the price of a slave.

Judas then is a pawn in the plot of the chief priests. He certainly sold Jesus out, but he was himself sold short by the chief priests. Although they were scrupulous in accounting for monies received, they had no scruple in paying money to procure betrayal and a killing. They professed to protect the temple, the centre of Israel, but they spent its resources for the benefit of foreigners.

In this story greed corrupts Judas and money is used corruptly by the chief priests to kill Jesus and so protect their power. Their dealings, like Judas' betrayal of Jesus, were built on mistrust, which finally destroys Judas when he realises what he has done and what kind of people he has been dealing with.

Matthew contrasts Jesus with the chief priests in their dealings with money and power. When he entered Jerusalem, Jesus' first act was to knock over the sellers' tables in the temple. Because the temple was the heart of the Jerusalem economy and the source of the chief priests' power, this act radically challenged the values that underlay the economic order. It stated God's priorities.

Although the chief priests crushed Jesus' challenge by having him executed,

Jesus rose from the dead, left terrified and helpless the soldiers who protect the old order, and summoned the disciples away from Jerusalem, the centre of corruption, to Galilee.

Judas' death and Jesus' rising seemed to have left mistrustful Jerusalem and its dealings behind. But Matthew unexpectedly returns to the chief priests' doings in Jerusalem. The chief priests bribe the soldiers to change their story and say that Jesus' disciples had stolen his body. Matthew records that their spin was largely successful.

So even as the disciples leave for Galilee, the dark forces in Jerusalem that control money and spin are still working, still effective. Judas may have died, but the high priests remain in charge, untrusting and untrustworthy.

The Easter story suggests that we should not expect a new and trustworthy economic order in which greed and short-term interests will suddenly yield to humane values. There is no reason why we should trust the market and those who claim to know its workings.

Easter doesn't make the grounds for mistrust go away. It does confront cynicism and apathy. From the perspective of Easter the victories of greed and myopia are cheap and hollow. The masters of the universe have only the power and the wisdom that we concede to them. Christ's rising shows that what matters in human life is deeper than greed can take us, and that it is worth trying to build a better world.

Judas and the chief priests of our day still roam the world. But their eyes are dead. Easter is bright eyed.

Asylum seeker love

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Saved*: 90 minutes. Rated: M. Director: Tony Ayres. Starring: Claudia Karvan, Andy Rodoreda, Osamah Sami**

Short filmmaker Dave Hoskin's article in the Autumn edition of *Overland*, 'Micro-budget Aussie flick makes no money', about the myth of the Australian film industry crisis, culminates in a bold proposal. He wants to reform film distribution models by helping the local industry forgo the commercial pressures of the box office.

'Forget the multiplexes and premiere the films the taxpayer has already paid for on the ABC or SBS', he writes. 'Our cash-strapped national broadcasters can pool their resources with the film industry and broadcast more local content. Our filmmakers are given a greatly enhanced ability to put bums on seats.'

In fact this is already beginning to happen. *Saved*, which premieres on SBS this Sunday, is a new Australian feature film directed by Tony Ayres (*Home Song Stories*). It's a co-production of SBS, Screen Australia and Film Victoria, and is a powerful example of what a genuine film/TV alliance can achieve.

Julia (Karvan) and her husband Peter (Rodoreda) share a damaged marriage. They have lost their five-week-old daughter to SIDS. While Peter buries his grief beneath a barrage of work, Julia withdraws into herself.

She finds an object for her unfulfilled mother-instinct when she visits a detention centre. She is moved by the vulnerability of young Iranian asylum seeker Amir (Sami), and becomes his advocate. This gesture grows into an all-consuming crusade that frustrates and bewilders Peter and his overbearing, overachieving family.

After Amir is released, Amir moves in with Peter and Julia. But her mothering instinct has morphed into a different kind of attraction. The mystery of Amir's background (he claims to have been tortured for his opposition to 'the regime' in Iran) adds intrigue and political subtext. But the heart of the story is Julia and Peter's marriage, and whether it is strong enough to survive the sustained grief and emotional turmoil.

In truth, it's hard to imagine watching *Saved* in a cinema. The aesthetic is 'small'. The suburban location and understated cinematography make it seem at home in the living room. The domestic drama theme, and the cast also seem at home there — Karvan, a sometime film actor, found her niche in TV series *Love My Way* and *The Secret Life of Us*.

But *Saved* is free from any hokey, 'movie-made-for-TV' stigma. Ayres and scriptwriter Belinda Chayko have devised well-rounded characters who drive a

story that develops engagingly and believably.

In writing the film, they interviewed numerous advocates for the rights of asylum seekers. Most were women who advocated on behalf of young men. These relationships were emotionally complex. Their script for *Saved* draws upon this research to lend authenticity to the sexual attraction that creeps into Julia's relationship with Amir.

The performances are, universally, fine. Layered, so that no character is entirely sympathetic or villainous. Both Julia and Peter carry blame for exacerbating the distance that rives their marriage, yet the deep warmth that Karvan and Rodoreda bring makes it clear that this is a marriage worth saving. And newcomer Sami is both youthful and wordly wise as the troubled protagonist Amir.

'If the endgame really is all about getting the highest number of eyeballs to watch Australian stories ... We need to follow the audience wherever they go, and tell them the best stories we possibly can', writes Hoskin. *Saved* is an assured and involving new Australian story. It's coming soon to a television screen near you.

Saved *screens on SBS this Sunday night, 12 April 2009, at 8.30 p.m.*

On Roos 'Chookgate' and footy's duty of care

SPORT

Andrew Hamilton

From one point of view the chicken video affair at the North Melbourne Football Club is just another instance of boys behaving badly. But seen more broadly it indicates how greatly professional sport has changed and the new questions that are put to it.

Of the incident itself there is not much to be said. It is another bead on the litany of young men drunk, young men violent, young men abusive, young men driving erratically and young men remorseful stories that is recited publicly several times a year in football and other professional sports throughout Australia.

The same stories of more local affairs are told quietly throughout the land. They are a regrettable part of young men growing up, and hopefully learning from their mistakes.

The public response to public stories of young men acting badly has become ritualised. Commentators point out the wrong in what the young men have done — in the most recent case, the demeaning of women. The players apologise for it and make some symbolic contribution to a cause that embodies the value they have trashed.

Players are then reminded that they are role models and that they must live up to the image which their sponsors would want projected. No doubt the concept of the role model does reflect the influence that sports heroes have on children. But when invoked by sports administrators it is above all a corporate concept. It has to do with preserving the funding stream that supports their competitions.

But beyond this ritual acting out of sin, confession and repentance lies a significant change in professional sport. The change raises more serious questions. It is the change from a part-time professional activity to a full-time professional activity.

The players are now employed by their clubs and spend time there outside of play and training. For footballers, becoming part of a professional team is like the change a member of the citizen military forces might make when he joins the army. The army becomes his whole environment and significantly shapes his values.

For that reason the way in which the army inducts recruits and monitors practices like bullying and discrimination is of legitimate public interest. So are the values that the institution professes and embodies in its practices. Allegations of abuse are rightly publicised and the army is careful to give the impression that they are thoroughly investigated. It acknowledges that beyond its professional competences involved in defending Australia it has a duty of care to the young

men who join it. As we say, they are entrusted to it.

In professional sports, too, young people no longer simply play for clubs. When they are drafted young players are entrusted to them. The clubs have a responsibility to them not simply as players but as young adults who still have to shape the direction of their lives.

For that reason the culture of the club and the values embodied there are of legitimate public interest. By and large there seems to be much to admire in the seriousness with which most clubs take their responsibility. Where doubts arise, as at West Coast a few years ago and Collingwood last year, the clubs are quickly, often crudely, held accountable.

From this perspective, the concerning issue in the chicken affair is not that it happened but that no one saw anything exceptionable in it. That speaks of shared cultural values. If this were happening in the army, we would not want to entrust young Australian men to such a culture. The army would act to challenge the values and the practices flowing from them. So, we hope, will football clubs. That is part of their duty of care.

Broadband deal better late than never

ECONOMICS

John Wicks

No one needs to be told that we in Australia are entering a serious recession due to the world financial crisis. Few need reminding that the crisis was generated in the USA, by unfettered free markets reinforced by the sanctity of the profit motive and sheer greed within the business sector.

We now have a worldwide crisis from which Australia is not immune. We face the spectre of two years of declining production and trade, and rising levels of unemployment. Few would disagree that we need a process of economic revival to address the worst impacts of recession. The question is what form the stimulus should take.

To address this we need to move beyond blaming greedy bankers and businessmen for the recession. It takes two to tango. We need to look at other factors too, in particular profligate consumption and minimally controlled consumer credit. That factor is as much apparent in Australia as subprime housing loans were in the USA.

The decade of growth that Australia experienced prior to the current crisis was fed by a consumption frenzy. Consider the growth in 'McMansions', household goods, must-have fashion, SUVs and more. This was fed in turn by an almost subprime credit system — no deposit, no interest, no repayments for two years. It was all about growth in employment, production, trade, storage, transport, and retail of consumer goods.

All of this at a time when we have seen a substantial crisis in our health system, a deficit of doctors, nurses and other medical staff, problems in education and training from pre-school through to university, a decline in public and affordable housing, unacceptable growth in homelessness, and an unsustainable decline in infrastructure including roads, railways, communications and other social infrastructure related to our health and wellbeing.

So while the recession is, on the one hand, a harbinger of pain and suffering for large numbers of Australians, at the same time it is an opportunity to address serious problems that have arisen in the past and to ensure our future wellbeing.

In that regard, the Government should be congratulated on its multi-billion dollar infrastructure spending program, the largest feature of which is its National Broadband Network announced yesterday. It will likely cost in excess of $40 billion but will have long-term benefits for manufacturing, trade, business, employment, education, health, and many other areas.

The broadband strategy may have arrived a few years late, but the current government cannot be blamed for that. Besides, better late than never.

Infrastructure spending in relation to schools and other aspects of education, housing, health and transportation are also crucial to Australia's future prosperity and wellbeing. These infrastructure projects will take one or two years to get underway, and longer to have their maximum impact.

In the intervening period the government has embarked upon its multibillion dollar cash handouts to boost consumption spending and give some form of impetus to employment. This needs to be seriously questioned.

There is little point in spending billions of dollars of government money to promote a return to profligate consumption, which is the cause of Australia's predicament in the first place, and is also a major contributor to the failure to address more important areas of our long-term wellbeing.

Regardless of what governments do we will face at least two years of hard conditions, so why not use that time to undertake fundamental restructuring of the economy, especially the employment sector?

We have had far too many people employed in wholesale and retail and banking, as well as in finance and credit, when we desperately need child and aged care workers, nurses and medical workers, teachers and the like.

Many people from the finance industry already have university degrees. It takes a further 18 months to gain a teaching diploma and become a teacher. It takes several months or more to train aged and child care workers. So why not finance retraining? This will help structurally change the economy for long-term benefit.

Official spokespersons say that a couple of hundred million dollars is being directed at retraining. That is insufficient. It needs to be several billion.

Of course a cash handout stimulus package will be more popular than two painful years of restructuring. I prefer the latter, but I'm not facing an election in 2010.

Indonesia veering towards extremism

POLITICS

Peter Kirkwood

When President Bush announced the war on terror, he said that, as well as a physical war, there should be a war of ideas. The latter never eventuated, but in the long run, it's probably more important in defeating extremism.

*The Illusion of an Islamic State: the Expansion of Transnational Islamist Movements to Indonesia*i by former president and Muslim scholar, Abdurrahman Wahid (pictured), is a rare example of progressive Islam entering the battle for Muslim hearts and minds, making a compelling argument for urgent action.

The book, launched last Thursday in Jakarta, on the eve of elections that begin on 9 April, is a battle cry to Indonesians to stand and oppose Islamist extremists. Wahid argues that hardliners threaten his beloved country, and his religion.

The book is strategic and political, deeply spiritual and theological, and highly polemical. Wahid doesn't pull any punches, describing extremist elements as an insidious virus that has infiltrated the religion, civil society and government of his country.

I met Wahid in 2006 when I travelled to Indonesia with Geraldine Doogue to make a documentary on Islam in Indonesia for ABC TV's *Compass*. Confined to a wheelchair, and almost blind from a series of strokes, he didn't appear to be a fighter or a formidable intellect. But in the interview we experienced the wily and influential social commentator that Indonesians know so well.

Wahid comes from one of Java's foremost aristocratic Muslim families, and all his adult life he's been a revered teacher, writer and community activist. For 15 years prior to becoming president he was head of Nahdatul Ulama, the country's biggest Muslim organisation with a staggering 40 million members.

The pessimism in this recent book seems to mark a deterioration in the situation in Indonesia. In the 2006 *Compass* interview he was more sanguine. 'The moderates I see are so many,' he said then, 'and only a small coterie of fundamentalists, or hardliners exist in Indonesia.'

His diagnosis that Indonesia is now veering towards extremism is worrying for Australia. Roughly 85 per cent of Indonesia's population of 240 million is Muslim, making it the world's most populous Islamic nation. If Muslim radicals come to power or gain significant influence, it would mean a huge hostile neighbour just to our north.

Wahid's analysis draws on two years of research conducted by a number of foundations and institutes in Indonesia. This involved interviews with a wide range of key government, military, religious, education and media leaders, and 591 extremist figures from 58 different organisations.

Wahid identifies the dangerous elements as al-Qaeda, Wahhabists (from Saudi Arabia), the Muslim Brotherhood (originating in Egypt) and Hizb ut-Tahrir (whose goal is a pan-Islamic global Caliphate). All are generously funded, he contends, by 'huge amounts of petrodollars' from the Middle East.

He outlines how extremist groups have taken over many mosques and tertiary institutes, and infiltrated government and political parties. He explains how Indonesia's two largest Muslim organisations, NU and Muhammadiyah, have been targets for infiltration. Both have recently issued firm guidelines on membership in an effort to stave off takeovers.

He singles out the influential Majelis Ulama Indonesia (Council of Islamic Scholars), the official body that issues fatwas, and the political party, the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), as having been taken over. The timing of the book's publication aims to stem support for the PKS.

The first round of elections on 9 April will decide which of the 38 parties standing for election will be represented in parliament. The three largest parties are President Yudhoyono's Democratic Party, Golkar led by Yusuf Kalla, and Megawati Sukarnoputri's PDI-P. Only parties or coalitions that win 20 per cent of the vote, or 25 per cent of the seats, can field candidates for the presidential election on 8 July.

In the 2004 election, the PKS won a sizeable 7.3 per cent of the vote. Wahid will be doing all in his power to minimise the vote for the PKS, and any party allied with it.

For inspiration, and a sense of hope, he looks to the past when Indonesia overcame similar challenges. He says this demonstrates that 'discontented souls will constantly shove our nation towards the brink of destruction until they succeed in acquiring power, or we stop them, as earlier generations of tranquil souls have done so many times before. Now it is we who must decide the fate of our nation.'

Easter poems

POETRY

Various

Easter

Good Friday
fish dinner
with an
elderly aunt
stations
of the cross
at her
local church
a glimpse
of sea view
afternoon tea
& a few hymns
her shoulder to my
knocking shoulder
her arm through
the crook of mine

Rory Harris

The Risen Christ

In Rembrandt's painting, the risen Christ
wears a jaunty hat, carries
a dainty spade, and wears a scabbard
in his belt. The spade, I guess,
was for digging out the stone
that trapped him in his now un-needed tomb,
the scabbard, and the knife within, for dealing with
grave-robbers shocked and disappointed

to find their helpless victim up and about.
But the hat: that seems too ostentatious,
too vain for a saviour and son of God.
This was before the news of U.V. rays, so sun-protection
could not be the cause. Why then?
Even if hat-wearing signalled his devotion
as a pious Jew, why such a hat? So roguish!
So impious! Impish, even!
He has come to greet his girlfriend
(well, so the stories go) Mary
Magdalene. He has crept up on her
in the midst of her unending grief,
praying, it seems, to two young angels
perched at the top of the stone steps.
Now I see! She has come to tend his lonely
broken body, only to find a pair of angels
sprawled at the mouth of the opened tomb,
placed there, one supposes, in token
of the miracle that's occurred. Then Jesus,
approaching Mary from behind, surprises her
with a voice she recognises, but feared
she'd never hear again. Her face is a mask
of wonder, uncomprehending. But what
surprises me is how unprepared, how dazzled
Christ appears, his eyebrows raised in stunned
amazement, as though he never imagined
she would return once more with gifts
to leave at his grave; as though he did not know
that she had loved him so, did not believe
that she believed in him. How human

he seems then, to be surprised

by love, not to expect devotion.
Was that what Rembrandt hoped,
that with a touch of paint he might

construe the risen, transformed Christ

as still wholly a man; and the world, even after

all that had happened, the suffering,

humiliation and betrayal, still an inexhaustible well

of mysteries, of unexpected hope?

Jeff Klooger

God of small things

I take the bread

remembering

God

made small

— a body broken

a scattering of crumbs

— some

no bigger than

a mustard seed

Janette Fernando

Poor nations could lead recovery

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

The message of protesters at last week's G20 London Summit was that wealthy bankers have caused us all to suffer. It is also asserted that the poor, particularly those in developing countries, are bearing a disproportionate burden of the economic pain.

Poor countries have been adversely affected by measures taken by the developed world to protect their economies. Wealthy nations have kept import tariffs high to protect their own economies, while the IMF and World Bank impose conditions on aid that require poor countries to maintain open markets.

Nobody was expecting good news to come out of the one-day event. But we woke on Friday to learn that leaders had put aside their differences to support a US$1 trillion injection of funds 'for global economies', including rich and poor.

The figure includes $250 billion in overdraft funds, and $100 billion to be given directly in loans to the world's poorest nations. The G20 leaders also reaffirmed support for meeting the Millennium Development Goals, which had been pushed aside by the crisis.

The London-based advocacy organisation Progressio — formerly the Catholic Institute of International Relations — describes the measures as a 'good first step' that will cushion the impact of the crisis for the world's poor. But Progressio's Tim Aldred says the measures fail to go far enough:

'It is more than we expected. But we would have hoped that more of the $1 trillion would be explicitly targeted at the world's poorest people. At best it looks like this money will keep poor people where they are, rather than lifting them out of poverty.'

The Economist outlines the case for directing money towards the world's poor. It argues that offering new sources of funding to developing nations makes good economic sense. It is not charity.

The Economist says that while these countries have far less fiscal room for manoeuvre than rich economies, 'they are also areas of the world where growth could rebound quite quickly, because households are not weighed down by the crushing debts typical in America and Europe'.

It is at once astonishing and heartening to consider that stimulating the economies of poor nations could kick-start the global economy.

Many of us have struggled to come to terms with the fact that the only solution to this crisis might be to put more money into bailing out the wealthy banks that caused the problem. Now that the G20 London Summit has uncovered a spirit of

international cooperation, it is time for the G20 to take a few extra steps, and give currency to the idea of giving developing nations a pivotal role in remaking the world economy.

Hitchcock's Easter drama

RELIGION

Scott Stephens

The films of Alfred Hitchcock are often regarded as a master class on the grotesqueries of Western society. To be sure, *The Birds*, *Rear Window*, *Psycho*, *Shadow of a Doubt*, *Rope* and even *Marnie*, all point to a kind of monstrous underbelly that disrupts the tranquility of everyday life.

But it was with his first attempt at cinematic realism, in an attempt to depict the true story of a wrongfully accused man, that Hitchcock managed to create a horror far worse than any Norman Bates.

In *The Wrong Man*, Manny Balestrero (Henry Fonda) is arrested in an unfortunate instance of mistaken identity and, with little or no explanation, is quickly arraigned on charges of armed robbery. The central sequence of the film follows Manny as he is led through the opaque, impersonal legal apparatus that will determine his fate.

In a particularly poignant moment, Manny, his face still fixed in a look of terrified bewilderment, clutches a silver crucifix and silently prays. All the while, lawyers spew their jargon-laden bile at one another as the uninterested jury talk among themselves.

The entire courtroom scene appears to Manny as simultaneously all-powerful and completely impersonal. It is in control of his life, and it couldn't care less. That's the obscenity of the entire ordeal. There is no slick dialogue or high courtroom drama — just the brutal enactment of an insane system convinced of its own rectitude.

Although it might seem a little strange to invoke Hitchcock at Easter, we can see a similar horror at work in the trial of Jesus. The Gospel narratives depict Jesus as paraded, like some freak at a carnival, before Pilate and then Herod, both of whom taunt and goad him to accept their supposed power and thus to join in their insanity.

They want Jesus to be part of their world, to quiver before them or at least to rage against them. But instead Jesus remains silent.

And like Manny Balestrero's bewildered innocence, Jesus' silence has the effect of throwing the madness of his would-be judges into sharp relief. His refusal to join their charade creates the space, the possibility of a freedom that was unimaginable to freedom-fighters who tried to oppose violence with violence.

In his remarkable book, *Christ on Trial,* Rowan Williams suggests that we should

understand God's transcendence through the lens of the 'obstinate uselessness' of Jesus' silence before his accusers.

'If we are really to have our language about the transcendence — the sheer, unimaginable differentness — of God recreated, it must be by the emptying out of all we thought we knew about it, the emptying out of practically all we normally mean by greatness.

'No more about the lofty distance of God, the sovereignty that involves control over all circumstances: God's 'I am' can only be heard for what it really is when it has no trace of human power left to it.'

It is in this way that Jesus' silence could begin shaping the practice of the Church. To participate in Jesus' silence would mean to commit ourselves afresh to an alternative, non-instrumental mode of communal life. It would require that we abandon that perverse moral calculus that determines what is worthwhile, useful and constructive in Western society.

In this sense the United States theologian Stanley Hauerwas remarked that the first task of the Church is not to make the world a better place, but to make the world the world.

In other words, the sheer difference of the Church's common life — our sacramentality — represents a refusal to bestow any moral legitimacy on our given social, political and economic structures. It will not resign itself to the soulless realpolitik that now structures and defines our societal sanity.

I doubt that there has ever been a more important time for the Church's practice to be marked by a kind of sacred uselessness or, in biblical terms, by charity. For charity, as the ethical substance of the Church, demands that the Church doesn't 'function' in the way that our state apparatuses do.

Above all, it would prevent it from succumbing to the temptation to gain a place among the other state-sanctioned service providers, and thereby be required to sell its soul in exchange for federal funding.

Like Jesus' silence, the Church's refusal to participate in the state's normalised madness would question the state's unquestioned confidence in its own rectitude, which allows its functionaries to pronounce any alternative as 'mad', abusive, extreme, impractical, or (worst of all) not conforming to 'best practice'.

Thus confronted by the sheer difference, the 'obstinate uselessness', of the Church's charity, the monstrous character of our state and civil institutions might finally become clear.

And all this in the hope that the God who vindicated Jesus' silence, who raised the crucified from death, would breathe fresh life into a world obsessed with its own nullification.

Pakistan is not doomed

POLITICS

Kimberley Layton

Analysts across the globe have become adept at predicting the implosion of Pakistan. They suggest that the culmination of the Taliban, economic woes, a weak central government, a corrupt military, an uncontrollable intelligence organisation, the possibility of another terrorist strike and the tensions with India will result in a failed state. March saw them yet again heralding the coming apocalypse.

But March has merely been an example of the cyclical nature of Pakistani chaos. It has not been an indication of its imminent failure. The logic of implosion is flawed.

The much feared creep towards Quetta by the Taliban is of international concern but it is not the primary reason for Pakistan's instability. There are certainly multifarious links between the Taliban, regional terrorist organisations and the insurgency in Afghanistan. But to fight on every front is strategically impossible and totally implausible.

In due course the Taliban problem will be confronted and hopefully resolved. But it will not happen before the internal political situation stabilises. Nor will it happen without US help.

Reform of the military and of Inter-Services Intelligence will be an incremental process that will occur only as civil society in Pakistan strengthens and the government re-aligns itself. Patience is a virtue in South Asia. Although the situation is not improving quickly, it does seem to be improving.

On 24 March Pakistani stocks closed at their highest level for the year, buoyed by MSCI Barra's assessment that political risk in the country had decreased. By the end of the month Pakistan will receive the next instalment of its US$3.1 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund,following successful quarterly review meetings.

The Obama administration has pledged to expand economic engagement with Pakistan, recognising that economic development may provide a bulwark against insurgency and violent extremism.

In a move that confounded international commentators, surprised Pakistani citizens, and left the Indian media dazed and confused, President Zardari pragmatically acquiesced to both external and internal pressure by reinstating the Musharraf-deposed Ifthikhar Chaudhry to the post of Pakistani Supreme Court Chief Justice.

In doing so, Zardari averted a planned protest march by irate lawyers and the violence that may have accompanied it, pacified the Pakistan Muslim League

enough to restart dialogue, and engaged in an allegedly constructive discussion with Army Chief General Ashfaq Kayani.

Many assume that another terror attack of the severity of those in Lahore or Mumbai would suck Pakistan into a nuclear war with India. Yet South Asia is spectacularly resilient. Terrorist attacks and outbursts of violence there do not typically engender regional disintegration.

Furthermore, despite claims to the contrary, relations between India and Pakistan are not worse than they have ever been. During 1965, 1971 and 1999 the two countries were actually at war with one another. Nor were relations during Partition cordial.

The Mumbai terror probe is progressing steadily. India got what it wanted when Kasab, the only perpetrator detained by Indian police, admitted he was Pakistani. Although the conclusion of the probe will inevitably satisfy neither Pakistan nor India, it is unlikely to annoy either sufficiently to provoke a serious confrontation.

Track two diplomacy (citizen diplomacy) has resumed, with delegates from both countries meeting in Islamabad under the auspices of the Nobel Prize winning Pugwash organisation. Representatives from India, Pakistan and Kashmir will also meet in early April in Bangkok with New Delhi's Public Policy Research Group to draft new initiatives that will build confidence.

Recent border incursions from Pakistan into Indian controlled Jammu and Kashmir have prompted only a limited response from the Indian government and media. Both are preoccupied with upcoming national elections and with the shifting for security reasoons of the Indian Premier League (IPL) to South Africa.

Pakistan may have a nuclear weapon in one hand but in the other it has a begging bowl. Across both Pakistan and the region disorder ebbs and flows. Political dynamics, the economic situation, foreign relations and the progress of the War on Terror may turn sour, but this does not mean that the state is about to fail. Don't believe the hype: it's not all over for Pakistan.

Seductive melancholy of a poet's last works

BOOKS

Carolyn Masel

Chris Wallace-Crabbe (ed.): *Vincent Buckley. Collected Poems*. Elwood, John Leonard Press , 2009.

John McLaren: *Journey Without Arrival: The Life and Writing of Vincent Buckley*. North Melbourne, Australian Scholarly Publishing , 2009. ISBN 9781921509292

When Vincent Buckley died in 1988, he was only one year into his early retirement — time he had hoped would provide him expanded opportunity to write. Leaving notes toward a third autobiographical volume, many poems in manuscript form or unfinished, it is clear he was prevented from accomplishing much of what he had planned.

Little of that is apparent in the volume or quality of poems in *Collected Poems*. Indeed, what first impresses about this pleasingly solid volume is the sheer richness of the oeuvre, now that we can consider it more or less in its entirety.

I say 'more or less' because the early volumes, *Masters in Israel* and *The World's Flesh*, are represented only by selections, and because there are unfinished and less successful poems, fragments and variants whose proper place is not here.

Some of the editorial difficulties surrounding the 1992 posthumous collection *Last Poems* were discussed by Penelope Buckley, who edited that volume. Chris Wallace-Crabbe, editor of the present collection, reaffirms that selection while pointing us toward two new groups of poems. Coming so many years after the poet's death, being presented with this new batch of poems is like receiving an unexpected gift.

Readers will find common threads as well as evidence of fresh ideas and even the development of new skills. There is an insistence on the incontrovertibility of individual perception, which is coupled with an extraordinary sensitivity to the world, especially its sounds and colours. There is a deep and pervasive and rhythmically seductive melancholy. There is the leaven of humorous folk poems and riddles.

Buckley's poetic career seems to trace a trajectory from the treatment of explicitly religious topics with religious language, to the exploration of experience in language that is not explicitly religious. But when individual and common experience — of love, or suffering, or conflict — is treated with the depth of seriousness that they can warrant, the result is pretty much the same.

Arguably, the later poems invite a wider range of readers, but it is doubtful

whether that is a virtue in itself. One of the last poems seems to articulate a new aesthetic that the poet hoped to be able to implement. Its first line, 'A poetry without attitudes', gave its name to one section of *Last Poems*. The poem pokes fun at seminars, critics and publishers, but it is a different thing for the poet:

while actually you are learning

to walk with it, to lie against it,

our earth-tremor, your vibrato

turning you slowly into song.

Many of the newly published final poems seem to bear out this aesthetic; relaxed and deeply rhythmical, they seem at once natural and precise.

These questions of persistence and development are touched upon by Peter Steele in his introductory essay, which invites the reader to consider a variety of preoccupations in, and approaches to, the poetry. Buckley ended his memoir *Cutting Green Hay* with Yeats' lovely line, 'And say my glory was I had such friends'. That his own friends' sense of relation has persisted is clearly evinced by their service to his poetry.

One can only surmise that, had he imagined a biographer, Buckley would have been grateful for one who would direct the reader's attention firmly to his own writings. John McLaren has done just that; he has subordinated himself in order to focus on the work before him, his task being to understand that work, whether it pertain to the intellectual apostolate at the University of Melbourne, or to autobiographical writing, or to poetry.

He had unprecedented access to a large body of material, and treats his sources with great thoughtfulness and discrimination. It is clear he knows Buckley's work thoroughly, because of the apparent ease with which he makes connections between different events and kinds of writing.

His observations are painstaking, serious and wide-ranging. Occasionally, his descriptions seem to reduce what might be better left complex ('The speaker in the sequence of poems wanders about the streets of Carlton, encountering the desperate as he seeks a God to redeem them') but even the more ordinary descriptions may serve as introductions to Buckley's work.

Sometimes, wanting to follow an aspect of the poet's life right through, one feels frustration when McLaren insists on shepherding us back to an earlier decade. But he has a sure feel for the largest structures, as instanced by his inclusion of Buckley's account of his vocation close to the beginning of the book, where it introduces the nexus of language, perception and the meaning of the world that would inform his whole life.

The popes versus the free market

RELIGION

Bruce Duncan

Pope Benedict's new social encyclical is finished and will be released in May. It will commemorate Paul VI's 1967 document on the development of peoples , and address the great global problems of hunger and gross poverty, climate change, human rights, nuclear weapons and disarmament, violence, fundamentalism and peace.

The encyclical has been delayed two years because of the need for Benedict to respond to the global financial crisis and the 'Great Recession'. He is likely to reiterate themes from Pope Pius XI's 1931 encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*, in response to the Great Depression. Many aspects of Pius' encyclical are relevant to the current crisis.

The Wall Street collapse of 1929 triggered the Great Depression which left a third of workers unemployed in many countries, and resulted in the rise of dictatorships in Europe, notably the Nazis in Germany.

The current economic crisis has different origins, beginning with the collapse of often fraudulent financial markets, with the collusion or blindness of business leaders and bankers, regulators, sections of the media and some politicians.

In addition, proponents of the neo-liberal economic ideology, with its inflated belief in free markets and minimal regulation, proclaimed that the rules of economics had changed. This belief helped undermine moral judgment in business circles and among investors, who were drawn into this giant bubble economy.

Various commentators warned against this corrosion of ethical standards, and forecast the inevitable collapse of this financial bubble (see Peter Hartcher's 2005 *Bubble Man: Alan Greenspan & the Missing 7 Trillion Dollars*), but regulators did not listen.

What will Benedict say about the current 'Great Recession' which is causing such growing distress?

First, he does not have to reinvent the wheel. Modern Catholic social writings have long insisted that economics must be directed to serve the good of everyone, not just the rich. Pius XI was particularly strong on this, though Benedict will also draw from later reflection, especially by Popes Paul VI and John-Paul II.

Second, Benedict will insist that the principles of equity, participation and social justice, as well as freedom and enterprise, are essential for a just economic system. He will attack the collapse of ethical standards, but is also likely to criticise the concentration of economic power in the hands of a relatively small number of people, institutions and companies.

Third, he will strongly critique the contemporary free-market ideology of neo-liberalism which encouraged a 'greed is good' mentality in sections of the business culture, resulting in the corrosion of due diligence in financial markets and by regulators.

As recent events have shown, the values of social justice and good governance need to be strongly reaffirmed throughout the international economy. The lessons from the Great Depression need to be learned all over again. The whole economic edifice relies on moral foundations — of honesty, transparency and social responsibility. The very word 'credit' derives from the Latin word meaning to believe or trust.

Pius XI attacked the vast inequalities of wealth and the greed of unchecked competition, for which Pius blamed 'liberalism'. The term did not mean, as it might today, a philosophy of individual economic responsibility based on fairness and social justice. Far from it. Pius understood economic liberalism to mean domination of the economy by rich and powerful elites who claimed the vast inequality of wealth was the consequence of inevitable economic laws.

Pius rejected this liberal ideology which considered the economic order as absolutely free and independent, and which claimed free markets would of themselves produce the best outcomes. Pius also opposed the minimalist role that liberalism assigned the State as the mere guardian of law and order.

Instead, Pius insisted the State must preserve public wellbeing and private prosperity, especially by protecting the poorer classes and wage-earners. He called for a more equitable distribution of wealth to meet the needs of all. He also advised that wage contracts be modified somewhat by a contract of partnership so employees could participate in the ownership or management, or in some way share in the profits.

Benedict will not of course oppose free market economies, but he will urge that they be better regulated and ensure an equitable distribution of wealth and opportunities. The problem, unsurprisingly, is in the details of how to regulate the economy, and especially special interest groups, to ensure fair and just social outcomes.

All democracies face the demanding task of finding the right balance, but Benedict will warn they will not succeed unless they are committed to the values of social justice and participation.

Affectionate portraits of 'the outsider'

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

Animator Adam Elliot has made a career out of affectionate, short filmic portraits of 'the outsider'. That culminated in his Oscar-winning 2003 short film *Harvie Krumpet*, the hero of which had Tourette's syndrome, and whose adopted daughter was a thalidomide baby.

Elliot's feature film debut, *Mary and Max*, is no exception. Both its title characters are misfits in their very different worlds. Mary is a socially awkward young adolescent, growing up in 1970s suburban Melbourne with her alcoholic mother and neglectful father. Max is a lonely New Yorker, a chronic overeater with undiagnosed Asperger's.

The film traces Mary and Max's unlikely pen-friendship over a course of decades. Isolated in their own social environments, they come to yearn for the human contact the letters provide. It's a paean to the power of friendship, although neither character quite realises the impact their letters have on the other.

'Mary gives Max panic attacks for the first half of the film,' says Elliot, talking to *Eureka Street* after the film's first screening for Melbourne media. 'The first draft of the script was very tame. But I realised there was not enough conflict, not enough drama. So they don't provoke each other deliberately, but they do unintentionally disturb each other.'

The film, like Elliot's earlier short films, uses a painstaking form of stop-motion animation, popularly known as 'claymation'. The medium has featured famously in more child-oriented fare such as the *Wallace and Grommit* films, and the TV series *Gumby*.

But while *Mary and Max* is animated, it's no kids film. It has its share of darker moments, including a suicide attempt and references to child abuse, as well as the more explicit portrayals of alcoholism, kleptomania and all manner of social disorders. Ultimately there are themes of betrayal and forgiveness, hope and redemption.

'Why can't you have dark themes in animation?' says Elliot. 'Is there a rule? Did Warner Bros make some Bugs Bunny rule 20 years ago that you're not allowed to have animated characters who die or try to kill themselves?

'There's a whole generation of animated feature films coming out now that deal with more adult themes', he adds. 'There's *Persepolis*, and *Waltzing with Bashir*, and even as far back as *The Triplets of Belleville*. It's great, because it means animation is evolving.'

Elliot is interested in portraying life in all its beauty and ugliness. He draws

liberally (and affectionately) from the lives of those around him. Max is based on Elliot's own Jewish-atheist-Asperger's-overeating New York penpal.

'That's why his character is so authentic and believable. The aim for me is to create characters that, even though they're blobs of plasticine, the audience will empathise with them, so that if they do die, or something happens to them, they are moved.'

Mary and Max is serious at heart, but it is also very funny. 'We tried to do like *The Simpsons* does, so you have to watch it again and again and again to get all the little references.' He adds that after the film's premiere at the Sundance Film Festival, one review lamented an over-abundance of scatological humour. A fart joke never hurt anyone, but in truth a lot of the sight gags are more subtle — keep your eye out for the Dame Edna stamp.

The details speak volumes. An opening montage sets the suburban scene of Mary's upbringing, including shots of a Sherrin footy on a tiled roof, and even a tyre swan. And so authentic is the feel of the film's New York location that then London-based Philip Seymour Hoffman (who puts in a wonderful performance as the voice of Max) reportedly felt homesick as he watched footage of the styrofoam and cardboard skyline.

While Elliot baulks at the easy judgment that he has an affinity for characters who are outsiders, on reflection he admits that it is in his nature to be drawn to such people. 'A lot of it has to do with my childhood: I'd befriend a lot of kids who were bullied or teased or ridiculed. My birthday parties tended to be this eclectic mix of kids who were outsiders, outcasts, marginalised, or seen as different.'

But his films, he says, are not just about empathy: 'they are about justice. It's actually trying to educate the audience and say: look, this person's quite normal. Spend some time in their shoes and you'll understand.'

I'm reminded of Todd Browning's 1932 horror film *Freaks*. That film, which stars real-life circus sideshow performers, purported to be compassionate and to subvert prejudice. But at the same time it feeds upon the revulsion it assumes its audience feels. Does Elliot feel he is in danger of that trap?

'In moments of self-doubt, I often think I'm exploiting these characters,' he admits. 'But I always think, no, it's okay because I'm educating people. And I really care about these characters. They're real to me.'

Dissecting rebel priest's heresy

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

One of the most potent accusations you can make against Christians is that they deny the divinity of Christ. This accusation was made, far too hastily, against Fr Peter Kennedy on the basis of a television interview (pictured). It may be helpful to ask in what terms the question of Christ's divinity came first to be raised and why it is has been seen as so important.

The early Christians knew that Jesus addressed God as Father. After the resurrection, they had to ask how Jesus was related to God. Although, as Fr Kennedy said rightly, Jesus could not have referred to himself as God, that did not settle how he was related to the God whom he knew as Father.

The question was pressed in the Fourth Century by the Alexandrian priest, Arius. In order to protect the unity and otherness of God, he said that the Father was alone and uniquely God. Christ was also a unique, but a lesser being. Later Arians would say that the Father was alone uncreated. As Son of God, Christ was created.

The debate about this question was tumultuous and often confused. Both those who followed Arius and those who claimed that the relationship between Christ and the Father was one of equality found Scriptural texts to support their positions.

But they also found that their opponents could also interpret these texts coherently within their own framework. One side argued for Jesus' equality with the Father, for example, on the basis that Jesus was described as the Son of God. Their opponents then cited texts in which angels or human beings were described as sons of God.

It slowly became clear that the issue was not about particular texts but about what the whole Gospel demanded. Did the story of what God had done in Jesus Christ demand seeing Jesus Christ as equal to the one he called Father? Or was it compatible with seeing Jesus as a lesser being, even as no more than a human being?

The conclusion was that the Christian faith represented in the New Testament demanded that Christ be seen as the Son of God who was equal in all respects to the Father.

This was not the easier position to hold. Its opponents immediately asked how it could be compatible with the central belief that God is one, and how a divine Christ could share fully the limitations and weaknesses of our human life. There was material here for another century or two of turmoil.

So why did they see it as so important to say that Christ's relationship with the

Father was one of equality? Finally, it had to do with intimacy. The Scriptures described God's relationship with us in Christ as intimate and personal. It could be crystalised in John's phrase, 'God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son'.

God's investment in us and our world was God's own self. It was family business. The image of the crucifixion as one of God sharing our pain.

The alternative, to see Christ as a lesser being meant that God's involvement with humanity was through a messenger or representative. Although this was a quite reasonable way to imagine God's relationship to the world, it did not correspond to the Gospel story of Jesus Christ. Jesus' life, death and resurrection were an event in God's life, not simply in a human life.

This conviction was also enshrined in Christian prayer and practice. Although it was problematic in the Jewish environment from which they came, the early Christians instinctively associated Christ in their prayer to God. Their forms of prayer suggested that the Father and Christ were inseparable.

This story has three continuing implications. First, that in Christian terms God needs to be seen in terms of relationship. To speak of Jesus as God is crude shorthand, useful for speaking with non-Christians, but often unhelpful within Christian conversation. We should more properly speak of Jesus as the Son of the Father, and of God as Trinity.

Second, the Fourth Century debate suggests that much is at stake in the discussion of Christ's relationship to God as Father. It has to do with the core identity of what Christians today believe with what the early Christians received. And it touches what that God has done for us and what we can expect of God.

Third, if the proper way of speaking of God in Christian conversation is as Trinity, the questions of gendered language and of the need for a variety of images of God are important in our day. It is perhaps significant that Ephraem, a strongly anti-Arian theologian, could speak easily of God as mother.

A farmer's life

NON-FICTION

Gabrielle Bridges

1950

Twins were born in an isolated country town. Let's call them John and Jane.

He died at 53. She may live past 83.

Their mother, a city-bred woman of 'nervous disposition', struggled with farm life and her driven, angry husband. After four children in six years, her usual robot-mask crumpled when told she was carrying twins.

1953

For six months they cried every night while their parents travelled Europe. All the children stayed with relatives who knew the alternative was a sanatorium.

1955

John required sedatives to sleep. Jane created fantasy worlds. They cried easily and wet their beds at night. Care-givers came and went. They treated them warily.

1957

He loved farm work, so struggled to gauge his father's moods, enduring beltings in silence — boys don't cry. Jane hid in books and her inner sagas.

1960

They were sent to segregated boarding schools, socially unskilled, unable to make friends.

1964

He attended an agricultural school, then studied for a farming diploma, bingeing every weekend. The father pitted the brothers against each other, all hungry for the land.

She won academic prizes but contemplated suicide.

1966

She asked to see a psychiatrist. She could explain little but the Valium helped. She fled to Western Australia.

1970

John returned to the farm, saying yes to everything. His older, strong-willed brothers had left.

Jane enrolled in nursing in the nearest city. Her classmates helped smooth her social awkwardness.

1973

John lived in the male world of farms and pubs, tongue-tied around the few single girls.

Upon marriage, Jane discovered her husband was an angry patriarch like her father. Unwittingly, she copied her mother with silence and sedatives.

1977

Jane had a son. She bought books about good parenting and vowed to stay alive. She told her brother about counsellors but 'I'm no psycho!' was his reply.

He mentioned a female friend. Jane hoped he'd found love but heard no more.

1979

Jane's second child slept poorly. After three exhausting years, she forgave her mother's inadequate care.

John poisoned himself with herbicides. His sister admonished him but masks and gloves were 'sissy stuff'.

1989

Their mother died. John drank more.

Jane was diagnosed with endogenous depression and anxiety disorder. After six weeks medication she decided upon divorce.

1993

John enjoyed two years on the farm while his father's ill-health kept him in the city.

Jane collapsed — work pressures, her ex-husband's abuse, the children's distress, her personal struggles.

1995

She returned to work but crumpled again — her future a disability pension. Medication clouded her mind but she enjoyed community work and a few close friends.

His father returned. John moved to the workman's cottage and refused to answer the phone.

1998

The farm was sold when their father died. John moved into the town and became the local drunk.

Jane loved and was loved. Her children were scarred but she was deeply grateful that they were more resilient than herself.

2000

Her annual mammogram showed early signs of cancer. Treated successfully.

2003

John was diagnosed with cancer including several secondaries — inoperable, terminal. After a life-time's bodily abuse, no-one was surprised.

2004

She nursed him as he weakened. He spent hours on the verandah encased in silence. She too was mute, hiding her grief behind the robot-mask and pills.

Afterwards, Jane revealed her silence to a local nun. The reply, 'You were Christ to him', eased her guilt a little. At least she'd been able to say, 'I love you', the night before he died.

My well planned salvation

POETRY

Ian C. Smith

Consorting

They shot one boy, tough with need
a bloody hole clear through his hopes.
From the train, factories and foundries
rusted angles, raw paths I know well.
Clouds sprawl across the sky
stimulating my stalled imagination
my past giving off an ashen light.
No more lying curled and still
waiting for the slamming of heavy doors.
I shall pay attention, feed my brain
so death will not gain on me
as I read my way into the future.
When I look up from turning pages
I want to see women with hair shining
in a town lazy like any other
wild with the taste of air and rain
or sunlight catching children's bicycles
scenes to keep life from getting out of hand.
Cool scents through an open window at night
exhausted blood returning to my heart
a new leaf turned by the breeze as I read
my escape, my salvation, well planned.

No relief

All along the cell-block
said the shyster to the thief.
The singing echoes like a threat

voice flatter than Bob Dylan's
loaded with false jocularity

disturbing his reverie in colour

of high A-list dealing days.

Fuckfuckfuck he whispers

his sweat sour in the grey slot

the months ahead impossible.

His strained reflection in stainless
he recalls erratic schooldays

the burgeoning differential

between brainpower and behaviour

his father's pet comment re. fees.

Like flushing cash down the toilet.

Add, he mutters to swirling water

more money than you dreamed of

plus The Brat of the Bar's career.

There must be some way out of here.

Protected witness

They grew silent in the rain after I found him

as if clues were an embarrassment.

Gulls cast shadows over the man

or what he had become, all memory gone

foetal-shaped near the cannery

lying next to a length of sodden rope

curled, soot or ash or blood-soaked

an S, a warning, a signature?

He must have run my route for fitness

downriver, towards the estuary

away from the mini-golf and motels

instead of running, like me, for survival.

Like me, he wore cheap running shoes
his beard neatly trimmed like mine
the same arm tattooed, a faded eagle
our eyes that shade of staring blue.
The plainclothes goons exchanged looks
the paramedics, too, but not with me.
I have to find a different route.
The postcards I can't send my children
are black with tiny words of loneliness.

Rehabilitating Stalin

POLITICS

Ben Coleridge

'Citizens, eat more potatoes and keep the skins on.' Since Russians too must tighten their belts in the current economic crisis, the best option, according to a Russian government agency, is to look to the dietary wisdom of their 'wise ancestors'. Almost two decades since *perestroika,* Russians are increasingly encouraged to become more comfortable with the past: whether it is a potato-laden diet or even Joseph Stalin.

This month, Orlando Figes' book *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia* , first published in 2007 and already translated into 22 languages, was denied publication in Russia.

The Whisperers draws on thousands of interviews conducted with survivors of the Stalinist regime by Figes and the Russian human rights organisation Memorial. Ordinary Russians recount the Stalin years, when, cowed by the Terror and the Gulag system, a whole society was transformed into whisperers.

The Russian language has two words for whisperer: one who whispers behind other people's backs and one who whispers out of fear of being heard. A Russian friend wrote that in the Stalin years Russians were a grey mass from which no one stood out.

The Whisperers, in its searing personal detail, makes Russians stand out and speak out, one by one, as victims of Stalin's terror. Reading the book becomes an act of memorial as the words of terrified people reverberate in the imagination: 'Farewell my loved ones, believe in justice ...'

The Whisperers is available in all the European languages of the ex-Soviet bloc, except for Russian.

The fate of the Russian language version of *The Whisperers* is, says Figes , evidence of a broader struggle for control of history publications and teaching in Russia. The Kremlin, he says, is working to rehabilitate Stalin, not to deny his crimes, but to emphasise his achievements as the builder of the country's glorious Soviet past.

Prime Minister Putin has a long standing conviction about Stalin's greatness. Putin believes that to dwell too much on Stalin's mistakes would be to burden Russians with paralysing guilt.

In a 2002 interview with the Polish newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza,* the interviewer delivered a broadside: 'What is Stalin's place in the history of Russia?'

He was met by the steely reply from the then president: 'That is a somewhat provocative question'.

The interviewer persisted: 'Was Stalin more like Ivan the Terrible or Peter the Great?'

'More like Tamerlane,' replied Putin.

What are the implications of Putin's curious comparison between Stalin and the great 14th century Turko-Mongol warLord Tamerlane? They are worth exploring.

Timur, or Tamerlane (pictured), was the founder of the Timurid Empire in Central Asia. He rose to place himself upon the throne of Samarkand. He supported the Golden Horde in its invasion of Russia and its sack of Moscow. As he expanded his empire, he sacked Baghdad, Damascus, and Aleppo, crossed the Indus and all but wiped out the Delhi Sultanate.

His brutality is recorded in his own memoirs where he wrote that, 'on the great day of battle these 100,000 prisoners could not be left with the baggage ... no other course remained but that of making them all food for the sword'.

In what light did Putin cast Stalin by comparing him to Tamerlane? Stalin means 'steel' and Timur means 'iron.' Both these men of metal were undoubtedly ruthless. Upon the sack of Baghdad, Tamerlane called on all his warriors to bring him two heads each in order to prove their loyalty. So afraid were they that many of the warriors killed prisoners for their heads.

In *The Whisperers,* Orlando Figes refers to the quotas issued by Stalin to the NKVD, which required the secret police to arrest and neutralise specific numbers of enemies of the people in each province, guilty or not. NKVD officers, afraid that they could easily become victims themselves, arrested almost anyone to fill the quotas. Like Tamerlane, Stalin made countless communities 'food for the sword'.

It is doubtful, however, whether these were the linkages Putin had in mind.

In the west, Tamerlane has prompted poetry, plays and music. So Edgar Allen Poe wrote in his poem 'Tamerlane' of: '... Timour — he/Whom the astonished people saw/Striding o'er empires haughtily/A diadem'd outlaw!'

Stalin cast as a Tamerlane, the 'diadem'd outlaw', in Putin's production of Russian history astonishes. It transforms Stalin from the ruthless Georgian of living memory into a far off, titanic figure upon whom it is difficult, and almost irrelevant, to pass judgement.

It silences the voices of the Russian people, the whisperers, those who are alive today, still testifying.

Understanding Stalin as a modern Tamerlane frees Russians from confronting history, a history where, as Nadezhda Mandelstam wrote, the two Russias faced each other, 'the one that was sent to the Gulag and returned, and the one that sent them'.

To compare Stalin to Tamerlane points to a philosophy that measures greatness

by strength and strength by force. In Russia force is being used to shape memory. Not only has *The Whisperers* been denied publication, but the archive of testimonies upon which it relied has been confiscated. In December 2008, masked men from the Investigative Committee of the Russian Prosecutor General's Office forced their way into Memorial's St Petersburg offices. They confiscated databases with biographical information of victims of Stalin's repressions, details about burial sites in the St Petersburg area, family archives and transcripts of interviews.

Evidently, Figes' interviewees must again whisper their testimonies so that Russians can be proud of their country. Christopher Marlowe had his Tamerlane proclaim to the assembled warriors, 'I hold the Fates bound fast in iron chains, And with my hand turn Fortune's wheel about.' Following Tamerlane and Stalin, some in Russia would like to hold memory bound in iron chains and thus, with their hand, turn the future's wheel about.

Conway's maverick way

EULOGY

Paul Collins

An Australian book with sales figures of more than 70,000 copies is considered a best seller, especially when it is by an unknown author. This success is compounded when the book is a psycho-historical analysis of the Australian character with the dull sub-title: *An interpretation of the Australian way of life.*

But it was the title that grabbed readers: *The Great Australian Stupor*. First published in 1971, the book gained instant fame and was often given to distinguished overseas visitors to Canberra as a kind of guide to the Australian 'soul'.

The author, Ronald Conway, has died in Melbourne. He was 81.

Born on 4 May 1927, Ronald Victor Conway was an only child who grew up in a religiously divided family. His mother was Catholic, his father a Protestant agnostic who converted to Catholicism on his death-bed. His grandfather had been a well known cricketer, footballer, journalist and manager of the first Australian cricket team to tour England in 1878. He was a wealthy and somewhat brutal man.

Conway's parents were not well-off. Not baptised until he was nine, he was educated in state and Catholic schools. He left school at 15, worked in a bookshop, joined the RAAF in late 1944 and, after demobilisation matriculated and went to Melbourne University.

Here he was caught up in the Catholic activism characteristic of those years. This centered on the 'Movement' and Bob Santamaria, the Campion Society (which Conway joined), the Newman Society, the Jesuits at Newman College and the Catholic Worker Movement. Even then Conway leaned more to the right than to the left, but he always maintained a somewhat maverick stance in Catholic ideological struggles.

In his autobiography *Conway's Way* (1988) he gives a taste in his florid style of those years. He says that at university 'a varied range of social movements flourished ... under the benign laicist policies of Archbishop Mannix. The elite members of the Melbourne social movements were having "dialogue" with their archbishop, clergy and wider society in the days when Sydney had little else on its pontifical mind but raffles and rosaries.'

He studied for a combined psychology-history degree. His psychology supervisor was Professor Oscar Oeser, a rather sour South African. Conway also enjoyed acting in comedies of manners of the Sheridan variety, and he joined the Saint Patrick's Cathedral Choir.

After graduation Conway became a teacher, and from 1955 to 1961 he taught history and English at De La Salle College, Malvern. In 1961 he began to practice

as a psychologist at St Vincent's Hospital: 'a great stretch of more than 25 years in dealing with intimate human difficulties lay ahead of me, like a horizonless Nullabor Plain', he writes.

At Saint Vincent's he met his patron and friend Dr Eric Seal who launched Conway into private practice as a psychologist.

It was on the basis of his clinical experience that a decade later he published *The Great Australian Stupor*. A provoking book, *Stupor*'s portrait of the Australian male as inadequate and often with covert homosexual tendencies, is devastating. 'In the modern absence of a horse, his car has to become a man's best friend.'

The book is daring, even over the top. In my view it doesn't succeed because it is too jaundiced. Historical reality and psychological theory, too, are awkward bedfellows. But as Conway says it was favorably reviewed, except by two left-wing Catholics.

Conway followed *Stupor* with *The Land of the Long Weekend* (1978), *The End of Stupor* (1984), *Being Male* (1985), *Conway's Way* (1988) and *The Rage for Utopia* (1992), described by David Tacey as 'a fabulously rich and entertaining book which covers enormous spans of history in search of the origins of our contemporary obsessive-compulsive behavior'.

Conway loved the theatre and the media. He was a film reviewer, broadcaster, playwright and journalist. Always independent, some would say 'contrary', he could be snobbish, pretentious and fastidious, and very 'Melbourne'.

But he was also one of that rare breed in Australia, someone who stood against the prevailing climate of thought which ignores the really important questions of faith, spirituality and human experience, and focuses on the boringly conventional and politically correct.

Although he was disillusioned with much that happened after Vatican II, and was very interested in other faiths — he called himself a 'Sufi mystic' — Conway remained deeply rooted within Catholicism. He died on 16 March and was buried from Saint Patrick's Cathedral.

The politicisation of defence

ES CLASSIC

Michael McKernan

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In March 2001, the managing director of a Melbourne-based management firm, the Value Creation Group, announced that his company had been hired by the Department of Defence to help 'realign' the leadership of Defence with the aims of the defence minister of the time. The report in the *Canberra Times continued*:

Dr Hawke [secretary of Defence] and former defence minister John Moore decided some time ago that top officers and their civilian counterparts needed more political savvy. Some officers thought they served the Queen. Others thought they served the Governor-General. Others thought they owed loyalty to the national interest.

In fact, as both men passionately believed, defence officers served the minister.

There are many sceptics, of course, in the public service and elsewhere, when it comes to the value of management consultants. While we do not know yet the cost of the Value Creation Group consultancy, the most recent annual report from Defence tells us that, for example, Keystone Corporate Positioning was paid $105,000 to 'advise on the formation, design and development of a balanced scorecard-based business planning and quality management system' and that the Phillips Group was paid $113,336 to 'develop a plan to help improve Navy's reputation internally and externally'. That might now seem to be money wasted.

Many in Defence may not yet know what a 'scorecard·based business plan' is but presumably few are unaware that the 'realignment' of senior officers with the minister worked brilliantly in the months leading to the last federal election.

Yet spare a thought for those who are confused about their role in the military forces; there is as yet no developed symbolism to show this essential link between Defence and its minister. Unfortunately, as the leadership may believe, the older symbols prevail. The Governor-General is still designated as the Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Defence Force; he still signs officers' commissions and, as rank increases, so does the prominence of the Crown on the officer's uniform.

As for the national interest, doesn't the army still have as its motto 'Serving the Nation', the motto that used to adorn even its vehicle registration plates?

It might come as a shock to many in the military, and in the wider community, that the noble profession of arms has been realigned to be simply doing the bidding of the government of the day.

With typical Australian irreverence we have taken some glee in the conflict

between politicians and the military across time. Indeed in our history there has been a certain tension, not to say a distrust, between the military and politicians in Australia.

Was General, later Field Marshal, Sir Thomas Blamey showing ultimate realignment with minister, Frank Forde, by appointing Major-General 'Gaffer' Lloyd as Adjutant-General in the last years of the Second World War? It was General Berryman who commented that 'Gaffer' appealed to Blamey because 'Lloyd could lie to Frankie Forde'. A nation at war may not want the minister in the dark; but soldiers then liked at least to sidestep fussy ministers.

In Eric Andrews' government-sponsored history of the Department of Defence in the Australian Centenary History of Defence Series there are so many examples of tensions between ministers and the defence hierarchy as to defy easy counting. And there is no index entry for 'ministers', 'realignment' or otherwise.

To pluck a couple of examples to stand for all the others: for a fortnight Malcolm Fraser, minister for defence, and his secretary, Sir Arthur Tange, were not on speaking terms because Tange believed that Fraser had trespassed into his areas of responsibility; Fraser had a legendary falling out with the Army Chief, Lieutenant General Sir Thomas Daly, in 1971.

Men such as Daly and Tange knew how to fight for their corner. They also knew why they should do so.

Some have spoken of the 'politicisation' of Defence, exemplified by Admiral Chris Barrie's pathetic press conference when he finally admitted that he knew what everyone in Defence had known for months about the 'children overboard'.

Barrie had to restore his standing with the Defence leadership group, especially after the prime minister, so adept at wedge politics, had opened a gap between the Chief of Defence Force, Barrie, and the Chief of Air Force, Air Marshal Angus Houston.

'Last night,' Howard gloated in parliament the day before Barrie recanted, '[the oppositionj thought they had an Exocet from the air marshal. I think you have had a decent torpedo from the admiral.'

This is the politicisation of the Defence Force: my admiral against your air marshal. A strong minister and supine Defence leadership had meant that what might have been spoken of, in the national interest during an election campaign, went unspoken. 'Political savvy' meant not inconveniencing the minister with facts. And it was done in the name of managerialism. Of making Defence responsive.

Perhaps the Defence Force is only halfway down the path of reform. As the annual report explains, in 2000–2001 defence capability would be strengthened in three ways: building alignment with government; building accountability for performance; building trust within and toward the senior leadership of Defence through the creation of a shared value base.

Few would now doubt that the realignment, the political savvy, has worked in the way the minister wanted. But there does seem to be room for more work on building trust towards the senior leadership. How the Value Creation Group will work that one out is anyone's guess.