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Paul Collins and the Vatican

VIDEO

Peter Kirkwood

At the end of last week Australians learned that adding a price to carbon might cost households almost \$900 per year. This week, Kevin Rudd revealed that there was dissension in Cabinet when, as Prime Minister, he decided to ditch a carbon trading scheme.

These were the latest rounds in the ongoing debate surrounding climate change, one of the big issues of our time. This debate usually focuses on two areas: whether global warming is a reality and is indeed caused by human activity; and what should be done to deal with it.

Another important aspect of this problem, much less discussed, is the way in which our ideas and beliefs shape the way we treat the environment; whether our basic underlying philosophies and belief systems have added to the environmental crisis, and whether they need to change to deal with it.

Paul Collins, who's featured in this interview for Eureka Street TV, is an Australian pioneer in this area. Since the early 1990s he's been writing and speaking about eco-theology, in particular Christian theology; how it has contributed to environmental problems, and how changing, adapting and developing it might lead to solutions.

Collins is a longterm contributor to *Eureka Street*, and this interview is part of a special series to mark the 20th anniversary of the journal. In the interview he discusses eco-theology, as well as his views on the Catholic Church and its governance, another of his pet subjects.

Collins is a former priest who belonged to a religious order, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. As a priest he worked in parish ministry and adult education before entering the world of public broadcasting. He worked for many years as a presenter on ABC TV and Radio, and for three years he was specialist editor in charge of all religion programs on ABC Radio.

He has a master's in theology from Harvard and a PhD in history from the Australian National University. Since leaving the ABC in 1996, he's worked as a freelance writer, speaker and broadcaster on the environment, social and ethical issues, history, the media and communication.

A major inspiration for Collins in his work on the environment is American theologian, Thomas Berry, who died in 2004 at the age of 94. Quoting Berry in an obituary for *Eureka Street* he [wrote](#) :

'The greatest failure of Christianity in the total course of its history is its inability to deal with the devastation of the planet.' Christians have sensitivity to suicide, homicide and genocide, 'but we commit biocide (the killing of the life systems of the planet) and geocide (the

killing of the planet itself) and we have no morality to deal with it'.

In 2001 Collins resigned from priestly ministry because of a dispute with the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith over his book *Papal Power*. He has remained devoted to the Church, seeking reform from within as a highly articulate and very vocal lay person.

He is a prolific writer, penning articles for a range of journals and newspapers. His books include *Papal Power*, *Mixed Blessings*, *God's Earth: Religion as if matter really mattered*, *Upon this Rock: The popes and their changing role*, *From Inquisition to Freedom: Seven prominent Catholics and their struggle with the Vatican*, *God's New Man: The legacy of Pope John Paul II and the election of Benedict XVI*, *Burn: The epic story of bushfire in Australia*, and *Judgment Day: The struggle for life on earth*.

Asylum seekers testing Labor's conviction

HUMAN RIGHTS

Susan Metcalfe

After the Rudd Government came to power in 2007 we were promised that people arriving by boat would be held only as a last resort and for the shortest practicable time, for the purpose of health, identity and security checks before being released into the community. Labor has not kept its word.

Detention centres have re-emerged as the toxic environments of misery we saw during the Howard years, and long-term detention has again become normal practice. Self-harm attempts have, again, become measures of last resort for desperate people under pressure.

Both Rudd and Julia Gillard have talked about the need to treat asylum seekers and refugees with compassion and both have pointed to the cruelty of past Howard Government policies. But although Labor did remove some of the particularly nasty aspects of its predecessor's policies, it has continued to prioritise its own political fears above the needs of vulnerable people.

In spite of the Coalition's mantra that the Rudd Government recklessly unravelled the Howard Government's strong border protection measures — including the detention of asylum seekers in poor Pacific countries and temporary protection visas — Labor has in fact balked at significant reform.

Back in 2007, with a new government in place, the talk within the refugee sector was that any attempt to bring about further substantial changes — like doing away with processing on Christmas Island or abolishing mandatory detention — would fail. The Rudd Government would go this far and no further. To take larger steps, it believed, would risk political damage and a surge in boat arrivals.

But the political damage has come anyway and, as with interest rates, asylum seeker arrivals are not easily controlled by domestic policy alone. Although it is rarely mentioned within the current, politically skewed debate, the boats were already on the move again under Howard in 2006/07.

And unless anyone wants to blame the Howard policies for the people smuggling trade starting up again, or try explaining why the boat arrivals increased after Howard came to power, the escalating conflicts in Sri Lanka and Afghanistan seem the most likely driving forces, not Australian policies.

In early 2008, Labor's then Immigration Minister Chris Evans said 'keeping people in immigration detention for long periods imposes high costs on Australian taxpayers and the

individuals'. Evans went on to claim, with the best of intentions, that the Rudd Government would 'return integrity to the immigration system and ensure that immigration status is resolved efficiently'.

But as the number of arrivals increased, Labor buckled under the pressure and resorted to long-term, indefinite detention of boat arrivals as its default position.

In a statement last week, UNHCR regional representative Richard Towle referred to the current detention arrangements. 'Experience shows that people held in such conditions frequently experience high levels of personal stress, including self-harm.'

Towle called on the Australian Government to look for alternatives. 'UNHCR believes there are ways of managing the legitimate security concerns of States while ... providing more flexible, community based arrangements for people in Australia while their asylum claims are being processed.'

This is a difficult policy area for any government. But asylum seekers who are dealt with fairly, who are dispersed in the community with access to support and advice and, most of all, who are not held under lock and key in highly stressful situations, are much more easily managed than large groups of traumatised people who explode under pressure in highly publicised enclosed environments.

Yes, a more humane approach will always provoke the Shadow Immigration spokesperson, Scott Morrison — who many view as a harsher version of ex Coalition Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock — to shout to the world that the Government welcomes boat arrivals. But he will do that anyway, and the political pain could hardly be any worse than it is now.

Labor's recent efforts towards finding regional solutions for refugees should be welcomed and it is work that was largely neglected by the Howard Government for more than a decade. But if Labor continues to refuse to honour the promises it has made on detaining vulnerable people within Australia, then it will remain wedged indefinitely in a mess of its own making.

Paul Keating said last week that 'Governments that wander along uncertain about where they are, looking over their shoulder, invariably get run over themselves.' Labor has been looking over its shoulder on asylum seekers since the appearance of Pauline Hanson and the Tampa incident in 2001. If they don't stop now, the train wreck will inevitably come, and another opportunity for Labor to stand up for what it says it believes in will be lost.

Gay love and lies

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***I Love You Philip Morris* (MA). Directors: Glenn Ficarra, John Requa. Starring: Jim Carrey, Ewan McGregor, Leslie Mann. 98 minutes**

Nick Urata, a key member of Denver indie rock group DeVotchKa, provides the theme tune, 'Faking Death', to this bizarre and incredible based-on-fact comedy. Theremin, violin and whistling provide the vehicle for a repeated 12-bar melody to sail across layers of strummed guitars and staccato percussion. The tune simultaneously evokes both romantic island fantasies and the vast prairies of spaghetti westerns. Deranged, yes, but also sweet. In this, it perfectly captures the film's essence.

Jim Carrey is Steven Russell, a flamboyant gay Texan who becomes a compulsive conman in order to fund his extravagant lifestyle. Eventually his frauds land him in prison, where he finds a new object for his hyperactive obsessions. Fresh-faced fellow inmate Philip Morris (McGregor) has been locked up for a nondescript crime. The two men are immediately infatuated, and enjoy a sweet prison romance. When Steven is transferred, he'll do whatever it takes to get back to his would-be soulmate.

When they are finally reunited as free men, Steven finds it all too easy to fall back into the patterns that first landed him in prison. He wants to build an extravagant life for himself and Philip, and the film details the ingenious and obsessive deceptions he applies in order to defraud a wealthy company that employs him. But he's lying to Philip, too, who knows that criminal activity is the surest way to ensure that they will eventually be separated again.

I Love You Philip Morris frequently juxtaposes sweetness and darkness. During the early stages of Steven and Philip's affair, Philip pays a rough inmate in an adjoining cell to play a romantic song on his tape recorder. Philip and Steven slow-dance, and continue even when sounds of violence emerge from next door, as prison guards arrive and beat the prisoner for playing music after lights out.

A similar juxtaposition is evident in Steven himself. We learn that he was adopted as a child, and carries a deep sense of rejection from that time. His extravagance and the criminal activity that funds it can be taken as an attempt, driven by fear of further rejection, to buy affection and commitment from the man he loves. He's no victim, but he's certainly damaged. We can feel sympathy for him.

Often, the juxtapositions equate to a sense of amusing irreverence. But screenwriters and first-time directors Ficarra and Requa have also created a slightly uneven tone, with slapstick comedy (keyed to Carrey's flailing, face-flexing talents) clashing at times with the film's more

serious, dramatic aspects.

The pacing, too, is uneven. The film lingers too long on Steven's life prior to 'coming out', as an ostensibly conservative Texan cop, church organist, husband (Mann is amusing as his surprisingly understanding wife) and father. Still, this section indicates that Steven has long been in the habit of creating elaborate personae in order to meet social expectations. It's no longer a habit. It's innate.

Despite such flaws the film is anchored by the undeniably sweet romance at its heart. Carrey and McGregor share a warm chemistry, and Carrey, in one of the best performances of his career, perfectly sets Steven's passion and intensity against McGregor's fine portrayal of Philip's vulnerability.

Sydney's crazy car culture

ENVIRONMENT

Greg Foyster



He was the angry driver from Hell.

The green Commodore screeched to a halt, and out stepped a hulking bogan with a shaved head, wraparound sunnies and tattoos from head to toe. He lumbered down the road, stopped face-to-face with the shocked cyclist he had almost run over, drew back his fist and screamed 'I'm going to punch your head off!'

This is how Liam Crowley, the 32-year-old store manager at Abbotsford Cycles, Melbourne, remembers his encounter with a living, breathing road rage cliché in November last year.

Witnesses soon arrived on the scene and the driver backed away, but not before issuing a warning to 'stay off the road'. 'I would suggest that he believes in his world that roads were built for cars, and cars alone,' says Crowley.

The angry Commodore driver might sound like a cartoonish stereotype, but he isn't the only person who thinks bikes don't belong on the bitumen.

Before being elected NSW Premier, Barry O'Farrell described Sydney's new 200km bike network as 'crazy' and said Lord Mayor Clover Moore had 'deliberately set out to inconvenience motorists'. But given cycling's overwhelming benefits to society, what's really crazy is O'Farrell's populist pledge to keep Sydney car-dependent into the future.

The NSW capital is already one of the developed world's most hostile cities for cyclists, according to a US academic who spent a year studying Sydney's bike culture. Dr John Pucher told *The Sydney Morning Herald* he encountered an 'an incredible level of aggression from Sydney motorists'.

The problem seems widespread: a 2005 survey found road rage was more common in NSW than in any other Australian state or territory.

Bicycle NSW claims cycling is becoming more popular in Sydney, but the city still lags behind Melbourne. Yet even the number of people commuting by bike in Australia's 'lefty' capital is relatively small. And on a national level, the percentage of trips taken by bike is still less than 2 per cent.

Meanwhile, the costs of car-dependence keep piling up. Our rate of obesity is among the highest in the developed world, with about half the population too slovenly to stave off sedentary lifestyle diseases, such as diabetes. Research from 2004 showed that each extra hour in a motor vehicle increases the chance of obesity by 6 per cent.

Aside from making us fat and sick, car travel is an economic ‘negative externality’. This means that while a driver receives a benefit in the form of convenient transport, everyone else bears the cost in the form of increased pollution, road traffic injuries and climate change. Car-dependence can have a net cost to society.

Cycling, on the other hand, can have a net benefit. As a moderate, low-impact type of exercise, riding a bike to work can reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, some cancers, diabetes and stress disorders. A 2008 paper for the Department of Health and Aging found cyclists save the economy \$71 million in health costs each year. And the more people who cycle, the safer our roads are for all users. If cycling doubles, the risk of transport injury per kilometre falls by 34 per cent.

Unfortunately, Australia’s insidious car culture is holding us back from reaping these benefits. Driving is considered the normal thing to do, so we use the car even for really short trips. In Australian capital cities, about 50 per cent of car trips are under five kilometres — a distance most people could cycle without raising a sweat.

The habit of reaching for the car keys is reinforced by a number of things, including suburban sprawl, but one of the biggest barriers to healthier forms of transport is driver hostility.

In a 2004 AAMI survey, 46 per cent of women and 38 per cent of men agreed with the statement ‘Aggressive drivers put me off cycling or walking’. The following year, a Victorian parliamentary committee found a common trigger for road violence was ‘cycling on a road considered to be the “proper” domain of cars’.

Most parliamentarians understand that as a long-term transport strategy, cycling makes a lot of sense. That’s why the NSW Liberals and Nationals issued a statement before the election saying that they ‘strongly support cycling as a viable, active transport option’. And then O’Farrell went and shot his mouth off.

One final piece of evidence in favour of cycling is it increases the body’s ability to transport oxygen, improving cognitive functioning. Perhaps if our friend Barry spent more time on his bike he wouldn’t make such stupid comments.

Palm Island cops dodge justice again

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan

On Monday I was in Townsville meeting with people about the latest saga in the police cover up of the death of Mulrunji Cameron Doomadgee, the Aboriginal resident of Palm Island who never emerged alive from the Palm Island Police Station after the burly Sergeant Hurley fell on top of him in November 2004.

The Aboriginal community has had to endure: three separate coronial inquiries; a decision by the Queensland Director of Public Prosecutions not to prosecute; the reversal of that decision on advice from Sir Laurence Street who said, 'A jury could well find that the only rational inference that can be drawn as to the fatal injury is that it was inflicted by Hurley deliberately kneeling Mulrunji in the upper abdominal area'; the trial of Sergeant Hurley who was acquitted with his barrister telling the jury that Hurley was the 'instrument of another young man dying and that is a cross he will carry for the rest of his life'; a detailed hearing before the Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC) which recommended 'that consideration be given to commencing disciplinary proceedings for misconduct' against six named police officers; a Supreme Court case denying the Queensland Police Commissioner the right to conduct the disciplinary proceedings on the grounds of apprehended bias; and now a decision by the deputy police commissioner that there was no need for any disciplinary action against any Queensland police officer.

All is well again in the state of Queensland. Or at least it is back to business as usual in Aboriginal-police relations.

The public is well familiar with the fact that the investigating police officers were treated to a barbecue at Hurley's residence on arrival on Palm Island before they commenced the inquiry into the death caused by Hurley. The barbecue was just the beginning of the chummy police cover up of their own negligence and dishonesty.

Here is just one example of the CMC's observations about the extraordinary behaviour of officers Kitching, Webber and Williams:

Kitching agreed that he only offered to pathologists information that he considered reliable and relevant. This seems in stark contradiction to his inclusion on the Form 1 of hearsay evidence about Mulrunji drinking bleach and his exclusion not only of [Palm Island resident Patrick] Bramwell's evidence but also of [resident] Penny Sibley's allegation of assault (the credibility of which had not been questioned). In effect, Kitching seems to have informed the pathologist of information adverse to Mulrunji but excluded allegations adverse to Hurley.

The pathologist Dr Lampe had been told by the investigating police that the deceased had

swallowed bleach (which he had not) but not that he had been assaulted (which he was). The CMC stated that the police officers who then conducted the internal review of this behaviour 'appear to be simply providing reasons to justify Kitching's failure to make this information available to the pathologist, and Webber's and Williams' failure to check the Form 1'.

The CMC, chaired by respected retired Supreme Court judge Martin Moynihan concluded that 'the investigation into the death of Mulrunji was seriously flawed, its integrity gravely compromised in the eyes of the very community it was meant to serve. The way in which the investigation was conducted destroyed the Palm Island community's confidence that there would be an impartial investigation of the death.'

Last month, the Queensland police deputy commissioner Kathy Rynders published a 410 page report finding that no officers needed be disciplined. For example, she made these observations about Kitching's Form 1 report:

I consider Kitching's failure to inform Dr Lampe of the assault allegations (whether reliable or not) a significant departure from Service requirement and in the circumstance would warrant the commencement of disciplinary action. I note that Kitching included unconfirmed information concerning Mulrunji taking bleach. Similarly, he should have included information of the alleged assault made by Bramwell and Florence ['Penny'] Sibley.

She then noted that the pathologist did a fine job despite Kitching's failures. Without further ado, she then says, 'I do not consider Kitching's failure to inform Dr Lampe of the assaults constituted misconduct. However, for reasons already outlined and Kitching's acceptance that the allegations of assault should have been brought to the attention of Dr Lampe, it is not my intention to commence disciplinary action, but to provide managerial guidance.'

Overall, she agreed with the CMC that there had been 'failings in the initial investigation' but concluded that all her boys needed was 'managerial guidance'. She thought that the serious flaws highlighted by the CMC related only to matters 'incidental to the investigation'. In her report, she wrote, 'The actions of the officers must be viewed objectively, not with the benefit of hindsight'.

Addressing the Palm Island community's perception of the police misconduct she observed, 'There continues to be strong feelings amongst many in the community. The danger, however, is that strong feelings tend to cloud sound judgment. Issues are prejudged.' She concluded, 'The evidence simply does not support action for misconduct or official misconduct.'

Moynihan described Rynders' decision as 'almost incomprehensible'.

Three years ago, Mike Reynolds who had been the long time mayor of Townsville before becoming a minister in the Queensland Government and then speaker of the Parliament,

called for a royal commission into the matter: 'The four-year legal history of this case has become so convoluted and tainted that I now believe truth and justice can only be obtained by a wide-ranging royal commission headed by an eminent jurist.'

On Monday Reynolds repeated his call for a royal commission, telling me that there was no other way for Queenslanders to put this matter behind them. 'We need another Laurence Street,' he said.

After the jury acquitted Hurley in September 2007, Aboriginal leader Gracelyn Smallwood said: 'This has not ended the way we wanted it to, but it has been a win on our slow climb up the Everest of justice.' On Monday she told me, 'People are just so tired and drained. We have lost hope in the Queensland justice system. We've stopped climbing.'

The Everest of justice is still well beyond the reach of Queensland Aborigines who happen to get in the way of the Queensland police. Meanwhile the Queensland police remain a law unto themselves.

Three years ago Premier Anna Bligh dismissed out of hand Mike Reynolds' call for a royal commission. She was confident that the legal processes would produce a transparent, just result. We are now at the end of the legal process line. The Bligh Government needs to listen again to responsible citizens like Reynolds and Smallwood. There must be a royal commission.

Adventures of a vegie amateur

NON-FICTION

Frank O'Shea

I have a special pair of gardening trousers. They are so old that they don't have belt loops, so I have to use galluses for the sake of the neighbours.

I tie these in the cross-over style like the dragoons. By right there should be two buttons at the back and two on each side at the front, but if you had all of those and you used them all, the effect would lack character. As it happens, I am missing a few buttons and I always leave one free; the effect is a mixture of rakish and medieval, with a dominance of the latter.

When I put on the trousers, I am required to put newspaper on the ground to catch the material that lodges in the turn-ups. This material is called loam and is supposed to be good for potting on — I hope you are impressed by my familiarity with these technical terms, even if I am not sure about them myself.

Thus duly dressed, I go out to the garden and spit on my hands. You never see the people on television gardening programs spitting on their hands, which is a dead giveaway that they are picked solely for their good looks or quaint accents.

Next I have to find my gardening shoes, which may be under the house or in the shed or maybe in the garage. All these places are locked at night, a sad sign of our suspicious society, but in our case also a precaution lest the shoes walk out on their own.

One of them is missing a lace and I keep promising myself I will buy a pair the next time I am in the gardening centre, but they hide them away somewhere and because I am a man, I couldn't possibly ask where.

Thus shoed and trousered, I find the garden fork and stand in the vegetable plot. I spit on my hands again and look around me. We grow quite a few vegetables but my favourites are rhubarb and broad beans because you can see those over the weeds. At this time of the year, however, it is 520 for 2 in favour of the weeds. And I doubt if the beans will take any more wickets this season.

I hate weeds. I understand that they are part of God's creation and so I should not hate them. But my back is unrepentant. They are of two kinds of weeds, those that fulfil their destiny in one season and those that go on year after year. One kind — I forget which — can be put in the compost bin, the other kind are supposed to be put to one side to be burned later.

So, when you are weeding, it is essential that you have two heaps so that the boss thinks you know what you are doing. In fact, you just put them in two separate piles as the mood takes you, happy in the laws of probability that suggest you will be right half the time.

How come you never see farmers weeding? They just let everything grow and then come along with the plough and turn the weeds over and ignore the fact that some of them may be of the wrong type and should be burned.

Today's farmers use a tractor for ploughing, but that has taken much of the romance out of the activity. The traditional ploughman was the poster boy for rural life; he sang to himself and was proud of his straight lines and of how little was wasted at what he called the headland.

The Irish poet Padraic Colum has a poem where he speaks of 'the Plough that is twin to the Sword, that is founder of cities!' (Because this is poetry, he can use capitals wherever he likes and throw in an exclamation mark to remind us to pay attention.) Later in the poem, he has the following:

Slowly the darkness falls, the broken lands blend with the savage;

The brute-tamer stands by the brutes, a head's breadth only above them.

There is nothing nearly as romantic about the advent of darkness in my case, though I have to admire a certain trimness in what I have done. The rhubarb is looking positively perky, but the beans have had it and the rhubarb will have to do all the bowling from now on.

I am stiff and sore in places you would expect, and I could probably do some potting on with the loam under my fingernails. But only if there was no bending involved.

The ambiguity of touch

POETRY

Various

Cinema Como

Instead of glistening lake,
there are midnight mirrors to swim through.
Instead of open sky,
fifteen satin suns are shaped into Louis XV armchairs.
Heavy curtains gather like storm cloud.
Instead of mountain,
a carpet of flowers bloom,
and that soft glow of lamp is tree.
My imagination begins to flicker,
goes wandering inside borrowed dream.
I try on new clothes
to walk a lonely highway with my protagonist.
I'm seeking that fine line of horizon
just as much as he.
It could end badly,
but for now it's about faith.
Revelation sits in Row D.
The darkened cinema soon works me loose.
I become a cosmos of stories
and slip through fingers
to fall into the scuttle of light —
pure radiance that builds suspense.

—*Libby Hart*

Planes

At airports, your hands
print the double glass windows
as if you are da Vinci.

I smile into Styrofoam-cupped coffee
& turn the pages of a Françoise Sagan novel
as planes glimmer & land outside.

Twelve months later, I wake you in my sleep
& demand to know about A380s & 747s; those
mystic metal machines whose physics elude me.

As a child, planes in the sky filled me
with inexplicable terror, but only
if there was no one to tell.

Earthbound by the swing set, steel wings
breaking sky 30,000 feet or so above my head
were equated with German Shepherds;
letters lost in the mail; being locked
in shopping centre toilets; & God
knowing my atheism.

At 23 planes become what I fear again
when mapping our way from Bratislava
we're hit by lightning & emergency-land.

The white flash is somehow metallic
& my mouth fills with a taste
that recalls losing a tooth.

Our first night in Austria & you
delight my three year old Au Pair charge,

teasing that she has yogurt on her nose.

I watch her fall for you, giggling into
the cup of her fingers, her affection
un-cautious.

Dialling plus-six-one home I wonder
what the skies hold for her, as she names
four of her dolls in your honour.

—*Jo Langdon*

Touch

When is touch
invasion of privacy
quick pat
impulse of compassion
light or lingering caress
To touch another
is to send
some intimation
subliminal blatant
casual or deeply meant
At a tram stop once
I tapped the shoulder
of a woman slightly known
In her swift turning and
her startled eyes
fear asked Whose touch?
When is restraint
the protocol

and when
is reaching out
the act most right
Contained
by skin and nerve
and separateness
we touch
or don't
—*Lerys Byrnes*

Aboriginal students' school shock

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Brian McCoy

I recently spent time with a group of young Aboriginal students from a remote community who had been at school down south. They had travelled across the length of the country to receive secondary education but only stayed for a short time. After a fight, involving other Aboriginal students, they all wanted to go home.



Their experience mirrored many I have witnessed over past decades. Aboriginal parents wish their children to spend time outside their community and develop skills of engagement with the wider society. A number of schools offer places for these students. Principals, teachers and residential carers respond generously. Yet, for many, that hoped-for transition often doesn't work.

For most Aboriginal children who attend boarding school, the honeymoon period wears off after a few weeks. Becoming homesick is common. Parents can become more anxious, teachers more frustrated and no one is quite sure what to do. Seemingly good intentions and careful preparations become unstuck and returning home, despite all the investment, can seem the only option.

Getting into a fight would seem to be one way of drawing attention to either the desire or the need to go home.

Recently Senator Jenny Macklin spoke about the importance of education for Aboriginal children, even suggesting punishment for parents who did not support their children attending school.

In my experience, it should be less about carrots and sticks, enticing or punishing, than about understanding how young Aboriginal students and their families can be better supported into transformative and rewarding educational experiences.

When I met this group of students I was reminded of the challenges they bring with them. English was not their first language and most had rarely spent long periods of time away from their family and community. They were now in an urban world where it is unusual to find anyone who can communicate with them in their own language. Most of the people around them speak a fast brand of English with a confident use of the culture that comes with it.

They can experience a sense of shame and alienation. It was easy to imagine them as a highly visible but vulnerable and voiceless minority.

While receiving schools try to sensitise their staff and students, those first weeks after

arrival are critical. As each new student is invited into the life of the school, they need to experience some confidence in negotiating a very different and demanding new culture. If this occurs, there is a good chance the young person will gradually begin to settle and make new friends.

I realised the students' parents and wider family also need advice and help. Their role is critically important and can easily be overlooked. Schools, at least initially, make life quite demanding for the young people, who are often used to more relaxed family and social surroundings.

Mobile phones can make contact too easy. I remember watching the excitement on student faces when the phone at the home they were visiting would ring and they could talk freely and at length with parents and friends. I could hear their family being similarly excited. These students were trying to settle into a very different social and educational world, but were clearly struggling to leave home. News, particularly involving funerals, adds to their sense of separation.

Eventually, students hear their own loneliness become their parents' call for them to return home. Letting go requires trust in those to whose care they have been entrusted, along with courage to be firm when going home seems the kinder option.

One of the lessons of the Stolen Generations is that the whole Australian community pays a terrible price when any of its children is forcibly removed from loving and caring families. Education cannot be forced. At the same time, the whole community continues to suffer while Aboriginal children cannot access and utilise the education benefits Australia can offer.

In order to avoid these pitfalls, we need to better understand the complexity of choices and experiences involved in these educational transitions. Most involve mixtures of anticipation and fear, hope and anxiety, for the young people and their families.

Easing these transitions for all involved will say more of our country's ability to be reconciled than words. This is the reality of that often and strongly promoted ideal, 'two-way learning'.

I have seen evidence that some students need more than one attempt to achieve an educational transition. After my recent experience, I later heard that most of those who returned home asked to return to the school and have another go. I don't know how long they will stay this time, but I salute their efforts, their families and the school in supporting and engaging a second attempt.

Gerry Harvey shares the love online

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



Last week, high profile furniture and electronics retailer Gerry Harvey [announced](#) that Harvey Norman would reluctantly open an online store. He's been doing the numbers and decided he's damned if he does and damned if he doesn't. Customers are moving online, but online remains outside the comfort zone of most traditional retailers.

'My heart's beating very strongly on whether we make any money out of it,' he said, '[but] I haven't got any choice.'

The main stumbling block is the interpersonal relationship that lies behind every economic transaction, and how to replicate it online. It's the love that consummates every business deal, often written off by accountants as necessary 'good will'.

It's also something that businesses are usually confident about face to face, but not online, at least for the moment. They are waiting for retail's equivalent of [Mark Zuckerberg](#) to provide them with a blueprint for online shopping. As we know, Zuckerberg's Facebook definitively put paid to the idea that the internet is for nerds, and established it as a vibrant space for human interaction.

To speak of love in connection with economics is not being flippant. In fact Pope Benedict XVI argues in his encyclical [Caritas in Veritate](#) that love is the essence of economics. Business transactions are between human beings rather than market forces, and should therefore be motivated by love and other values that can be considered ethical.

That means 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you'. Make human beings feel that they are the focus of every business transaction and watch the profits flow.

This applies to both sides. For customers, it's worth considering gestures such as taking the time to affirm the person behind an online transaction that went well. There are many feedback mechanisms that allow buyers to declare their love for the vendor — 'great product delivered quickly, doing business with you is a pleasure'.

University of New South Wales Professor James Franklin has a [commentary](#) on Benedict XVI's 'economy of gratuitousness and fraternity' in new social ethics journal *Solidarity*.

Reflecting the Pope's view, he says all economic transactions are not purely monetary, but opportunities for each party 'to go beyond what is contractually required so as to create mutual assistance, human development and goodwill'.

In the short term, it's usually about the profits. But when love blossoms there are dividends

that will have a wider benefit. Pope Benedict hopes we will become addicted to love and ‘that love will not only manifest itself in individual transactions, but that there will arise a whole sector of the economy devoted in the first instance not to profit but to achieving positive social aims’.

Franklin comments on this Third Sector, or ‘social business’:

That concept can again look naïve at first glance, since one might expect hard-headed profit-focused companies to undercut enterprises saddled with a ‘moral overhead’ and drive them from the market. In some sectors of the economy, that may be so, but there is a long record of economically successful ‘social’ businesses in certain economic roles.

Perhaps Gerry Harvey’s trepidatious heart beat will give way to a love that goes beyond profits.

Why Tony Abbott is right about welfare

HUMAN RIGHTS

Frank Quinlan

When people talk about work-life balance it's easy to get the idea that work is a necessary evil – something we do to make money so we can spend the rest of our time doing the things that really matter. But that's not how Pope John Paul II thought about work. He insisted that work is how we find fulfillment. It isn't just about making money to live; it's one of the ways we live life to the full.

That's why I agree with Tony Abbott's argument that we need to reform the welfare system, even though I disagree with some of his suggestions on how to do it.

In a recent interview on ABC radio, the leader of the opposition argued that work isn't just about the economy, it's also about individual welfare and the social fabric. What he didn't want to see 'is people who might be participants in the economy just parked forever on welfare when there is an alternative'.

One of the things worrying Abbott is the growing number of people on the Disability Support Pension. He suspects many people on this payment could benefit from work but aren't because of a welfare system that focuses too much on what they can't do and not enough on what they can. He's right.

Our welfare system is disabling. With unemployment payments at around \$237 a week, there's no mystery about why a person who's struggling to find work would want to apply for the higher, but still inadequate Disability Support Pension (around \$335 per week). But to claim the pension you need to keep showing how your disability makes it impossible for you to work. In other words, you need to focus on what you can't do rather than what you can. That's not the right approach.

The first step in fixing this problem is to eliminate the gap between unemployment payments and the pension. Unemployment payments are too low and need to be increased. The system is encouraging people to focus on their disabilities when it should be encouraging them to think about what they have to offer an employer.

The second step is to make sure that people who can work have real opportunities to work. One way of doing this is to follow Denmark's example and create 'flex jobs' that come with wage subsidies for employers. It may be that in the short term creating subsidised jobs costs more than what government saves on income support. But as Abbott argues, work has benefits for individuals and the social fabric that go beyond the benefits to the economy.

Part of the dignity of work comes from knowing you are making a contribution. This is why Abbott's proposal to expand work for the dole sends the wrong message. It reinforces the

idea that people on income support have it too easy and that being forced to work will make being on welfare less attractive. It sends the message that work is a bad thing and that any person who values their own wellbeing will try to avoid it.

A better idea is to reinvigorate the idea of mutual obligation. If a job seeker has done everything they can to find work but keeps getting knocked back by employers, the community should accept an obligation to provide a subsidised job, help the person overcome their barriers to work or both. Employers also have obligations, and sometimes it is employers who put up barriers. The government needs to find ways of making it easier for employers to meet their obligations.

One place to start is with government itself: the Australian public service. Despite a strategy aimed at hiring and retaining staff with disabilities, the proportion of Commonwealth public servants with a disability has fallen. The public service should be setting an example for other employers and demonstrating that job opportunities exist for people with disabilities if they choose to pursue them.

Like other major employers, the Catholic Church could also lead the charge to ensure there are opportunities for those experiencing disabilities and other barriers.

For policy makers, it's a mistake to focus on the resentments of people who sit in focus groups or ring shock jocks complaining about 'dole bludgers' and demanding benefit cuts and more work for the dole. Too often people assume that if they can find a job easily, everyone else can as well. A failure of empathy is never a good basis for policy.

The key to good policy is to focus on the benefits of work and look at ways to offer those benefits to as many people as possible. When we start thinking about work as a punishment or burden we've lost sight of why moving people from welfare to work matters.

Andrew Bolt and free speech

MEDIA

Ellie Savage

Melbourne *Herald Sun* columnist Andrew Bolt's [appearance](#) in the Federal Courts this week has posed questions about eugenics, identity, race, free speech and welfare fraud.



Nine Indigenous Australians are suing Bolt in a human rights file for breaching the Racial Vilification Act due to what they perceive as gratuitous insults based on race and skin colour that appeared in a number of columns published in 2009. They assert that Bolt's statements claim the fair-skinned Aboriginal Australians 'chose' their identity in order to access 'serious perks and Aboriginal-only benefits', and personally attacked the nine individuals.

Some voices in the media have presented the case as a challenge to free speech in Australia – political correctness gone crazy. However, this case is not about silencing critiques of the construction of race or ethnicity, nor Bolt himself.

Those who fear a breach of freedom of expression in this case need fear only if they intend to engage in personalised attacks based on the racial or ethnic character of their opponents.

Where freedom of expression is enshrined, it cannot reasonably be absolute; moderation is necessary to protect individuals from defamation, violence, and undue vilification. If we believe in liberal expression, it is not our duty to advocate in favour of hate speech and misrepresentation, but rather to understand and critique the political motivations that form the policy which moderates it.

As a high school student, my introduction to liberty ran along simplistic lines: you can do anything, anything at all (an exciting proposition for an adolescent), so long as your doing so does not infringe on anybody else's right to do their 'anything'. So, not really *anything* (less exciting, more adult).

In a healthy society, liberty is moderated and directed by a sense of some greater good, whether that is social, moral, or legal. Absolute liberty is dystopic, best avoided. Freedom of expression follows similar lines: Bolt can say anything he chooses, so long as his words do not infringe on a person's moral right to enjoy integrity and a reputation that befits her.

While it's conceivable that a person could disingenuously tick the Indigenous or Torres Strait Islander box for some imagined privilege, the real-world benefit in doing so is so minuscule it barely warrants concern. Shrill accusations against the poor of welfare fraud are ubiquitous. Their reality is far less threatening than is the cost of tax evasion by Australia's wealthy.

One of the many problems with Bolt's claims against the plaintiffs is the subtext of his argument: that these people choose, enjoy, and exploit benefits they receive on the basis of their race without paying their dues (i.e. without suffering from racism).

Bolt accused artist Danie Mellor, a 'white university lecturer, with his nice Canberra studio' of pushing aside 'real draw-in-the-dirt Aboriginal artists', seeming to imply that since Mellor neither draws in the dirt nor lives in it, he therefore has no right to enter competitions for indigenous artists.

To Bolt's understanding, affirmative action, or the 'significant benefits' awarded to Indigenous Australia, is payoff for the inevitable disadvantage and racism they experience due to racial appearance. Discrimination they might endure, then, is balanced out by enjoying, he says, 'more rights' than anyone else.

It is apparently inconceivable to Bolt that Indigenous-specific grants and opportunities might constitute coy reparations for the irrevocable damage and impoverishment wrought by settlement and more than a century of systemically stolen children.

The nine plaintiffs, including the leader Pat Eatock, are native title activist Graham Atkinson, academic Wayne Atkinson, professor of law and Indigenous studies and Australian of the Year 2005 Larissa Behrendt, former ATSIC member Geoff Clark, artist Bindi Cole, public health worker Leeanne Enoch, author Anita Heiss, and lawyer and academic Mark Macmillan.

All are accomplished professionals whose racial backgrounds, if that is important, are mixed. All nine have dedicated their careers to significantly advancing Indigenous affairs in the public sphere.

If their racial identity has given them any advantage, it is the advantage of having feet firmly placed in two nations. If anything can be said to have benefited from their professional and cultural contributions, it is the idea that Australia could recognise and meaningfully reconcile with its history.

Bolt is accused of gratuitously and intentionally insulting and humiliating the nine plaintiffs quite simply due to the colour of their skin. Their case argues that a legal provision enshrining racial equity — in a nation whose awakening from racist and racialised policies is ongoing — has been transgressed. The outcome to this complex case carries a great weight.

Ricky Ponting's dignity

SPORT

Tony Smith

According to some commentators, cricket is a metaphor for life. Cricket leadership certainly has some strong parallels with political leadership. Captains have their own individual approaches and it is better that they stick to their own styles rather than take advice from everyone. At one extreme, the cavalier Keith Miller supposedly told his fielding sides to 'scatter', while at the other the control freaks would micro-manage field placements and tell bowlers exactly where to bowl.

Ricky Ponting, who has just announced his retirement as skipper of the Australian men's XI, seems to have found a happy medium between the archetypes of anarchist and dictator. Ponting occasionally seemed to be keeping his players on a tight leash, but that is probably attributable to the nature of the era rather than the man.

Regardless of the balance between wins and losses under his captaincy, Ponting handled a difficult period well. The team was rebuilding after the retirement of dominant figures such as Justin Langer, Matthew Hayden, Adam Gilchrist, Shane Warne and Glen McGrath. This created its own pressures, particularly in the Ashes series, at which he was not successful.

Ponting seemed to be constantly surrounded by support staff such as managers and coaches and was perhaps constrained by them. This was an era in which professionalism grew more intense, with team meetings, the adoption of game plans and frequent media commitments. Players were in demand for unprecedented product endorsements. No previous captain had to balance so many demands and expectations.

Although Ponting has declared that he will remain as a player, it seems clear that he saw the captaincy as an extension of his individual performance. He seemed to sense that the team performed better when he led by example and scored runs. That made the job of captaincy easier.

Indeed, if one criticism sticks to Ponting as a captain it will be that he led well when Australia had the edge, but lacked the instincts of a Richie Benaud or the ruthlessness of an Ian Chappell to seize the initiative from an entrenched opponent. Sometimes, the situation would cry out for the ball to be thrown to Michael Clarke or Simon Katich, but Ponting would do the predictable and bowl the quicks.

Early in his career, Ponting was distracted by a drinking problem. Luckily, this was kept from the public until he could announce that he had put it behind him. Indeed, overcoming that difficulty probably helped Ponting to emerge as a champion batsman.

Interestingly as a batsman Ponting knew exactly how to regain authority over an attack.

Australian cricket went through a period when hooking and cutting the fast bowlers was considered to be irresponsible and consequently bowlers could pitch short at will. Ponting was fearless when playing off the back foot and was a delight to watch when driving on the front foot. In the field Ponting was courageous, a safe pair of hands in close and a tireless chaser in the outfield.

Ponting generally behaved with dignity under pressure. He seldom displayed emotion and then it was usually a stare or a hint of a smile. He gave no public sign of ever being disappointed with any of his players, but usually made positive comments, even when things were not going well. He always seemed conscious of the privileged position he occupied.

If there was one moment Ponting probably wishes he could expunge from the record — just as MPs can correct Hansard proofs — it would be from the recent home Ashes series. When the umpire delivered an adverse decision, Ponting, who was having a break, immediately reacted. Not only did he surrender his own dignity on that occasion, but by allowing a fast bowler to confront the umpire, he also surrendered a degree of authority.

As some recent Australian elections have shown, leaders are not always able let go in time to avoid embarrassment.

One lesson from politics is that good leaders have an eye to their successors. It may well be that Ponting intended to retire earlier but that he hung on to ensure that the time was right for his vice captain Michael Clarke to take over.

Clarke, like Ponting, joined the Test team young and was known as 'Pup'. He too has faced public pressures. When Clarke's relationship with his partner ended, he came under immediate intense scrutiny, and the media posed unfair questions about his suitability for leadership. Clarke remained dignified and calm throughout and scored a century when he resumed playing.

Clarke has promised to run the team his way, which will be excellent as he obviously enjoys his cricket. He always looks more relaxed than the heavily gum munching Ponting.

It is a new era. In the not so distant past, the thought of an Australian captain sporting a tattoo would have been anathema to the establishment. In the commercial realities that prevail today, purveyors of 'temporary' tattoos will probably make a fortune when the kids start demanding a tat like Pup's. That small quibble aside, Michael Clarke should be an excellent role model.

It is pleasing that Ponting, once a batting prodigy, erstwhile champion batsman and captain courageous, decided to keep playing in the role of senior statesman. With his experience Ponting could score many more Test runs. That would ease the pressure on Clarke and make another contribution to the success of the team and the value placed on the 'Baggy Green'.

Obama's Libya dilemma

POLITICS

Tony Kevin

Gaddafi's forces have unexpectedly counter-attacked, pushing rebel fighters further back to the east, recapturing a strategic oil town Ras Lanouf and threatening to retake another oil town Brega, closer to the rebel centre Benghazi.

Following the massive destruction of Gaddafi's tanks and heavy artillery by US and NATO airstrikes over the past week, Gaddafi's professional soldiers changed tactics to small groups of lightly motorised well-armed fighters, who in open country warfare can still prevail, thanks to their better weapons and familiarity in their use, over poorly armed and untrained resistance fighters.

NATO now faces difficult choices regarding how to step up their military support of the resistance: by more intensive aerial bombardment (which runs greater risks of accidentally killing resistance fighters); engaging in clandestine arms supplies to rebels, despite the declared international arms embargo; or even inserting clandestine special forces fighters to help the resistance.

All three options carry risks, yet without additional support, the resistance could again be driven back to the outskirts of Benghazi by Gaddafi soldiers. NATO would then have to decide quickly whether to bomb Gaddafi's Tripoli command and control assets, which it has so far refrained from doing, or put peacekeepers on the ground.

On a global canvas, the war goes better for the resistance, although Gaddafi is like a master chess player who fights on stubbornly even after losing his queen, hoping for a mistake by his opponents.

President Obama gave an assured, coherent public defence of US policy two days ago. He explained why the US had to intervene to defend the safety of Libyan civilians at risk of imminent death from their vengeful, murderous ruler. He explained, convincingly, why the US needed to act here even though there are many cases around the world of bad rulers being left undisturbed.

He also explained why it was necessary for him to wait until the UN Security Council and Arab League had endorsed US military intervention in Libya, and why the US could not now pursue regime change in Libya by military force but had to leave this to local forces.

On these last two points, Obama aroused the anger of the American unilateralist political tradition. Major Republican figures John McCain and Rudy Guiliani argued that America looks weak and irresolute if it does not quickly go in with force on the ground to topple Gaddafi.

These views show no appreciation of the finely poised international environment the US and NATO face over Libya, following the damage wrought to American global prestige by George Bush's illegal invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the horrors that followed from that decision.

Obama knows the mood could sour quickly in the Middle East and Arab world if the US were to exceed the UN Security Council mandate by going into Libya with US ground forces, probably incurring collateral civilian casualties in the fog of war.

Yet if the war drags on, Obama will face increasing domestic criticism. Americans are anxious to see stability restored to their oil supplies and prices, and will press for an early outcome in Libya.

Gaddafi — mad but crafty — will try to drag out the war. He probably has enough cash on hand, despite the freezing of regime assets abroad, to go on paying his mercenaries for some time. Fighting is their job, after all. They may not care that their leader's cause is lost. After the war ends, they will melt away to the south to fight another war, another day.

By any rational prognosis, Gaddafi cannot prevail. There is no way now that the US, UNSC Arab League and NATO could reverse their collective decisions that his rule is illegitimate. Their face is now massively engaged in the cause. Gaddafi must go.

NATO will do whatever it takes to protect Benghazi, whatever the collateral damage to Tripoli and its civilians. The responsibility for such a tragedy would be wholly Gaddafi's, in trying to hang onto power despite all rational pressures and inducements to step down. International media — which play a key role in this war — will continue to highlight Gaddafi's brutality and his resultant loss of legitimacy.

Behind the scenes, diplomacy is working hard for a safe exit for Gaddafi and key aides: most probably in Italy. There is ample EU precedent: the French Riviera is full of former African and Caribbean dictators, living out their days in comfort and security under deals struck with Paris. Let us hope Genoa or Sanremo will similarly tempt Gaddafi.

At risk of being proved wrong, I predict the endgame is approaching in Libya.

Does Catholic identity matter?

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

In a recent speech given to Australian Catholic students titled 'The Fall of the Christian West', American Cardinal Raymond Burke was [concerned](#) with Catholic identity. This issue has also preoccupied Catholic thinkers, institutions, religious congregations and other groups.

Although the topic touches important issues, it is generally unhelpful to make identity the starting point of conversation.

Cardinal Burke defined true Catholic identity by its opposition to secularist societies. These were portrayed negatively by their acceptance of abortion, euthanasia, gay marriage, pornography, contraception and restrictions on religious expression, and defined by their consistent philosophies.

So when Catholics are influenced by their societies their Catholic identity is eroded. To be a Catholic is defined in terms of beliefs, dispositions and practices that are self consciously orthodox. This will inevitably lead to opposition, to martyrdom of opposition.

The difficulty with preoccupation with Catholic identity is that it stands in such conflict with the central movement of the Gospel expressed, for example, in the story of the Good Samaritan.

In the story, a Jew asks Jesus, 'Who is my neighbour?' His question is about identity, about who belongs to his group. He invites Jesus to mark out the boundaries of faith and practice that separate this group from other groups.

In response Jesus tells a story about a Samaritan, a member of a group from which all Jews would separate themselves. The Samaritan tends to an injured Jew whom Jews with some status in the community pass by, presumably because contact with the bloodied man would have made them ritually impure.

After telling the story, Jesus rephrases the question, asking his questioner who proved a neighbour to the injured man.

The story suggests that the question we begin with should not be about identity but about how we meet the needs of the people who present themselves to us. Identity questions fix our attention on the group to which we belong. The question Jesus asks invites us to look through the eyes of strangers. Only from that perspective can we safely reflect on our group.

This story, which encapsulates Jesus' ethic, suggests that groups inspired by a Christian motivation should always begin by looking outwards to ask who in their world are in need of healing, freedom and love, and asking how we can reach them.

That starting point leads to a different logic than the logic of identity. The conversation will go in three directions. It will lead people to ask how they can best support each other in their faith and in their commitments so that they can continue to give themselves happily and effectively to strangers.

It will also lead them to reflect on their society in concrete terms. They will ask what forces enhance and diminish the freedom and dignity of the people who are bruised. Accordingly, they will naturally build relationships with people and groups that have a different ideology, but whose lives and work reflect a passion for the humanity of the disregarded. These Samaritans will be their natural allies.

They will also reflect on their opponents, some of whom will be fellow Christians, whose actions and policies crush dignity, destroy freedom and treat people as means to selfish and abstract ends.

If Christian groups serve the disregarded effectively, they will certainly be targeted by their opponents. Most will find martyrdom too grandiose a term to describe this common human experience. If they must be called martyrs, they would be happy to accept the traditional appellation of martyrs of charity.

Finally, they will be led to reflect on the reluctance of some of their members to proclaim the Gospel boldly by going out to others. That will make them ask whether those who join the group are motivated by a passion for God and for humanity. It will also raise questions of formation.

But the conversation about formation will start with the leadership of the group. People in positions of leadership are likely to be furthest removed from immediate contact with those in need and so from the opportunity to proclaim the Gospel. They will need most formation. What they learn from this formation will help them encourage in younger members the passion for the Gospel that led them to join the group.

This kind of reflection that begins with the Good Samaritan story no doubt leaves many questions unanswered. But it has one virtue that is often lacking in conversation that focuses on identity. At each step it asks insistently: what ultimately matters?

Kids learning violence

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***In a Better World* (MA). Director: Susanne Bier. Starring: Mikael Persbrandt, William J  nk Nielsen, Markus Rygaard, Ulrich Thomsen . 118 minutes**

The English-release title of this Danish film, *In a Better World*, evokes the idea of a utopia where justice is universal and moral decisions easy. This ironic fancy is echoed in the phonetic similarity of the Danish title, *H  vnen*, to ‘haven’ or ‘heaven’. In fact, *h  vnen* translates literally as ‘vengeance’.

Indeed, *In a Better World*, which won the Oscar for best foreign language feature earlier this year, can be taken as a meditation upon the various human responses to violence, in a world where both justice and morality can be difficult to either define or obtain.

Shortly after the death of his mother, young boy Christian (Nielsen) starts at a new school. There he meets social outcast Elias (Rygaard), a victim of bullying, whose parents have divorced, and whose doctor father Anton (Persbrandt) is frequently overseas working in an African refugee camp. Charismatic Christian sees in Elias a potential confidant and prot  g  .

The bullying Elias endures from one of his peers is brutal and frequent. When Christian attempts to stand up for him, he too is brutalised. Elias has resigned himself to this fraught existence, but Christian won’t stand for it. He retaliates with more severe violence than that which he suffered himself. This not only defeats the bully, but earns his respect. Christian and Elias have become dark allies, and learned a frightening lesson about the capacity of violence to still conflicts.

(I’m sure Casey Heynes, who became an internet hero when a video of his [violent retaliation](#) against a peer’s physical taunts became a hit on YouTube, could relate.)

Such tangible lessons of the schoolyard prove difficult to shake. Appalled by Christian’s reverence for violence and the potential influence this might have on Elias, Anton attempts to provide the boys with a demonstration of Gandhian non-violence. He stands placidly during an altercation with a slap-happy mechanic, resisting the urge to strike back. The nuances of his ‘moral victory’ are no doubt missed by his bullish aggressor. They are certainly lost on the boys, particularly the increasingly angry Christian.

The film offers various other, more subtle permutations of violence. Christian’s apparent lack of empathy stems from his internalisation of fierce emotions regarding his mother’s death. It is implied that her death came about, after a long illness, through an act of passive euthanasia by Christian’s father (Thomsen). Christian considers this, too, to be an act of violence, and resents his father for it. He cannot perceive the compassionate dimensions that

such an act necessarily contains.

Even for wise adults, human emotion and the temptation of cathartic violence can sell principled pacifism out to easy aggression. The film juxtaposes the boys' budding, dangerous friendship with Anton's experiences in Africa. Anton is faced with providing medical care to a wounded militant who has committed atrocious crimes against local pregnant women. This provides the ultimate test to Anton's principles, particularly as those around him bay, understandably, for the man's blood.

Director Bier, assisted by a strong cast (Nielsen, in particular, possesses the natural charisma necessary to make Christian both frightening and sympathetic) negotiate the ideas contained in *In a Better World* with an abiding sense of humanity and dignity. This is a confronting and compelling film.

Vindicating Islam

RELIGION

Herman Roborgh



Just before I arrived in Pakistan a few weeks ago, the Governor of the Punjab, Salmaan Taseer, was attacked and killed by one of his own bodyguards. The Governor had declared the blasphemy law to be a 'black law' (*kala kanun*) because it was being used to oppress religious minorities in Pakistan.

Soon after, when I was visiting the capital city, Islamabad, the Minister for Minorities, Shahbaz Bhatti, was shot dead just a few blocks away. Leaflets left at the scene of the crime stated the reason for the murder: speaking out against the blasphemy law.

There may have been other reasons for these murders but the immediate effect was to provoke fear and insecurity among Pakistani citizens belonging to the religious minorities.

What aggravated the shock and pain for friends from the minority community, with whom I spoke shortly after these murders, was the realisation that their Muslim teachers and professors were keeping silent. Not one protested against the injustice of openly assassinating political figures.

Posters in the streets proclaiming the Governor's killer to be a hero only added insult to injury. Sweets were even distributed in the killer's honour. A similar response followed Bhatti's murder.

I began to wonder what was going on in the minds of these educated persons that would make it possible for them to celebrate the murders of their Provincial Governor and State Minister. How could one explain their readiness to condone the murders of these leaders, who had spoken out against a law which many thinking people knew was the cause of much injustice and oppression?

Muslims in other countries have already stated that blasphemy laws are incompatible with Islam and that, when the Prophet Muhammad himself was insulted, the Qur'an did not order him to retaliate. So why were these intellectual persons in Pakistan so defensive about the blasphemy law?

Nothing much can be gained by examining the moral attitudes of these particular professors and intellectuals. It may be more helpful to consider how the relationship between religion and politics has developed in Islam ever since Muhammad unified the religious, civil and political domains through the example of his own leadership.

Although a distinction between the political leader (*Caliph*) and the religious scholars

(*'ulama*) began to appear soon after the death of the Prophet, Islam has never recognised a formal distinction between the authority of 'Caesar' and that of God. Ever since the experience of the earliest Muslim society in Medina, the integration of religion and politics has provided Muslims with a sacred memory which has become a model for social and political life in Muslim societies.

Despite the unfortunate use of words like 'crusade' and 'axis of evil' by former President George W. Bush in recent years, political or military action by the West has not generally been couched in moral or religious language. Instead, Western powers justify 'pre-emptive strikes' against a perceived enemy as necessary in order to protect certain 'national' and 'strategic' interests.

Similarly, civilian deaths are regarded simply as 'collateral damage'. Military actions (e.g. 'drone' strikes by NATO in Afghanistan) are not expressions of religious fervour. The absence of religion from political language allows the West to pursue its aggressive policies throughout the world without implicating Christian belief and morals.

In contrast, political leaders in Pakistan routinely use religious concepts to justify their actions and garner support.

The close connection between politics and religion is evident in the language used, for example, in the daily *newspaper Jang*, which reflects the more widespread political culture in Pakistan. The English daily newspaper *Dawn* is far more critical and expresses the viewpoint of the educated elite.

The political culture in Pakistan may throw some light on the behavior of certain professors in Lahore who were responding to the murders of political leaders by distributing sweets. It is not true that these professors have a dislike for the religious minorities. It is possible that they would agree to some way of amending the blasphemy law. But their spontaneous behavior reveals a mentality which tends to see political events such as these murders through the lens of religion.

Just as the *mujahidin* soldiers, who defeated the Russians invading Afghanistan a few decades ago understood their victory as the victory of Islam, so these professors in Lahore may have felt that defense of the blasphemy law was necessary for the vindication of Islam, at least in Pakistan.

Leather fish bonding

NON-FICTION

Margaret McCarthy

The silence that follows the thud of the ball shouts 'Run!' I jog backwards, staring high into the dark tree backdrop, one hand raised to shield the glare from my eyes. The ball is a speck, a bird, a comet hurtling to earth. The mighty football seeks its target: me.

I position myself, guessing its trajectory. Run head up, arms open and upward, and wait for it to land in my beginner's trap. I count. *Three!* A caught ball is a mark. *Two!* A mark earns the praise of the gang. *One!* Praise beats running after a dropped ball. *Zero!*

The football crashes though my arms and hits the ground.

I bend to pick it up, it bounces away. I run after it for ten metres. It leaps all over the place with the unpredictability of lotto balls in a barrel.

It is raining. The ball has doubled its weight and is like kicking a basket of wet washing. And it's slippery, like grappling a live fish. But the other players — Vin, Steve, John, Bruno, Andrew and the rest — seem to catch and kick with purpose.

A ball hurtling towards me from on-high raises a new set of fears: bent fingers, sprained wrist, broken nose. No wonder I drop so many. But then, the way to avoid running around like a grasshopper in a plague is to take successful marks.

Many of these guys have played footy for a long time. I watch with admiration and jealously as Steve takes a mark with ease.

As I continue to fumble the leather fish, Steve calls out an instruction for better catching. He demonstrates an open-armed approach, offering an opportunity for the ball. Then closes his arms around the ball, holding it 'like a loaf of bread'. I've never held bread like this before, but figure the ball won't slip when it knows you are looking at it thinking: 'sliced or toast?'

Steve kicks to me. Despite his expertise, the kick is a dud. The ball bounces between us. We shrug and smile. No-one's perfect.

We play with an original kick-to-kick Sherrin — a mud coloured, leather Aussie Rules football, shaped somewhere between a soccer ball and a blimp. It's kicked by foot from player to player. In a good moment, a leg will lift towards the heavens and the ball will torpedo in an arc to the next-in-line. The players give a couple of loud hand claps in appreciation.

The nature of the kick can be known by the sound. When kicked with the point of the toe, the footy is quiet, and the pain in your foot is loud. Early in my kick-to-kick career, I learned to face the laces of the ball up, to connect the footy with the laces of my runners. When I collect

the ball, I position it in front of me and kick, hoping to hear the right *thud*. It's more of a *thigsh*, but it will do.

Our leader, Vin, has kept our bayside game going many years, but I've only rocked up in the past couple. Kick-to-kick costs no money. We don't need special clothes. Around us, people walk their dogs or jog. Once, we were invaded by a real football team.

While we're here, talk fades. Keep the footy moving, strive to mark, aim to the next in line. Celebrate good marks or kicks with a single cry.

Andrew, who knows less about footy than I do, kicks a reverse chainsaw to Bruno. Bruno, who gets us here on Sunday mornings with his text message bugle call, jumps with both feet into the air to mark, then drop kicks to John. John's a giant who doesn't like to run. Instead, he marks by reaching into the sky and plucking the ball with a single hand.

The ball is sent into the air with a mighty 'thud'. It seems to stall at its peak before deciding to return to the earth. I stand under it. My elbows kiss, my fingers spread. The ball is headed toward my lily-white triceps. I see the lace, the fading Sherrin logo branded on its side.

My knees bend and my pride grows. I hold the ball steady. Not the squashing I once gave a loaf coming home from the supermarket. Not afraid of it slipping through like giving a baby it's first bath. But with the sureness of one who holds the wet, leather ball in her grip and will only release it when she's ready. The guys cheer me with a couple of hearty claps.

I return the ball from my arms to my hands. My head has emptied. I size up the distance to the next player. Twenty-five metres or so. Further than I've ever kicked. I face the ball laces up, jog into motion, kick the ball with a *thud* and watch while the next-in-line runs backwards.

After the floods

POETRY

Various

A Warmun canvas

after the floods, March 2011

Beneath the runnels of grey
leaking and seeping from the top of the canvas,
ochres and mustards spill in disarray.
Bright white dots sit in deltas,
their linear connection sagging and pooling.
Strong sienna mounds are smoothed and weep into the flats,
The bold black has been thinned and wiped with a cloth.
Tarmac is torn into jigsaw pieces.
The place where the women sat
is hidden by shredded wet season grasses:
the artist has sprinkled splinters of Spinifex onto the surface.
Below the waterline, a rufous mud dishevels the purpose.
Above the waterline, struts and rooves stamp rectangle chequers
onto the place where community can no longer gather.
Two dogs look out from a corrugated raft.

A long way from Sydney

There are currawongs in Dwellingup
but that's all you'll get of Sydney.
Here operas happen without architects.
Domestic confusion is played out in
small wood houses of two bedroom Acts,
an orchestra of one-tonne utes,

no need for surtitles.

Currawongs.

They ignore the little birds —
squeaky toys lining the fence —
and fly their long throats around town
while the cockatoos are out on a job.
At evening they tuck the forest in,
leaving the town sky open for locals
to cast their own shrieks and whistles
up into the star filled harbour.

Blood brothers

No love lost in the lawyers' office —
scalpel to the farm,
the jugular weeping,
a mother at home
winding wool into balls
to knit into sweaters
against the winter's wind.
Brothers in blood;
the feud boiling over fences,
simmering on the flats.
The canker of Colorbond
competing on opposite hills.
Dam walls restraining
the festering valleys.

Sunday afternoon, Spring

We are on the verge, fixing the retic
among the long shadows of the street trees.
Down the hollow street his thongs flap, flap.
He crosses the road to say 'She's not doing so well.'
The lavender is low with the weight of its purple.
Bees are sewing the wedding white flowers of the quince.
Beneath the bottle brush, the leaving sun stirs nectar.
On such a day as this
lovers, mothers and sons
should not have to say goodbye.
No one should be dying.
Then the new holland honeyeater with one glass whistle
and one more,
whips me back to Spring.
A magpie scrapes the warm air with its wings,
lands on the car, scratches the roof, tic, tic.
Black and not black, together in one bird;
telling me
this day is as much about life as it is about death.

Small parties, big ideas

POLITICS

John Warhurst

The right of the two territories (ACT and NT) to have legislation overturned by the Commonwealth Parliament but not by the Government alone has become embroiled, to their disadvantage, with gay marriage and euthanasia law reform. The Greens have moved the relevant Commonwealth bill and are the most active supporters of both reforms. This combination is explosive and emotional, causing the bill to be sent to a Senate committee.



A small party (The Greens) is leading the debate, and the smallest components of the federation (the territories) are perceived to be central to the process, and may be among the likely locations for follow-up legislation.

These related issues necessitate understanding both Australian federalism and the broad social reform movement that since the 1960s has challenged accepted laws in the social sphere.

The dynamics of federalism involve both independent action by the constituent units (states and territories) and cooperative action overseen by the Commonwealth Government. The territories are creatures of the Commonwealth Government with limits on their constitutional powers. Nevertheless they generally act as states and are allowed to do so until they threaten a larger interest.

Territory citizens are limited not just by their constitutional position but by their small populations. They get pushed around for both reasons. The ACT gets discounted for being socially atypical and, as a Labor stronghold, is disregarded by the Coalition and taken for granted by federal Labor.

ACT interests should not be disregarded. Not only does it have a legitimate claim on due and transparent democratic process, but it also indirectly represents a sector of the Australian electorate often submerged in larger state populations.

The ACT speaks not just for itself but also for equivalent like-minded segments (middle class, highly educated, urban) across Australia. Each big Australian capital city has at least one, and Sydney and Melbourne two or three, 350,000 sized segments composed just like the ACT.

The social law reform agenda includes controversial issues such as abortion rights, gay rights, and women's rights. For constitutional reasons the battleground has mostly been state parliaments.

The ACT electorate has supported such social movements, but the ACT Government has not led the way; self-government only came in 1989, coincidentally about the time the Greens appeared federally. The NT generated pro-euthanasia legislation in the 1990s, later thrown out by the Commonwealth Parliament. Abortion law reform began in SA in the 1960s under a state Liberal government.

Social law reform was under way well before the Greens. By themselves they cannot either pass such legislation or veto its removal once a territory has introduced it. The major parties together can always outvote the Greens. In that scenario the balance of power means nothing.

There are in fact more MPs in both the Labor and Coalition party rooms than Green MPs who are pro gay marriage and pro euthanasia. But they are confined by the internal politics of the major parties which fear a split on these issues. In the long run it is the opinions of these major party social progressives, not the Greens, who should be feared by opponents of gay marriage and euthanasia.

Federalism theory supports a small territory playing a social reform role; that is supposed to be one of the advantages of federalism. But small territories should not be surprised that national governments and federal MPs from larger states want to rein them in on such issues.

Similarly the spirit of multi-party politics supports a small party like the Greens playing a prominent role in social reform, but only an initiating or ginger-group role, not a decisive one.

Gay marriage and euthanasia will continue to be debated in State and Federal Parliaments. Territory and Green aspirations have their equivalents in all parts of Australia and in the major parties in all parliaments. While some in the territories and in the Greens will be disappointed not to be right out in front on these issues, they will play a secondary role in determining the direction Australian society eventually takes. Larger parties in larger parliaments will ultimately prove decisive.

Demonising the Greens

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

Currently the churches and the Greens have a mostly dysfunctional relationship. It is comparable with that which exists between many parents and their adult offspring. The parents instilled strong values into their children, but the children have taken those values in directions the parents had hoped they wouldn't.

More than a few Greens owe their passion for social justice to a strong Christian upbringing. It is understandable how this could develop into support for policies that threaten the institutional church, such as backing government schools at the expense of religious schools because government schools don't charge fees and therefore offer a better deal for the poor.

The days and weeks before Saturday's NSW state election witnessed a sometimes unseemly stand off between the churches and the Greens. While the Greens failed to live up to expectations in the NSW counting, the air is unlikely to clear quickly because the Greens will shortly hold the balance of power in the Senate, in Federal Parliament.

On Friday, the Clarence Valley *Daily Examiner* [quoted](#) Lismore Catholic Bishop Geoffrey Jarratt's assertion that the Greens 'policies on euthanasia, abortion, same-sex marriage and school funding show them on the dark side'. He was echoing a [message](#) issued earlier in the election campaign by all but two of his fellow NSW bishops.

The local Greens candidate Janet Cavanaugh hit back, claiming that her own strong Christian upbringing gives her authority to interpret Christ's words in a way that may differ from the bishop.

Bishop Jarrett should examine his own position in keeping silent on many of the major moral challenges of our time, including mandatory detention of refugees, our involvement in the illegal war in Iraq, and the over-representation of the mentally ill and Aboriginal people in our jails.

Cavanaugh stresses that her 'reasons for joining The Greens included the fact that Greens' policies agreed with [her] sense of social justice — a result of [her] strong Christian upbringing'.

While there are many other Greens who attribute their social justice values to a religious background, it's probably true to say the majority no longer publicly identify as Christians. Notable exceptions include Lin Hatfield-Dodds and Christine Milne.

Hatfield-Dodds argues in an [article](#) for ABC Religion and Ethics titled 'Being a Christian,

and Being Green' that Christian leaders and lobbyists who have no time for the Greens 'do speak for some who are part of the Christian faith tradition in Australia, but not for all'.

Frank Brennan spelled out areas of agreement between mainstream Christian values and Greens policies in his [article](#) 'Why a conscientious Christian could vote for the Greens', published in *Eureka Street* last year. He is more cautious, listing incompatibilities and stressing that acknowledging common ground does not mean denying differences.

[Elsewhere](#) he praises the NSW bishops for entering into the debate but suggests they should also subject the policies of other parties to the same 'detailed scrutiny' they have applied to the Greens. His message is: don't demonise the Greens, but scrutinise policies of all the major parties.

If churches worked with, rather than against, the Greens while they hold the balance of power in the Senate, we could discover that the legislation enacted turns out to be more 'Christian' than Labor or Coalition legislation; rooted more in values than in political pragmatism. Those Greens policies Christians regard as odious could be sidelined as Greens see political value in Christian support.

David Hutt, NSW Director for the Australian Christian Lobby, [wrote](#) last week in an article critical of the Greens: 'This is the most important NSW election in a generation. NSW needs a Parliament that will work to deliver a more moral, just and compassionate society.' Taken out of context, it underlines common ground that exists between Christians and Greens, and could almost have been written by a Greens lobbyist.

Acknowledging that Christians and Greens have similar goals could help each group to see value in the other's way of approaching these goals. Greens could come to understand the value of religious schools that give priority to the teaching of values. More Christians might support carbon reduction.

Hatfield-Dodds says: 'As citizens of a social democracy, we must engage respectfully with each other. And as we listen to each other's views and respect each other's experiences, we will build a better world together.'

It's like parents agreeing to disagree with their recalcitrant adult offspring, and listening to their contrary views rather than cutting them off. Both parties are often pleasantly surprised to discover that what unites them is stronger and more life-giving than what divides them, and that the real enemy lies elsewhere.

Cheap milk and supermarket ethics

COMMUNITY

Michael Walker

The past decade has seen the rise of the 'ethical consumer' and especially of the 'green consumer'. The success of the Fair Trade movement can be seen as part of this trend, whereby consumers seek out the Fair Trade label to ensure that the producers of their goods are paid a fair wage.

Word occasionally reaches us of the high cost of our goods. Notwithstanding large distances, language differences and physical security barriers, the world heard last year about the suicides of overworked employees at Foxconn's Shenzhen factory, where the Apple iPhone is assembled.

Many concerned individuals have adopted a strategy of 'shopping ethically': avoiding products they know to be sourced unethically and finding alternatives. This was a great idea when products were made from raw materials and relatively close to the point of purchase.

But today supply chains stretch all around the world. One well-known company may be responsible for marketing and branding (Apple), another for assembling the product (Foxconn) and still others responsible for assembling the components. Dozens of unheard-of companies specialise in items as obscure as the tiny electrical motors that allow digital cameras to zoom and focus.

The whole system is so complex and interconnected that it is not uncommon for an outsourcing company to be unaware themselves that production has been further subcontracted. This happened disastrously to Mattel in 2007 when their children's toys were found to contain lead paint.

Who on earth can expect to truly know the environmental and labour standards under which the many parts of today's products were made?

Then there are some raw materials that are both ubiquitous and invisible. Take phosphate, for example.

Phosphate is used as a fertiliser mostly in corn and thus forms part of the production supply chain for everything from corn syrup to cattle feed to ethanol. It is also used as an ingredient in detergents, food additives (including one in Coca-Cola) and the lithium-ion batteries used in mobile phones.

As it happens, 85 per cent of the world's phosphate reserves are held by Morocco, and a large part of their production comes out of the occupied territory of Western Sahara. The hapless Sahrawis today sit in refugee camps in Algeria while we enjoy convenient access to

phosphate dug out of the lands they used to live on.

Morocco's monopoly on this resource is so complete that even Australia, a phosphate producer, still imports from them.

If you are concerned about this state of affairs, would you even know what products to boycott?

It is a similar story with palm oil, much of which is unsustainably produced in Indonesia at the expense of the rainforest. Estimates vary widely but it is possible that 50—90 per cent of all packaged goods in supermarkets contain palm oil.

Milk has been in the headlines lately, with many people concerned about the effect of Coles' \$1 milk on the 'little' producers. They should look closer. Those producers are actually large companies, quite capable of fending for themselves, who have been putting the squeeze on farmers for decades.

For their part, the dairy farmers' association is lobbying right now to reduce costs by denying food to 'excess' calves en route to slaughterhouses.

It's barely possible to move without touching a product about which you would be concerned if you knew the story of its production. Boycotting is not a practical option unless you are happy to accept pre-industrial living conditions. The only viable option is for ethical consumers to become activists. The process of globalisation that brings our goods so readily from around the world can also carry our concerns back to the point of origin.

There are groups helping companies establish adequate systems to monitor their suppliers. There have also been encouraging successes: in the past two months petitioners mainly from the change.org website convinced clothing chain Gap to insist on higher safety standards in factories in Bangladesh, and major florists 1-800-Flowers to offer Fair Trade certified flowers. Expect to hear more such success stories in the future.