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Meditation guru's monastery without walls

VIDEO

Peter Kirkwood

This interview with Laurence Freeman, Director of the World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM), concludes the series recorded at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Melbourne in December 2009. It is sponsored by the Asia-Pacific Centre for Inter-Religious Dialogue at the Australian Catholic University .

Freeman talks about the importance of inter-religious dialogue and openness to other faiths, the practice of meditation in the Christian tradition, and the dangers of religion without the contemplative dimension.

I made a documentary about Freeman for ABC TV's *Compass* in 2002, and so had the privilege of spending a week with him on one of his regular trips to Australia. I was able to observe this quietly forceful man as he lectured on contemplation, and led meditation with groups large and small, in a range of settings, including book stores, churches, community halls, and even in Yatala Prison in Adelaide.

All these places, and the groups of appreciative people who come to hear him, form what he calls his 'monastery without walls'. Though he is a Benedictine monk, he doesn't lead a conventional monastic life. He's based in London, but is continually on the move, travelling around the globe visiting the thousands of groups that form his worldwide meditation network. In Australia there's around 460 groups in regional and metropolitan centres.

Freeman is the second director of the WCCM. Its founding director, John Main, also a Benedictine monk, was a close friend and mentor. Freeman first met Main when the older man taught him at a Benedictine high school in London. Subsequently, when Freeman was a university student, Main taught him how to meditate. This formed a close spiritual bond between them.

Main had learnt meditation himself earlier in his life before he became a monk. He was a diplomat in Malaysia, and became friendly with Hindu Swami Satyananda, who taught him about contemplative practice. At the age of 33 Main joined the Benedictines at Ealing in London.

He began to explore contemplation and meditation in the Christian tradition, particularly in the writings of the early desert fathers. So, he recovered a contemplative dimension that had been somewhat lost in Christianity, and began to popularise it, teaching it to ordinary believers. People who join the WCCM are encouraged to attend a weekly meditation group, and to practice daily at home for 20—30 minutes morning and evening.

When Main died in 1982, Freeman took over as director. The network has now grown to

include people from most Christian denominations. He has also formed strong links with those who practice meditation in other religions, particularly Buddhists. Every year the WCCM holds a major conference called the John Main Seminar, and this is frequently addressed by leaders from other faiths; in 1994 the keynote speaker was the Dalai Lama.

Freeman is a prolific author. His latest book, published in October 2009, is *The Selfless Self: Meditation and the Opening of the Heart.* Over the last few years he has edited a number of books about Main, featuring Main's writings. Some of these titles are *John Main: The Expanding Vision, Word Made Flesh* and *The Heart of Creation: Meditation, A Way of Setting God Free in the World*.

Human rights framework only a start

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan

The Rudd Government's Human Rights Framework announced this week by Attorney General Robert McClelland (pictured) is a welcome though incomplete addition to protection of human rights in Australia.

The key elements including legislation setting up a Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights, funds for human rights education, and a progressive audit of existing legislation including discrimination laws and national security laws should be uncontroversial even in an election year. After all they are measures fully consistent with the submission put to the National Human Rights Consultation by the Federal Coalition.

The Labor government has baulked at the recommendation for an Australian Human Rights Act which would allow judges to assess Commonwealth laws, policies and practices for human rights compliance. Mr McClelland told the National Press Club that 'a legislative charter of rights is not included in the Framework as the Government believes that the enhancement of human rights should be done in a way that, as far as possible, unites rather than divides our community'.

There has been a recurring suggestion that the National Human Rights Consultation Committee which I chaired was a group of like-minded persons with a preconceived view on a legislative charter of rights, attentive only to the voices of an elite. Ironically, the suggestion has come from members of an elite with a preconceived view hostile to any such charter, invoking the good of the people, regardless of the views expressed by the people.

It is worth recalling that the discussion paper for the consultation was written by the Attorney General's department before the selection of the committee. The three questions put to the public did not mention a charter of rights specifically. Most people who made submissions and the majority of those who attended community roundtables morphed the discussion into a question about a human rights act.

35,000 people made submissions to us. More than 6000 came through the door and sat down for a two-hour discussion with us, as we conducted over 60 community roundtable discussions the length and breadth of the country. Of the 35,000 people who sent submissions of any sort, 33,356 expressed a view for or against a human rights act. 87 per cent of those who expressed a view were in support. The overwhelming majority of those 6000 persons who attended a community roundtable supported such an Act. The independent research resulting from a random telephone survey of 1200 persons turned up 57 per cent in support, 14 per cent opposed, and 30 per cent undecided.

The detailed social research also included focus groups and devolved consultations with some of Australia's most vulnerable people. The Committee put great store in the independently commissioned social research, presuming that the tens of thousands who made submissions and the thousands who participated in community roundtables, despite their record numbers, would not be fully representative of the community which includes persons not motivated, interested or educated about the issues raised in the discussion paper.

Definitely the support for parliamentary scrutiny and human rights education was even greater than the support for a charter. But there is no getting away from the public's interest in and sympathy for a human rights act.

The committee saw itself as performing a public trust, reporting to government on what we heard from the public. In light of what we heard we thought it appropriate to make recommendations about what would be workable in light of the public concerns and requests, honouring the principles of parliamentary sovereignty and federalism. We knew our task was politically charged once so many citizens wanted to focus on the question of whether Australia should have a human rights act. The Coalition parties were opposed. The Labor Party was divided.

Given the Cabinet decision not to legislate a human rights act, the Attorney General has done well in crafting a suite of measures otherwise responsive to the views expressed by the public. Some well informed persons who made submissions doubt the long term utility of a parliamentary committee of human rights, statements of compatibility for proposed legislation, and stipulations that public servants take into account Australia's human rights obligations — without the stick of judicial oversight which a human rights act would provide. Time will tell.

Victoria's Charter of Rights is to be reviewed next year. To date it has been applied selectively and without sufficient regard to evidence based policy. If the Victorian Charter proves more robust and consistent, and if there are proven shortfalls in the new Commonwealth measures, a Commonwealth Act will be back for consideration in 2014 when the Framework is reviewed.

Meanwhile politicians on both sides of the Chamber will continue to espouse the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act for well intentioned interventions on Indigenous communities, protracted detention of asylum seekers while claims are put on hold, inhumane detention in inadequate facilities like Curtin, and rushed national security laws that leave even their elders on both sides uneasy with the civil liberties ramifications.

Australia is a great place for most of us to live enjoying our human rights. We can still do better. Injecting human rights discourse in public discussion and law making about contested issues often helps.

Critics of a human rights act should not get upset in future when judges fill some of the

gaps despite the absence of a human rights act. As the Attorney General told the press club:

'It is the Government's view that the well-established principles of statutory interpretation, together with the proposed Statements of Compatibility and any Committee report — will provide the Courts with the appropriate tools to undertake their role in the context of the Parliament's enhanced focus on human rights considerations.'

If these appropriate tools prove inadequate as they have in countries like the United Kingdom, our politicians will need to be a little more attentive to the public who want to get right the balance between parliament and the courts for the good of all persons subject to Commonwealth laws and policies, maintaining unity and avoiding division between those with and without adequate human rights protection.

Anzacs underground

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Beneath Hill 60* (M). Director: Jeremy Simms. Starring: Brendan Cowell, Steve Le Marquand, Gyton Grantley, Bella Heathcote. Running time: 122 minutes**

Australian films frequently excel when they tell a distinctively Australian story within a well executed genre framework. Based on the non-fiction book by Will Davies, *Beneath Hill 60* is a war film whose heroes are members of the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company; civilian miners who have enlisted and been tasked with tunnelling beneath the front lines to attack their German opponents with explosives from below. Its central character is the real-life figure of Captain Oliver Woodward (played here by Cowell). The film details his involvement in a secret operation that his superiors believe will virtually end the war; the infamous Battle of Hill 60.

As a generic war film, *Beneath Hill 60* is well executed. Director Simms evokes the scale and danger of the battlefield, as well as the particular hardships associated with the miners' subterranean pursuits. He puts his audience within the physical space of his characters in a way that also allows us access to their psychological space. The film begins below ground and we spend arduous minutes following a stooped and grotty Woodward as he traverses the claustrophobic labyrinth deep beneath the front line. When he does finally emerge into daylight, the relief provided by this breath of fresh air is cut short by the combative chaos of the trenches.

Woodward's muddy-grey wartime experiences are contrasted with shiny flashbacks to an impossibly glossy rural Australia, and to his chaste courtship of a picturesque teenage girl (Heathcote). These sequences are embarrassingly mawkish; Heathcote in particular falls, in this instance at least, into the category of 'just a pretty face'. The scenes, designed to reveal what Woodward left behind and what he hopes to return to, come close to ruining the film. They also tell us less about Woodward's character than do his actions and demeanour on the battlefield.

Mainstream war films tread a fine line if they are to respect the experiences of soldiers without glorifying war itself. *Beneath Hill 60* is not unkind to the Anzac myths. The soldiers display mateship and self-sacrifice. They are brazen and resourceful. Their skills are acute and extend beyond tunnelling: early in the film Woodward and two comrades prove their mettle in stealth, crossing no-man's land to explode a pesky enemy machine gunner in his hidey hole. But they also possess a touch of the larrikin, giving cheek to figures of authority when cheek is due.

But neither does the film glory in myths. During its climactic moments director Simms employs one or two nifty plot tricks to the effect that, even if you find yourself barracking our boys to victory, you are left with no doubt that doing one's duty comes with a cost. The viewer is not permitted the moral luxury of a 'faceless' enemy; the same cannot be said of the characters. But a sombre coda indicates that the spoils of war are not just patriotic pride, but often include physical scars, psychological damage and emotional paraplegia.

These are obvious but necessary maxims that Simms enunciates with sufficient grace — lest we forget.

Possibility springs in Russian winter

NON-FICTION

Ben Coleridge

My Renaissance history lecturer tells the story of her difficulty as a student when she was deciding in which area of history she would undertake further study. Her professor obligingly introduced her to a famous scholar of Renaissance history who looked at her and exclaimed, 'If you study the Renaissance, the stones of Florence will speak to you!'

It is an enlivening prospect, the possibility of a place coming alive through books, of feeling with your senses the human stories embedded in it. During the Russian winter, in the small city of Yaroslavl, far away from Florence, my collection of books began to speak to me; their words and descriptions began to wander through my head every time I walked into the frozen street.

Yaroslavl, a small industrial city, sits at the point where the great Volga meets one of its tributary rivers. Ancient silver domed Orthodox churches and classical mansions line the river banks and behind them the skyline is clouded by smoke stacks. In the streets, buses throw up mud as their engines stutter in the cold; old women, bent over and covered in blankets, beg for coins outside the city's churches; young people stroll arm in arm.

Winter there is cold and sometimes hard, as it has been in the wake of the Global Financial Crisis. Many people are continually underemployed or underpaid, and the GFC led to factories closing and rising unemployment. The much discussed 'contract' between Russia's elite and ordinary Russians, whereby the latter sacrifice their civil and political rights for economic wellbeing, is not delivering.

People in places like Yaroslavl are beginning to find themselves without civil and political rights or economic wellbeing — not free but held fast, imprisoned by restrictive circumstances, unable to move to seek opportunity elsewhere. The streets in the late afternoon are silent and ice covers the ground.

In the silence, Simone Weil's words stood out. She wrote that freedom, personal and political, is a vital need of the soul, that harm is being done to men and women whenever they cry out inwardly: 'why am I being hurt?' Although people may be mistaken as to who is inflicting suffering or why, 'the cry itself is infallible'. The streets of Yaroslavl are quiet, but the quietness feels like the 'infallible cry' of hardship.

In Yaroslavl, the experience of political disenfranchisement spreads a culture of disempowerment to every corner of people's lives. One evening, a friend explained to me that to have 'a successful relationship' with a girlfriend cost around 3600 roubles (the cost of

several dates over a few weeks) whereas to have 'a successful relationship' with a prostitute cost 2000 roubles for one hour.

Perhaps it was because he wasn't free, because possibility was denied to him, that he understood 'relationship' in those terms. Already, at the age of 24, he described feeling the same despair that Maxim Gorky described in *My Childhood*: 'It was as though I had been filled up with something very heavy and for a long time I lived at the bottom of a deep and dark pit, without sight or hearing.'

Then, in the midst of gloom, a person in Yaroslavl will wake up to a bright winter morning with freshly fallen snow, clear blue skies and sun. It is the kind of morning which Pushkin described ecstatically and his verses spring to mind as people emerge from apartment doors and wade through snow drifts: 'sunlight and frost, a matchless blend!' Children haul out their skis and laughter rings across the yard; everybody suddenly seems gripped by the very same ecstasy that gripped Pushkin, the same desire to be out in the sunlit snow.

Leaving Pushkin in the yard with the children, I found different words in the forest outside the city. I walked down a small track in the late afternoon and everything was silent, no birds and no noises, no wind, just birch and fir trees blanketed by snow. The only sound was the occasional thump as snow fell off an over-burdened branch.

Maxim Gorky loved the forest; he used to run away there to escape from the depravities of his 19th century village. It was for him a kind of mystical place, where quietness and his imagination drew him away from the misery of life. Vasily Grossman also felt moved by the quietness of the forest: 'The forest seemed silent. The many layers of branches kept off the light; instead of tinkling and gurgling, it was like a soft cloak swathed round the earth.'

Reading these lines was the strangest experience. While I walked in the forest I described it silently in my mind. And then, back in my room in our small apartment, I recognised my own quiet words in the descriptions of Gorky and Grossman. The forest had drawn out of us the same inner words, the same soft, calm, quiet feeling.

This is not to be presumptuous; it is to say something about the power of writing, along with the power of place. Heartfelt writing imprints a soul on the page, and in the writer's soul we recognise our own murmurings. In the forest I thought of Gorky and Grossman; in the muddy streets and factory yards Simone Weil prodded and prompted me; and on sunlit mornings, Pushkin expressed everyone's happiness.

Even as I left Yaroslavl at the beginning of spring, Grossman spoke of my own sadness at departing, as if he had written a book about me: 'It was the past that slept under the snow, beneath this cool half light — the joy of lovers' meetings, the hesitant chatter of April birds.'

When Harry Hogan went to war

BY THE WAY

Brian Matthews

There wasn't much doing in the tiny New South Wales town of Quirindi on Christmas Eve, 1914, but the Federal Hotel in Whittaker Street was riotous with shouts and laughter. The young blokes were full of talk about the war in Europe and, as the beer flowed, several boasted they would enlist and find excitement in exotic foreign lands.

Harry Edward Hogan, great-grandfather of my mate Gary Hogan, was one of the more determined, though maybe also one of the more inebriated. But Harry was stone cold sober when he travelled down to Sydney early in the new year. He stayed at his sister's Kings Cross pub for a couple of rowdy nights, then enlisted in Liverpool.

Harry was 18, a knockabout bush larrikin ready to give just about anything a try. He joined the Second Machine Gun Battalion on 10 February 1915, trained for four months, embarked on 25 June and set foot on the beach at Gallipoli on 16 August, a few days after the start of the doomed August offensive that was the Allies' last throw of the dice before their retreat from the peninsula.

For the next four months Harry Hogan, like so many of his fellow soldiers, had an undistinguished, brutalising time, memories of which would stay with him forever. If, in his happy-go-lucky, thoughtless way, he had imagined performing daring, perhaps dramatic deeds, it took no time at all for such notions to founder amid the chaos, the blood, the wounds, the deaths.

Never shirking but always scared stiff, Harry staggered through the months until serious head wounds were added to his more or less constant and worsening state of shock, and he was taken to hospital in Alexandria on 23 December.

He was following in the wake of many wounded fellow Australians, including 21-year-old Albert Facey, repatriated from Gallipoli after a direct hit on his trench and a gunshot wound to the shoulder. He had been 'on Gallipoli only six days short of four months'. As for Harry Hogan, having arrived virtually on the eve of the August offensive, he left as the great retreat from Gallipoli was beginning.

Harry recovered after treatment but, still not 19 years of age, he had seen gruesome sights, experienced indescribable horrors and confronted his own crippling fears. He was scarred beyond any treatment that the hospital in Alexandria could give him or even knew about. And this was only the beginning.

Discharged for duty on 13 January at Ras-el-Tin, Alexandria, he was attached to the British

Expeditionary Force and disembarked at Marseilles on 23 March 1916. For nearly two years he slogged robot-like through the cauterising life of the trenches, succumbing periodically to agonising bouts of trench fever and the maddening itch of scabies.

By the time Harry Hogan was sent to England for treatment, his whole personality seemed to be faltering. He began to figure on charge sheets for various offences — drunkenness, refusing to obey an order from an MP, absence without a pass while under treatment, AWOL for a month and picked up by MPs in London.

Recovering yet again, however, he returned to France on 23 July 1918 with the Second Machine Gun Battalion and saw out the war in scarifying encounters with the Germans' last ditch offensives. During this stint his arduous path crossed that of 18-year-old James Lovell, 8th Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment, whose forward lookout post was threatened by one of the last massive German pushes of 1918 but who kept reporting under fire on enemy movements and won the Military Medal for bravery in the field.

Harry embarked at Le Havre for England on 15 January 1919 but, defeated again by serious illness, spent six months in various British hospitals before at last sailing for Australia on the *Karmala*, on 1 July.

Once he was as fit as he was ever going to be, Harry Hogan — a raddled, stooped and haunted looking 23-year old — went bush and stayed there. He worked as a jackeroo and a fencer and, though he eventually married, he would disappear into the backblocks for months on end, returning broke, hung over and impenitent.

His obdurate, grieving silence was as eloquent a statement about his shattered spirit as the luckier James Lovell's summary of those years: 'I lost a lot of friends. It was a massive waste of lives, a slaughter that should never have happened.' Or Albert Facey's anguished recollection in his marvellous memoir, *A Fortunate Life*: '[The time] on Gallipoli were the worst four months of my whole life. I had seen many men die horribly, and had killed many myself, and lived in fear most of the time. And it is terrible to think it was all for nothing.'

Machine gunner Harry Hogan would surely have agreed.

The dignity of Carl Williams

MEDIA

Andrew Hamilton

The death of Carl Williams has predictably been covered as if it were an episode of *Underbelly*. It comes complete with reminders of past episodes, pictures of the central characters, enticement by future developments of the plot, and a heavy voice-over reinforcing the moral message that what goes around comes around.

What has been lacking is even a moment in which we are invited to pause in solidarity with one of our fellow human beings who died unprovided for in what should have been a safe place.

Carl Williams certainly killed without remorse, causing grief to people who had not hurt him, and was rightly jailed to protect society and to assert the fragile rule of law. But he was a human being like ourselves, with a humanity whose essential dignity, like our own, could not be erased by any of his misdeeds.

A few years ago a banner outside a Melbourne Cathedral bore the message: 'God loves Saddam Hussein'. It caused offence, but for Christians the message was non-negotiable. So is it non-negotiable to claim that God loves Carl Williams.

This sense that we all share with criminals the heart of what makes us human, and that the death of every human being diminishes us, is difficult to sustain in a culture which regards celebrity as a desirable commodity and then turns criminals into celebrities.

Celebrity privileges plot over character. Celebrities are what they do, whether what they do involves making money on a grand scale, showing great skill at kicking large leather balls, acting for film or telly, accompanying people who do any of the above, or being photographed by the right photographers. The core of their humanity is obscured, indeed is of no interest. It cannot be commodified.

The same is true of people who are made celebrities for doing dark deeds. Hitler, Saddam Hussein, Pol Pot, Stalin, Jack the Ripper and modern serial killers are identified with the terrible things they have done. They are seen as monsters because of the monstrous effects their actions have had on others. Their real self is not seen.

The same is true of Williams and the other criminals who are portrayed in *Underbelly* and similar series. They exist for the plot; are the colour of their black hats.

The difficulty with viewing people as celebrities is that we shall see what happens to them only in terms of the plot. The famous tennis player who contracts cancer will be reduced to the

exemplary one who fights her illness as she once fought her opponents. When celebrities who have treated other people violently suffer themselves from violence, their suffering is approved because it is an expected part of the plot. It shows crime does not pay.

This focus on externals, on what people do rather than on who they are, is ultimately demeaning. It reduces them to comic strip characters, and ourselves to readers of comics. Williams deserves better than this, not simply in recognition of his humanity, but also for our sake. The quality of our society is at stake.

If we see Williams' death simply as the just or aesthetically satisfying end of his public story, we effectively accept that jails are properly places where righteous punishment for crimes can be meted out, even outside the law. They are defined in terms of retribution. They will not be seen as safe places where it could be possible for prisoners to reflect on their lives and learn better ways of living. The scandal of a prisoner who was known to be at risk being killed in a place to which he was sent against his will in the name of public safety will be overlooked.

We ought to expect more of jails than this, because human beings are more than what they have done, because their destiny is not scripted by their story, and because Carl Williams and his life matter.

Learning how to die

POETRY

Tony London

Sunday afternoon perambulation Khanyana

I stepped out up above the stream on the green grass
that grows on top of the steep river bank between
shepherded goats and a tethered cow, the afternoon
sun following the rain, the water running dark from
up in the Himalayas as sweat ran into my eyes. The old
man let me into his low laid dry stone walled mill. In the
roaring dark driven by the diverted river, the stone mill
ground out the flour, the inside stone walls and steps and
wall like dusted scones and ghostly from the white powder.
He indicated the waiting grain, the bags of produce now
soft and dumpy, awaiting delivery on spindly unlikely
thin legs, it was pride in his task and handiwork. Up river
from the School for Refugees the small mill worked each
afternoon, rattling clear above the whooshing river in the
deep gorge, ancient tasks to meet the deep hunger of the
body and the soul. I stepped out for a coffee where Dilip,
[Lt Col. Retd] would make me a brew with his electric grinder
in the new coffee house. The sweat dribbled down the valley
of my back as I made my ascent from the old to the new,
picking my way through the stones of the road and from
one era to the next. The dry stone wall up near the bridge
displayed the ancient skills as the stones were brought up
from the river bed and each placed delicately put in its place

and time by the patient crouched stonemasons, whilst their families sat and watched, the women picking their own goat

path up from the river bearing their contribution to the

growing wall. The chosen men pick and split and lay flat the stones

all interlocked like the families. I sat and had a hesitant

conversation with Dilip out on the terrace, the army man

with the carefully pressed decorum as I dipped biscotti

brought in from Delhi and became part of the changes.

AP

As a bat makes parabolas in the dusk, arcs

and loops the mind cannot harness, but

simply wonder at, so too the meanderings of

this man's mind. Sometimes his brush will

touch the surface, and maybe again, and then

some patterns will be caught in tones and

shapes for marvelling. Sometimes a confused

bird will hit the window and leave a brief wing

pattern on the glass, a rare image from nature,

one that cannot be replicated easily. So too his

canvasses, rare that they are, become images of

nature with an ironic twist of form or

colouration from the master — for he is no

journeyman, this spreader and dobber of paint,

whose surety of line and form belies the sometimes

timorous heart and the self deprecation, that

leaves his brushes unattended for too long

between tube squeezing and energetic forays.

At my lessons

Learning how to die creeps up on you,

image by image, until you come to

understand the signs. I can count probably

no more winters than I have fingers, and

no longer clench my fist to avoid counting.

This is all about probability I tell myself,
but know the odds are shortening each night

when I finally relent and put head to pillow

in the early hours. I have hovered above

my death bed to see who would call by. The

old people in the mortuary silence of the

doctor's waiting room, rehearse the look,

the patois, become familiar with the creeping

symptoms, the medicines of resistance, the

gentle small steps on the way. I have imagined

lying there and slowly going through the

cat scan tunnel that is the umbilical between

now and then. Polanski had Macbeth

momentarily seeing the jeering faces, Lean

had Thomas More suddenly seeing blackness.

Survivors of building falls tell of seeing their

life flash before them. I have already begun to
divest myself of the trappings, letting books

unreturned remain so, letting friends drift away

if they choose, trying to see every day as a prize

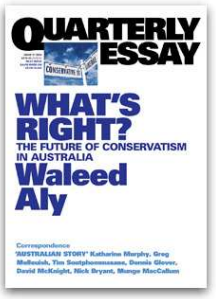
and each sunrise as a new experience to be explored

and touched and smelt in the art of discovery. No
I am not born again, not lost in doing good for
others, just a student maybe distracted, lost in his own,
lost on his own, waiting for the chalk to screech across
the blackboard for a moment of understanding.

Abbott and the new Catholic Conservatism

POLITICS

Michael Furtado



Dr Waleed Aly of Monash University impressively argues in his current Australian Quarterly Essay that conservative parties have backed themselves into a corner by embracing free-market extremism, and that an illiberal social policy, combined with a free-market economics, offers little hope for Australia.

This is precisely the policy territory inhabited by the Australian Coalition Parties, and begs the question, given the preponderance of Catholics in their senior ranks, as to whether the philosophy of the Coalition can accommodate a Catholic emphasis on social justice.

In general Aly's argument, that a reactionary brand of politics is unlikely to work because a better educated public opinion is swiftly leaving it behind, particularly on questions of global warming and the GFC, is to be welcomed. Aly's may be a clear — even a necessary — argument, but it is not an original one.

Political scientists have long been acquainted with Lipset's typology of the Radical Right, in which he and his confreres, Daniel Bell and Theodore Adorno, make crystalline the proposition that a Catholic politics is a politics of the centre, opposed to both collectivism and capitalism.

Does Aly's contribution to a much-needed new conservative policy discourse offer hope for those wedded to the resuscitation of an Australian political Catholicism, or does his analysis mark a radical incompatibility between the positions of a Liberal leader and the fundamental claims of the Catholic social justice tradition?

To answer this question is not only to depart from the depictions and continua of the right and left but also to engage in a kind of Socratic critique of Catholic Social Teaching to establish where it sits on some of the abiding socio-economic questions of the 21st century, such as women's and homosexual rights, global warming, the ubiquitous intrusion of the free-market into everyday life, the predicament of refugees and Indigenous people and a host of other complex imponderables manifestly unaddressed by Catholic Social Teaching alongside its standard contributions to the discourse of justice and peace.

Thus, the problem with conservative politics may not simply be semantic, reflecting an inability to comprehend Aly's distinction between 'conservative' and 'neoliberal', 'right' and 'left'; it may simply be that a familiarity with Catholic Social Teaching is inadequate on its own to inform a contemporary Catholic political consciousness, thus accounting for a disparity of

policy positions between the likes of an Abbott and a Blair.

Indeed, with so many of Labor's policies being unashamedly neo-liberal, it makes sense for the Coalition to advance a case for an alternative conservative social and economic program for Australia. How this is done is as important as what it is, as its family-friendly Paid Parental Leave policy demonstrates.

To move in such a direction, at considerable expense to the business sector, is to justify statist intervention to serve the common good. Rudd's failure to do this has exposed Labor hype on 'working families' at the cost of family-friendly policy. It also offers the kind of policy leeway to expose Rudd's now empty assurances on refugees and climate change.

Such a reconfiguration would restore some semblance of the politics of Menzies, who championed a role for the state in a corporatist-centrist Australian politics that has too easily been abandoned. Remember too that the first changes to White Australia were made by the Coalition Parties against the objections of Calwellian Labor.

Indigenous intervention was a form of protectionism long overdue, rather than a bland reliance on socially liberal policy. Indeed, there is much to salvage from Howard's policies, misconstrued as universally liberal and bereft of state intervention in the interests of the underprivileged that could be reworked into a new policy front on this score. More could be done to link such a policy frame with several aspects of Catholic Social Teaching, especially on industrial relations.

The Coalition could heal a suppurating sore in the Australian body politic by integrating low-fee private schools into a localised, varied and choice-driven public education system, through school-funding arrangements similar to those obtaining in other countries, giving parents valuable school choice without making it dependent on the payment of fees. This is a matter currently vexing Catholic education authorities, conscious that their demographic is steadily becoming wealthier, privatised and less Catholic.

In general then, such a shift is better countenanced in terms of issues that politicise Catholics and their allies, such as school funding, the treatment of refugees and bioethical questions, than a vague desire to conform to a Catholic Social Teaching that is manifestly silent on major questions of culture and society.

In fact religious politics have been successfully employed whenever Catholic principles have come under threat. What better time to resurrect a new kind of conservative Catholic politics than now, as much on bioethical questions as on parental choice of schooling, the human rights of refugees and the unborn, as on Indigenous policy and industrial relations!

Palestine's heavy metal revolution

POLITICS

James Dorsey

Meet Invincible Voice (I-Voice), two Palestinian rappers with an international following and more than 20,000 hits on their MySpace page .

Yasin Qasem, a 21-year old freelance sound engineer, and TNT aka Mohammed Turck, a 20-year-old foreman, have little difficulty touring Europe. But when the duo recently wanted to perform in Morocco they were denied entry. Yasin could not even get a visa to lead a sound engineering workshop in Casablanca. Earlier this year, the duo obtained visas for Dubai to produce their upcoming album but were turned back at Dubai airport.

Yasin and TNT have two strikes against them. They are Palestinians and they perform music that is viewed by authoritarian governments as subversive.

From Morocco to China, heavy metal musicians and their fans have been arrested and accused of threatening public order, undermining Islam and performing the devil's music. Last summer, police in Riyadh broke up a heavy metal concert in a residential compound attended by 500 mostly Saudi fans.

The highly-charged music nonetheless lives on in underground clubs, basements and private homes. 'As musicians push the boundaries of acceptable musical performance in their countries, it is clear that, wittingly or not, they are helping to open their cultures and potentially their political systems, along with them,' says Marie Korpe, executive director of Freemuse, an organisation promoting freedom of musical expression.

In a world with a dearth of outlets to express discontent, heavy metal offers an opportunity to resist authoritarian political and cultural regimes in which fans feel estranged or marginalised.

'We play heavy metal cause our lives are heavy meta'l, says Reda Zine, one of the founders of the Moroccan heavy metal scene. A Chinese colleague adds: 'Youngsters can express their hatred and emotions through metal. The music of Chinese metal groups reflects injustice, political inadequacy and corruption in government.'

The two musicians are quoted by Mark LeVine, who is a University of California Middle East history professor, an accomplished musician who performed with the likes of Mick Jagger and Albert Collins, and author of a just released report entitled *Headbanging Against Repressive Regimes: Censorship of Heavy Metal in the Middle East, North Africa, Southeast Asia and China.*

Boosted by the internet and technologies that facilitate mass distribution and are difficult

for governments to control, underground music in the Middle East and North Africa prompts reminders of the role music played in the velvet revolution that toppled regimes in Eastern Europe and the Suharto regime in Indonesia. It 'reminds us of a past, and offers a model for the future, in which artists — if inadvertently at first — helped topple a seemingly impregnable system of rule', LeVine says

Underground music, he says 'are avatars of change or struggles for greater social and political openness. They point out cracks in the facade of conformity that is crucial to keeping authoritarian or hierarchical and inegalitarian political systems in power.'

The music enables musicians and their fans to carve out autonomous spaces resistant to intrusion by government and conservative culture. To some, its rituals and practices demonstrate affinity with those of Islam. 'I don't like heavy metal. Not because it's irreligious or against Islam; but because I prefer other styles of music. But you know what? When we get together and pray loudly, with the drums beating fiercely, chanting and pumping our arms in their air, we're doing heavy metal too', a Baghdad Shi'ite cleric tells LeVine.

That association makes heavy metal even more subversive. In a crackdown that until today puts its stamp on the heavy metal scene in the Middle East and North Africa, police in Cairo in 1997 arrested 100 heavy metal fans. The arrests followed publication of a photo from a metal concert allegedly showing someone carrying an upside down cross. Egypt's then mufti, Sheikh Nasr Farid, demanded that those arrested repent, or face the death penalty for apostasy. Intimidated, musicians and fans destroyed their guitars and shaved off their beards to avoid arrest or worse.

A decade later, many musicians remain reluctant to publicly discuss their music or lyrics even though government policy is somewhat more relaxed because President Hosni Mubarak is more concerned about the Muslim Brotherhood and bloggers than it is about underground music.

Unlike in Egypt, Morocco's heavy metal scene successfully resisted government repression. In 2003, when authorities sentenced 14 musicians on charges of being Satanists, the scene responded with mass protests. The government was forced to overturn the verdicts in a rare civil society victory against an Arab government.

The victory highlighted a lesson Arab regimes have seldom understood: the velvet glove is often more effective than the baton. Yet heavy metal in the region stands at a crossroads. The more mainstream tolerance it achieves, the less socially and politically critical it becomes.

'If heavy metal becomes just another genre of defanged and commodified youth culture, the cultural avant-garde of youth culture who a generation ago made it so important in the Middle East, North Africa, China and Southeast Asia, will naturally search for other genres of music to express the anger, anxieties and despair that originally made the music so powerful,' LeVine says.

Putting patients before premiers' egos

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has been attempting to persuade state premiers to agree to his government's health reform proposals. The negotiations have produced an unseemly display of political brinkmanship, chiefly from Victorian Premier John Brumby, who is anxious to show some political muscle ahead of this year's state election.

His proud boast that Victoria has the best health system came unstuck during his 'Putting Patients First' address to the National Press Club last Wednesday. He was particularly rattled by this question from Sue Dunlevy of the *Daily Telegraph:*

Victoria's hospitals see fewer emergency and elective surgery patients within the recommended time than hospitals in NSW. You spend $123 less per patient than NSW. Your hospital system provides fewer beds per thousand people than NSW. And your hospital performance has been going backwards for five years. Why should you be regarded as some kind of authority on health? And why should patients in other states have to put up with a second-rate system because someone who can't run his own health system is behaving like a bully?

It doesn't matter which state has the best health system. And a state boasting that its system is better than other states' systems is not putting the wellbeing of patients first. It is a source of shame that some states have better health systems than others. Having so many separate health systems is most likely holding us back.

It's even worse that a leader appears to be proudly endorsing this inequality in health services available to Australians. There's no question that all Australians must be equal in the eyes of the nation's federal and state health policymakers. Perhaps Brumby's brinkmanship is the best argument in favour of the Prime Minister's attempt to wrest control of health from the states.

A recent collection of essays from social advocacy group Catalyst Australia titled *Equality Speaks: Challenges for a Fair Society* includes a succinct analysis of Australia's health care system that points to the need for greater coordination.

Australia's ability to tackle inequitable health outcomes is greatly hampered by a complex health delivery system traversing Federal and State jurisdictions and private and public health services. In all there are nine departments of health in Australia for just 20 million people.

Moreover *putting patients first* for a fairer and more equal society involves forgetting not only about state fiefdoms, but departmental fiefdoms as well. Catalyst Executive Director

Jo-anne Schofield, who wrote the health policy analysis, believes undue attention to performance indicators such as hospital emergency waiting times can miss the point of health reform. She says it's about 'building communities where opportunity can flourish'.

Even lifestyle interventions through preventative programs can fly in the face of genuine health reform, as evidence shows that such targeted interventions mostly succeed among more advantaged groups. Schofield says prevention will have little impact if the social determinants of health are not considered, including factors which result in social exclusion such as poverty, disability, poor social support and lack of education and skills.

Putting patients first is about understanding the social context of those with the most acute health challenges, not the construction of political ego.

The Catalyst collection is a print publication, but Catalyst has kindly made a PDF file of the health chapter available to Eureka Street *readers for download here .*

The trouble with school ethics classes

EDUCATION

Neil Ormerod

It is difficult to see how anyone could object to the teaching of ethics in schools. Everyone could benefit from a better understanding of ethics after all.

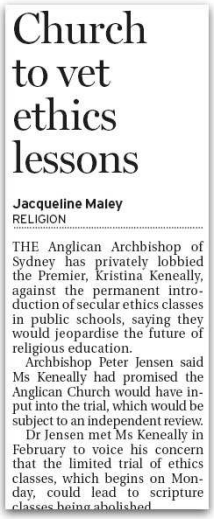
However, the recent emerging brawl in NSW over the teaching of ethics in public schools is making for some interesting bedfellows as the Atheist Foundation and the Sydney Anglican diocese trade blows over the proposal by the St James Ethics Centre.

The Centre is proposing that students who do not sign up for scripture classes in the public school system should be offered ethics courses as an attractive alternative to 'twiddling their fingers' while scripture classes take place.

One of the ironies of the fight is that the Centre itself was originally established by the Anglican parish of St James, King Street, Sydney. This is one of the few tolerated 'non-evangelical' Anglican parishes in a diocese otherwise dominated by the evangelical approach of the Jensens.

Still the Centre is now less formally related to the parish and has moved towards a greater independence from any particular religion. Nonetheless their website home page prominently features a quote from St Augustine.

And they can now count the Atheist Foundation as an ally in their efforts to promote ethics education in schools. The Foundation argues that one can be ethical without religious faith and that secular values 'can be appreciated regardless of one's religion or lack thereof'.



Church to vet ethics lessons

Jacqueline Maley
RELIGION

THE Anglican Archbishop of Sydney has privately lobbied the Premier, Kristina Keneally, against the permanent introduction of secular ethics classes in public schools, saying they would jeopardise the future of religious education.

Archbishop Peter Jensen said Ms Keneally had promised the Anglican Church would have input into the trial, which would be subject to an independent review.

Dr Jensen met Ms Keneally in February to voice his concern that the limited trial of ethics classes, which begins on Monday, could lead to scripture classes being abolished

The concerns of the Anglican diocese seem to move in two directions. The first is that the ethics programs might attract students away from existing scripture classes and diminish their effectiveness. This looks more like a matter of turf wars, of seeking to maintain numbers and so justify their continuance.

However the more substantive issue is the Anglicans' concerns over a 'secular' ethics displacing traditional Judeao-Christian ethics based on the Bible. Secularism is raising its ugly head!

This is perhaps less an issue for Catholics who have always claimed a basis for ethics in 'natural law', not just the Bible. But for evangelical Christians solely dependent on the scriptures for their ethical demands, the claim of a secular ethics based on reason alone is more problematic.

Indeed the Catholic Church has been much less vocal on the issue, perhaps for this reason.

The Catholic tradition has always seen its ethical precepts as based on reason, with scripture assisting us because of the 'darkening of the intellect' caused by sin.

The claim that a purely 'secular' ethics can be developed based on reason alone is itself not unproblematic. At least since the time of Kant, philosophers have been attempting to derive ethical precepts 'from reason alone', with lesser and greater success.

Certainly there has been no agreement between them beyond bland generalities. Indeed the injunctions offered by Richard Dawkins in *The God Delusion*, such as 'in all things strive to do no harm', 'live life with a sense of joy and wonder' and 'enjoy your own sex life' are superficial and ineffectual in resolving significant moral issues.

On the other hand the course proposals of the St James Centre seem on first glance more designed to make people more reflective moral agents, rather than to help them arrive at substantive moral precepts; more about procedure than content. While of value in itself, such a process has no clear way of overcoming the debilitating effects of self-interest, however enlightened, leading to a moral subjectivism and relativism.

Certainly the moral relativism of our present age will not be challenged by such an approach. Absolute injunctions against torture or slavery require something more than a procedural account of moral reasoning.

In seeking to develop our moral reasoning, we may well ask what exactly counts as 'reason'? Many people today would claim that the ability of our Aboriginal people to live sustainably on this continent may have something to teach us about proper use of resources, a major moral issue. Is that not then a 'reason' to at least consider their moral precepts?

The fact that the vast majority of religious believers live lives of simple virtue, despite some spectacular failures, may also be a 'reason' to seriously consider the contribution of religious ethics.

Even a secular ethics may find in this sufficient reason to at least dialogue with religious ethics; certainly it would be unreasonable to completely exclude such dialogue. I'm sure the St James Centre would agree, but I'm not sure their atheist supporters would.

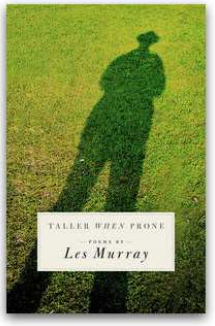
Finally any ethical approach must recognise the difference between moral reasoning and moral performance. Beyond appeals to self-control, moral reasoning cannot provide the empowerment we need in order consistently to perform as moral agents. Nor can it tell us what to do in the face of our own persistent moral failure.

We need something beyond moral condemnation and genuine moral guilt in the face of such failures if we are not to sink into despair. And so beyond ethical consideration there are questions of grace and forgiveness, areas where Christianity at least claims to know something worth knowing.

Black Saturday gibe mars Murray's might

BOOKS

Philip Harvey



Les Murray: *Taller when Prone*. Black Inc. , Melbourne, 2010. ISBN: 9781863954709. RRP $24.95.

We were at dinner in Soho

and the couple at the next table

rose to go. The woman paused to say

to me: I just wanted you to know

I have got all your cook books
and I swear by them!

I managed

to answer her: Ma'am
they've done you nothing but good!

which was perhaps immodest

of whoever I am.

—*'Fame'*

No recipes here, but this could be called a travel book, with the poet at home on the lonely planet. Visiting the Dead Sea and its 'clear Mars-gravity water' Murray reports that 'we drifted/ high as triremes'. In the Midi he sees lavender 'deeply planted as mass javelins/ in the hoed floor of the land'. And closer to Bunya, Bass Strait is an 'Undersea waterfall,/ no shoaling slants above/ nowhere a roaring wall'. Geography and abundance: the spruiker of sprawl continues to think big.

Talking of travel, Murray also tells us, in 'Science Fiction' that

I can travel

faster than light

so can you

the speed of thought

the only trouble

is at destinations

our thought balloons

are coated invisible

no one there sees us

and we can't get out

to be real or present

and quite in keeping with past expectations, the travel we experience in our heads reading Murray is rapid, exhilarating, and very often new. Perhaps this is why we read and write poems in particular, to approximate the speed of connections that our minds make anyway every minute. Murray is intimating this awareness.

Many of the delights of the Murray worldview are in action here. If you are still open to learning how English can say new things in fewest words, look at this description of eucalypts: 'Blown down in high winds/ they reveal the black sun of that trick.' Or these six words for the universe: 'The illuminant immense/ irrefutable by science.'

Likewise, the familiar Murray modes of expression keep on keeping on. There is the peculiar language of surfaces — planes, angles, patterns — that seems to be his own preserve, and the related language of spatial surprise. 'He is often above you/ and appears where you will go,' he writes in 'Observing the Mute Cat'.

We hear the bumptious tossing about of opinions, memories, snapshots, voices, history and cultural baggage. 'Infinite Anthology', for example, is a comic excerpt in the history of those favourite poems of everyone's, words themselves. Two of my favourites are 'blackout — Aboriginal party or picnic, whites not invited' and 'offbook — (theatre) having one's lines down pat'.

And there is the talk, the never-ending talk which, as with any good poet when we are in the right mood, leaves us wondering how we ever did without it. A country poet of prodigious knowledge, Murray is always best in his seamless seeming.

Having said that though, I personally can live without 'The 41st Year of 1968', a poem that would reduce the causes of the Black Saturday fires to differences in forest management between what he calls 'hippies' and 'rednecks', both of these straw men. Utilising poetry to play the blame game is unacceptable in this context and demeans our understanding of the complexity of that disaster. No one is better or wiser for this poem, but thankfully this collection has little of Murray's black-and-white polemic, a habit where he forgoes subtlety in the name of old prejudices and imagined paybacks. The Royal Commission is still in session.

Les Murray's self-diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome, made public in a remarkable previous poem called 'Asperges', marked a turning point in how we may appreciate both the man and his poetry. It in no way alters 'the achieve of, the mastery of the thing', but avails us of new insight.

If one takes the diagnosis on face value, it opens insightful understanding of the kaleidoscopic, almost Shakespearean range, accessibility and especial use of his vocabulary. It may well shed light on the distinctive adversarial nature of much of his work about human relations, as well as Murray's self-styled isolation.

And, more obviously, it certainly explains the in-the-headness of so much of his poetry, something that is a blessing for his readers but probably less so for the poet himself: all that sensation needing words to make it tolerable. I conclude this coda to the review by quoting in full 'Phone Canvass', a koan of gentle identification, that may possibly be akin to empathy:

Chatting, after the donation part,

the Blind Society's caller

answered my shy questions:

'... and I love it on the street,

all the echo and air pressure,

people in my forehead and

metal stone brick, the buildings

passing in one side of my head ...

I can hear you smiling.'

Imelda Marcos the Musical

MUSIC

Tim Kroenert

'Like most politicians, she was driven by psychological angels and demons', writes US-based musician and artist David Byrne of Imelda Marcos, the former first lady ofthe Philippines. 'Sometimes one side would win, and sometimes the other.' Byrne visits both angels and demons in *Here Lies Love*, a concept album 'musical' about Imelda Marcos' life.

From the outset, Byrne runs the risk of deifying a monster. He presents a largely upbeat package of songs, and this would seem to conflict with the historical reality. According to human rights groups, more than 1000 people were assassinated without trial, and up to 35,000 were tortured, under martial law instigated during the Marcos reign. Imelda's infamous 3000 pairs of shoes were only the most benign symbol of the regime's excesses.

But Byrne is aware of the inherent ironies. The glorious title track (performed by Florence Welch) has Imelda recalling her early life from a modern-day dance floor. The phrase repeated during the anthemic chorus, 'Here lies love', is the epitaph Imelda famously wanted inscribed upon her grave stone. Immediately the album conflates themes of death and celebration. This is ostensibly a rags-to-riches story but, in Byrne's fable, ambition and excess are the hallmarks of the fatally flawed.

Byrne distills historical record, quotes and his own insights into 22 vignettes that signpost the significant events in Imelda's life and career. With English DJ and producer Fatboy Slim he has created songs that evoke the disco, funk and soul music of the 1970s (Imelda was, importantly, something of a disco junkie) while being thoroughly modern, even otherworldly in their theatricality.

We witness Imelda's troubled childhood, her friendship with housekeeper Estrella, her rejection by youthful beau Benigno 'Ninoy' Aquino, and her success as a local beauty queen. We are shown her marriage to future president Ferdinand Marcos, the early beneficence of their leadership, the eventual corruption of their regime, and the country's descent into chaos under martial law and the notorious Order 1081 established in 1972.

By casting a different performer for each song, the album caricatures the different emotional and psychological states of its characters at different stages in the story. Martha Wainwright croons Disney-like as young Imelda preparing to go out and face the world ('The Rose of Tacloban'). Santigold strikes a coquettish sneer as Imelda the 'champagne diplomat', drinking and dancing with world leaders as a means of forwarding Filipino interests ('Please Don't).

At times the casting is vital. 'The Whole Man' would be a poor stand-alone song; it expounds Imelda the politician's childish philosophies about the true, the good and the beautiful. The song is helped by the vocals of Kate Pierson, who is recognisable as the female voice from 1970s new wave band the B-52s. That band made a serious job of being silly (think 'Rock Lobster'); in Pierson's hands 'The Whole Man' becomes a straight piss-take, and Imelda a half-lucid would-be guru.

Byrne's portrait of Imelda is nuanced and memorable. Amid the funked-up name-dropping of 'Dancing Together' (sung by Sharon Jones), Imelda parties with celebrities on New York's club scene, apparently under the delusion that she is doing her political duty by living out the aspirations of fellow Filipinos. 'Please Don't' hints that her desire to see the Philippines excel on the world stage has its roots in her snubbed existence as a youth. 'Walk Like a Woman' (Charmaine Clamor) reveals Imelda's emotional turmoil at being remade by her husband into the political and social asset he believes she can be.

Byrne's supporting characters are sketchier. Notably Estrella, whose substantial subplot merely shadows Imelda's story, and therefore tells us more about Imelda than Estrella herself: she witnesses Imelda and Ferdinand's marriage from the fringes in the lovely and naÃ¯ve 'When She Passed By' (Allison Moorer); an older, plagued Estrella is rejected upon the doorstep of her former friend in 'Never So Big' (Sia).

Estrella's best song (and one of the album's) is 'Order 1081', in which she (played by an aching Natalie Merchant) witnesses the often violent effects of martial law. Estrella's shack is bulldozed, along with thousands of others in the slums on the edge of Manila, as part of a clean-up campaign led by Imelda: the extent to which Imelda has lost her humanity is reflected in this unknowing destruction of her childhood friend's home.

Ferdinand's one song is one of the weakest on the album: in 'The Perfect Hand' he drawls on, via country singer Steve Earles' tobacco rasp, about the mutual advantageousness of his union with Imelda.

More poignantly, Benigno Aquino, Imelda's former lover and now a political rival to Ferdinand, duets with Imelda on 'Seven Years'. The song begins during his time in solitary confinement under Order 1081 and ends with his assassination. The latter event led to the downfall of the Marcos regime in the face of the formidable People Power Movement. This song, sung by Byrne and the eerily shrill My Brightest Diamond, drips with portent.

Here Lies Love concludes with an imagined duet between Imelda and Estrella, 'Why Don't You Love Me?' (Cyndi Lauper and Tori Amos). For Imelda, the question is directed to her fellow countrymen, whom she sees as having betrayed her. Estrella's question is for Imelda, the friend who abandoned her during repeated times of need. It is a simple human plea directed to a woman who, it seems, has little of humanity left to give.

Abuse cases teach Church deportment under fire

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

Deportment was a word much used by school authorities in my childhood. It is rarely used today. Deportment meant not running riot on trams; it meant wearing caps (or gloves), looking interested when bored, and being seen but not heard. Deportment meant acting like a lady or a gentleman.

The concept of deportment, though, was tricky. It disclosed the possibility of a gap between external behaviour and inner disposition. So continual exhortations to deportment aroused resistance because they showed disrespect for our real selves. Inveterate exhorters also became paranoid about their real enemies — those who practised impeccable deportment with a contemptuous gleam in their eye.

This was part of the ordinary tension of school life, lived in the confidence that in general the students 'got it' — that they accepted the values embodied in good deportment. But every now and then came times of anxiety. The standards of deportment were seen to decline; the authorities feared that the students didn't get it; they noted with alarm every uncapped head; for reassurance they insisted on more detailed deportmental compliance: not just caps, but tidy caps at the right angle, had to be worn. It all met with more and more passive resistance until in time anxiety ebbed.

The little dramas of deportment illuminate some aspects of the most recent controversies over sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. The publicity given to abuse and to self-serving responses to it in the European church and the Roman centre has created high anxiety. The behaviour of Bishops and the Pope are under scrutiny, and each day brings evidence of new perceived lapses.

Every day, too, brings new instructions about deportment to the Pope and his Curia. He must sack bishops, resign, apologise personally, submit to independent investigation, reveal documentation, call a church-wide season of penance. To my unreconstructed schoolboy self, these exhortations seem to flow from anxiety that the inner attitudes of the Vatican officials may not match their words. The boy in me says, 'Give it a break. Stop nagging, and try trusting the poor coots.'

Unreconstructed schoolboys, of course, are not good guides, especially for the older self. But neither is anxiety a good counsellor. The question which feeds anxiety is always whether the people under consideration 'get it'. If they show that they have, the media caravan moves on, and the people within their organisations get on with their lives.

As any spin doctor will tell you, persuading people that you 'get it' also requires correct deportment. It consists of absorbing angry and unfair criticism of yourself and your bosses and not responding to it, making it clear through your words and gestures that the people who are closest to your hearts are those who have been damaged by your organisation, that your highest priority is their flourishing, that you take responsibility for your organisation's deficiencies, and that you are working seriously to identify and remedy its deficiencies to ensure that no one will be damaged in future.

Bad deportment will persuade people that you didn't get it. If you are defensive, leave it to your lawyers, blame the media, regard the fairness of the way you and your organisation have been treated as the central issue, protest that your organisation is better than many others that have got off lightly, defend the integrity of your masters, and dissociate the organisation from wrongdoers within it, you will convince people that you haven't got it at all. You may have good arguments, particularly about the mistakes made by the media, but you show that you have missed what matters.

The Catholic churches in the United States and Australia have generally learned harsh lessons in deportment as the extent of abuse became public. As most of us have to do, Catholic spokespersons have learned from their mistakes. And the churches are generally safer, more modest and better places for the learning. Current evidence suggests that the European churches are still learning under fire.

Of course good deportment can be mere spin. But it is a first step to dispelling anxiety. And good deportment often helps to good attitudes. The lines that first sound strange on our lips can become part of our operative view of the world.

But ultimately intentions and actions need to match words and gestures. Only if church leaders show themselves over the long haul to be single minded in their care for those who have been abused in the church, and painstaking in identifying and changing the conditions that encouraged abuse and its covering up, will anxiety finally dissipate.

Then we may have firm ground to hope that whenever people meet in the churches, they will flourish, not wither, and that the institutions of the church will help their flourishing. Deportment won't seem such a big deal.

Death and rebirth of a migrant

NON-FICTION

Gillian Bouras

Easter is meant to be a time for reflection, but this year I feel I didn't have the right focus during Holy Week. My focus was on myself and my grief, although you'd think I'd be used to the pain of the divided heart by now.

Towards the end of March I said goodbye to my eldest son, to my aged father , and to the city of my birth, Melbourne, which I had been visiting for more than three months. Then I flew the long hours to Athens, arriving in a morning blur of fatigue mixed with joy, for in Athens I was reunited with my youngest son, and shortly afterwards telephoned my middle son, who lives near Chania, Crete.

Alexander and I returned to the Peloponnesian village for Easter, to the house in which we have both lived on and off for nearly 30 years. But part of me was still in Melbourne, watching the change of colours, hearing the trams rattling and clicking their way along leafy tunnels, walking familiar streets, seeing the striped sails of yachts against the blue of the bay. Talking to my son and father and to my friends. Especially that: part of me was indeed still talking to them all, and in Australian English.

So, on driving up the village street to the house, I felt once more that my ageing heart, held together with Velcro and Band-aids, was about to start some serious bleeding through the worn seams.

When such melancholy descends the only thing to do is walk. And so I did, eventually fetching up near a chapel on a hill, for the village is ringed by chapels, six of them, in a kind of protective belt. Outside the one I found on Good Friday a gum tree and a Judas tree stand side by side. I sat and contemplated these for quite some time: my life, or my two lives in a neat symbol. Such was my thought.

And then I took in the scene around me. I had viewed it many times before, of course, but when your life forms a pattern of departure and return the familiar is constantly made new. The glories of autumnal Melbourne were gone, but here were the beauties of the Greek spring. Here again were the reminders of life's pattern of loss and gain, another nudge, if you like, to an understanding of the way in which life is so much more and so much less than we expect.

This little settlement, marked by roads snaking up and away into more remote villages, is backed by the irregular pleats and folds of the last of the Taygetus mountain range. Now those pleats and folds are tufted with bushy yellow gorse. Wisteria, blooming purple for Lent, droops in splendour over stone walls, and there is matching purple in the aubretia at ankle-height. White irises grow wild here, and march in rows along the terraces of olives.

The groves will soon be carpeted in yellow, white and mauve, but in the middle of all this colour, churches and chapels always drape their interiors in deep purple and black. Two days had to elapse before the shedding of these signs of ritual mourning.

The most striking landscape colour of all is the red provided by the poppies that I once believed grew only in Flanders Fields. But Greece has 11 species of these flowers, more correctly called anemones. And red is the colour the Czar of all the Russias used to wear on Easter Day: demon-defying red.

It was all so beautiful. I reminded myself then of the wisdom of living in the moment, or at least trying to do so. And at that particular moment I was very alive, I did appreciate every little thing that I could see. And hear: the birds were bursting with song. And smell: the scents of spring and new-cut hay were all around me.

And my divided heart, my nomadic life? What was and is there to say? Perhaps just this: migration is a kind of death, for the old self has to die. But there is a life, at its best a rich one, after such a death.

Perhaps my Holy Week focus was not so misdirected, after all.

High-tech health in the bush

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Ben O'Mara

Technological innovation is an important part of supporting the health and wellbeing of communities.

The Rudd Government has recognised the positive impact that new and emerging digital technology can have in creating better health outcomes by its commitment to eHealth in the planned reform of Australia's health and hospital system, the introduction of the Individual Electronic Patient Health Record (IEHR), and the contribution of significant funding to the National eHealth Transition Authority. eHealth, it seems, is the way of the future.

The IEHR is a secure, electronic record of a person's medical history, stored and shared in a network of connected systems, which individuals and health professionals can easily view through a computer and online. This suggests a more coordinated and efficient communication of patient information that can help to improve the quality of care and reduce health expenditure in the long term.

The problem is that the rollout of the IEHR and other eHealth projects face challenges due to the differences between and among communities across Australia in relation to their quality and frequency of access to technology, and the ways in which health and wellbeing are understood and communicated.

Communities from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds in rural areas, such as the Vietnamese, Tongans and Sudanese in country Victoria, and Indigenous Australians in the Northern Territory, face significant challenges not only in the provision of effective health and wellbeing information and support, but also the kinds of technology available for their everyday use.

Research performed by the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network found that people who live in rural and remote regions, including Indigenous communities, do not have the same access to technology services as people in metropolitan areas. They are less likely to have broadband access. 3G network coverage can be unreliable, and even basic telephone usage in some places is limited.

Engagement with technology is further complicated by cultural background, age, educational level, language proficiency and familiarity with technology. This has particular implications for refugee and migrant groups.

VICNET and The State Library of Victoria worked with members of the Dinka, Harari and S'gaw Karen communities in the Wyndham area and discovered that simple training and

access to the internet is not enough to ensure digital inclusion for many new and emerging communities. Internet content in the appropriate language is scarce, and to create culturally appropriate content requires specific skills.

These are important considerations for eHealth initiatives that require health service providers and community members to have high quality broadband, up-to-date computers, familiarity with English based web platforms and the technical know-how in order to take advantage of online health information.

The beauty of innovation is that it does not need to rely on high cost, exclusive and 'top down' approaches to using technology that supports health and wellbeing. We can instead draw on the technology that communities feel comfortable with, understand and can afford.

In Zandspruit, one of the poorest rural areas of South Africa, Monash University has worked with the Emthonjeni Community Centre to set up a Digital Doorway project which is a freestanding, public access computer that can operate in standalone mode or as part of a two, three, or four-terminal kiosk.

It is a kind of 'tough' technology that features a basic computer housed in a steel casing, has a vandal-resistant keyboard, a protective plastic screen and solar power option. Information can be uploaded locally or remotely, and can include in preferred languages a range of subjects, including health and wellbeing.

The Health Interactive Technology Network has worked with local people in many indigenous communities across Australia to create a network of easy-to-use touchscreen kiosks providing high quality, culturally sensitive health information. By building content in partnership with communities, including films and interactive media on subjects such as smoking, sexual health and vaccination, the kiosks engage with the communication preferences of communities, and help to address problems of literacy, affordability and familiarity with technology.

There are a wide range of technology-enhanced health initiatives possible as part of the Federal Government's investment in eHealth. For the IEHR and other eHealth technological innovations to be most effective in supporting Australia's diverse population, they must address the real differences communities have in quality of access to technology, build on their capacity to use the digital technology they are familiar with and can afford, and involve them meaningfully in the design, production and dissemination of information about health and wellbeing.

Fruit half-eaten by animals

POETRY

Belinda Rule and Libby Hart

How like

And I am wondering about your face,

how it alters when a mood takes hold.

Such a changeling

like a sparrow, like a burning flutter,

higher and higher up into the tree.

Like a breath by cold night,

the crispest revelation breaking ice.

What is left is the warmest sensation at the pit of stomach.

How like a stretched metaphor you are,

how like broken branches from an apple tree.

Like its fallen fruit half-eaten by animals.

How like a mystery,

entangled by the twang of a country that can't own you.

How like an endless path of thought.

How like a mesmeriser

with the power of foresight.

How like his instruments buzzing blackly across my mind.

How like the concept of the wheel,

of the science of silence.

How like etcetera in the tall, green grasses.

How like a slipperiness of truth slithering by and by.

How like the moon in all of its tiredness,

of the river who waits for the clearest direction to your door.

—Libby Hart

Gospel

You don't need to tell me how
Daniel always wins, for I

am the difference between

two pieces of cake. Later I will find him

and exact my reward — the strawberry

sliding down my gullet and

onto the floor. I have no gullet.

I am the thing that falls off the shelf

when nothing has fallen.

I am the ringing in your ears.

I come from where you go

when you don't appear to be here. On windy nights,

I pop the thumbtacks out of the wall.

If you

stare down the barrel

of your empty pupil,

you will not find me.

Beneath the spongy green rim

of your iris, I curl up to

stay still, which is

sleep.

Other times,

I inhabit the space between

the dust and the floor, where

I see what no-one else has seen

or will see: the shadows of the dust,

small as seeds of snowflakes.

Before I was here,

I was there,

and I said to them,

You will not stop seeking until you find,

and when you find, you will be disturbed,

and when you are disturbed, you will probably

spill something and

stain your shirt.

I said to them,

Lift up a stone,

find a spider, fat as a grape.

Do not split a piece of wood,

or I do not know what

I will be tempted to do.

I say to you now,

I have cast fire upon letters

left too close to candles, I have
stolen mustard seeds to cast

at rocks, the space between

the lid and the jar

ticklish around my middle.

I have parted the very walls and

marched the ants through. I say,

Run, and I will be

tucked up in the heel

of your shoe, gnawing at the lining.

—*Belinda Rule*

Plane tragedy prolongs Polish-Russian curse

POLITICS

Tony Kevin

The Devil himself could not have better orchestrated Sunday's air tragedy at Smolensk Airport, in Western Russia.

According to reports, a Polish Air Force Tupolev-154 government VIP aircraft crashed in heavy fog on its fourth landing attempt, after being advised by Russian ground traffic controllers not to try to land, killing all 96 persons on board.

Those killed include Polish President Lech Kaczynski, senior Polish armed forces general staff, Polish politicians representing major parties, leading Polish media intellectuals, and select family members representing the estimated 22,000 Polish army officers who were murdered by the Soviet secret police at nearby Katyn Forest under Stalin's orders in 1940.

The symbolism of this disaster could not be worse. This was a national delegation on its way to a solemn 70th anniversary remembrance ceremony at Katyn, hosted by the Russian government. It was to be a symbolic moment of reconciliation between two neighbouring countries that have been separated by war, religion, language and conflicted senses of national identity and historical destiny. The Polish-Russian relationship has for centuries been deeply troubled, almost as if cursed.

The Katyn massacre had been a culminating horror. After the bloody Nazi-Soviet military occupation and partition of Poland, and the subsequent Nazi invasion of Russia, what was left of the invasion-decimated Polish officer corps was encamped under Soviet guard at Katyn Forest, now close to the front line as Wehrmacht armies, already deep inside Russia, rapidly advanced towards Moscow. Stalin ordered that the Polish officers be killed, and that the murders be blamed on the invading Nazis.

After World War Two, this lie came into increasing doubt, but it was not until Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev released hitherto secret Soviet records that Soviet responsibility for the Katyn massacre was finally acknowledged.

Now, this — a horrible event, overshadowing a moment that was to have conveyed a positive symbolic message of the deepest historical significance for all Poles.

Regardless of politics, all Poles are now mourning the loss of lives here. We will have to

wait for what the black box flight recorder (already recovered) says. Former Polish President and Solidarity leader Lech Walesa has hinted at the possibility that the presidential party might have had a hand in overruling pilot advice that it was unsafe to try to land in the thick fog.

The pilots were highly experienced Polish air force pilots, well used to the region's adverse winter flying weather, and one could understand the human temptation for those on board to proceed with the landing, with a Russian welcoming delegation waiting at the airport and in view of the huge symbolic weight of the occasion.

President Lech Kaczynski, along with his twin brother Jaroslaw, were polarising figures in Poland's complex multi-party democratic politics. Their right-wing Law and Justice Party has represented a political viewpoint that is socially conservative, pro-clerical, strongly nationalist, pro-NATO, and generally suspicious of Russia.

Their party does not form part of the present centrist Polish governing coalition, headed by liberal Prime Minister Donald Tusk. Jaroslaw Kacynski now would seem the most likely politician to be elected to replace his brother in the largely symbolic role of President.

Russian leaders President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin have responded to the tragedy with appropriate and sensitive words and actions, expressing the Russian people's grief at Poland's tragedy. Putin has taken personal charge of the official Russian crash investigation.

At this stage, it seems reasonable to anticipate that, though the plane was old, some form of pilot error will be found to have been the main cause. But inevitably, the tragedy casts a further deep shadow on Polish-Russian relations. The stars lined up very badly for the two countries on this sad day.

I end on a personal note of sadness. When I was Australia's ambassador to Poland in 1991—94, the head of my domestic staff establishment was a gracious and dignified lady in her 50s, of impeccable breeding and manners, called Zosia. She was the daughter of a Polish Army officer who was killed at Katyn. She had grown up fatherless and poor in Communist Poland after World War Two. If Zosia is still alive, I feel deeply for her today; and I just hope that she was not on the plane.

Refugee backflip misses what matters

HUMAN RIGHTS

Andrew Hamilton

The Government's decision to suspend the processing of future asylum seekers from Afghanistan and Sri Lanka raises many questions. As always when there are many possible points of discussion, it is important to ask what matters. In this case what matters is that asylum seekers find respect for their human dignity in ways consistent with Australia's proper responsibilities and interests.

This decision does not respect the dignity of asylum seekers. One of the reasons given for the delay in processing is that it will deter others from coming by boat to seek asylum in Australia. The tired and brutal logic of deterrence involves inflicting avoidable suffering on an innocent group of people in order to send a message to others. It treats human beings as things, and is inherently lacking in respect.

Not only the reason for the decision, but also the suffering entailed by delayed processing diminishes the humanity of asylum seekers. The delay will extend the time they spend in detention. My experience over many years as chaplain in a small detention centre is that most asylum seekers (who come by air) arrive alert and with bright eyes. After three months their eyes become opaque and they are often frustrated and angry. After six months they become listless and show signs of depression.

Those working with refugees commonly say that the effects of detention do not end when they gain residence, but still impair their lives many years afterwards. As Australian of the Year, Dr Pat McGorry said detentions centres are factories for producing mental illnesses. And that, despite the best efforts of staff in the centres.

The human cost of delay will be ravaged lives and greater callousness directed towards them. This was nicely symbolised in the simultaneous decision to send federal police to Christmas Island to deal with the aftermath of the decision.

The decision also raises larger questions whether the processes for determining asylum seekers' claim to protection on Christmas Island guarantee respect for their human dignity. Respect centrally involves fairness. At present Australian policies towards people who arrive by boat to claim asylum are quite unsatisfactory, although, in contrast with the previous government, they are administered in a generally fair way. But the decisions made by Government officers and the review of negative decisions are not subject to statutory review. The justice of the decisions depends on government and ministerial good will, not on law.

Now that the Government has bent to the populist winds fanned by an opportunistic

Opposition, there are grounds for fearing that the claims of asylum seekers will be judged in a way that unduly reflects the interests of the Australian Government. The Australian Government will have an interest in minimising the number of asylum seekers who are found to be refugees. It will have an interest in recognising Sri Lanka and Afghanistan as countries in which citizens, including minorities, can live safely, and to which asylum seekers can be deported.

This interest will be shared by many other nations, particularly those thatlook to withdraw troops from Afghanistan. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is now reviewing their guidelines of refugees from Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, and will certainly come under strong pressure to issue a bland and optimistic report, which officials will then be able to use in rejecting claims for asylum. If decisions were to be based on unrealistic assessments, the truth of the asylum seekers' lives, and so their dignity, would prove to be expendable.

If the processes of decision making lack integrity, the repatriation of asylum seekers whose claim for asylum is rejected will also put in jeopardy their human dignity, and indeed their lives. Recently, some refused asylum seekers have been deported to Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. If we cannot trust the processes by which they have been refused protection, and by which countries have been adjudged to be safe, we shall deport them unsure whether we have respected their rights to life and security.

These are immediate concerns raised by the recent decision. It also prompts some saddening reflections on asylum seeker policy. The present policy of processing people who arrive by boat outside Australia's deemed immigration zone is designed to disrespect their dignity. Even when softened by humane administration it is vulnerable to manipulation in times of controversy with resultant hurt to the lives of asylum seekers.

But to move to a principled and comprehensive policy, particularly when such a policy needs to be based on negotiation with other nations to protect the persecuted at each point of their journey, requires great political courage and leadership. That is unlikely when an election is close, when the majority of Australians want people who arrive by boat to be treated harshly, and the opposition party is a mouthpiece for the most brutal elements of this majority.

We may wonder whether we shall ever again see Government leaders with the courage to defend the humanity of people who belong to unpopular minorities.

Yes we can beat church sex abuse

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

In his Easter message , Cardinal George Pell made an oblique reference to sexual abuse in the Church when he referred to 'Christian failures to live up to Christian standards' and 'too many scandals and many victims'.

There is no doubt that most Australians dismiss such utterances as too little too late. Yet it is possible to look at them optimistically when set against actions of the recent past.

Less than two years ago, Bishop Anthony Fisher was widely criticised for describing those who focused on sexual abuse during World Youth Day as 'dwelling crankily on old wounds'. Earlier, Bishop Geoffrey Robinson had been criticised by his fellow bishops for his 2007 book *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church* in which he dealt frankly with sexual abuse.

The Catholic Church is fortunate that it has templates to work from, in the processes that have accompanied the formal apologies to wronged Australians made by the Prime Minister on behalf of all of us. These were the apology to the Stolen Generations in February 2008 and the apology to the Forgotten Australians in November 2009. These apologies demonstrate that reconciliation is possible.

On the morning after the Forgotten Australians apology, John Honner wrote in *Eureka Street* that they were 'all innocent', and there had been many living 'heroic, resilient lives, holding on to hope …| struggling for recognition, respect, healing and compensation for over a decade'. In making the apology, the Prime Minister accepted that this was 'an ugly story' and that 'its ugliness must be told without fear or favour'.

Honner pointed out that there would be some who had been associated with the children's homes who would not like the judgment on which the apology was based. He suggested that the rationalists would say 'get over it and move on', the apologists would say 'it wasn't all bad', and the lawyers would say 'say nothing'.

The Stolen Generations and Forgotten Australians apologies were many years in the making. They began with angry dismissals, harsh treatment of whistleblowers, and lame admissions. Yet they achieved reconciliation.

With sexual abuse in the Church, it is likely that there are more people on board than we think. Some of the work has already been done. For years, Bishop Michael Malone of Maitland-Newcastle has laboured with abusers and victims, to the extent that it has taken a toll on his own health.

There have been gestures from other Church leaders. In 2003, the then Jesuit Provincial Father Mark Raper took up the challenge from the media to visit and offer solidarity to a victim of sexual abuse. Afterwards on the *7:30 Report*, he rejected uncritical reliance on the advice of lawyers, declaring that the Church's 'financial assets are not as important as the people we seek to serve'.

These trailblazers have shown that there is a way forward. Cardinal Pell's acknowledgement of scandals in his Easter message is a start. But the task will not be complete until the Bishops make a formal apology. In preparing the apology, they might profitably draw on Bishop Robinson's book.