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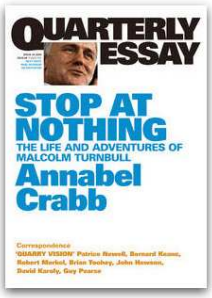
The adventures of Malcolm Turnbull

BOOKS

Jonathan Shaw

Annabel Crabb: *Quarterly Essay 34*, 'Stop at Nothing: The life and adventures of Malcolm Turnbull'. Black Inc., Melbourne, 2009. ISBN 9781863954310. Extract



The great wave of Utegate has passed over us, leaving Malcolm Turnbull on the sands, chastened but apparently unrepentant, and far from exhausted. As the title of the current Quarterly Essay warns, reports of his political death are manifestly exaggerated. When he smiles before responding to an importunate journalist, his teeth make one think of weapons rather than a rictus of defeat.

Annabel Crabb's *modus operandi* in her newspaper columns is to skewer the pretensions and foibles of our politicians with a deft phrase — she gave us the Ruddbot, for example. So one might have expected this essay to be a bit of a romp, an extended piece of light relief strung between Guy Pearse's distinctly unfunny essay No 33 on the continuing power of the coal lobby and Noel Pearson's forthcoming No 35, on education, unlikely to be a barrel of laughs.

'Stop at Nothing' does not disappoint on the amusement front. Unlike other recent and current parliamentary leaders, Turnbull on the one hand has considerable charm, erudition and ebullience, and loves a good anecdote, and on the other takes risks and makes enemies, generating a whole different stream of anecdote.

Kerry Packer's death threat, Turnbull's sheer gall in taking on — and winning — the Spycatcher case, deliciously alarming glimpses of how the players talk to each other at the big end of town ('Turnbull: If you want to be an assassin, you have to get blood on your hands. Conrad Black: You don't just want me to get blood on my hands, you want my bloody fingerprints on the dagger') — all these make excellent copy.

But it's not all fun and games. Crabb's essay is in effect a brilliant piece of backgrounding on the events of the last two weeks. She interviewed Turnbull at length, as well as an impressive cast of those who know him, including John Howard (whose comments are remarkably benign), Bob Ellis (characteristically indiscreet), Tom Keneally (who has a 'warm if slightly scarred relationship' with Turnbull), and a number of ambivalent members of the Liberal Party — ambivalent not about the party but about their parliamentary leader.

She gives us snippets from an unpublished musical about Jack Lang that Turnbull worked on with Ellis, and some prize-winning student poetry, both of

which their author might have preferred to stay forgotten. She raises and discredits a nasty rumour about Turnbull and a cat, a rumour that was nevertheless back in circulation last week.

She gives us juicy bits of the story of Turnbull's work for Kerry Packer when he was under investigation by the Costigan Royal Commission in 1984, and of their spectacular parting of the ways, complete with mutual death threats, seven years later. Probably most seriously, she explains aspects of the parliamentary Liberal Party, its allegiances and rivalries, for those of us who aren't politics-tragics.

If Peter Costello is the greatest prime minister Australia never had, Turnbull is — still, perhaps, despite the polls — the greatest prime minister Australia hasn't had yet. These 94 pages aren't so much concerned with his politics or with the kind of prime minister he would be, as with the feel of the man; not so much what makes him tick as what a fabulous film could be made with him the lead character. We don't know how that film turns out yet.

A footnote: the most striking feature of the current issue of *Quarterly Essay*is an absence. Each issue includes correspondence on the previous issue. Guy Pearse's 'Quarry Vision', published in March, argued that the coal lobby's influence is virtually as entrenched under Rudd as it was under his frankly denialist predecessor.

One might have expected the right of reply to be taken up by the prime minister, the minister for climate change, or someone on their behalf. Nothing published here challenges Pearse's grim, and terrifying, portrait of a government that is failing to grasp the nettle. Instead there is silence made all the more eloquent by Rudd's lengthy self-promoting articles in Black Inc's other publication, *The Monthly*.

In Pearse's short piece at the end of the correspondence, he notes, 'The notion that Australia is blinded by a 'quarry vision' that renders its political leaders incapable of deeply cutting greenhouse pollution at home is apparently uncontroversial.'

Uncontroversial, and not about to change any time soon. After all, how many battalions has Morry Schwartz?

Swine flu and the Eucharist

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

The swine flu saga has been of interest mainly because the responses to it have shown what Australians consider to be important. That is also true of the response within Australian churches. Some Catholic churches have discouraged parishioners from receiving communion from the cup, and from shaking hands at the ceremonial greeting during the Eucharist. The response to such measures has been mixed. Some accept the restrictions easily, others resentfully.

These responses may correlate with different, though complementary, approaches to the Eucharist. And since in the Catholic Church the Eucharist is the central symbol of the joining of God to humanity in Jesus Christ — the core of Christian faith — the divergent responses may also indicate two different emphases in understanding this core belief.

In the first account, the teaching that the coming of the Son of God into our world shows that the world and all we encounter in it are precious. God's becoming human means nothing if our world is bereft of God's presence. All reflects God's glory.

The second account emphasises the unique transformation of whatever God touches directly. It sees Christ's humanity as uniquely graced. It sees human beings who turn to Christ as endowed with a unique relationship to God, and sets the miracles worked by Christ and by Christian saints on a quite different level from the daily miracles of life.

Those who come to the Eucharist with this second view, focus sharply on the mystery of Christ's presence through the elements of bread and wine. They also emphasise the solemnity of the action by which Christ becomes present. This emphasis on mystery is expressed most clearly in Eastern liturgies where the central part of the Eucharist takes place behind closed doors.

In the celebration of the Eucharist, the emphasis on mystery and transcendence is conveyed by the use of distinctive vestments and incense, by fine music, and by formality of gesture and word. The celebration calls for a deep reverence displayed in formality, silence and inwardness.

This approach also stresses the boundaries between the sacred and the profane. It stresses, for example, the different reality of the bread and wine before and after they are consecrated, and may restrict to the clergy the right to touch the cup and plate used in the sacrament.

Those who see the Eucharist in this way are unlikely to object to restrictions

placed on the reception of the cup and on shaking hands during the Eucharist. For them, respect for the mystery of God's presence in Christ in the Eucharist can be shown by not receiving as well as by receiving. And shaking hands is incidental within the celebration of the Eucharist.

Those who see in God's becoming human as an affirmation of God's presence within our daily world will also set the Eucharist within a broad context. They will attend to the connections between people in the congregation, the local and universal issues of the day, prayers for particular intentions and small gestures. Because they see the presence of God in the tangible world in Christ as central, they will also make touch and connection central in the celebration of the Eucharist.

They will also express reverence in a more complex way that respects the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, but also respects Christ's presence in the members of the congregation and the world in which they belong. They will see reverence expressed appropriately in greetings and attention to other people, in laughter at what is humorous, in intense silence at moments of deep prayer. Reverence is about attention and not about withdrawal.

From this perspective, the restriction on the chalice and on shaking hands are significant measures. They restrict the tangibility that is integral to the Eucharist and they limit connection. So those who see the Eucharist in this way will accept such limitation only grudgingly, and will ask for strong evidence that the discouraged practices present a serious threat to public health.

Of course these two approaches to the doctrine of God's presence in the world are not mutually exclusive. Most Christians will incorporate each into their faith in different contexts. Neither should be exclusively canonised in the liturgy.

Masterchef cooks up fine reality trash

TELEVISION

Tim Kroenert

My wife is a food aficionada. Foxtel's all-cooking Lifestyle Food channel is, therefore, on often in my house. The programs don't generally appeal to me, although I reap the benefits at dinner time.

There is one program which we discovered, and became hooked on, together. *Masterchef* is the pinnacle of reality TV. I'm talking the original, UK version here. It is compelling. A taut, high-stakes cooking competition.

Competition is the key word. These are real people — amateur cooks who dream of leaving behind their ordinary careers to become professional chefs. The dream leads them through an increasingly pressurised series of challenges that put their skills to the test.

It's heat-based — small groups cook off against each other for the right to progress to the next round. The focus is on the 'sport' of cooking, so personalities rarely come into it. Nor do the acute voyeurism, the tearies and tanties, sniping and backstabbing that are the hallmarks of *Big Brother* and its ilk.

This is reality TV, without all that irksome reality TV crap.

Needless to say we were intrigued when we learned there was going to be an Australian version of the cult UK series. But with *Masterchef Australia* now bubbling towards its final weeks, our feelings have been mixed. It bears the brand, but *Masterchef Australia* stands little comparison to its UK predecessor.

This is the theme park version of *Masterchef*. It is *Masterchef* as imagined by the network behind Australia's *Big Brother* and *The Biggest Loser*. Its formula owes a lot to those shows.

Soap opera plays a big part. The contestants live together in a camera-studded dwelling, so that the personality clashes become part of the story. The tanties and tearies are there (although less so since Kate was eliminated). And the talking-head confessionals from contestants about their fellows are not always charitable.

Okay, so Channel Ten needs to think about its ratings. It's only to be expected that it will execute a formula that has proven to be a winner in the past. The problem is, in terms of being a test of excellence, *Masterchef Australia* is more *Deal or No Deal* than *Eggheads*.

The sudden-death challenges make for dramatic viewing, but mean that overall ability becomes subservient to luck and 'on-the-day' performance. This format has seen — among other, lesser tragedies — the exceedingly talented Justine sent home, while the middling Sam remains in the competition.

This is excellence sacrificed to entertainment. It wouldn't have happened in the UK. There, the judges take into account contestants' performance throughout the competition. Eliminations are not based solely on recent troughs and triumphs. Those who have shown consistent excellence, stay. Those who have erred too often, or have failed to improve despite the judges' feedback, get the boot.

Still, *Masterchef Australia* is not all bad. Its judges, chefs George and Gary and food critic Matt, have gradually found the balance between offering judicious criticism, and mentorial wisdom. George and Gary have almost mastered the 'strict but cuddly' aura and easy, matey chemistry of their UK equivalents, John and Gregg.

Sniping about 'reality trash' aside, there is something to be said for the series' emphasis on personalities. Of course, the character arcs are manufactured. It's debatable how much the edited, on-screen character reflects the flesh-and-blood human being.

With that caveat, it must be said that the show has exceeded at surprising, and thus engaging, the viewer with its portrayal of different contestants. Justine emerged from among louder, bolder personalities to become arguably the most self-assured and gifted chef in the competition.

Dark horse Andre has also come out of his shell. Following a streak of top-notch dishes he began to display a more relaxed air. This week, when stirred by the judges about his previous reticence, Andre retorted: 'I'm not here for all the hoorah TV bullshit'. With Justine out of competition, at that moment Andre became my favourite contestant.

Then there's Chris. The tattooed, slightly dirty-looking 41-year-old seems to exude arrogance. But he can cook. That pig's head he dished up on Monday night had my saliva glands burbling. When George told Chris 'That's you on a plate', I'm sure he was referring to the skill and passion that went into this sublime piece of cooking, and not to imply that Chris was a pig.

Perhaps Chris' arrogance is actually justified self-confidence. 'Chefs need to be arrogant,' my wife says, referring to the personality traits required to excel in the high-pressured, strictly hierarchal environment of a pro kitchen. If that's true, Chris is a shoe-in to become Australia's first Masterchef.

Unless he has an off-day during one of the sudden-death challenges.

Post script: Last night, Justine and two other eliminated contestants were readmitted to the competition as wild card selections by the judges. A tacit admission by the producers of the faults of their own system? Perhaps. Still, a good result for all the Justine fans out there — my wife and me included.

Irish and Indigenous gathering places

COMMUNITY

Shane Howard with Regina Lane

At the top of a hill in south-west Victoria sits the church and hall of St Brigid's in Crossley, surrounded by rolling green hills of fertile volcanic soil. To the south, the hills drop away to the Southern Sea. These fields have sustained the largest rural Irish immigrant population in Australia for more than 150 years.

The Irish migrants came from a country traumatised by the great Famine of the late 1840s. It is estimated that well in excess of one million Irish people died of starvation. It was Ireland's holocaust.

My own great grandmother, Mary Cleary, was the soul survivor of her family and she was sent to Australia to her only known living relative. She sailed out of Cobh harbour in Cork, as a young girl, knowing there was no family to go back to.

Her story is not unique in this area. Many of the migrants who came to the Port Fairy, Killarney, Crossley and Koroit areas were from some of the areas worst affected by the famine. They came to Australia in desperation as a beaten people, with little but the will to survive.

Before migrants came to these shores, it was Gunditjmara country. The Aboriginal tribal clan lands of the KoroitGunditj, MoonwerGunditj and TarererGunditj. By the time the Irish began arriving in the early 1850s, the Aboriginal population had been decimated by disease, alcohol abuse and killings. Their tribal lands had been usurped and they were reduced to fringe dwellers in their own country.

Last Saturday night, in that country hall in Crossley, Archie Roach, a Gunditjmara man, a child of the stolen generation and multi award winning vocalist, sang in solidarity with the Irish Catholic descendants of those famine migrants.

Five generations after our forefathers built and paid for St Brigid's church at the turn of the 19th century, the people of Crossley and Killarney are fighting to save the gathering place from private ownership. Against the wishes of the local community, the buildings are for sale by tender by the Catholic Church.

At the sell-out fundraising concert to buy back the buildings (pictured), Archie told the audience of young and old, black and white, old residents and newcomers: 'My people know what it is like to have something you love taken away from you. This place belongs to these people. You can't just take it away. They belong here. It's their place.'

This from a man who knows a thing or two about community and the pain of having it taken away. We should not repeat the same mistakes by devaluing our

own settler heritage, and the sacred space and communities our Irish forebears built for us.

The principle is simple and universal: people need a place to belong; it is innately human to share song and hand down stories, and find strength, support and salvation in each other. All these things are the glue which binds our communities together.

In 2006, at the annual renowned 'St Brigid's Session' fundraiser, famed Irish musician Mary Black sang a capella, as children practiced their Irish dancing, and locals passed the sandwiches.

A few weeks ago, at the 'Saving St Brigid's' concert, a soft Irish brogue could be heard as familiar faces greeted each other. Children ran free as locals passed their home cooked fare around the outside fire, clapping along to the music.

Mayor of Moyne Shire said 'The Catholic Church might own these buildings but we all know historically and morally they belong to the community'. The church was built for 6000 pounds, paid by our ancestors, of which the Catholic Church donated 750 pounds.

Our ancestors were not wealthy. They made great sacrifices to raise these funds to build a community gathering place. Ironically, today we find ourselves in that very same position — about to indebt ourselves to buy back our buildings so they continue to be a vibrant focus of our community life.

The Friends of St Brigid's was formed in 2006, to uphold the area's unique Irish heritage, by turning the former church into an Australian-Irish Cultural and Heritage Centre, a plan backed by the Irish, Federal, State and local governments. The centre will house the history and culture of the Irish immigrants who came to South West Victoria, a centre of national and international significance.

Ninety five years ago this week, our own forefathers Dan Lane and Dan Madden stood to thank Archbishop Mannix for opening St Brigid's church. They told the congregation: 'We have decided to build a Church. Let us build a good one; one that we can proudly hand down to our children as a legacy.'

We are proud children of that legacy. Let's not lose these stories and memories. They are dramatic stories of endurance and survival, acted out in the fields of south-west Victoria. Let us cherish this great chapter in Australian history and write the next chapters of a society no longer divided by religious or racial differences or intolerance.

Let's ensure our own song and story shared at St Brigid's are kept alive. We owe that to our children's children.

Migration reform good news at last

POLITICS

Kerry Murphy


Move brings humanity

PETRO GEORGIOU

Abolishing detention debt will give refugees a more secure future.

'Migration reform' is commonly the wording used for any changes in the Immigration portfolio, but it is not often that it has positive connotations when dealing with refugees and asylum seekers. However in the last 18 months, four changes made by Minister Evans do have positive benefits.

The abolition of the 'Temporary Protection Visa' (TPV) and the 'Pacific Solution' last year was welcome not only by advocates but by the refugees living in the limbo that the TPV created. Most should now have their permanent visa, but many waited years for this.

Permanent residence means they can at last sponsor their immediate family such as a spouse and dependent children. It also means they can visit family in a third country and know they will be able to return to Australia.

Both of these scenarios were prevevented under the TPV, which was incredibly punitive. The trauma of initial family separation is bad enough without the added trauma of knowing it will continue for years. This policy influenced many spouses and children to travel to Australia by boat rather than wait years in unsafe conditions.

All successful refugees are now granted permanent residence. This helps them to establish their lives in their new country, without constantly worrying about what is happening to their family overseas.

The second major reform was in detention practice. Now the focus is on making detention as brief as possible, with access to community housing. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship tries to reduce the numbers of people going into detention and see if there are ways these people can stay in the community on a bridging visa. This is a marked change in approach from the former government, whose focus was the reverse.

A related reform is the abolition of detention debts. These were introduced in 1992 by a previous Labor government. The debt was a daily rate (usually more than $120) charged to a detainee which they had to repay on being granted a visa unless it was waived.

In reality, very little money was ever collected — about three per cent, according to DIAC — as those granted protection had the fee waived, and others who were returned to their home country were unlikely to ever pay the amount unless they wanted to come back to Australia.

The debt was only enforced against a small number of former detainees. The economics of outstanding debtors meant it would cost more to administer this

flawed scheme than would ever be recovered. Now the abolition Bill is in Parliament and will probably pass the Senate with the support of the Greens and Independents.

A fourth reform was the introduction of a new Ministerial Direction (number 41) to set out the factors to be considered in character cases. The lessons of Dr Haneef's case have been implemented as well as the criticisms in the Ombudsman's report about cancellation of visas for long term residents of Australia.

Now, the fact that someone came to Australia as a minor and has spent their formative years or a major part of their life here, will be a major factor to consider before their visa is cancelled.

The old practice meant that people with criminal convictions who had lived most of their life in Australia could be removed to a country where they had never really lived, or had not been for many tears. This harsh practice is less likely under the new Direction.

The Government has promised reform of permission to work on bridging visas, and to look at implementing 'complementary protection', which is about finding a domestic way to protect people at risk of a serious human rights problem, such as statelessness or torture, that cannot be linked to the refugee criteria.

These reforms are welcome and long overdue. While the systems were set up or supported by Labor, they are now prepared to change their old policies.

It is disappointing that only a few Coalition MPs have stood up for reform. The Opposition claims we should punish asylum seekers, because their actions help people smugglers. This ethically flawed principle has finally gone.

The treatment of asylum seekers and others in the Immigration portfolio will always demand a balance between the sometimes competing interests of sovereignty and human rights. These new policies emphasise the importance of human dignity and human rights in a policy area that was previously focused on punishment.

Not a freakin' travel article

NON-FICTION

Susan Merrell

Having been in Academia for more than a decade, I've learnt to guard against stereotyping. So on arrival in New York, I had not given a thought to the loud, brash New Yorker of legend. I wasn't expecting to encounter clones of Eddie Murphy, Sylvester Stallone or Jerry Seinfield.

Yet, they were all there, en masse. New York is full of ... well ... New Yorkers. And boy, are they loud!

On our first night in New York, we were content to leave the 'city that never sleeps' to its own devices and climb under the covers for an early night. We didn't expect to be disturbed. Wrong. Around midnight, we were woken by a voice. There was no one there. Was it the radio? The television? No. It was coming from the next room.

Believing the walls to be unusually thin we sat patiently while the voice gave a critique of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*. It then went on to explain the parallels between *West Side Story* and *Romeo and Juliet*, hardly drawing a breath. The monologue was punctuated by a second person's intermittent 'uh-huh'.

The oration was long, the breath control and voice projection awesome. The speaker was thorough. Luckily, they were not in possession of any insights on other Broadway shows — at least none that were shared that night.

But the walls were not thin. The critic had a voice that could penetrate 20 m of wet cement. It wasn't a unique skill in New York.

What's more, New Yorkers don't seem to have dialogues. You know, conversations where speakers take turns. It's most noticeable when they are on the phone (and they're always on the phone). There are just no gaps.

Taxi drivers are serial offenders. I'd often make the mistake of thinking the driver was talking to me and attempt an answer. My joining in never bothered them. They just kept talking on that phone as if I wasn't there. And I thought only my children had that talent.

Walking along Broadway in the Financial District we were privy to a mobile phone conversation that went on for more than ten blocks. The speaker was loud. And was he indiscreet? HELL, YEAH. If only I had known the identity of the listener (I knew most everything else) blackmail would have been almost obligatory. (But only if one had criminal tendencies — and everyone knows writers don't have those.)

Yet I am not suggesting New Yorkers are impolite. Insensitive to those around

them, yes. Impolite, no. In fact most service providers had obviously been schooled in polite key phrases and told to use them often. 'You're welcome,' was the polite retort to everything that was said, whether it was the appropriate response or not.

Inappropriate responses are known as non-sequiturs. They're my husband's preferred mode of communication. In his case he is listening but is as deaf as a post. Not something to which he'll freely admit. To cover up his deafness, he guesses.

'Which stop are you getting off at?'

'No.'

What's worse, since being in New York getting him to admit he's hearing deficient is impossible. He's heard every word that has been uttered while in New York, even through walls, hasn't he?

Interestingly, people speaking at high decibels did carry some rewards — in restaurants, for instance. While Hubby and myself quickly gave up on our own mealtime conversations (competition being too fierce), eavesdropping became mandatory and a bit of an art.

If you chose your dining neighbours wisely there was all sorts of interesting stuff you could pick up.

One man was planning to move to Korea to take up a teaching post. He got the job during a 'speed interview'. Akin to speed dating, he had gone to a jobs fair where one moved from employer to employer and had five minutes to convince the interviewer to hire you. Imagine that.

Conversely, you could be unlucky and just be privy to a mealtime of whining about the 'FREAKIN' ECONOMY'. Should I have interjected with a question about American culpability, do you think?

All of the New Yorkers we encountered were real people, not stereotypes. Nevertheless they were eerily familiar. I think that in our endeavours to be politically correct, we sometimes fail to understand that stereotypes are formed from particular and prevalent types. To ignore this is as misleading as to imagine that every one of a type will conform to a standard.

Five poems by Kevin Hart

POETRY

Kevin Hart

Dreaming of an old friend

(after Tu Fu)

All day fat brooding clouds blow by
But you, old friend, don't come to town.
Instead, you're lit in dreams three nights
As though your spirit's running down.
When we must part you always sigh,
'Wife, kids ... it's hard to leave the fray,'
'Besides, the dough ... the fuckin' flights.'
Your smile says, 'Life's just gone astray.'
DC's new crop of boys gets high
While you, sad friend, stand still and wave.
And *you*, don't prate of 'Dream' and 'rights':
My friend can't dream inside the grave.

Late questions in winter

Are you the rain my Grandma knew so well?
You're cold enough and sharp enough, my friend.
Perhaps you're rushing from the same wet hell,
Perhaps you're lines some minor devil penned.
And you: are you the snow she hated so,
That danced around her head and bit her hands?
Sick slushy snow, thick coal dust snow, shit snow:
Well, maybe now she's gone she understands —
Or maybe that's just something for the birds.
And you, dark winds, are you the same young Teds?
And you, old stew, are you her final words?
'More rain out there than hairs on all our heads.'

Hangers

'Two boys are hanging there,' my sister said,
'Two dirty ones like you.'
'Our father strung 'em up last week,' she said,
'By now they'll be quite blue.'
My parents' room had curtains always drawn
And shadows flush with ears,
The wardrobe lived inside that darker world
With shouts and cries and tears.
That wardrobe creaked across my dreams all week
It knew where bad boys are,
Its door would spring full open in my face
And fling a smell of tar.
And then one day, when everyone was out,
I — slowly — turned the lock:
I saw the dead boys in my winter coats
And ran right round the block.

Bread

If there was only a hunk of bread, days old,
If there was only a glass of something strong
(And candles feasting in the simple cold),
If there was only a woman, hands like song;
If there was only an evening playing blues
(And fireflies flickering along the road),
If there were only trees that froze in queues,
If there was only a heel of bread, days old ...

Morning knowledge

My gentle father died when day was young,
When there was very little left to take:
Gray face, a raft of bones, a bitter ache,

A word or two still living on my tongue.
There's bread that only dying men can eat,
Worn words that only weary men can say.
Sometimes those wispy words just slip away,
Sometimes that gritty bread falls on a sheet.
In those last days my dad ate nothing much;
His words were mostly gnawing at warm air.
Dark One, I'll be the one to smooth his hair.
You be the one who lets him know my touch.

Turnbull's Utegate mudslide

POLITICS

Michael McVeigh


THE AUSTRALIAN
Turnbull smashed by polling
Gillard runs gauntlet on ground in Iraq

Job security seems to have been the biggest topic of discussion in the Australian Parliament over the last fortnight — namely that of senior politicians.

The casualties began earlier this month when the Defence Minister, Joel Fitzgibbon, was forced to step down after it was revealed meetings between his brother and government officials had breached the Ministerial Code of Conduct.

Then it was Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Treasurer Wayne Swan's jobs in jeopardy over allegations of impropriety under the Ozcar scheme. The mud-slinging has left no one clean. Opposition Leader Malcolm Turnbull began on the offensive, but has since had to defend his own position after the case against the Prime Minister fell apart.

Compare the situation in Canberra to Italy, where Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi has again been embroiled in controversy, this time over the alleged use of government resources to fund a lavish party. Yet, unlike in Australia, the controversies seem to have no impact on his popularity in the electorate. Despite the revelations, his coalition recorded a convincing victory in provincial and municipal elections last week.

Obviously, there are two very different political cultures at play. Australia has inherited its cultural legacy from northern Europe. In our culture, rules are the lowest common standards by which a person needs to live in order for society to function. If our politicians are seen breaking the rules, it puts the whole system in jeopardy. Hence, the general response to controversy is for them to step aside so the system can continue to operate.

Italians have a more sympathetic view of human nature. Rules are viewed as standards to which a person should aspire. Humans are flawed creatures, and while we should try to live according to the rules, we will inevitably fall short. Berlusconi's supporters often point to his flaws as an excuse for his actions. We should not be judged on our moments of weakness, the argument goes, but also on our positive achievements.

As we've seen over the last week, both of these views of politics can get in the way of good governance. Politicians are in important positions of power, and abuse of that power is a serious issue. However, there also needs to be space for fairness and understanding, and yes, even compassion. A mature culture recognises that people are capable of making poor decisions, and are also capable of redeeming themselves.

The ongoing calls for resignations and time spent dealing with controversies in Canberra over the last week raises questions about the sort of pressures and expectations we place on politicians, and about the best way to ensure effective government.

When a single mistake can cost someone their position, there is no incentive for our politicians to be transparent and acknowledge their mistakes. Instead, the incentive is to cover up what has happened or deflect blame onto others. Politics becomes a game of whodunit, and the real business of governance is pushed aside. As the politicians engaged in debate over the Ozcar affair in the media and during Question Time last week, other important issues such as the Carbon Trading Scheme were put on the backburner.

The Berlusconi situation in Italy highlights the importance of mechanisms to oversee the business of government, and where it is necessary for politicians to be called to account. But our politicians need to understand that a mistake is not simply a sign of unworthiness. It is possible for politicians to redeem themselves and make amends for what they have done.

The public quickly tires of politics based on controversy. The biggest casualty in the Ozcar affair appears to be the person leading the attacks, the Opposition Leader Malcolm Turnbull, whose approval rating has suffered a dramatic fall in the latest polls.

Turnbull is learning that a politician's job security isn't just tied to their ability to play politics and handle controversy. It's also linked to their character and how they are seen to act in the public sphere. If he does come to understand this, perhaps it won't be too late for him to find redemption.

Michael Jackson's tragic gift

EULOGY

Tim Kroenert

In German, the word 'gift' means 'poison'. This double meaning is appropriate to a consideration of the life of Michael Jackson. Jackson's gift as a musician was a lifeblood that drove him to the heights of celebrity. However that world also proved toxic to him.

Jackson's achievements as a pop artist can be appreciated even by those who were not fans of his music. As a child in the 1960s, he was a prodigious vocalist. His enormous, soulful voice helped drive family vocal group the Jackson 5 to Motown superstardom.

Later, as a solo artist in the 1980s, he revolutionised pop music with his inimitable, percussive vocal technique and the erratic fluidity of his trademark style of dance.

In 1984, 'Thriller' and its accompanying short film revolutionised the music video; Jackson's appreciation of visual mediums came to match his aural mastery, and the scale of his live shows came to match the scale of his immense celebrity. He was dubbed the 'King of Pop', but to many, he was more than royalty; he was a god.

But the Michael Jackson story has the hallmarks of a tragedy. For him, the burdens of being so famous, at such a young age, were compounded by physical and emotional abuse from his father. He was the epitome of the proverbial 'troubled former child star'.

He became attached to an aura of oddness. In the 1980s it was rumoured that he slept in a hyperbaric oxygen chamber to slow the effects of aging and, later, that he had purchased the remains of The Elephant Man.

Jackson's ultimate fall from public grace began in dramatically seedy fashion. In the 1990s, there were allegations of child abuse against him. True or not, the damage to his reputation was permanent. The name Michael Jackson was forever mossed with sleaze.

Gradually, tragically, Jackson's public persona became divorced from humanity. The skin condition *vitiligo* may have explained his ever-paler countenance, but more unsettling were the repeated bouts of plastic surgery that transformed his face into an alien mask.

His perceived freakishness was behavioural, as much as physical. The tabloids had a lot to answer for. Scandal and scuttlebutt plagued Jackson like a swarm of insects. But he made few appeals to normalcy. His extravagant lifestyle, and baffling deeds such as the stupid 2002 prank of dangling his infant son off a hotel balcony, helped to shape the eccentric self-caricature he had become.

When celebrities die, public grief is disproportionate. Possibly this is because death reasserts the humanity of one who has seemed beyond it. In Jackson's case, because he seemed to have become so far removed from his humanity, the shock of his sudden mortality is even more profound.

The tragedy is all the more significant because he has died prior to 50 scheduled, sold-out shows in London. This monstrous billing was pitched as a 'long awaited comeback'. In reality, it may have been a last grab at redemption. Jackson achieved his life's glories as a professional musician; a return to the stage might have recaptured that glory and proven once again why he was so famous to begin with.

If it was such public redemption he was after, sadly he died before he got his chance; succumbing, it would seem, to the toxic air of the inhuman world into which his gift had led him.

The Michael Jackson story is tragic for another reason. He leaves behind three children, two from his second marriage to Deborah Jeanne Rowe, and the third said to have been conceived with the assistance of artificial insemination and a surrogate mother. One can only hope that his tragedy does not become theirs.

Towards an earth-friendly legal system

ENVIRONMENT

Peter D. Burdon

Our biosphere is sick and is behaving like an infected organism. As carbon has been collecting in our atmosphere it has also been collecting in the ocean, and as time has passed, soil erosion, deforestation, and dramatic losses in biodiversity have continued unabated.

We face a convergence of crises, all of which jeopardise life on Earth. There is a growing recognition that our current approach to environmental law is insufficient and that the situation is worse now than it was forty years ago when the first environmental protection legislation was passed.

The reasons why our current system of environmental law is failing are complex. But one important reason is inherent to law itself. The law does not protect the natural world from destruction, but supports its destruction. The effect of regulation is that if a company has ticked the appropriate boxes and stays within the prescribed legislative boundaries, its activity is acceptable. As a result environmental lawyers generally try to protect communities by monitoring corporate activity and checking license applications.

So the only things regulated by environmental law are environmentalists. The laws regulate the way environmentalists respond, and make them predictable. In addition, corporations often set aside money for appeals which in any case are tax-deductable.

Companies may also have 'indenture acts' that permit them legally to override of environmental laws. The most obvious and harmful example of this is the Roxby Downs Indenture Ratification Act 1982 (SA) that exists over BHP Billiton's Olympic Dam lease and overrides the States Environmental Protection, Aboriginal Heritage, Natural Resource Management, Water Resources and Freedom of Information Acts.

The regulatory framework for environmental protection is defensive in nature and actually impedes our ability to protect the environment. Environmental 'movements' are driven by communities that are unwilling to accept such a defensive role for themselves. They try to address the problems of governance that confine them to this defensive position.

Environmental law remains trapped in a regulatory framework because it regards nature as a legal object, that by definition can be bought, sold, exploited or destroyed to satisfy human preferences. Nature receives its protection through the property rights of human beings, not because it possesses recognised value or legal rights.

People were once treated in the same way. In response to slavery abolitionists did not ask for a 'slave protection agency' — they sought recognition of their rights in law. To secure rights for human beings or nature we should not fiddle with the regulation of how this 'property' can be used. We should change the framework of governance that defined human beings or nature as property in the first place.

Nothing, they say, is as powerful as an idea whose time has come. In the past eight years communities have successfuly been pressing for legislation that gives rights to nature. In Pennsylvania five Municipalities (20,000 people) passed 'rights for nature' ordinances that say nature has right to exist and flourish and gives community standing to advocate the rights of nature.

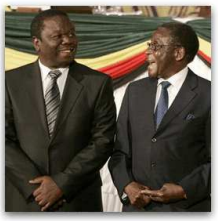
In 2008, too, the constitution of Ecuador was amended to state that nature has the 'right to exist, persist, maintain and regenerate its natural cycles, structure, functions and its processes in evolution'. To ensure these rights the government is responsible for 'precaution and restriction measures in all the activities that can lead to the extinction of species, the destruction of ecosystems or the permanent alteration of natural cycles'.

Thomas Berry coined the term 'Earth Jurisprudence' to describe this evolution in law. Earth Jurisprudence contends that our law must evolve to reflect the inherent value of nature and that human beings are deeply connected and dependant on nature. This shift has the potential to protect our environment and shift our perception of nature in a way that a regulatory approach cannot.

Inside the Zimbabwe blast furnace

POLITICS

Munyaradzi Makoni



A fractured nation of resilient Zimbabweans sighs for a return to normalcy to a country that still brings death and poverty to them. Hope springs eternal that the country could be the pride of Africa again.

Close to three million Zimbabweans haven't seen the country in the past five years. Political and economic ructions drove tens of thousands off into neighbouring nations. Zimbabwean exiles scattered the world over mull over the prospect of going back, but the old fears of poverty and persecution still hold them at bay.

The country has suspended its own currency, naming the South African Rand as the currency of reference. The 80 per cent unemployment record still stands. Electricity is a rare visitor. Some hospital wards remain closed. Water taps have to wait longer before water can flow again. It's a blast furnace of hardships.

Still, yesterday's political archrivals are today's strange bedfellows. A year ago, President Robert Mugabe contested Zimbabwe's presidential run-off alone after Morgan Tsvangirai refused to participate, out of protest against a campaign of torture against his voters.

Today, we find the descent into socio-economic hemorrhaging ground to a halt with the coalition government of president Mugabe, Tsvangirai and Arthur Mutambara in February 2009. Now that a thin veneer of progress in the country exists, can Zimbabwe heal itself?

The unity pact has survived its first 100 days, but the former ruling Zanu PF party still appears desperate to call the shots. President Mugabe declared that the reserve bank governor, Gideon Gono will not go — he saved the country in its hour of need. Gono earned the reputation of raiding foreign currency accounts of institutions without consent.

But the Media and Information Commission that selectively licensed journalists has now been archived by law. Under the unity government, too, people are salivating at goods that now fill the shops, though the majority cannot afford them.

Strikes appear to be on hold for now. For the first time in ten years there is a promise of economic growth, no matter how small.

The international community is cautiously providing monetary support to resurrect dead services. The survivors of the catastrophe in civil society and the churches see hope.

Zimbabwe's post-independence churches, especially their leadership, have historically been divided, leading to silence over Mugabe's increasingly authoritarian rule. But the early 2000s saw grass-roots leaders in various denominations organising themselves against the government's dereliction of duty.

When 'Operation Murambatsvina' (clean up filth) began after the 2005 elections, the broader church displayed some boldness by trying to defend the slum dwellers who were driven out of cities and towns.

The Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC) expressed displeasure in their pastoral letter, 'God Hears the Cry of the Oppressed', blaming the government for all the problems. The letter roused the ZANU-PF machinery, which went into overdrive. The vocal members of the church and civil society were punished.

Problems on the political front mounted, economic decay worsened, and the tensions went out of control. Neighbours became enemies and relatives became foes. It was like the Rwanda genocide all over again, though at a lower level.

The coalition government has sown glimmers of hope. There is an opportunity to rebuild morally. Shattered Zimbabwe had risen from the dead.

'Give consideration to the setting up of a mechanism to properly advise on what measures might be necessary and practicable to achieve national healing, cohesion and unity in respect of victims of pre and post independence political conflict,' says the GPA signed by the coalition government.

This support has led more than 25 civic and church groups to meet in May under the Church and Civil Society Forum — National Healing and Reconciliation. They admit that people have been killed, some maimed for life, so that national healing needs to come.

The forum includes ZCBC, Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe Council of Churches and civil society. It wants to consider grassroots views on how the healing process should proceed.

'We cannot wish each other away as we are coming from different political fields, but we need to recognise each other,' says John Nkomo, the minister who represents the organisation on national healing and reconciliation.

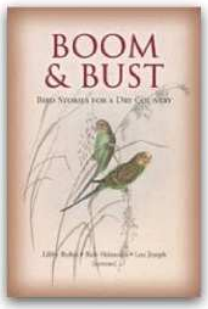
As the search for healing slowly rolls on, the country can only smile as it longs for the peace and harmony of 15 years ago.

Bird stories for a dry country

BOOKS

Tony Smith

Libby Robin, Robert Heinsohn and Leo Joseph (eds), *Boom & Bust: Bird Stories for a Dry Country*. CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, 2009. RRP $39.95. ISBN 978 0 643 09606 6. Online



Anyone who has read Sean Dooley's *The Big Twitch*understands the image of eccentricity and obsession that can attach to amateur ornithologists. Yet it is dangerous if we ignore the fortunes of avifauna, because they inhabit the Australian landscape like canaries in a coalmine.

The contributors to *Boom & Bust*, including botanists, zoologists, philosophers, environmentalists, sociologists, hydrologists and archaeologists, provide a timely scientific reminder that the fate of birds is inextricably tied to our own.

Libby Robin and Mike Smith point out that Australia leads the world in mammalian extinction and in threatened species. They argue that 'people can interact with natural dynamics to constrain or amplify them' especially through their impacts on species and habitats.

Taking an active interest in the activities of birds is, then, a responsibility of every Australian, made more urgent by climate change.

Robin and Leo Joseph provide a gentle but vital methodological introduction, describing the arrival of the research party — 'our rag-tag group of academics' — in a dry creek bed in Central Australia. Particularly informative is the interaction between the disciplines involved, whose practitioners are united by their respect for the birds of this dry land and the adaptations they make to climatic variability.

A chapter by the late Graham Pizzey describes the popular perceptions of an 'irruption' of the black-tailed native hen in populated areas of the south-east after rains in the early 1970s. Steve Morton on the zebra finch, David Roshier on the grey teal and Julian Reid on the pelican explain the importance of breeding periodicity, migration, group behaviour and adaptation to 'anthropogenic-driven environmental change' in the survival of these relatively common birds.

Penny Olsen reflects on the elusive night parrot, of which there have been few recent sightings. In 1990 and in 2006 it 'turned itself in' as road kill. Protected by the desert, the night parrot 'has gone bust, but has not yet turned to dust'.

Unfortunately, as Smith reports, the genyornis is extinct. This large flightless bird seems to have succumbed perhaps 50,000 years ago to the combined effects of habitat fragmentation through climate change and the introduction of predation

by humans.

Deborah Bird Rose explores the complexities of Indigenous concepts of country and kinship. Rose is interested in 'pattern, connectivity, patchiness and flux' and uses the rainbird to illustrate the importance of birds as 'tellers' of environmental fluctuation.

In examining the evolution of species of woodswallows, Joseph ponders those that have not survived, while Robert Heinsohn suggests that the co-operative breeding habits of the white-winged chough might well be a metaphor for the way that humans react to cycles of boom and bust.

Robin offers a warning about our national symbol, the emu. The fencing of the land is a direct threat to a ground species that practises nomadism to cope with boom and bust. Noting the observation by Indigenous people that emus and kangaroos graze together because they watch out for one another, warning of danger, she argues that 'where booms and busts can change country dramatically, a nation needs watchful guardians, day and night'.

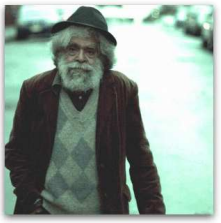
As Robin and Joseph suggest, 'the stage is set for a boom in understanding'. This important book shows that if we ignore the warnings provided by birds and by the scholarly researchers who interpret bird behaviour, we could invite the worst bust in our history.

Indigenous Robin Hood's just desserts

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Bastardy*: MA, 84 minutes. Director: Amiel Courtin-Wilson. Starring: Jack Charles.**



During the opening scene of this documentary, the principal subject, Jack Charles, displays his arm to the camera as he shoots up with heroin. This is part of who I am, he explains, so if the film is going to be truthful, it might as well go all the way. The image of Charles injecting his drug of choice recurs throughout the film.

Charles is a colourful character. He's an Aboriginal elder, and a professional film, television and theatre actor who has worked with Geoffrey Rush, Neil Armfield and, notably, on Fred Schepsi's seminal *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*. Charles is a patron to his people; he founded the first Aboriginal theatre company, Nindethana.

He is also a part time criminal who has been in and out of jail for 40 years. The 58-year-old, found at the start of *Bastardy*to be living contentedly on the streets of Melbourne, justifies his acts of serial burglary as 'collecting the rent' from affluent white suburbanites who dwell on what could rightfully be considered Aboriginal land.

For seven years *Bastardy* follows him with a nonjudgmental gaze, even with the sympathy of a confidant. That opening scene establishes the stark confidence with which Charles regards the filmmaker, and also his audience.

Charles makes no excuses. He is what he is. The heroin, he says, makes him feel good, and does no-one any harm but himself. ('If this is harm ...' he utters blissfully.) And who can fail to sympathise with his acts of theft, from people who have plenty to spare, in the face of his appeals to the historic, systemic oppression of Indigenous people?

Charles takes the viewer through all the space and corners of his world. We follow him on set for his latest gig, and to the scenes of past crimes. We see him regale pedestrians with folk songs, his voice and guitar chords gritty like the concrete of his urban surroundings. He exudes confidence, but there are hidden insecurities. He hates to be dirty, he confesses, as he doesn't want people to mistake him for a bum.

We sit with him as he recalls his longtime attachment to another man — as far as we can tell, the only significant romantic relationship of his life. This is one of the most moving scenes of the film. As he reflects on his sex life and admits to the emotional attachment, this is the only time the gregarious Charles seems shy.

Charles may have the gift of the gab, but his bravado is not without its chinks.

He rips off someone he and the filmmaker are acquainted with, and when Courtin-Wilson confronts him, he flounders. It permits the viewer to wonder if he believes his own well-rehearsed rhetoric.

Bastardy is neither an exercise in apologetics, nor a morality tale. Needless to say, Charles' miscreant deeds do catch up with him. The prospect of another stint in jail, at his age, is a terror to Charles, who has previously been nonchalant about his convict history.

The film's final moments find him wondering if he can kick his vices; if he can go clean, go straight, and live out his remaining years on the straight and narrow. Charles' life has been a drama, and despite the film's credit roll, the curtains are yet to be closed.

Paradoxes of Christianity and Islam

RELIGION

Herman Roborgh

Paradoxes torment the ruthlessly logical. But they lie at the heart of religious faith, indeed perhaps of any insight into reality. They appear to be absurd, yet they point to a truth that cannot be expressed straightforwardly.

The scriptures of both Islam and Christianity are full of paradoxes. Some readers of paradoxes simply emphasise only one part of the paradox and neglect the other. Critics of Islam and of Christianity feast on one-sided interpretation of this sort. Other readers smooth over the apparent contradictions or are so dulled by familiarity that they do not even notice them.

But the best way to interpret paradoxes is to allow both sides to fascinate and challenge us. They can then lead us to new ways of thinking and feeling, and to a new appreciation of the greatness and the mystery of God.

I would like here to point to five paradoxes that are shared by Christian and Muslim scripture. The first is that Christians and Muslims regard themselves as both the servants and the friends of God.

The Christian scriptures say that Christ came to serve and not to be served, that his followers are to consider themselves merely as servants and that they are to be servants of one another. But Christ also had a very loving and intimate relationship with God, whom he addressed as 'Abba (Father)!'. By telling them that they were no longer his servants but his friends, Christ wanted his disciples to share in this loving relationship with God.

Similarly, the Qur'an calls believers the servants of God who surrender to God in obedient submission since God is almighty and has full knowledge of the secrets of the heart. But it also says God relates with people in a compassionate way: 'God is most compassionate and most merciful towards people.' The believing servant is invited to enter into a relationship with God through which the Almighty is closer to them than their jugular vein.

The second paradox is that Christians and Muslims regard their own faith as the true way yet also affirm the truth of other paths.

It is clear that, for Christians, Christ is the Way to God. Yet Jesus is also presented as saying, 'many will come from the east and the west to take their places with Abraham'. The Catholic Church acknowledges that those outside the community of the Church can attain salvation, thereby recognising the value of other paths to God.

Similarly, the Qur'an says that God has chosen Islam as the true religion:

'Today I have perfected your religion for you, completed my blessing upon you, and chosen as your religion Islam.' But the Qur'an also acknowledges the faith of those outside the community of Muslims: 'The (Muslim) believers, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabians — all those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good — will have their rewards with the Lord.'

The third paradox is that Christians and Muslims must announce the truth of their own faith but are also committed to dialogue.

The New Testament represents Christ as sending his disciples out to teach and to baptise in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. But at the birth of Christ, the angels made a universal announcement of 'peace to men who enjoy God's favor'. The Second Vatican Council encouraged Christians to live together peacefully with Muslims. Other documents support dialogue between faiths.

Similarly, the religious tradition based on the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad encourages Muslims to invite people to embrace Islam. But the Qu'ran also states, 'There is no compulsion in religion'. The Qur'an tells Muslims to find a common word between them and other believers, and states: 'Our God and your God are one and the same.'

The fourth paradox is that Christians and Muslims acknowledge two ways of being a believer: an ordinary way and a more perfect way.

Christ did not come to abolish the law or the prophets but instructs everyone seeking fulfilment to follow the way commonly recognised as obedience to the law. But he also makes it clear that 'it is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life'. He told a questioner: 'If you wish to be perfect, go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor'.

The message of the Qur'an is also addressed to 'all mankind' and provides the same basic teaching of religion that has been taught by all the Prophets since Abraham: 'Say, "My Lord has guided me to a straight path, an upright religion, the faith of Abraham, a man of pure faith. He was not a polytheist. "'

But the Qur'an also recognises different degrees of closeness to Allah and speaks of 'a steep path' which makes more than ordinary demands on a believer. Sufism, which stems from the earliest period of Islam, has also developed a variety of 'paths' and 'stations' along which a believer may make progress in virtue.

The fifith paradox is that Christians and Muslims strive against evil but also encourage forgiveness and reconciliation.

Christ came not to bring peace but a sword. He publicly criticised the leaders of religion for their hypocrisy, and forcefully drove sellers out of the temple. But Christ also taught his disciples to forgive their enemies, and he himself forgave those who were crucifying him.

The Qur'an too allows believers to 'fight in the way of God' but forbids aggression: 'Fight in God's cause against those who fight you, but do not overstep the limits.' But it suggests pardon and forgiveness as the preferred option: 'In the Torah we prescribed for them a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, an equal wound for a wound: if anyone forgoes this out of charity, it will serve as atonement for his bad deeds.' Fighting must be balanced with pardon.

Both Christians and Muslims have encountered the presence of paradox in the history of their religious traditions. There is nothing to be gained from denying or avoiding the reality of paradox. On the contrary, paradoxes can be integrated into a believer's life by letting them speak to us of the mystery of God's greatness.

If we learn to be receptive to the presence of paradox in our own faith tradition we may be more understanding of the way paradox appears in the faith tradition of others. We shall avoid focusing on texts from other religious traditions that state only one side of the paradox. Ultimately, too, sustained reflection on the paradoxes to be found within each of our faith traditions may open us to a more profound awareness of the mystery of God.

The wobbly Anglican

NON-FICTION

Eleanor Massey

The little church on the Yarra is dressed for Lent. There are three parishioners, the locum and me. The vicar's gone. Years ago, he arrived from Sydney, with tambourines and a direct line to God. The old-timers bolted, the vestry emptied, the bills piled up, and now the diocese is talking foreclosure, the waiving of debts and disbandment.

I sit in the back pew, in gumleafed sunlight. Iris Murdoch shuffles up. 'I nearly became a Buddhist,' she whispers to Phyllis James, sitting next to her, 'but then said to myself, "Don't be foolish, Iris. You're a member of the Church of England."'

Philip Larkin, further down the pew, guffaws, and then falls silent, perhaps contemplating the fate of churches when they fall completely out of use. That must be one of his 'dubious women' beside him. It's either her or Archbishop Carey's 'toothless crone' taking the last spot.

'Won't you come forward?'

I start out of my reverie, but no, it's not Billy Graham, after my soul. It's the kindly locum, hands folded over surplice. To my polite but distant 'No, thank you', he then bellows, 'Spoken like a true Anglican!'

So, a dishevelled crew of the living and the dead, we stand and join the current faithful, declaring we are joyful in God's word, have our eyes fixed on Christ and are ready to run the race set before us. We listen to Samuel, Paul and John and read a sad travesty of Psalm 23.

That evening, I fly home to Sydney.

We moved up here in the early '90s, and the local congregation soon had my number. Only Anglicans from Down South bow their heads in the Creed, kneel in prayer and 'amen' in extraordinary places.

'It all started with Samuel Marsden', cautions a friend, 'the flogging parson'.

A stint at a private school, teaching English and Religious Studies, further enlightens me as I dodge The Crusaders, stare disbelievingly at the vicar and bypass the Mothers' Prayer Group. But in the end, it is Sydney's Archbishop and Dean, the Jensen brothers, who tell me where I'm truly at, as they overturn the church furniture, drive out the miscreants and boycott the Lambeth Conference, that beleaguered supporter of women priests, and bishops belonging to 'the other team'.

My brother and I grew up in Auckland, in the sectarian '50s. The only other

teams we knew were denominational ones. If you married 'out ', then, like Flanders and Swann's ill-fated couple, the honeysuckle and bindweed, you might pull up your roots 'and just shrivel away'.

To avoid such a fate, our family strode a middle Anglican path, although one godfather, fleeing his third wife, headed off to Kuwait before my christening and sent back a bible with 'There hath no temptation taken you, but such is as common to man ...' inscribed on the flyleaf.

The Catechism, having none of that, ensured we renounced the devil and all his works, and when the Bishop lifted his hand from our heads, the Church of England girls school took over. For seven years we sat cross-legged under 'The Blood of the Martyrs is the Seed of the Church', and the dusty Melanesian spears and faded shields bore witness.

Mission boxes sat on our mantelpieces at Lent, and the missionaries repaid our efforts with slide shows, in which Mother Hubbard dresses meandered eternally towards a little church on a green hill, just above the encroaching jungle. Back home, we were armed for the Wicked World with copies of *The Screwtape Letters* and *Honest to God*, while my brother, who was six years older and had escaped all this, waltzed and quickstepped in church halls, with girls who wore orchids and batted their eyelids. 'Definitely No Rock 'n' Roll' was chalked up on blackboards outside.

Then, in 1958, Billy Graham barrelled down on our innocent islands and broke the spell. He asked my brother to come forward, and my brother did. He saw the true light, and embarked on the Wanganella for Sydney and Moore College. We farewelled him, clutching paper streamers till they snapped. 'Now is the Hour,' we cried with the seagulls, 'for us to say goodbye. Soon you'll be sailing,' we sobbed, 'far across the sea'.

But Sin City ensnared my brother before he could reach Moore College and it was the Jensen brothers who seized the baton and ran the race as Billy Graham saw fit.

So neither lapsed nor nominal, but wandering — squizzing through church doors to check the whereabouts of altar, cross and candlesticks, before slipping into the back row, beside dubious women, toothless crones, and the ghost of Iris Murdoch.

Last up to Communion, first out the door.

A True Anglican.

Utegate: Wayne Swan's 'marginal crime'

POLITICS

John Warhurst

Australian politics has at its core some ethical standards by which MPs may be judged. They include equitable representation and responsible lobbying, clean hands and the avoidance of corruption, and honest relations between parliament and the executive. How have they held up in the so-called Utegate affair?

All parliamentarians have a role in representing their constituents and, in the case of senior parliamentarians, representing wider community interests. They should do so while maintaining a level playing field. Everyone should be served equally. No one should get preferential treatment.

But some tilting of the playing field is often inescapable in life and politics, and is therefore acceptable. In this case both the level playing field (as attested to by Michael Delaney, CEO of the Motor Traders peak body) and the tilted playing field (as shown in some legitimate email evidence) have operated side by side.

How can that be? Those closer to the government of the day, in this case an acquaintance and constituent of the Prime Minister and/or the Treasurer, seem to have attracted greater official interest. But at the same time, there appears to have been no shameful neglect of other representations.

The Opposition cry foul but if they really believe anything exceptionally unethical has taken place then they are setting very high ethical standards indeed. These are standards they themselves have failed demonstrably to meet in the past, and that they will find very hard to adhere to should they regain the government benches.

Corruption in politics does not just mean money changing hands. If this is the standard then there has been nothing corrupt about Utegate (unless you count the gift of the ute itself).

However, corruption in politics is more usefully seen as a corruption of the process by which the highest standards of non-partisanship and even-handedness should be applied to the policy-making process. When this happens special interests are deliberately advantaged over others.

As revealed once again by this affair Australian politics at the federal level is not squeaky clean. Some interests and individuals do better out of the system than others. But neither is it deeply flawed and corrupt. In the rough and tumble of Australian politics government ministers sometimes do play favourites; but they do so while generally attempting to give everyone at least a basic level of service.

To put it another way, while some of us fly first class and some fly economy, most people get a seat of some sort.

That is still not fair. But nor is it corrupt. As a consequence, when the political temperature rises to unsustainable levels, as in this affair, the electorate is well served if it takes all claims and counter-claims with a grain of salt.

None of this is necessarily tied to one of the central tenets of the Westminster system, that executive-parliament relations must be based on truth and trust. If the word of a minister in parliament cannot be accepted without qualification, if a minister misleads parliament, then the system breaks down. In these circumstances the minister should resign to preserve the integrity of the system.

This is the charge against Wayne Swan that the Opposition continues to pursue.

There is some case against the Treasurer, but it is not black and white. and therefore it is not a hanging offence, at least not on what we currently know.

The stock in trade of parliament, unfortunately, is to be careful with words and to be economical with the truth. Swan has claimed that all car dealers received identical treatment. Yet what seems to have happened is that while all car dealers received identical basic service, the insider appears to have received first class, personal attention. That is the way in politics.

Swan's survival has been assisted by an Opposition that lost its focus, tempted to divert its attention by the possibility of the scalp of the Prime Minister. But essentially the Treasurer's alleged crime is a marginal one in an imperfect political world.

Why people power won't reform Iran

POLITICS

Shahram Akbarzadeh

Is Iran in the grip of a colour revolution? Are we witnessing people power and the prospects of regime change? Reports and public declarations on the events can be misleading.

There are two very different objectives being pursued by those who reject the official outcome of the 12 June election.

The reformist candidate, Mir-Hussein Mousavi (who is reported to have received 34 per cent of the vote against the 64% of the incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmandinejad) has not called for a revolution. As a matter of fact he is among the founders of the Islamic regime.

Mousavi was Iran's Prime Minister for eight years while Iran was engaged in a bloody war with Iraq. Some of the most aggressive foreign policy initiatives which won Iran a pariah status were carried out under his watch, including military and training support for Hizbullah in Lebanon. He was an ardent advocate of the hostage taking of US personnel at the American Embassy in Tehran in 1979 which sent US-Iran relations into a nosedive.

People change, and Mousavi has clearly modified his views. He no longer advocates a confrontational course with the United States and has pointed to Ahmadinejad's foreign policy faux pas as an embarrassment to the Iranian nation. Mousavi's measured and dignified statements on Iran's international standing and social liberties have resonated among the population. But has Mousavi promised anything more than the past president Khatami had achieved?

Mousavi has not advocated any fundamental change. He has not questioned the supremacy of the Supreme Leader, who is the Head of the State and Commander in Chief of the armed forces and can overrule the three pillars of the state. He has not hinted at any change in Iran's nuclear policy or a rapprochement with the United States (or with the vaguely-defined international community). All he has promised is a more pragmatic approach in foreign and domestic policy making.

Given the choice between pragmatism and revolutionary idealism, it is no surprise that many observers and the Iranian electorate have become excited about Mousavi. But this does not explain the intensity of the street demonstrations in his support and the casualties that green-band protestors have suffered.

The explanation for the intensity of the riots and its underlying dynamics may be found in the pent-up energy and aspirations of the Iranian youth.

Mousavi's electoral campaign offered an opening for disenchanted youth to challenge the Islamic regime. Voting for Mousavi, wearing the green bands that have become the trademark of his supporters, and defying bans on public rallies

are not simply the manifestations of the reform movement. This is going beyond reform. The demonstrators are now chanting 'down with the dictator' and 'down with Khamenei' [the Supreme Leader]. Street riots in Tehran are manifestations of an all-out revolt against the regime.

The internet-savvy youth in Tehran and other major cities who found a rare opportunity to express their desire for social and political freedom were terribly disappointed by the obviously rigged election results. That disappointment is now being played out in the streets in open, albeit suicidal, defiance of the regime.

Unfortunately for these brave souls, the Islamic regime is in no mode to compromise. Too much rides on the outcome of the riots. Granting a full recount of votes, as Mousavi has demanded, would be seen as a sign of weakness. Predictably the Supreme Leader Khamenei has warned that any blood shed as a result of continued protest will be on the hands of the reformists.

The Islamic regime, led by the hardline faction of the Ã©lite, has already demonstrated its willingness to use brutal force to suppress dissent. The regime enjoys the loyalty of the Revolutionary Guards and the feared Basij militia. These forces are as much about security as about ideological indoctrination.

In addition, there are vast segments of society that have a vested interest in the survival of the regime and will be mobilised in its defence if necessary. To make matters worse for the anti-regime protestors, the reformist leadership is bound to betray them.

This is a hopeless situation for the protestors who have no leadership and no overwhelming popular support.

The ultrasound

POETRY

David McCooey

Ultrasound

Grainy television footage
    from outer space.
And then we see you, tiny astronaut,
    in thrall to your human hands.
Your ribs cast a tent of
    light, dramatic and impossible.
Your normal morphology is
    pointed out to us, organ
by organ: your bifurcated brain,
    the chambers of your heart,
your spine, your face — surprisingly
    familiar and haunting.
The radiologist gives you back
    to darkness and to patience.
In the lobby, we pay the bill
  for this experience. Part
silent movie, part surveillance.

Putting the baby to sleep

In this time of no-time
(colours slipping into dawn),
this search for the ghost
of being is a concentration
of bodies, a ritual of
gesture and sound
(murmuring and washing
machines). It is a watching

of clocks and their
slow workings of minutes,
followed by the
awkward gymnastics of
placing the sleeper into a cot,
and the laying on of hands
when eyes flick open
(like a minor tragedy).
Returning to the darkness
of bed, your body is
as taut as a horse.

Informed solutions to Australian slavery

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

The *Stolen* controversy at this month's Sydney Film Festival underlined how difficult it is to even acknowledge that slavery exists.

The film alleges that 38-year-old Fatim Salam is a slave, and that slavery is a significant problem among western Saharan refugees. Salam has lived in a refugee camp in Algeria since she was three years old. Members of the Sahrawi Polisario Front, which runs the camp, brought her to Sydney to deny she is a slave, and to denounce the film.

Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH) is the anti-slavery advocacy initiative of Australia's Catholic Religious orders. Its purpose includes informing the public that slavery exists today, not only in countries like Algeria, but right here in Australia.

ACRATH says women and children are continually trafficked to Australia from Southeast Asia, South Korea and China. Some leave their homelands voluntarily to work in brothels, while others are forced or deceived into coming. They are slaves, but often do not see themselves as such. They are reluctant to seek help, due to lack of trust, self-blame, or 'training' by traffickers.

Suppression of information about the conditions of these workers allows the slave trade to continue. Traffickers have also been helped by the paucity of advocacy groups equipped to expose their activities, as well as the lack of resources for promotion of what is being done.

ACRATH has an excellent website , packed with useful and accessible information about slavery in Australia. But nobody visits. The site's forum has been online since last year, yet at the time of writing there were zero posts.

The Federal Government is doing its bit. It has allocated $250,000 each to four groups including ACRATH, to help eliminate human trafficking.

While the work on ACRATH's website is yet to bear fruit, it should be noted that the lobbying efforts of ACRATH and similar organisations helped to persuade the Government to introduce a range of improvements to its support for victims, which were announced by Immigration Minister Chris Evans at last Wednesday's National Roundtable on People Trafficking. These include the provision of permanent visas.

In welcoming the changes, Human Rights Commission President Catherine Branson QC referred to a woman who was trafficked to Australia and who had, for years, been left with an uncertain immigration status.

'She said she didn't have the words to describe how happy she felt — that having a permanent visa meant that she could have security and certainty now, that she can finally move on with her life without fear of being returned to her home country, that she could study, that she could confidently go out and get a job.'

This woman is fortunate that she had the information and the confidence to come forward and acknowledge her circumstances. The Minister says the Support for Victims of People Trafficking Program has provided assistance to 131 people since its inception in January 2004.

Hopefully there will be an improvement in the flow of information about slavery and what can be done to beat it. This will result in many more victims taking advantage of the improved help provisions.

Plight of the 'skilled unemployed'

COMMUNITY

Beth Doherty

At first I avoided it. I avoided filling out forms and jumping into the endless queues at my local Centrelink office. I reasoned that Centrelink is for those who are in real need, people who are struggling to make ends meet.

Centrelink is a safety net for those who are out of work; unable to work; with limited capacity to work; or studying to improve suitability for work. None of this particularly applied to. After returning home from six months of volunteer work overseas, my plan was that I would spend a couple of weeks looking, and that after a few resumÃ©s were sent out, the phone calls would start pouring in.

They didn't. Almost two months after my return to Australia (with less than two dollars to my name and a huge credit card bill) I had had one job interview, sent out resumÃ© after resumÃ©, addressed numerous selection criteria, and written page-long cover letters touting my attributes to potential employers.

All of this happened quickly. Two years ago, I was in the position where I was finishing up one job on Friday and starting the next on Monday. I'd received three or four job offers before settling on one near my home.

Each week, as part of my previous job working with adult migrants in Sydney's South, I would sign forms and fax letters verifying that, yes indeed, my students were fulfilling their activity agreements by attending language classes.

Now, I found myself on the other side of the desk. Every two weeks, I had the unenviable experience of going into my local Centrelink office to report on all paid work and voluntary work completed over the specified time period. My activity agreement required me to apply for 10 jobs a fortnight. By this point I'd applied for well beyond that figure with little success.

It was reported on 11 June by the *Sydney Morning Herald* that job losses during the month of May pushed the unemployment rate up to 5.7 per cent.

'If you look over the last six months, we've had about 80,000 full-time jobs lost in that period of time, and pretty much no overall job creation,' said Su-lin Ong, senior economist at RBC.

Sadly, to be employed doesn't always mean full-time or permanent part-time employment. One could work a casual job for five hours a month, and still not be included in unemployment statistics. Thousands of underemployed workers are unable to survive on the hours they are given.

Similarly, thousands of skilled migrants who want to work are placed in

language learning programs as a way of reducing the unemployment statistic.

'The rise in unemployment is remarkable,' said JP Morgan economist Helen Kevans. 'It's the highest since 2003 and a sign of things to come.'

As I wrote letters recommending my skills and qualifications to potential employers, my empathy for my former students grew. No wonder many just give up trying. It is a hard thing to do, to present yourself in a positive light, rejection after rejection. You stop believing the things you write. You start to wonder if your qualifications, experience or even human dignity mean anything in this money-driven economy.

I was what is referred to as a 'skilled unemployed person'. That is, a person who has not only job experience, but qualifications to match a number of criteria which employers seek. The skilled unemployment rate is now at the highest it has been since 2001, and jobseekers are currently outnumbering positions by almost 10,000.

Skilled workers are among the highest number of casualties of the current economic breakdown. Nearly 43,000 since the start of 2009 are counted as among those who have lost their jobs.

At this point, with all this wasted talent standing in Centrelink queues in the hope of not being there next week, Australia risks becoming a society where inequality and poverty are the norm. The rich still get richer, the poor get poorer.

Organisations such as the St Vincent de Paul Society have all reported a spike in those seeking emergency accommodation. Much of this caused by interest rates that have risen steadily over the past two years and have only recently been brought down in the face of imminent economic meltdown.

There are thousands of unemployed, marginalised people on Centrelink who struggle each day to live on a small amount of money.

Now, in addition to these, a new underclass of skilled, qualified, highly educated people is also in there. Talent and work-ethic is being wasted, and it doesn't seem it will change in the near future.

Post script: This week, after two and a half months of searching, I returned to my former job — teaching adult migrants in south/western Sydney. Once again, I will be working with people who struggle to make ends meet and line up each fortnight in Centrelink queues. This time, I will view their experiences through a different lens.