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11 March 2011 Volume: 21 Issue: 4

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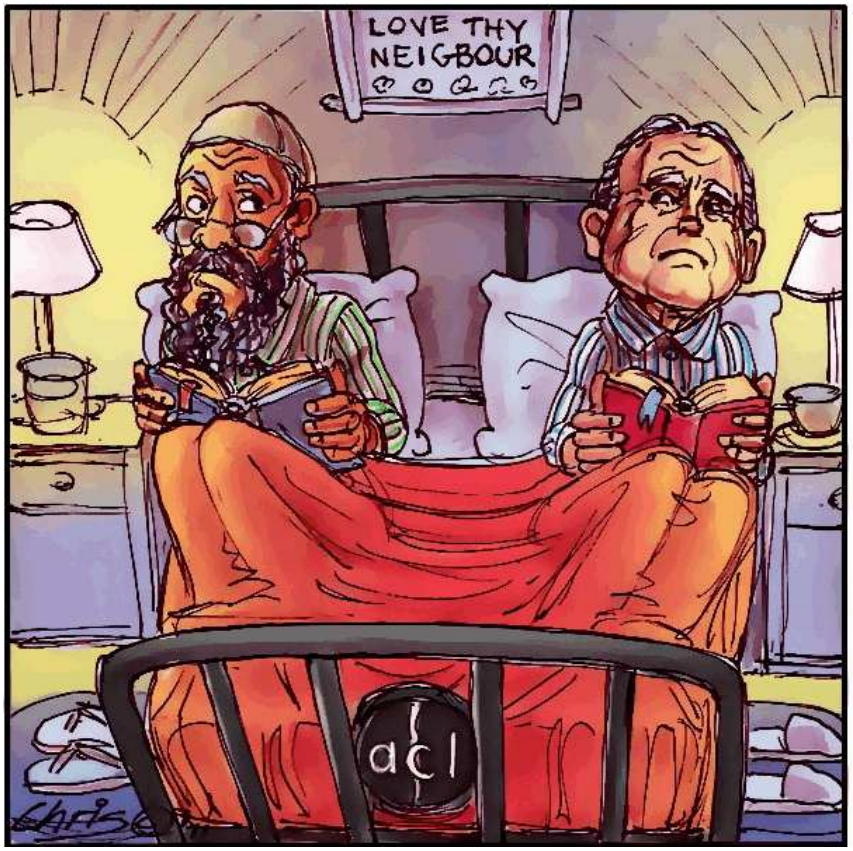

Eureka Street is published fortnightly online, a minimum of 24 times per year by Eureka Street Magazine Pty Ltd

Requests for permission to reprint material from the website and this edition should be addressed to the Editor.

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Responsibility for editorial content is accepted by the publisher.

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Drawing Julia Gillard

VIDEO

Peter Kirkwood

In a 2007 *Vanity Fair* article entitled 'Why women aren't funny', well known atheist and curmudgeon Christopher Hitchens asks : 'Why are women, who have the whole male world at their mercy, not funny?' 'Why are men, taken on average and as a whole, funnier than women?'

In a riposte to Hitchens, *Eureka Street* cartoonist Fiona Katauskas retorts that he 'must hang out with the wrong kind of chicks. I know many enormously funny women and men. The difference between them is that the men constantly tell you how funny they are and the women don't — some even clam up entirely around their male counterparts rather than compete for the limelight.'

While she doesn't necessarily clamour for the limelight, the feisty Katauskas is not backward in coming forward — and she's funny. In this interview, part of a series marking the 20th anniversary of *Eureka Street*, she talks about the art, craft and inspiration of the cartoonist, and reflects on the significance of *Eureka Street*.

The daughter of a Lithuanian immigrant father, and an Anglo-Australian mother, Katauskas says on her website she 'became a cartoonist quite accidentally'. At university she studied politics and journalism, then travelled extensively before working in overseas aid and human rights.

After being made redundant in late 1996, she writes that she 'despaired a bit (as you do) then decided to embrace the Personal Reinvention zeitgeist and became a cartoonist. I'm bloody glad I did. Cartoonists are lucky folk indeed — able to take all their experiences, beliefs, bile and passion, wrap them in a metaphor and get their fingers inky in the process.'

Since then she has worked full-time as a cartoonist, her work appearing in a range of publications including the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Australian*, the *Australian Financial Review*, *The Bulletin*, *The Chaser* and *New Matilda*. She has also illustrated books, and designed cards and T-shirts.

In 2009 she won the New Matilda Prize for Political Cartooning, and her work has been hung regularly in the National Museum of Australia's annual collection of political cartoons.

The NSW democracy deficit

POLITICS

Tony Smith

On Saturday 26 March New South Wales voters will elect the state's 55th Parliament. Liberal leader Barry O'Farrell (pictured) seems so certain to head a coalition government after 16 years of Labor rule that media speculation has concentrated on the size of the majority he will command.

During an election campaign, candidates mix with the people and face public scrutiny. They appeal for support on both broad and specific grounds, pledging themselves to behave with integrity and promising to legislate for particular policies. Elected candidates claim that the voters' endorsement gives them a popular 'mandate'.

Labor has governed NSW since 1995. Its mandate was renewed in 1999, 2003 and 2007. For various reasons — fatigue, ministerial resignations, mismanagement, allegations of corruption, policy failures — voters are unlikely to renew its mandate. Psephologists say no Labor seat with a majority under 15 per cent can be considered safe and that Labor could be reduced to a rump of about 16 seats.

If voters are disappointed with Labor now, they could be positively angry after the election. Labor's unpopularity is providing the Coalition with such an easy campaign that an O'Farrell Government will face very little pressure over specific mandates. As the election seems to be a non-event in terms of deciding government, the public is showing little interest in specific policy debates and the media have brought little pressure to bear on the Coalition over policy details and likely costs.

O'Farrell seems to be a decent and moderate sort who will behave honourably. He will be mindful however that few Opposition Leaders who win elections remain in government as long as their parties. Not since the 1930s has a premier who was a winning Opposition Leader lasted as long as his party in government. O'Farrell must consider his legacy from the first day.

The pressures on premiers are enormous, and not since Bob Askin (1965—75) has a Coalition premier lasted five years. Interestingly five post-war Labor premiers have had over five years to implement their programs, perhaps because the Labor machine has been so dominant.

O'Farrell will be subject to very diverse forces including the Liberal and National Parties and the Coalition's natural constituency in the 'big end of town'. His immediate winning Coalition predecessor in 1988 Nick Greiner was partially successful in managing these forces.

Greiner's comfortable majority however, disappeared at the 1991 election.

By contrast, Bob Carr increased Labor's one-seat 1995 majority so greatly in 1999 that Labor has stayed in power for another 12 years under Carr and his successors, Iemma, Rees and Keneally.

Traditionally the Liberal Party claims to be the party of economic expertise. Often, however, the Coalition style of public sector management emphasises not so much management as disposal of public assets.

In the 1980s and 1990s both major parties embraced economic rationalism, but few governments pursued privatisation, decentralisation, downsizing and user-pays principles as vigorously as did 'NSW Inc'. Public sector employees took industrial action as services were subjected to market forces and forced to behave like business enterprises. Greiner's opponents questioned his mandate for reform.

O'Farrell is likely to learn from the fates of his predecessors. He will note Carr's success in ordering his new Cabinet ministers to avoid major decisions in the first 100 days.

O'Farrell does not face the same challenges which Greiner did in 1988. Indeed, Labor governments reversed few of Greiner's reforms. It would be reassuring however, if O'Farrell projected a more positive image of himself and of his vision for a Coalition Government. O'Farrell has the luxury of being able to run a largely negative campaign, constantly reminding voters of Labor's shortcomings.

No one, especially no politician, should regard elections as the alpha and omega of democracy. An elected dictatorship that thrives on the general apathy of citizens is hardly democratic. While many voters could never bring themselves to cast a ballot for the Coalition parties, they realise that no party has a monopoly on ethical government. All voters should accept a change in government as an opportunity for renewal.

Barring some dramatic development, O'Farrell will aoon become the state's 43rd premier. The greatest danger facing him is that his general mandate to restore government integrity could be squandered if he introduces policies that should have been presented to voters during the campaign.

A plea such as, 'we didn't rule it out' sounds just as hypocritical as talk of 'core promises'. There is no surer way to breed public cynicism and dissipate the good will available following an election victory.

Private school education in purgatory

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Wasted on the Young* (MA). Director: Ben C. Lucas. Starring: Oliver Ackland, Adelaide Clemens, Alex Russell. 97 minutes**

High school. A place where every assignment bears the weight of your future. Where the petty expectations of peers are not petty at all, but are painfully felt. Where, amid the jostling demands of classroom and schoolyard, you are supposed somehow to 'grow up', and become your adult self.

There are good times, too. But in retrospect, high school appears largely to be a kind of penitential ritual that had to be undertaken on the way to escaping the purgatory of adolescence.

At least, that's my experience. But I wonder if it's Ben C. Lucas', too. Certainly, the Australian writer-director's debut film *Wasted on the Young* offers a nightmarish vision of schoolyard society, drenched in a sense of hellish dread, that to me seems exaggerated but unnervingly familiar.

The film focuses on a rivalry between rich kid Zack (Russell) and his stepbrother Darren (Ackland). Zack is smart and popular, an elite swimmer, a small-time drug dealer, and unchallenged king of the schoolyard. Darren is a tech whiz, a swimmer, too, but smaller than Zack, both physically and socially.

Zack and his mates take some petty pleasure in tormenting Zack. That is, until one night when, during a drug-and-booze-addled party, Darren's would-be girlfriend, Xandrie (Clemens) is assaulted and left for dead. At which point, the stepbrothers' rivalry kicks into a higher and more perilous gear.

The film's greatest achievements are stylistic. Lucas' film is visually, aurally and cerebrally resplendent. It's as if John Hughes collaborated with James Ellroy to write a screenplay, and then handed it to David Lynch to direct.

In fact, *Wasted on the Young* is nothing if not an exercise in Lynchian atmospherics. Lucas employs these in order to strangle a sense of menace out of mundane situations.

He achieves this using loads of slow-mo, hallucinatory flourishes, and prolonged, abstract images of, for example, the boys' bodies sluicing through liquid-silver water. Cinematographer Dan Freene has ensured that the imagery is as compelling and disturbing as the story.

Sound, too, is employed to unsettling effect: jolts of loud contemporary music interspersed

with artesian oceans of gloomy noise. The film sounds like the incarnation of every adolescent's combined existential angst as it rumbles down the grimy grey-lino corridor of the viewer's psyche.

With increasing disquiet you realise there appear to be no adults in this world. Absentee parents, and teachers who are never seen and rarely heard (barring one incidental exception), make this seem like an alien world from which the adults have absconded, abandoning their young to their own devices.

There is perhaps a cautionary aspect to this, relevant in the midst of the current furore about schools funding: a pricey education is insufficient if it is divorced from ethical frameworks provided by wise adults. Dangerous, even: Zack, after all, is a smart kid choosing to use his smarts for evil, not good.

The surreal aspects are offset by authentic period detail, notably the everyday technologies that are integral, even organic, to the characters' world. IM and SMS messages appear on-screen as subtitles that float above the characters, as resonant as spoken dialogue. A violent altercation is documented by students wielding camera phones. Webcams and digital video recorders also play a pivotal role.

This is an ambitious but imperfect film. It is somewhat cold and alienating, although arguably this reflects the characters' experience of their schoolyard society. The characters themselves are stereotypes — obnoxious bullies, vicious bitches, loveable misfits; merely vehicles for Lucas' ideas.

But the film's formidable style and fulsome use of the cinematic tools of image and sound effectively carry its themes of youthful alienation, and of the moral vacuity that thrives when social hierarchy stands in for moral order.

In defence of same-sex unions

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan

The messy same-sex marriage debate continues in Australia and in the US. I remain of the view that we should not extend the definition of marriage to include same-sex unions; that we should legislate to recognise same-sex unions; and that we should leave questions about the legal availability of new technologies for the creation of children by same-sex couples for determination at a later date.

In Australia, the issue is focused in the Parliament; and in the US in the courts. Here the Prime Minister has committed her party to consulting with the public while deciding how to deal with the Greens on the issue. There the President has decided his Administration will no longer argue for the constitutionality of the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act in court proceedings.

For many same-sex marriage advocates, the debate is a matter of equality and non-discrimination. A person should be allowed to marry the person they love whatever the gender of the partner.

The trouble with much human rights discourse is that it is too readily reduced to assertions about individual rights and non-discrimination. Human rights discourse needs to be more subtle when it comes to a conflict of rights situation, or when the law is having to consider the public interest or the common good as well as individual liberties.

Historically the state had little interest in recognising and enhancing the place of marriage as a social institution just for the good of the couple. The state interest in marriage is just as focused on the rights of the children and the need to provide support for the social structure most suited to the rearing and nurturing of children.

Though there has never been an ideal time when all children were born into a marriage, we have maintained marriage as the ideal institution for the raising of children by their biological parents.

In Australian civil law, we recognise de facto relationships as well as marriages. Marriage is covered by Commonwealth law, while de facto relationships are largely governed by state and territory laws. Marriage should remain a Commonwealth matter.

If the Commonwealth Parliament were to attempt legislatively to expand the common law definition of marriage to include a union between two persons of the same-sex, there would probably be a High Court challenge to determine whether such an attempt was constitutional, given that the Commonwealth Parliament has a restricted power to make laws 'with respect to

marriage'.

Under our Constitution, the Parliament cannot increase its powers just by legislatively redefining the constitutional heads of power. To take a very different example, the Commonwealth Parliament has power to make laws with respect to 'lighthouses, lightships, beacons and buoys'. It cannot willy-nilly define lighthouses to include tall inner city buildings and then make laws governing those buildings.

Just as the states and territories deal with de facto relationships, the best way to proceed is for the states and territories to give recognition to same-sex civil unions. That way we can accord equality to same-sex couples in their relationships without changing the nature of state recognised marriage.

While some human rights activists think this approach unprincipled, there are many Catholics who wonder how a Catholic priest can approve even civil recognition of same-sex unions. After all, Pope Benedict, before he became pope, taught constantly the immorality of all homosexual acts.

He also spoke against state recognition of same-sex relationships when he headed the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). Some Catholics agree completely with this teaching. Others find it problematic.

Back in 1986, then Cardinal Ratzinger taught: 'Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder.'

Though homosexual acts committed by a heterosexual person might be judged immoral, one cannot credibly cast judgment on all such acts committed by a homosexual person without first taking into account the personal and relational context of the sexual act.

There are homosexual persons who enter into loving, faithful and committed relationships. These persons should be able to live in society free from discrimination, without state interference and with state support and approval. They should enjoy the same state protection as de facto couples enjoy under existing state and territory laws.

It is very difficult to characterise such a law giving this non-discriminatory protection to same-sex couples as 'so harmful to the common good as to be gravely immoral' as Benedict has previously done. It is at least contestable whether such a law would be harmful to the common good.

Not everyone who opposes same-sex marriage is a religious bigot or enemy of human rights. We need to keep an eye on the rights of all persons, including future generations of children, and on the maintenance of a social institution which is about more than the couple. We should continue to distinguish marriage from other relationships in the law whether they be de facto or same-sex.

Loving addicts like Charlie Sheen

MEDIA

Jen Vuk

In my early 20s, I came to appreciate what it means to fall head over heels. He was erudite, aloof and utterly unattainable. Or so I thought. When he finally looked my way, my heart literally skipped a beat. But my good sense ran a mile.

The cracks began to appear not long after we started dating. I tried desperately to maintain the faÃ§ade. After all, we were would-be actors and poets. Artistes, if you don't mind. Conflict and drama were par for the creative cause.

What I didn't know was the tawdry life he had been building for himself away from our little hub. He had resumed an old love affair — with heroin.

This erstwhile episode returned to me last week as I sat glued to the unravelling of US television actor Charlie Sheen, which came to a head yesterday with the actor's sacking from the high-rating sitcom *Two and A Half Men*.

But it wasn't the actor's meltdown, as much as the drama being played off stage by his close friends and family, that had me compelled.

Theirs is the story of making mistakes, underestimating the power of addiction and loving too easily, if not judiciously. A drama with no script or guarantee of a happy ending, but with all the sorry hallmarks of a sequel.

When asked about his 45-year-old son's battle, Sheen's father, Martin Sheen, seemed strangely ebullient. 'He's an extraordinary man,' he told Sky News. 'He's doing well.'

It was an odd reply in the face of what appeared to be an all-too public cry for help, but read between the lines of the 70-year-old's reaction and you will find the very real complexities of loving an addict.

If there's one thing about drug dependency it's that it has no mercy. Take a stroll through Sydney's Kings Cross or down Melbourne's Victoria Street on the days when heroin flows freely, and tell me the drug doesn't get under the skin of its host; leeching life as they once knew it, one needle at a time.

Addiction changes a person. In place of transparency you will find stealth, secrecy, desperation and dishonesty. Where there was once light and shade, there now lurks only the shadow of doubt.

And, yet, the person you love is still there, somewhere. But how to reach them? And what to say to them when — or if — you do?

In the 2008 documentary *Ben: Diary of a Heroin Addict* — one of the most harrowing examples of the daily pressures of heroin addiction on family life — Ben's mum grapples with her 34-year-old son's compulsion. 'I think the hardest thing of all it is that you give us a little bit of hope, and then you snatch it back again.'

This to-ing and fro-ing. The conveyor belt of promises and lies. The glimmer of hope would be all too familiar to Martin Sheen. When asked how he was supporting his son, he told Sky: 'With prayer ... and we ask everyone who cares about him to lift him up, and lift up all those who are in the grip of drug and alcohol abuse, because they are looking for transcendence.'

As someone who once searched for that transcendence at the bottom of a bottle, Sheen speaks from experience. A major heart attack at the age of 38 forced him to reassess and, ultimately, turn his life around. But having stood in his son's shoes doesn't mean he can now take that next step for him.

It took several years (and many tears) for me to realise I was fighting a losing battle. Unlike me, my partner's mistress Heroin didn't get upset, hold a grudge or, worst of all, nag. I should have walked away sooner, but thought I could make a difference.

When I did finally sever ties, it was with a sigh of relief. I'd survived and could now finally live my life. I could and, in the end, did walk away.

But not his mother. Her face, on one of the last occasions we met, will be forever imprinted in my memory. Beneath that fixed smile of hers was an air of weary, unfathomable resignation.

Now, as a parent myself, I have some understanding of what that look means. It carries the weight of lost dreams and aspirations, and the realisation that not only is love alone often not enough to save your child, but perhaps, just perhaps, somewhere along the line it, too, had a hand in shaping their awful reality.

A spiritual reading of the Egyptian Revolution

RELIGION

Henri Boulad

The Egyptian Revolution of 25 January. Instead of repeating a chronicle of events with which everybody already is familiar or offering an analysis of the revolution, which others more competent than I will have made, I have chosen to walk on ground that no one, as far as I know, has dared tread. This is a 'spiritual' reading of the Egyptian Revolution.

Some 200m from Tahrir Square in Cairo, a man runs forward from a flood of protesters to charge towards a police battalion. Dressed in black, they block the width of Rameses Avenue.

It is an absurd confrontation. On one side, a man with empty hands; on the other side, a well organised force equipped with batons, helmets, visors, and shields. On one side, moral force; on the other side, brute force. It would have been an unequal combat.

I can still see the young man, like a lion, throw himself against the wall of shields, face tensed, eyes flashing lightning, his heart steeled with fierce resolve. I could not ask myself from which side came force and power: from the side of the unarmed man, or from the side of the over-armed police.

The answer was clear. The man with empty hands was stronger than the battalion ranged against him. In this struggle between brute force and moral force, the latter won, and won easily.

The same story was repeated two days later on the Kasr-el-Nil bridge. There an armoured vehicle was forced to stop when confronted by a youth who stood in the middle of the bridge and defied the vehicle as it advanced inexorably towards him.

This youth was not alone. Behind him, a river of protesters was advancing with equal determination against armoured cars and police drawn up for combat. Amazingly it was not the crowd that retreated, but the police, disconcerted and disarmed by this fierce resolution.

In these two snapshots lie the key to this revolution and a summary of it. I realised, as did the world, that set in the face of armed force, there is a force of another order, infinitely more powerful and deep, the force of the spirit.

This same message was delivered in the biblical story of David and Goliath. The result of combat between the weakling who carried a simple slingshot and stone, and the giant Goliath armed with his armour and sword, was never in doubt. But it was the boy who won.

There are many modern examples of the paradoxical relationship between force and

weakness. We need think only of Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela.

All this shows that in our world, our history and our humanity exists a hidden force capable of sweeping aside everything in its way. We can ignore it or pretend to ignore it; we can try to crush, to suffocate it, to strangle or to break it. But one day it will finish up on top.

Jesus had this moral and spiritual force. He triumphed over evil by his sad defeat on the cross. The defeat was followed by a resurrection. There was nothing very glorious in it, because it took place amid the greatest of secrecy. To the eyes of the world nothing really happened on Easter morning. Only bit by bit became clear the power of this event which turned history upside down.

For the believer, Easter is not the simple reversal of a pitiable defeat. It is the explosion of a life stronger than death, a love stronger than hate, an energy capable of reshaping the future and triumphing over all.

It was this energy that last month inspired the passionate crowd in Tahrir Sqaure. It made the Tunisian people explode and inspired the series of revolutions in every nation of the region. Thirty years ago it overturned the dictatorships of Africa, Asia and Latin America. In a completely unexpected way it also led to the implosion of the Soviet Empire and the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The lesson to draw from the Egyptian revolution is that we never have to drop our arms, be discouraged, concede defeat, believe ourselves conquered, or compromise with evil. We need never allow ourselves to be impressed by the great of this world, nor to be intimidated by force and power.

We can believe that a man with empty hands is stronger than an army ranged for battle. We can believe that one who fights for truth, justice and right will one day be victorious.

If we believe that, we can roll up our sleeves and commit ourselves, body and soul, to this combat, the only struggle worth considering.

Faith in the dark

POETRY

Alex Skovron

Faith

So there we were, tramping upcountry,

nowhere near the end of the world,

though maybe it felt like that,
especially when, at sunset,

the forest subsided into the eeriest

hush, and we might then

have glimpsed that point of infinite grace

they talk about in the old scriptures;

but once omnipotent night

slid over the campsite to reveal

nothing beyond a black more dazzling

than any darkness could contain,

all we could do was inhale

an immense presence touching everything,

which we called faith.

Possible friends

(after Adam Zagajewski)

Those who no longer exist

are the ones, bittersweet, we cling to.

Their keepsakes we embrace

too late: his capricious tartan scarf

you never wore, her booklet

of psalms and proverbs — they sting us

from what might have been, brittle

channels in the brickwork

of lost choices. And then
the universe of strangers, so-called:

that Heathrow cabbie

you converted to an ancient cousin

and then tipped profusely

as a kind of penance, the old Belgrade poet

who pocketed, for *you*,

a two-millennium tile at Viminacium

(you tried so hard yet he couldn't grasp

your refusal, your antique ethics)

or the aging waitress at LAX

diminished over a perfect spoilt romance,

her voice a far-off waltz

you almost recognized from — where?

How many faces in the pinball metropolis

with proud eyes flashing by

are faces we have once crossed already

(and if not, in a previous life);

how many, in a parallel moment,

if we should only stop each other to listen,

might grow into our lifelong familiars —

to sit with us, debate Heraclitus,

elucidate the essence of the Preludes,

or tell us just who we are?

De la nature

Our friendship was purely aristotelian,

all ethics and poetics, but no law

to commandeer doubt or dialogue;

There was no sharp agony of alternatives,

no sticky neo-nietzschean imperative,

no will to profounder cleansing;

At the time (of course) one felt quite thirty,

executor of a divine estate

amid all those tabloid rumours of demise;

We trudged colosseums of becoming,

our connectedness, more euclidean now,

still kindled a stern metaphysic;

Though at last (the universe cooling)

one noticed the global glow

that wriggled from the tar-line up ahead;

And made haste placidly — was it not

just around the corner of a page,

nearly there, we were treading time;

Our friendship grew quaintly cartesian,
all seven-way mirrors and equations,

and we flirted with dialogue and doubt;

Little knowing what awaited here,

we exulted in the chorus and the comedy,
wading forward, still quite thirty.

Priests, sex and the media

EDITORIAL

Andrew Hamilton

Catholic priests have been much in the news this last week. On Friday, Paul Collins discussed a study of parish life in Australia. And there has been much discussion of a new book by Chris McGillion and John O'Carroll on Catholic priests working in parishes.

The discussion of *Our Fathers* has been colourful. It has retailed pithy quotes from priests interviewed in the book, and highlighted disagreement with church positions, and critical judgments of Roman and episcopal authority. The book and the criticism made of it deserve reflection.

Media coverage of the Catholic Church usually assumes that it is a homogeneous and disciplined body with bishops, priests and laity walking in step with the Pope, and that its uniformity derives from fear of authority. From this perspective the difference of views and plain speaking among Catholics will always be presented like rebellious voices in a strict school, with unspoken anticipation about how the headmaster will deal with the situation.

This way of telling the story is unreal. Priests are more like franchisees than employees. They identify with their parish and are fairly independent in building it up. Like franchisees most have been ready to criticise any authority above them, and always ready to grumble. This need not amount to disaffection.

In this survey the level of dissatisfaction is about what I would have expected. It reflects the tumultuous times priests have lived through, when as a group they have gone from being highly to lowly esteemed, when the church they serve has diminished and aged, and when their own workload has increased with age.

The attitudes to moral issues and to doctrine described in this book are also much as I would have expected, especially given the ambiguity of the statements to which the priests were expected to respond. Most priests learn to use words carefully when dealing with questions about contentious issues of faith and morals.

In the survey, for example, they were offered the options to agree, disagree or be undecided in responding to the statement 'it is always a sin for unmarried people to have sex'. This statement could be understood in two different ways. It might be taken to mean that it is never objectively morally justifiable for unmarried people to have sex. Or it could mean that unmarried people always commit a sin when they have sex (including, presumably, if they are sleep walking, are ignorant that what they are doing is wrong, etc).

Priests who understood the sentence in the second sense would have to disagree with it, even if they accepted the Catholic poition that objectively sex is properly reserved to marriage.

Given similar ambiguities in other statements to which the priests were asked to respond, I am not convinced that the survey reveals a widespread rejection by priests of Catholic moral positions. The question needs closer and more precise analysis.

The quotations from interviews with a range of priests are the most thought-provoking part of the book. The priests generally speak the language of their people: blunt and straightforward. Their views are salty and down to earth, sometimes compassionate, sometimes unfair, and always worth listening to. Their language is that of men who have worked through the heat of the day.

For all their criticism of the Catholic Church, they present as a committed group of men with a passion for what they do. Indeed, most of the aspects of the Church that they criticise, whatever their presuppositions, are associated with a lack of generous passion.

Their language is characteristically Australian. A significant point in which it seems lacking is that words do not come easily to speak of the hunger for God and the relationship with God that underlies their ministry. That lack is also Australian. It is understandable when so much Church language is stale, referring to but not evoking God's presence. But in times when a deep centre is required to be a priest, deep and earthed words are needed.

Taken together *Our Fathers* and 'Catholic Parish Ministry in Australia: Facing Disaster' suggest the size of the challenges that the Church faces. That is why they deserve close reflection.

A generally aging clergy whose numbers are clearly inadequate to carry on the forms of service and of local gathering that have been inherited, and who have toiled to serve their people in this difficult situation, need encouragement. It will be important that they can contribute their wisdom to the necessary reconfiguring of the Australian Church, and that their energies are engaged only in projects that have a high importance and a persuasive rationale.

Footy sex scandal exposes child protection failure

MEDIA

Moira Rayner

I spent the weekend before International Women's Day in the company of women who had started high school when I did, 50 years ago, in a nice, safe, Presbyterian school.

We had all done well, considering the naughty, dangerous and defiant activities we engaged in back then. We are not only lawyers, investors and singers of reknown but practised liars, Great Escapees, drinkers, sneakers-out- to-be-with-boys-and-sailors, and hoons who had gotten away with it.

We could laugh, now, about how the authorities had been fooled. This gave me cause for thought.

We have witnessed great heartache over the crude behaviour of some footballers, their representatives and supporters, brought to attention by an (until recently) unidentified 17-year-old girl whose motive is revenge for her own humiliation and pain over similar exploits with players.

The details don't matter, but her rights as a child and as a woman certainly do. The girl's identity is notionally protected because she's a 'child'. Yet in her own eyes she's a woman scorned, who is championing all women's rights to be treated with respect by exposing footballers' misogyny.

She seems to be estranged from her parents one minute, and staying with them the next; put up temporarily in hotels by newspapers and motels by 'friends'; regretful of past lies and attacks at one moment, pitiably defiant the next.

Any mother, any sister, must be, as I am, frightened for her wellbeing. We know where this leads.

When I started legal practice, Australian child protection laws enabled police, child protection workers and parents to approach a children's court to have a girl made a ward of state, and deprived of her freedom, if she appeared to be 'in moral danger'.

These laws were meant to protect society from the damage young girls were thought to do when they are sexually active. They were presented as protection of the innocent child from the ill-effects of being sexually exploited, but we have always blamed the victims of such exploitation. And the 'moral danger' provisions were always used to protect girls, not boys.

And they never did much good, because there was nowhere for them to go. These girls would end up in institutional care, 'for their own good', together with offenders, victims of

neglect or abandonment, or the mentally ill or intellectually or physically handicapped.

Sometimes I would get a call from one of these girls asking for help, usually with a story about running away from abusive homes or to avoid the 'moral harm' caused by male relatives.

Thus, in my youth I was an active campaigner for law reform. Not only was such a law sexist, but it failed to take into account the growing competence and assurance of a girl who was becoming a woman and dealing with her relationships in an honest and accepting way.

Over the years since, the laws have changed. It is no longer a lock-upable offence for a child over the 'age of consent' to engage willingly in sexual relationships so long as their partner does not have an unequal share of power and control of resources needed by the other — a teacher, tutor or other person with responsibility and authority over them — and isn't too much older than them.

Thus speaketh the law, though the moral implications remain the same: What is the harm done by a child who is sexually active before she is socially or emotionally mature to handle the consequences? Does the woman have rights that should take priority over the rights of a child to self-expression and to learn from mistakes? Some mistakes have permanent consequences.

We have laws that enable, but don't require, child protection agencies to take responsibility for children who may be endangered by these choices, but they do not act when the children concerned are 16 or so. What do we do for these very vulnerable young people?

We know the adolescent brain is insufficiently developed for its owner to anticipate consequences of their own conduct. That's why adolescents make fabulous soldiers, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child protects adolescents against exploitation as seriously as the rights of toddlers to be fed, clothed and housed.

I've never met a woman who did not look back with regret at the harmful memories of her earliest sexual experiences, if she was very young.

And yet the old rules about respectful treatment in sexual relationships have changed, and nothing has taken their place.

Thus, the boys in the footy club were apparently concerned that 'the 17-year-old' (then 16) was 'legal' when she sought out their company. Their club managers were embarrassed by the rude photos she later released but claimed they were so concerned for the welfare of 'the 17-year-old' that they would provide somewhere for her to live for 'months', which they don't seem to have done.

And most recently, player agent Ricky Nixon popped out of the country just before even more embarrassing photos of him in 'the 17-year-old's' hotel bedroom came out. He, too, was

only trying to help her. With a bottle of wine. In his underpants.

Everyone's concerned, yet nobody can do anything to break this horrible cycle of scandal, in the middle of which stands a child who has been treated like a woman, and badly.

I wonder how she feels when she watches the news and sees her face in public shadow, her identity a phrase, a reference, a judgment, instead of the person she is.

She needs someone to set her some boundaries and enforce them. She needs someone who loves and cares about her without a stir in his loins. She needs cameras and crews to ignore what she says. She needs some quiet time and reflection. For God's sake. And hers.

A truce between science and religion

RELIGION

Ashleigh Green

Last year Stephen Hawking released his book, *The Grand Design*, which purported to explain why a creator is unnecessary. The claim is based on the premise that the universe's existence is a result of M-theory, which suggests that the collision of two membranes could have caused the Big Bang.

While Hawking's M-theory proposal may well be valid, it raises the question of whether the existence of God can be disproved by science. While many scientists support such a view, others disagree. As science has progressed into the 21st century, a growing number of scientists have begun to explore the complementary nature of science and religion.

John Polkinghorne, a theologian and scientist from Cambridge University and co-author of *Questions of Truth: Responses to Questions about God, Science, and Belief*, recently shed light on a new, harmonising model of science and religion.

Polkinghorne claims that the 20th century saw the death of a merely mechanical view of the world, and 21st century science has re-opened the possibility of a world that is random, unpredictable and cloudy at times; not because of the absence of God, but due to the fact that God designed a world with the ability to create and act freely, according to its nature.

Yet Polkinghorne suggests that such a world, with the capacity for change and creativity, is indicative of a god who does not intervene in magical ways. For example, the earth's crust, as a result of God's design, is free to behave in accordance with its nature. This may lead to earthquakes and tsunamis, but nonetheless the earth is free to act in its own way, just as we are free to act in ours.

The unpredictability of nature, therefore, is bound up in the very essence of its design.

The terms 'cloudy' or 'unpredictable' may not match up to the rigid, clear-cut science you were taught in high school. But neither is science always rigid or predictable. As Polkinghorne points out, the quantum world is anything but.

Quarks are particles smaller than protons and neutrons. Their properties are entirely random, and no one has ever isolated a single quark in the lab.

Thus, the discovery of the quark was an interesting experiment in faith. Several properties of the physical world could only be explained by the unseen quark. So, suddenly, in the

scientific picture, appeared these unseen realities that gave intelligibility to the world. Parallels could be drawn here between science and religion, notably to passages of Christian scripture that refer to 'believing without seeing'.

Polkinghorne claims that an understanding of the relationship between science and religion cannot be based merely on the old 'God of the gaps' theory; that is, the idea of God accounts for the things that science can't explain. He suggests that if God is the god of truths, perhaps the more that science advances, the more we learn about God.

The 20th century realisation that light is both a particle and a wave sparked doubts about a 'mechanical' worldview. The fact that light could exhibit both wave- and particle-like properties stumped many scientists. Some refused to believe. Some accepted the proposal but shrugged it off as weird. Others pushed so hard for light's dual nature that heated debate ensued.

Yet today, one century later, there is a general consensus that various substances in the physical world do possess a dual nature. Polkinghorne asks whether it is reasonable to believe that God too, could have a dual nature? That he could indeed enter the earth as both God and human?

It is not a matter of using science to prove the existence of God, but rather to illustrate that God and science can co-exist in a harmonious, complementary kind of way.

Hawking insists that science is able to disprove the existence of God. Yet Polkinghorne is adamant that science explores only one layer of existence. God works through poetry and artwork, saints and mystics. You cannot fully appreciate an artwork by examining the chemical composition of its paint. Similarly, you cannot understand God's function in the universe by looking only at its physical nature.

Hating hipsters and bogans

NON-FICTION

Ellena Savage

I was recently sitting in an inner-city beer garden with four friends (a designer, a sound engineer, a student editor and a doctoral candidate), discussing the shameful traits that characterise 'hipsters' — the slick young urban gentry with access to recreational drugs and synthesisers.

'They're just so smug,' one said to a chorus of nods. Another offered a quip about fixed-gear bikes, the hipster's vehicle of choice, while sipping on his boutique cider.

To the outsider, of course, my friends and I look as though we might ourselves be hipsters, and are probably derided as such behind our backs. We studied arts and sciences at university, and those of us who didn't are pursuing careers in the arts and social sectors.

We live in the fashionable inner-city suburbs, make our op-shop outfits look fashionable, read classics and literary journals, watch *Q&A*, hold compassionate politics, and have social lives that involve parties, theatre, lectures, protests and lattes. We love Brooklyn and Berlin, but also think Africa might be 'pretty cool'. Yes, there are puerile vanities here, but where are comparative vanities not entertained?

In bogans, of course. But then, being a bogan would put one under the same weight of social scrutiny: the stereotype says they are anti-intellectual, sexist, racist, small-minded hicks with a taste for processed food and alcohol marketed to 14-year-olds.

Criticisms levelled against hipsters and their grown-up, Green-voting elders — 'latte sippers', 'Chardonnay socialists' (are socialists prohibited from drinking, or is only Stolichnaya allowed?), and the caricature of 'middle-class guilt' — have little to do with actual coffee, chardonnay, or affluence. They have more to do with attempting to unravel fraud.

There is a sense that the trappings of inner-city elitism are manufactured markers of status, rather than genuine expressions of alternative life; that politically correct gestures have little value when they cost nothing to commit. *Self-interest*, the critic laments, *is at the heart of outward gestures*.

While this criticism is valid — the existence of the vapid fashionista is well documented — we should discern what value there is in contempt, particularly when aimed at groups such as 'hipsters' and 'bogans', which are impossible to precisely determine.

Aside from externalising angst about the possibility of having hypocrisies of one's own (calls of hypocrisy rarely come from the unencumbered), hipster hatred, like bogan hatred, is equally about uncritically deprecating an entire set of cultural practices and preferences to

advance oneself.

Hipster derision expresses a deeply held parochialism and conformism in Australia (and globally), which is especially apparent and alarming among young people for whom hipsters are their generation's answer to Boomer lefties and Gen X radicals.

Perhaps my generation has learnt from previous ones that when belonging to an alternative class becomes popular it loses currency. Or that we are wise to the mythologies of Baby Boomer idealism and rebellion paralleled with their pursuit of wealth and status.

But hipster derision is more than that. It is a tall-poppy mechanism that identifies a perceived elitist in-group and devalues it in order to justify one's belonging to the mainstream.

That it is strongest among people my own age is a testament to the cynicism of my generation; our humour credits the perception that vegetarianism and veganism, charity and consumer responsibility are moral vanities rather than attempts to make ethical use of the privilege afforded us.

Although we have made cultural leaps and bounds, Australia is still a parochial country in many ways. One of these is the emotional challenge we attach to being confronted by people who have chosen or inherited other ways of living.

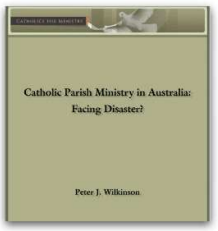
It would be nice if everyone were able to compartmentalise their differences, keeping them out of sight, but we all outwardly practice culture whether or not we can recognise the trappings. So long as the choices hipsters, bogans, and old-fashioned conformists make — however conceited — remain their own and do not harm others, criticism should be reserved for more interesting matters.

Arts communities, where hipsters reside, certainly include dilettantes and frauds — they always have. Regardless of their existence, a vibrant artistic culture is an indication of cultural affluence, which should never be devalued.

Australian Catholics facing disaster

RELIGION

Paul Collins



Most of those aware of what is happening in the Church know that Australian Catholicism is in trouble. When people focus on this most think of sexual abuse. In fact this is more a symptom than the actual core of the problem. The core issue is leadership, or lack of it, and the failure to provide adequate pastoral ministry.

This is the overwhelming conclusion of Peter Wilkinson's just published and detailed study 'Catholic Parish Ministry in Australia: Facing Disaster'.

Drawing statistics from 'The 2010-11 Official Directory of the Catholic Church' Wilkinson looks at everything connected with on-the-ground ministry in Australian Catholicism and shows that parishes are failing for a complex of reasons to meet even the basic liturgical needs of parishioners, let alone the broad range of other challenges facing the church.

'The crisis is real', he says, 'and the scale is huge.'

Wilkinson says 'it would be simplistic to measure the faith of Australian Catholics and the success or failure of parish ministry purely by rates of regular Mass attendance, which might perhaps be better read as ordinary Catholics attempting to convey a message to their leaders about how they see their church'.

In this context I actually think he overestimates the percentage of Catholics attending Mass. He puts it at 13.8 per cent in 2006. My guess for 2011 is somewhere between 7 per cent and 9 per cent.

What this study has done is to substantiate the claims that many have made, but none before have adequately demonstrated. Wilkinson shows that one in four Australian parishes is now without a full-time priest, that very few new parishes have been established despite a rapidly increasing Catholic population and that 184 existing parishes have been merged since 1994.

There has been a catastrophic decline in the number of priests, recruitment of seminarians is far below the number needed, the average number of Catholics per parish has increased 25 per cent in the last ten years (from an average of 3481 Catholics per parish in 2000 to 4368 in 2010), and fewer students from poorer Catholic families are enrolled in Catholic schools.

A most useful aspect of the study is the material Wilkinson has unearthed on the recruitment of overseas priests. This strategy (which he says 'appears to have originated out of despair and desperation') has been in place now for over 20 years, but it has hardly ever been

discussed in public except in last year's ABC Compass program *The Mission* on Nigerian priests in Hobart Archdiocese.

Accurate statistics on foreign priests are particularly difficult to unearth and, as Wilkinson says, 'the few publicly stated objectives of the strategy are confusing'.

When I recently contacted the Department of Immigration under freedom of information requesting a copy of the contract between the Bishops Conference and the government I was told this was 'commercial in confidence'. This is problematic given the church is not a commercial operation and claims tax exemption.

As a band-aid solution, importation of priests only puts off the question of why local vocations are scarce. Wilkinson points out that if the bishops want to maintain an average of one priest for every 3600 Catholics nationwide then, given the number of local priests available, the majority of priests in parish ministry in Australia in 2020 will have to be overseas born.

The statistics are that the number of priests needed is 1780; the number of local priests available will be 800, which leaves a shortfall of 980 which will have to be supplied by foreign priests. Local seminarians will not make up the shortfall.

Wilkinson is not the first to argue this. Melbourne's Father Eric Hodgens has been arguing this for a decade now.

Wilkinson points out that there are some real problems involved in importing priests from other cultures. One is the mismatch between the 'missionary' ambitions of many of the foreign priests who see themselves as evangelising the Australian Church, and the pragmatic expectations of the bishops who simply see them as getting us through a tough period.

'If this mismatch is not resolved quickly', Wilkinson comments, 'the strategy could end in tears.'

He also shows that of the 205 diocesan seminarians, 38 are studying at the Neo-Catechumenal Way seminaries in Perth and Sydney. While these will be incardinated into these archdioceses when ordained, they only have to do two years work there before going 'on mission' elsewhere in the world. So that means that there are really only 176 seminarians for the whole of the Australian Church.

Another difficulty that Wilkinson doesn't canvass is that many of these foreign priests are inexperienced and come from cultures that are tribal and patriarchical. They have little or no comprehension of the kinds of faith challenges that face Catholics living in a secular, individualistic, consumerist culture that places a strong emphasis on equality, women's rights, and co-responsibility for parish ministry and mission.

'Catholic Parish Ministry in Australia: Facing Disaster?' is without doubt the most

comprehensive survey of its kind ever undertaken. Not only is it a valuable source of statistics but it clearly sets out the issues confronting Australian Catholics.

The trouble with iPad Confessions

APPLICATION

Andrew Hamilton

Confession has been one of the Catholic practices most intriguing to the wider public. That's not surprising. It is associated with secrecy, sin (subtext: sex) and sacerdotalism. So recently the Confession app for the iPad received predictable publicity and led to speculation whether confession could be made virtually as well as virtuously.

In fact the app simply helps people prepare for confession. But it also shows how new communications technology is shaping church practices, and in the process is raising more fundamental questions about them.

The internet has become an accepted field for personal spirituality. The Irish Jesuits' site Sacred Space , which offers reflection and images to accompany the text chosen each day, has been enormously popular. So has the English Jesuit podcast, Pray as you Go . It offers music, text and questions for reflection.

Retreats now are increasingly offered electronically. Input for reflection is sent each day, and guide and retreatant can exchange reflections.

In addition all manner of YouTube videos, blogs, ringtones and websites are designed to help people name, understand and enter their faith more deeply.

So it would seem a small step to make confession available online. Indeed, even in the Mexican religious persecution of the 1920s, many people confessed by telephone. Yet the Catholic Church has insisted that confession be made face to face.

This insistence is not simply a matter of sticking to outmoded technology. It rests on the conviction that the sacraments involve bodily contact and communication. In the Catholic outlook it follows from the belief that God has taken on our bodily existence in Christ. It is natural that we meet Christ in the Church through bodily actions: eating and drinking, being washed or anointed, marrying.

So Catholics have resisted the privatisation of faith, whether this is expressed in finding God simply in one's heart instead of going to church, marrying without public ceremony, or simply saying sorry to God in one's heart without need to say it face to face. Faith should be expressed in bodily and communal ways.

It is often hard to make this argument cogently within the Catholic Church, however, because its theology and practice so often privileges the individual soul over the shared bodily condition. Particularly in ritual, bodiliness is formalised and etherealised. The treatment of confession offers a good example of this. Its public and bodily shape has been eroded over

many centuries.

The earliest forms of confession were mainly for public sins that were destructive of the community and any claim it made to live by Christ's values. Typical sins were denying Christ during persecution, adultery and murder. The sinner needed to be reconciled both with God and with the Church community. The process of reconciliation was protracted, with penitents publicly identifiable and excluded from the Eucharist until they were publicly welcomed back.

The public dimension of reconciliation fell into the background in succeeding centuries when emphasis was put first on the performance of severe penances measured to each sin, and then on the accurate confessing of all major sins. Confession to a priest remained a symbol of the reconciliation with the church, but the priest was usually portrayed as representing God rather than the Church.

In the ritual, contact was minimised and disembodied by the confessional box. Confession was experienced as the exchange of whispers in the dark.

After the Second Vatican Council the communal dimension was re-emphasised, and was embodied in communal forms of reconciliation. After permission for these popular rites was withdrawn, however, the transaction has again been popularly presented as a private encounter with God through the priest as God's representative. Little attention is given to the communal and bodily dimension.

Actually, the communal rites were open to criticism on the grounds that they too were fairly disembodied. Certainly those who participated gathered as a community, but the ritual was largely through listening to and speaking words without much bodily involvement.

In contrast, for example, we could imagine the power of a ritual in which the whole congregation prostrated themselves in penance, as has been done by the celebrants in services asking forgiveness for sexual abuse within the church.

But unless the bodily and communal dimension of the sacrament of reconciliation is emphasised, the prohibition of virtual confession will seem to be no more than a quixotic refusal to acknowledge new technologies. And the distinctive earthiness of the sense of what it means to be Catholic will come under increased pressure.

Reincarnated goats and the sacrament of change

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Le Quattro Volte* (G). Director: Michelangelo Frammartino. 84 minutes**

The Italian word 'volte' evokes not just the noun 'time', but also the verbs to 'merge', 'become' or 'transform'. All connotations are relevant here. *Le Quattro Volte* floats on the passage of the seasons, and the minute progressions of time in a timeless Calabrian village. Philosophically, it considers change and growth as almost sacramental aspects of earthly existence.

The overarching narrative follows a metaphysical path, as a soul progresses through four states of being: from human, to animal, to plant, to mineral. But this virtually dialogue-free film is not fixated on esotery. Quite the opposite: the camera's still, gently inquisitive gaze finds magic in the mundane, and humour and meaning in the everyday events of village life.

An elderly goatherd walks the village's steep, rutted streets, delivering vessels of milk to his neighbours. He's beset by a vicious cough, which he soothes with a concoction of water and ash from church altar candles. His eventual death coincides with the birth of a goat, which takes up the mantle as the film's central character, and is surprisingly, wonderfully anthropomorphised.

The theme is of reincarnation, but not devaluation. The goat's life is not less than the man's.

This idea is carried further: eventually, the goat 'becomes' a tree, which, placed at the centre of ritualised festivities in the village, is celebrated in a way neither man nor goat was in life. And the reverential pyrolytic process to which its timber is later subjected imbues the resultant charcoal with an almost religious significance.

The film is full of ideas, which director Frammartino allows the viewer to discover through contemplation. Notably, it subtly chastises religious institutions that fail to meet the basic needs of human beings. This is implicit in the hollow booming that is the only result of the sickly goatherd's urgent knocking on the church door on the night before his death.

This image makes a sad irony of the man's simple faith in the healing power of the ash he earlier swept off the church floor.

Frammartino finds a more epic metaphor for the vacuity of religious ritual if divorced from human reality. A Passion play taking place outside the village is juxtaposed with a slapstick comedy-of-errors that occurs simultaneously within it. The two scenarios are linked by the shuttling movements of a barking dog, and by the camera, which pans between them like an intrigued onlooker. The effect is farcical and poignant.

La Quattro Volte unfolds slowly, without commentary or interference. Its measured, laconic nature could be narcotic if entered into with anything other than a receptive and focused attitude. But patient viewers will be rewarded by its beauty, and the brief running time means that the end credits roll before meditation gives way to tedium.

Mass story

NON-FICTION

Brian Doyle

The lovely chapel where noon Mass is usually held at my university is in dry dock, having its keel repaired and generally being buffed and honed.

So the noon Mass, not usually peripatetic, wandered into a classroom for a while, and then into a tiny dormitory chapel, where it has been celebrated for a few weeks, for those of us who can find it, up the old stairs, past the soda and candy machines, and down the hall to the right, behind the door with the crucifix.

There were 14 of us in toto yesterday, including a guide dog, who looked rapt at the whole thing, and who never took his eyes off the celebrant, an immense sapling of a man who looks exactly like a young Abraham Lincoln, without the hipster beard.

Also there was a small child, perhaps age two, with a terrifying neck brace; she too was wonderfully attentive, never taking her eyes off the miracle in the middle, which was a refreshing lesson for me, who has far too often taken his eyes off the miracles.

In a room this small there is no sitting in the back, there not being any remote regions, so we all sat essentially in a circle, and young Abe cheerfully noted in his homily that this sort of small gathering, with bread and wine and excellent stories and two miracles, surely harked back to the original meeting of the ancestral clan, which was also on an upper floor, and also featured a sinewy celebrant and 12 companions, although in our case we were luckier in that we were graced by a child, the greatest of miracles, and we were honored also by a representative from another species.

Although there may well have been dogs at the Last Supper, said Abe, considering the various times in the scriptures that dogs are mentioned as scooping up bread crumbs falling from tables.

One great thing about Mass being celebrated in a crowded college dormitory is that you can hear the seething life of the hall thrumming overhead and burbling faintly through the doors and windows; not until yesterday had I enjoyed a Mass during which I heard reggae music, and the samba of washing machines, and an argument about the Satanic nature of the Los Angeles Lakers, and what sounded like a skateboard being ridden down a staircase at high speed.

All these sounds were gentle, and did not obtrude on the music of the Mass, but somehow having the murmured soundtrack of youth in the background as we celebrated the miracles deepened the experience, added a little more of the salt and song of life to an event too often ossified as mere ritual, and what could be more beautifully human and holy than sitting over

food and telling stories and insisting on miracles, in the company of a child and a dog?

At the Eucharist, when his master stood up to join the line, the guide dog stood up as well, and they both sat down simultaneously when the man returned to his pew to meditate. I think the man teaches philosophy here but I am not sure. The dog teaches grace and patience and love, perhaps.

Slipping into the rear of the chapel just before the Eucharist was a campus policeman who tucked the tools of his trade into a corner of a pew before he too went up for Communion; Abe, noticing him as the end of the Communion line approached, broke the last host in two, and gave the first half to the mother of the girl with the neck brace, and the second half to the campus public safety officer.

Several people stayed after Mass, and the mother of the girl with the neck brace asked Abe if he would ask the blessing of the Lord on her daughter, who had survived one surgery on her spine but faced another on Thursday, and Abe said sure, and cupped his enormous hands over the girl's head, as round as a small pumpkin, and did so.

The girl stared at him with the most beautiful frightened green eyes I have ever seen.

I noticed she only had one shoe on, her other foot wriggling happily in its pink sock, and I asked the mother if the shoe was lost, perhaps I could help hunt for it among the pews, but she said o no, she just likes to wear the one shoe, and who am I to say no to that? She only likes wearing a shoe on her left foot, even in winter. She won't eat anything that's red, either. She has a mind of her own. Are you a priest too? Can you also bless her?

I said that I was not a priest but I would absolutely hold her daughter in my heart and pray for her and maybe try to write a small essay so people who read it all over the continent and perhaps abroad would pray for her also, when they got to the end of the brief essay and found her daughter with one red shoe, and the mother said she would be very grateful for that, so that is what I have done. The Mass is ended. Go in peace.

Old men behaving badly

POLITICS

John Warhurst

Australian politics is generally benign and democratic, lacking the passion of revolutionary moments and extreme democratic enthusiasm. At first glance there is no comparison with tumultuous events overseas such as the overthrow of the dictator Mubarak in Egypt and the uprising in Gaddafi's Libya. But all political situations share common themes: questions of age, tenure, transition and family ties.

Mubarak, 82 years old, was just one of a number of old men behaving badly in world politics. Silvio Berlusconi of Italy disgraces himself and his country by his antics at the age of 74. Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, 88, is even older and yet refuses to relinquish the reins of his deadly regime.

Women and younger men can also behave badly in both dictatorships and democracies, of course, but old men are hard to beat for flagrant abuse of power. Democratic elections don't prevent old men from holding power and not all governments led by old men are dysfunctional; but if we were to remove all leaders over 70 around the world the balance sheet would be positive.

By contrast it is refreshing to see Barack Obama at 49 and David Cameron at 43 take office in the USA and the UK respectively. In Australia Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott are fighting it out in their late 40s/early 50s. Their relative youth is a breath of fresh air.

Extremely long tenure often accompanies age. Mubarak was in office for a massive 30 years. To put this in context, when he took over Egypt in 1981 the Australian PM was Malcolm Fraser. The American President was Ronald Reagan. No wonder he was out of touch with the young people protesting in the city square. Mugabe has been in office for 30 years so far and Gaddafi even longer.

Democracies can produce long tenures too. Berlusconi was first elected in 1994. In Australia there is no real equivalent. But Sir Robert Menzies was Prime Minister for a record 17 years and John Howard for almost 12 years. The USA has instituted a two-term rule for presidents which restricts them to eight years. This has been copied elsewhere and there is a wider term-limits movement in the USA.

There are arguments both ways for restrictions on political terms. They can have unintended consequences on political behavior in office, such as elevating inexperience prematurely, but they should be considered. Monarchs and popes have unrestricted terms that can lead to very long periods in office too. More often than not earlier succession would be

beneficial all round.

Shorter, restricted terms should be welcomed. Eight to ten years is plenty. The balance sheet would be positive if there was greater turnover in office. Long-serving political leaders rarely do their best work in their final years. Turnover is beneficial. No one is irreplaceable and new leaders bring fresh perspectives to old problems.

The fact that leaders don't go earlier reflects the difficulties in arranging a smooth succession to office; not just in dictatorships but in democracies. The top job is just too comfortable. Long-serving leaders cast a large shadow. Regular democratic elections should solve these sorts of problems but they don't always do so.

There is a tendency in dictatorships for children to inherit the position. Democracies, like Singapore (the Lee family), the USA (the Bush family) and India (the Nehru family), don't escape political dynasties and dominant families either; nor does Australia entirely. There have been dynasties like the Downers, Beazleys and Creans in federal politics.

In NSW Mike Baird, son of former state minister and federal MP Bruce Baird will soon probably be State Treasurer in a new Liberal government; while yet another member of the Ferguson family will enter politics for Labor.

We should not overstate the case for similarities between Australian politics and what we witness overseas. But, without straining too hard, there certainly are discernible common issues.

Asylum seeker's goodbye

POETRY

Various

Family history

For years you search, persuaded
the blank spaces in the jigsaw
can be filled by pieces
lying on the table.
You comb dictionaries looking
for the word, eight letters,
second one a *D*, so 7 down fits
in the mortise cut on 12 across.
You twist the cube to make
the green face green, the blue all blue,
but a pesky yellow chip
always turns up in one corner.
At last, you realise
that what you hold is not
a jigsaw, cube or crossword
but a faded photograph —
crinolines and waistcoats —
the heads of him and her,
top right, torn off.
Defeated, you concede
the missing corner long ago
slipped down in the dust
behind a chest of drawers

in a house abandoned.

—Bob Morrow

Moving day

The trailer hauling our ancestor's furniture

is tiny, so,

lest we forget

and merge violently

into some other Australians careering up

this old colony road,

a bobbing broomstick

reminds us of something behind.

We had finally crammed our mother

like flattened linen into a Sydney flat,

wadded in by what few remains

could be wrestled up steps,
through the tiny door,

the old house now a dark shell
perched in a Goulburn field.

The rest

fragmented between charity,

dumps and heirs:

like these rattling red cedar boards,

felled by our people after the gold all dug out,

when the great trees

still clambered up hinterland,

felled and milled and wrought into this table,

jolting up the freeway

beneath a scarecrow broom,

ever onward to the city,

such tiny remains of so many hands.

—David Hastie

Asylum seeker

It was hard to stay calm crossing the tarmac;

gripping each boy firmly

to ensure they mounted the gangway

before another mortar

scorched their lives again.

It was hard to look back

for hot desert sands were stinging her eyes,

quickly obscuring aging parents

waving forlornly from the terminal.

And it was hard to cry

for the three year old

abducted and murdered

now decaying in a corner of the family vault.

As the plane crawled skywards

it was also hard to believe

that the pock-marked landscape

would be her last glimpse of Baghdad.

—John Collard

Stealing Libya's revolution

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

We hardly know it, but the revolution being played out in Libya is actually about the aspirations of the country's youth. It is not about Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, who is yesterday's man. Yet he has been front and centre of international media coverage of the revolution. He has even claimed that he is the real revolutionary.

One reading is that for him, any publicity is good publicity, because publicity contributes greatly to keeping him in power. By that logic, western media are complicit in keeping him in power and disenfranchising the Libyan people. He is egged on in his extreme barbarism by international media fascination with the extremes of his colourful personality.

His eccentricity, coupled with uncaring ruthlessness, is the act that keeps us transfixed.

It is refreshing to read the analysis of the Jesuit Islamic scholar Samir Khalil Samir , who does not even mention Gaddafi.

Putting the Libyan revolution in the context of those of Tunisia and Egypt, he suggests western countries have been caught napping in their preoccupation with economic investments. It is true that maintaining economic relations involves honouring the dictators rather than the people. But this causes western nations to overlook the youth movements that are energising these nations.

Samir describes what is happening as a 'springtime in the Arab world'. The demonstrators are predominantly young people under 30. They keep in contact with each other and the outside world through social media.

Their ability to communicate is their power base, but their number is also significant. Half the population is under 30. The common thread is the desire to have a job and get married in the midst of economic hardship, and their motivation is overwhelmingly practical. Samir writes:

These young people are focused on national and social problems, they are not demonstrating for any ideology, right wing or left wing. In all these months, no American or Israeli flag has been burnt; no-one has made claims in defence of an Islam that must rule the earth. They do not want ideologies; they want realism.

Samir's Jesuit colleague in Alexandria, Henri Boulad, painted a similar picture earlier this month when he wrote that Egypt's revolution belongs to the young people, not the Muslim Brotherhood, which is attempting to appropriate it for their own purposes.

Samir is confident that the young people will not be manipulated by extremist religious or

ideological movements, though he does admit he is worried by the absence of leaders. The danger in this is that western countries only know how to relate to leaders. They will relate to bad leaders rather than seek out authentic would-be leaders who often do not put themselves forward.

If the motivation of western nations is economic rather than humanitarian, they are only too willing to deal with rogue leaders who suit their purposes.

This is how the Muslim Brotherhood and similar hard-line groups could steal the revolutions courtesy of western nations. It is frequently western patronage that keeps corrupt regimes in power. Samir suggests that now is a good time for the west to do some soul-searching:

It is time for Europe to take advantage of this new situation to examine its conscience. What did we do with these regimes? We supported them.

Celebrating the carbon tax

MEDIA

Tony Kevin

At last, an Australian government has presented for public consideration an intelligently conceived framework for a national carbon emissions plan. Much work must be done over the next four to five months to flesh out the key elements, so it can be put to Parliament for approval as law.

Has Julia Gillard broken her pre-election 'no carbon tax' promise? Does it matter? Her promise was legitimately overtaken by events — the election outcome leaving Labor in precarious minority government, with the ascendant Greens and two interested Independent members (Tony Windsor and Rob Oakeshott) enjoying a powerful voice in climate change policy.

One may doubt whether this plan would have been put forward so soon in Gillard's first elected term, had her hand not been forced.

The election outcome reflected disenchantment with Labor's repeated climate change policy failures since 2007, and the resulting haemorrhage of Labor's youth and inner urban vote to the Greens. Even so, carbon emissions policy might have stayed in the too-hard basket for another term, if Gillard had had any parliamentary choice. She does not.

The incoming Minister, Greg Combet, made clear soon after the election that the Multi-Party Climate Change Committee (MPCCC) would study all policy options for setting a price on carbon.

The committee, whose proceedings are confidential, has now announced a hybrid package with a temporary fixed carbon price (or tax) starting in mid-2012, but with firm plans to move to an emissions trading scheme three to five years thereafter.

The plan to which Gillard has committed herself is an intelligent bid for Labor's political survival at the next election, as well as being entirely in the national interest.

The Greens and Labor may dispute parenthood of this jointly supported plan: actually it was first put forward in Ross Garnaut's 2008 Climate Change Review.

Tony Abbott is the bad fairy at this christening, determined to blight this baby's future. His confected outrage is opportunistic. He is trying to whip up the same alliance of climate change denialism and conservative business opposition that brought down Nelson, Turnbull and Rudd.

It is a tragic mistake for the Coalition that under Abbott's leadership they have abandoned any serious participation in national policy-making on climate change. Abbott will be remembered as a wilfully shortsighted obstructionist, who puts his own perceived tactical political advantage ahead of the national interest.

Fortunately, Abbott speaks here to a dwindling and increasingly discredited constituency.

There is no doubt that the mainstream electorate now better grasps the need to tackle climate change with effective national policies. A traumatic sequence of destructive extreme weather events, the manifest failure of tokenistic policies like coal industry carbon capture and storage, and the shelving of unattainably grandiose international carbon trading ambitions, have concentrated serious minds on things that are necessary and achievable at the national level.

Labor has learned lessons from its bad experiences in 2007—2010. It is focusing on issues more likely to unite than divide: the need for business certainty, and the importance of Australia not falling further behind the energy changes that are happening internationally. Combet and Christine Milne, with admirable pragmatism, are downplaying target-setting and climate change doomsaying.

What might go wrong now, apart from Labor losing office before the 2013 election through adverse by-election contingencies? After mid-2011, Labor and the Greens will together have numbers in the Senate for many years to come. Were the Coalition to win in 2013, it could still not legislate to end an already functioning carbon price law.

The next few months will see a messy but necessary debate involving all interested stakeholders to determine the final scope and numbers of the plan. This debate — which already began last weekend between the Prime Minister and Senator Milne over taxing petrol — will be partly played out in public and partly privately within the MPCCC, where Greens and Independents exercise real policy influence.

The Opposition will be quick to exploit any public evidence of rancour in the committee.

This is why government ministers, the Greens and the Independents must hold to the discipline of a civilised, contained debate. After the overblown rhetoric, false policy starts and humiliating backdowns to powerful interests over the past three years, Gillard and Combet need this year to get some real carbon policy runs on the board.

They can only do this by a process of patient, courteous but steel-willed negotiation. Any sign of policy weakness will be quickly exploited by enemies.

Here is a brief roadmap of the key issues.

First, the committee must agree and win public approval for an initial carbon price of between $20 and $30 a tonne.

The renewable energy and gas industries, as well as Greens and environmentalists, will argue that only an upper-end figure will send meaningful price signals to the coal power industry and to renewable energy industries waiting to go forward. The coal lobby and Labor's industrial conservatives will press for the lowest figure. I hope for something above $25.

Second, they must decide the scope of the coverage of the scheme. It would be prudent to limit it initially to the electricity generation sector — producing over 40 per cent of Australia's carbon emissions — while compensating flow-on domestic electricity price increases to poorer consumers.

This will maintain community support by sending an encouraging message that the tax is doing the job, as new non-polluting (wind, solar) or less polluting (gas-fired) power stations get underway.

Third, the vexed transport sector: the largest carbon emitter after electricity generation. Garnaut has warned that exempting fuel would undermine the scheme. But petrol price rises will directly hurt consumers already worried by petrol price hikes caused by Middle East unrest.

I would expect the Greens to stand firm on the principle that petrol must be included in the scheme. Labor should press the Greens to accept an interim fiscal compromise, initially offsetting the tax for a few years by reducing the existing fuel excise tax.

Fourth, when and how far to extend coverage to industry. Some industry processes of themselves emit carbon dioxide, e.g. Bluescope Steel's blast-furnace technology. There are fears that direct carbon taxing would further handicap such import-competing industries, threatening their sustainability and 'hiding' Australia's carbon pollution in expanded imports of manufactured goods.

It is an emotive argument, based on the value of industrial jobs at home and a fair playing field for our threatened manufacturers. The Greens would do well to respect such concerns.

Environmental groups and Greens will press for (and should get) complementary policy measures as well as a carbon price, to speed up movement to a renewables-based energy sector.

Agriculture, while relieved that its emissions will not come under the scheme, will press for positive incentives to carbon-conserving farming practices, and fair treatment for irrigators.

Last week's announcement was the important first step on a hard road. Now it will be up to the community to unite behind building an achievable multiparty consensus. Otherwise, Coalition troglodytes — weaker now, but still with capacity to divide and harm — will wreck Australia's best hope yet for a good carbon emissions policy.

In bed with Fred Nile

RELIGION

Irfan Yusuf

My middle class South Asian 'aunties' have certain things in common. They all cook *real* Indian food (not that Anglicised 'vindaloo' or 'butter chicken' rubbish served by the tonne at metropolitan food courts). They all want their kids to become doctors. And they all believe that God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve. They would happily support any push to stop gay marriage.

Years ago, Rev. Fred Nile could boast of having support from many socially conservative ethnic and ethno-religious groups for his morals crusade. When the film *Hail Mary* came to town, Nile was accompanied by a crowd of Muslims offended by the film's portrayal of an historical figure the Koran describes as being chosen by God above all women of creation.

Nile's 2001 autobiography boasts of his opposition in the New South Wales Legislative Council to 'homosexual bills, including several bills to decriminalise sodomy'. In 1993, he successfully argued for a clause exempting religious teachers from homosexual anti-vilification legislation, including for 'teachers from other religions such as Judaism and Islam'.

As a devout Christian, Nile naturally was not attracted to the faith of his Muslim supporters. But he was prepared to build bridges with them for a common cause. The common enemy was the 'homosexual lobby'. In war, my enemy's enemy is my friend.

In more recent times, and in search for other friends, Nile has turned on his Muslim friends and declared them enemies. His positions on moral issues are even more on the fringe. Social attitudes have come a long way since Mr Nile first protested at the Mardi Gras in Oxford Street. Gay marriage is becoming a mainstream issue across the Western world.

To fight gay marriage, Nile needs all the friends he can get. But after making calls to ban Muslim immigration for a decade, does he have much chance of securing Muslim allies? Is the Mufti Catholic?

More influential in the campaign against gay marriage is the Australian Christian Lobby (ACL). Yet even they cannot help but marginalise their potential allies. The whole basis for ACL's opposition to gay marriage (their slogan is *man+wife4life!*) is that ... wait for it ... it will open the doors to polygamy . So claiming that God created Adam and Steve may well lead to God also creating Adam and Eve and Fatima and Shakira and Yasmin and who-knows-who-else.

Or to put it another way, gay marriage might usher in sharia law.

So how does gay marriage lead to polygamy? ACL cites an article published by the Institute of Marriage & Family Canada. She writes that Canadian courts are considering whether a ban on polygamy is unconstitutional. She also mentions that polygamy is problematic because there are 'polygamous Muslim families living in Toronto, collecting multiple benefits'.

The common thread linking polygamy to same sex marriage is a fear of dole-bludging Muslims marrying multiple wives or husbands.

It's hard to resist poking fun at such an outlandish argument. Imagine if we had gay marriage AND polygamy. Then you'd have gay dole-bludging Muslims marrying multiple wives AND husbands. The queue at Centrelink would be even longer, and Centrelink staff would need special training to avoid both homophobia and Islamophobia.

In the broader community, the ACL has virtually no support. If they had strategic sense, they would harness support from socially conservative non-Christians on issues such as gay marriage and abortion. Instead, ACL and the like go out of their way to play sectarian wedge politics.

The result is that even the most homophobic Muslims would rather stay silent on this issue than be seen to be supporting sectarian bigots.

In this respect, the biggest allies the gay lobby (if such a unitary lobby exists) has in helping them get support for gay marriage are groups like the ACL, who effectively split their own voter base thanks to their uncanny ability to offend a huge pool of potential supporters.

There's another thing ACL clearly don't understand. Anecdotal evidence suggests virtually no support for polygamy among Australians who feel inclined to tick the 'Islam' box on their census forms. I am not aware of Muslims writing letters to their local MPs calling for bigamy to be decriminalised.

Not all Western Muslims oppose gay marriage. In the United States, the first Muslim delegate to the Maryland Legislature, Saqib Ali has publicly declared his support of full marital rights for same sex couples. Ironically Ali went to high school in Saudi Arabia where homosexuality is a criminal offence.

However, a sizeable portion of Muslims is opposed to both polygamy and gay marriage. And if ACL's campaign against gay marriage continues to involve sectarian silliness, they might just find themselves in bed with Fred Nile.