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Good news from Palestine

VIDEO

Peter Kirkwood

Unlike most media reports from Israel/Palestine, this interview relates a good news story from that strife-torn region. And the interviewee is a very unlikely advocate for the Palestinian people.

Till two years ago, De La Salle Brother Peter Bray's career consisted of teaching and education administration in Australia and New Zealand, doctoral studies in the United States, and some lecturing at university level in a number of countries around the world.

Then, because of the sudden illness of the vice-chancellor of Bethlehem University , out of the blue he was asked to fill the unexpected vacancy. He took on this role with determination and vigour, and it opened his eyes to the suffering of the Palestinians.

The idea of establishing a university in Palestine was first mooted during the 1964 visit of Paul VI to Israel. Christian Palestinian leaders were concerned about the number of young people drifting away from the area in order to pursure university education, many never returning. They asked the Pope for assistance in setting up a Catholic university in their homeland.

So, under the auspices of the Church, and partly funded by the Vatican, Bethlehem University opened its doors in 1973. It now has 3000 students from various faith backgrounds, and since its foundation has educated 12,000 graduates.

It has schools offering courses in five subject areas: Arts, Business Administration, Education, Nursing and Science. It also has three institutes specialising in hotel management, community partnership and leadership training.

Even though it has been closed down 12 times by order of the Israeli military, the longest period for three years from October 1987 till October 1990, classes have been held continuously on and off campus since the university opened.

Since then the De La Salle Brothers have administered the university, providing some of its lecturers and the vice-chancellor. Peter Bray of the latest to fill this role, and is well qualified for the job.

Born in New Zealand, he has been principal of three De La Salle schools in Australia and New Zealand, and for 11 years immediately prior to going the Bethlehem he was director of the Wellington Catholic Education Centre in New Zealand.

He has a doctorate in leadership from the University of San Diego, and has lectured in this field in universities and other tertiary educational institutions in New Zealand, Australia, the

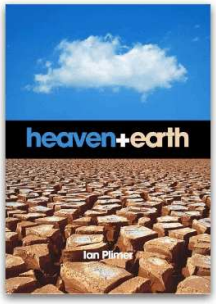
USA, Ireland, the Philippines, England, Turkey and a number of European countries.

He is well placed to lead Bethlehem University through the next phase of its story which its website outlines as 'people committed to pursuing their higher education — with perseverance and courage in the face of adversity and injustice — working together in hope of an ever widening circle of colleagues to build a better future'.

Cardinal Pell's climate hot air

ENVIRONMENT

Tim Stephens



On Wednesday, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that 'a dire warning about the need to mitigate man-made global warning from a Vatican-appointed panel of scientists has not yet convinced Australia's highest-ranking Catholic', Archbishop of Sydney Cardinal George Pell.

The 'warning' came from The Fate of Mountain Glaciers in the Anthropocene , the first report released by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, an independent body within the Holy See. It notes that today's change in ice cover (the most visible evidence of climate change) is happening at an unprecedented rate and is due to human-induced changes in carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere.

The report echoes the positions of both John Paul II, who spoke at length about environmental questions, and Benedict XVI, who has expressed similar anxieties and has overseen the Vatican's endeavours to become the first carbon neutral state.

The Vatican's views, however, are not shared throughout the Church, and Pell's is the loudest and most persistent voice of dissent. He has not taken aim at the Pope for his views on climate change, but has been exceptionally vigorous in his criticism of climate change and climate scientists.

The difficulty is not that he holds heterodox views on this issue. We are all entitled to our opinions. What is concerning is Australia's most senior Catholic clergyman vigorously advancing a position that could be interpreted as a statement of the official stance of the Catholic Church in Australia.

Earlier this year, Dr Greg Ayers, head of the Bureau of Meteorology, painstakingly examined the scientific claims made by the Cardinal in a letter tabled in a Senate estimates hearing. In response, Pell called Ayers, one of Australia's leading atmospheric scientists with 140 peer-reviewed articles to his name, a 'hot air-specialist' who had made 'an unscientific contribution'.

This is but one of the more recent inflammatory statements by Pell, who often deploys more colourful rhetoric and invective on climate change than Tony Abbott or Andrew Bolt in his attacks on 'warmers' .

Across a number of years in his column in the *Sunday Telegraph* and the *Catholic Weekly* he has argued that the climate is not changing or, if it is, it is not changing as much as it has in the past, or if it has that this is natural, and that human beings have had no impact, or a negligible

one, and that nothing we can do will make any difference.

He has repeated the talking points of climate sceptics that have been thoroughly refuted by climate scientists by reference to the peer-reviewed science (this is aggregated on the excellent website SkepticalScience run by Australian physicist John Cook, himself a committed Christian).

Pell relies on the work of Professor Ian Plimer, one of Australia's leading geologists, who is an atheist and outspoken critic of creationism. However Plimer's book, *Heaven + Earth*, which seeks to debunk climate change, has itself been debunked by Professor Ian Enting , a mathematician at the University of Melbourne, and by one of Plimer's own colleagues and friends, Professor Barry Brook .

On the basis of Plimer's work, Pell has:

said 'evidence shows the wheels are falling from the climate catastrophe bandwagon';

rejoiced in the 'wonderful irony' that winter weather in Copenhagen in December 2009 interfered with the 'huge jamboree on global warming';

claimed 'it is improbable that human activity can achieve significant global climate changes' and that climate researchers have 'fiddle[d] with the evidence' (he did not apologise once the University of East Anglia scientists were cleared);

criticised those who correctly describe carbon dioxide as a pollutant as 'propagandists capturing the language';

stated that there is no consensus among climate scientists;

asked 'how long must global cooling continue before it becomes a problem for global warmers?' (even though we've just had the warmest decade on record);

repeated that the temperatures in the Middle Ages were higher than they are today (the peer-reviewed science says they were not),

then delighted in what he called the 'delicious' fact that there was a cold snap in Europe in December 2010 in response to the claim by 'global warmers ... that 2010 ... [was] one of the hottest years on record'.

It should be no surprise then that Pell was listed in 2009 as a supporter of the Australian Climate Sceptics Party (although it must be noted that this was not at the Cardinal's request — he is not a member of any political party).

This is an extraordinary amount of commentary lavished by Pell on one issue — no other contemporary issue seems to have attracted his attention to the same extent.

On climate change Pell has adopted a peculiarly post-modern position, arguing that we

should not accept at face value what institutions such as the US National Academy of Sciences say, but rather assess for ourselves whether we think global warming is caused by human activities or not.

It is ironic that he has bought into a post-modern narrative of science as inherently contestable and scientists as villainous, given that similar ideas are often expressed by radical environmentalists who adopt fundamentally anti-science views such as an irrational opposition to nuclear power .

Pell's interventions on climate change have prompted me to write to him on many occasions, passing on standard scientific texts on climate change, recent scientific papers of relevance and interest, and extending an invitation to organise a meeting with a leading climate scientist.

That offer has never been taken up, and there is no indication my correspondence has had the slightest impact. Pell is wedded to the views of Plimer, despite the fact that Plimer's key claims cannot be maintained, and his outlandish statements (about the contribution of volcanism to climate change for instance) have never been corrected.

Pell has said to me that when it comes to commenting on climate change he makes clear that he is simply speaking as an individual and expects no-one to accept his claims simply on his say-so. However he does not include this disclaimer each time he speaks on climate change.

The reality is that given Pell's prominence and his constant interventions in national discussions as one of Australia's best-known climate change contrarians, his views gain a good deal more attention in the media than the views of Australian bishops more generally.

Unless you are a close follower of religious affairs you are unlikely to be aware that the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference has heeded the mainstream science, issuing a position paper on climate change in 2005, and a statement in 2009 supporting Benedict's prayers for the success of the Copenhagen Climate Conference.

Pell's views on climate change have no scientific basis, and his interventions on the topic have done great damage to the reputation of the Catholic Church in Australia and to agencies such as Caritas that are taking practical steps to help vulnerable communities in developing countries whose livelihoods are being threatened by climate change.

There are no signs that Pell intends to step back from public discussion on the topic. In October he will deliver the second annual address to the Global Warming Policy Foundation, a climate sceptic think-tank in London, established by Lord Nigel Lawson, and which includes Plimer on its Academic Advisory Council. The first Foundation address was delivered by VÃ¡clav Klaus, President of the Czech Republic, who argued that climate change is a ruse to justify a totalitarian ideology.

It remains to be seen whether Pell will speak on the same theme to his audience at Westminster Cathedral Hall, but it seems unlikely he will refer to any of the recent published science, such as the report of the Australian Academy of Science that identifies four lines of evidence (physical principles, the record of the distant past, measurements of the recent past, and climate models) to conclude that greenhouse gas emissions from human activities are the main cause of recent climate change.

It is, to use Pell's own words, likely to be more 'hot air', both in the sense of being unscientific, and also in being inflammatory.

Last-ditch confession

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Get Low* (M). Director: Aaron Schneider. Starring: Robert Duvall, Bill Murray, Lucas Black, Sissy Spaceck . 103 minutes**

Get Low begins with the sight of a blazing rural homestead, and ends with the image of a small group of friends clustered around a humble grave. In between is the story of an old man's last bid for forgiveness and redemption. The film offers a meditation on getting old, and on the desire to garrote regret before mortality makes its final fatal lunge. Also, it's a comedy.

A gnarl of menacing myths has enveloped eccentric loner Felix Bush (Duvall) in the minds of the nearby townspeople. He is part boogeyman, part clown. Local children shirk his 'No Trespassing' signs to toss rocks at the windows of his backwoods shack, and flee in terror at the first sight of his lurching, scruff-bearded presence. Their parents equally mock and fear him.

But Felix's fiercely defended domicile, we discover, is also a self-imposed prison where, for 40 years, he has lived alone in a hell of guilt. We don't know — yet — the source of this guilt, but assume it has something to do with the old photograph of a young woman that he keeps above his bed and to which he speaks tenderly at night. Also, presumably, with that epilogistic vision of a flaming house.

Lately, Felix has death on his mind. He lands on the doorstep of down-on-his-luck funeral director Frank Quinn (Murray) and his boyish assistant Buddy Robinson (Black). He wants to buy a funeral. But not just any funeral. He wants to be alive and present — the guest of honour. And he wants everyone in town to attend. (A big ask for such a feared and hated man.)

Frank is skeptical, but is intimidated by Felix and swayed by the sight of the wad of filthy bills that the old man waves at him. Frank and Buddy find themselves suddenly cast as both party planners and PR reps as they set about turning Felix's scheme into reality. Comedy does ensue, but their gradual discovery of Felix's past, and his deeply buried pain and vulnerabilities, is the film's heart.

Get Low's cast both elevates the film and reinforces its themes. Duvall and Murray have been popular, well-known actors for decades; they are now 80 and 61 respectively. Spacek, who plays a central role as Frank's would-be love interest and a former lover of Felix's, is perhaps best known for her role as a troubled, telepathic high-school student in *Carrie* (1976). Black is the former child star of mid-1990s TV show *American Gothic*, in *Get Low* portraying a working husband and father. The choice of actors in and of itself underpins the film's

reflections on the joys and adventures of getting old(er).

The film is especially a showcase for its two lead actors. Murray's comic timing is sharp as ever: watch him down a tumbler of Scotch in the split second before Frank encounters Felix for the first time, and slide into slimy salesman mode as he guides Felix through a showroom of coffins. He is equally capable of gravitas, and captures the wearier aspects of Frank's character (Frank, too, is an ageing, lonely bachelor), and his growing appreciation for the value, beyond money, of Felix's funeral-party.

For Duvall, this is the kind of substantial 'old man' role that great actors must relish during the latter years of their career. Thanks to his introverted but deeply felt performance, his Felix simmers with soul and fury. We can recognise in him the guilt and pain that has tortured him for 40 years.

We learn that the prison of isolation was not his first response to the 'sin' that birthed this guilt. An accomplished carpenter, he built an elegant wooden church, an act of penance and also, perhaps, a bribe to God to let him off the hook of his guilt. When this failed, he chose isolation.

Neither act could substitute for the course he really needed to take, which was, simply, to confess, and accept responsibility; the only true salve for guilt.

Confession, it turns out, is the goal of the funeral-party. During this climactic scene, Duvall delivers a stunning monologue that makes sense of the film's plot and thematic nuances. Felix finally confesses, in front of his peers, in front of those who have become his friends, and in front of God. He can die in peace.

An Anglican angle on Toowoomba

RELIGION

Andrew McGowan

This week the third stage of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission begins its work at the ecumenical Monastery of Bose in Italy. Its focus will be on 'Church as Communion — Local and Universal'. Both sides of this now uncertain conversation have important things to say and to hear.

In particular they will certainly be aware of the recent enforced retirement of Roman Catholic Bishop of Toowoomba, Bill Morris, which raises sharply the question of how any central authority in the life of the Church should be exercised, particularly in relation to the office of bishop.

One important area of conversation, firmly evoked in one aspect of Bill Morris' case and less regarded in another, is the clear place in Catholic tradition of local ecclesial responsibility, particularly for episcopal ministry.

The historian Eusebius recounts that when the Roman Christians needed a bishop in about the year 250, they had some possibly miraculous assistance:

They relate that suddenly a dove flying down lighted on [Fabian's] head, resembling the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Saviour in the form of a dove. Thereupon all the people, as if moved by one Divine Spirit, with all eagerness and unanimity cried out that he was worthy, and without delay they took him and placed him upon the episcopal seat.

The principle that bishops were elected by local clergy and people was established in ancient times, even where interventionist pigeons were not involved. Ambrose of Milan was famously acclaimed while still a catechumen; Cyprian of Carthage is adamant about the principle of popular election.

While other bishops, especially the Bishop of Rome, could be involved in episcopal elections and depositions, and choices were later made by Cathedral chapters rather than by larger assemblies, there is no obvious trajectory from this picture of local responsibility to one of a central authority with no constraints for its exercise other than personal fiat.

Reactions to Morris' removal have been varied, but conservative cheers and more circumspect reflections tended to reflect on law, and consideration of the Pope's actions in the light of secular models and practices, rather than on Christian tradition itself. Morris' own response includes a striking quote from the Pope's own statement to him:

Canon Law does not make provision for a process regarding bishops, whom the Successor

of Peter nominates and may remove from Office.

Although the ancient stories of Fabian, Ambrose and others concern the arrival of bishops rather than their departure, this present legal vacuum sits uneasily with the general practice of the Church that established the Canon of scripture and the Creeds.

While Canon Law may currently provide for nothing more than papal discretion, to regard this as a universal and obvious truth reflecting tradition would be strange. Canon law is eminently changeable. How it seems to have changed, and could yet be changed, requires some reflection.

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference made no reference to the legal state of affairs or secular points of comparison, but in saying that they had in their meeting 'reflected upon the unique role of the Pope as head of the College of Bishops' they signalled that there was a collegial dimension to primacy that was hard to discern in these recent actions, while also acknowledging 'Pope Benedict's faithfulness to the Petrine ministry, even when it involves very difficult decisions'.

Bishops of the Church of England are not appointed more democratically or transparently than Roman Catholic bishops (although there are better-known processes and lines of accountability — and they would have better legal redress should anyone try to get rid of them). Elsewhere in the Anglican Communion however there are expressions of that more ancient practice, where clergy and people have active responsibility for their bishops' appointments.

The Anglican Communion has been shaken by events and issues, from lay presidency in Sydney to openly gay and lesbian bishops in the USA, that reveal not only deep division but a lack of means for central intervention. There have also been recent cases in the Anglican Church of Australia, notably Ballarat and The Murray in South Australia, where the lack of a mechanism to remove an elected bishop from a dysfunctional situation has been damaging.

No one system of ecclesial leadership is ideal, to be sure. The fruits of ecumenical dialogue should include deeper understanding of characteristic problems in each system, but also the prospect of calling one another to faithful exercise of the Church's tradition. 'Catholicity' refers not merely to present Vatican practice, but to a tradition that extends across time as well as space.

Anglicans, who also lay claim to this tradition, should listen to the possibilities as well as pitfalls of a Petrine ministry as exercised in the Roman Catholic Church. They may also be able to share the strengths and weaknesses of their custodianship of a tradition just as ancient as Peter's, wherein the local church itself is the place where the authenticity of a bishop's ministry must be judged, at the beginning and at the end.

Teaching boys to love and hate books

NON-FICTION

Gillian Bouras

It's probably fair to say that I put my three sons off reading. They had their bedtime/anytime stories for years, of course, but had to become used to my saying 'Just a minute' or 'Hang on' while I raced to the end of a page or chapter. And their father used to become hypertensive, to say the least, whenever he saw me grilling chops with a fork in one hand and a book in the other.

Still, I suppose one out of three is not too bad: my army son reads military history and biography. My eldest reads the papers sometimes, and occasionally succumbs to the charms of a particular style of book: the last I can recall was Gail Holst's *Road to Rembetika*, a fascinating account of the hashish inspired music that reached Greece from Asia Minor in the 1920s.

But as for my 30-year-old baby, Alexander, what is there to say? As far as I know, he has not even read my first book, in which he has a starring role, as in it I recount in dramatic detail the story of his birth, at which time I very nearly died.

He reads the Greek sports news; otherwise, he is the complete technophile, and changes his mobile phone almost as often as he changes his socks. I understand this up to a point: every so often the Kindle sings its siren song, but so far I have either put wax in my ears, or tied myself to a mast, figuratively speaking, because I value the book as object, as well as for a host of other reasons.

With Alexander's history, I didn't expect much when I showed him the marvellous present sent to me recently: a first edition of Charles Dickens' *Household Words: Vol. I*.

It is a thing of beauty, and was clearly designed to be a joy forever. Of an impressive solidity, it has a dark crimson and gold-embossed leather spine, and blue and beige marbled swirls with another tinge of crimson on the hard covers. Inside there is just a slight foxing on fine paper bordered in light black: every page is set in two columns.

Household Words, which appeared weekly, was edited by Dickens from March 1850 until May 1859. The title comes from the St Crispin's Day speech in Shakespeare's *Henry V*: 'Familiar in his mouth as household words.' And in *A Preliminary Word*, Dickens outlined the paper's principles, writing, among other things, that 'we hope to be the comrade and friend of many thousands of people'.

Sometimes, however, the readership was deemed not large enough, but in 1854, Dickens solved the problem when he started serialising *Hard Times* within its pages: circulation doubled almost immediately. Elizabeth Gaskell and Wilkie Collins also serialised novels in the magazine, which seems to have maintained a balance between fiction and non-fiction, with the

latter predictably concentrating on the social issues of the day.

There are even letters from Australian colonists, while Caroline Chisholm and her migration scheme are mentioned twice.

Alexander came to call soon after the present arrived. 'Look what I've got.' To my utter astonishment, the technophile said not a word, but took the book, and opened it. Then he stroked, actually *stroked* the pages. He stood quite still, and so did I. Then he said: 'What a beautiful thing.'

For myself, I thought about the hands that had touched this volume and the lives that had undoubtedly been touched by it. And now, very unexpectedly, a life in the Peloponnese had been touched by it more than 160 years after its publication.

Alexander's girlfriend Nina is even more of a technophile than he is: if I want help with my mobile phone I consult Nina. She was with Alexander during the most recent visit. He had not been here long when he said, 'Mum, where's that Charles Dickens book?'

'Upstairs. Why?

'I want to show it to Nina.'

And Nina reacted as we both hoped she would.

In *A Preliminary Word*, Dickens had a message for technophiles: 'The mightier inventions of this age are not, to our thinking, all material, but have a kind of soul in their stupendous bodies which may find expression in Household Words.'

Right then, right now: Charles Dickens would have had much to say about post-modern technology. If only he'd had the chance.

Philippines bishops' contraception conundrum

COMMUNITY

Fatima Measham

The battle in the Philippines over the Reproductive Health Bill continues unabated, with Catholic bishops calling for a tax boycott. President Benigno Aquino III has in turn threatened sedition charges. He was obviously not perturbed when Church authorities warned last year of excommunication if he supported the bill. He has said that he will not veto it.

So what is the furore all about?

The Philippines is the only predominantly Christian country in Asia, with 80 per cent identifying as Catholic. Also, it is the 12th most populous nation, of which a third lives in poverty — that's 32 million people who do not meet an adequate standard of living.

It is these factors that make the conflict over the RH bill volatile. The flashpoint is that the bill promotes a comprehensive family planning program that includes contemporary forms of contraception and age-appropriate sex education.

It predictably set its supporters on a collision course with Catholic leaders, who have been quite vocal in their opposition to government endorsement of artificial contraception rather than Church-approved 'natural family planning' (abstinence based on a woman's menstrual cycle).

The issue may be difficult to grasp from an Australian perspective, since Australian Catholic bishops do not enforce a ban against the pill or condoms with such activism. But in the Philippines, where Catholicism is woven through the culture and language, the teaching against birth control permeates even its politics. Electoral ambitions live and die according to the candidate's stance on contraception.

The Aquino Government, however, positions its population policy within its anti-poverty program.

The premise is that a family can only sensibly produce children within its means, and, by extension, a meagre economy like the Philippines cannot sustain its current population rate.

While children are deeply treasured in this family-centric society, economists at the University of the Philippines point out that poverty incidence rises with the number of children. Also, larger families tend to spend less on each child's education and health, which perpetuates the cycle of disadvantage.

Hence, there are serious consequences of Catholic teaching against artificial contraception.

To be fair, Pope John Paul II spoke of 'a prudent, conscious generosity that weighs the

possibilities and circumstances, and especially gives priority to the welfare of the unborn child. Therefore, when there is a reason not to procreate, this choice is permissible and may even be necessary.' His words offer a window that some would rather have bolted shut.

However, it is patently unjust for Filipino women to lack access to relevant education and services regarding their reproductive health. Though they nearly exclusively bear the burden of raising children, they are disempowered from choosing how many to have and how far apart.

This limits their participation in the workforce, but more importantly takes a toll on their health. The maternal mortality rate in the Philippines is 162 per 100,000 live births compared to 8.4 in Australia.

The irony is that, while Catholic bishops have staunchly opposed modern forms of birth control, the public paralysis that it has engendered over sexual health care has led to high rates of abortion — an estimated 27 abortions per thousand women. Inability to afford raising another child is the most significant reason, identified by 72 per cent of women who had an abortion.

The Philippine Catholic Church can thus be seen to be at odds with its ministry for the poor. Its inflexibility becomes punitive when women who are unable to make informed choices live with the consequences anyway. By compelling people to choose a family planning method that is unreliable, it is keeping impoverished Filipinos from sensibly constructing a more dignified future for their children.

The reality is that people do want to act morally within their desire for a better life. That is why they would prefer to avoid getting pregnant than have an abortion. Many Filipino women are already making this choice but now feel stigmatised by the public brawl over the RH bill. What is lost is the idea that the decision to not have a child can be made in good conscience.

The 1968 Winnipeg Statement, the Canadian bishops' response to the papal encyclical against artificial contraception, accommodates such exercise of faith, declaring that 'the unity of the Church does not consist in a bland conformity in all ideas, but rather in a union of faith and heart, in submission to God's will and a humble but honest and ongoing search for the truth'.

This open-heartedness to a continuing understanding of God's truth was echoed by Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner at the time:

'Bishops should not act as though the encyclical were irreformable or as though everyone who dissented were guilty of contempt of authority or were separating himself from the church. They should refrain from imposing canonical penalties on persons who respectfully and discreetly propose another view ...

'If no one could voice his opposition to reformable doctrines, the development and correction of the Church's official teaching would be seriously hampered.'

Philippine bishops, as well as others in the Catholic leadership, would do well to reflect on his words today.

Osama bin Laden's wasted life

NON-FICTION

Brian Doyle

And what could anyone add to the ocean of comment and opinion and conclusion and musing and snarling and vengeful remarks published and shouted about the recent death of Mr O. bin Laden, late of Abbottabad, Pakistan, shot to death in his bedroom, perhaps with his television remote in his hand, perhaps moments after he finished coloring his beard black again for a video production scheduled for the morning?

Not much, especially in my case, after nearly ten years of quiet rage that he murdered three of my friends on September 11, cackling over their deaths, a cackle I will never forget as long as I live.

And yet, I find myself thinking how very sad; not his death, in which the bullets he had so often assigned to others found him at last, but his life, wasted on a foolish and murderous idea, causing such epic wreckage, and perhaps in the end doing far more damage to his beloved religion than anyone else in its long and often admirable history.

I say this as a Catholic man, well aware that my religion tried bin Laden's idea, and found it a roaring failure, responsible for uncountable deaths of innocent souls; we call our collective terrorism campaign the Crusades, and even the most rabid among Catholics today cannot say with a straight face that our attacks on the infidel succeeded in anything except gaining the Church a well-deserved reputation for militant murder; and from those bloody years the Church sensibly retreated back mostly to a business model, spending the next 700 years as one of the largest, richest, most influential, riveting, and troubled corporations in human history.

Catholic nations continued to send agents to murder and rob the pagans of the New World, certainly, but rather than murder other established religions we sought to outpopulate them, ignore them, negotiate complex truces, or, as we did recently with the Anglicans, offer them readmission to the mother ship from which years ago they embarked, in their case because of the sexual politics of kings, one of the great human spectator sports.

In a real sense, after the Crusades finally petered to their ignominious end, we matured as a religion, we realised that the sword was the worst of persuasive devices, and we turned to other hinges of history, some brilliant, like the public relations geniuses Mother Teresa of India, Karol Wojtyla of Poland, Mary MacKillop of Australia, and the elementary school system on which much of modern Catholicism was built.

Today, long centuries after we waged holy war against people who called God other names than we did, there are a billion Catholics, and two billion followers of the devout Jew Yesuah ben Joseph.

It was the fervent dream of the late Mr bin Laden that an epic war arise between the nearly two billion followers of Muhammad ibn Abdullah, blessed be his name, and the followers of Yesuah ben Joseph, blessed be his name, and this fiery dream, born in 1998 with the murder of Kenyan and Tanzanian innocents, consumed 20 years of what must have been a very bright intellect, an often-attested-to personal charisma, and a mountainous personal fortune, and again I find myself thinking how sad this was, how misguided, how twisted.

What a waste of gifts given to that man by the Creator!

Imagine, for a moment, the same man alert to humour, perhaps the greatest weapon of all. Imagine the same man infused by the holy merriment of a John XXIII, a Dalai Lama, a Desmond Tutu. Imagine that same poor soul, consumed day and night by smouldering hate and worries about rehearsing his lines for his video performances, alert instead to the power of mercy, apology, simplicity, conversation, common ground.

Imagine what he might have done for the religion he loved, had he bent his capacious talents to witty connection rather than wanton destruction. Imagine, for a moment, that he might have become a great man, rather than the preening thug he was, wrapped in a shawl, obsessed with himself, hiding in a dark room, waiting for the explosive death he must have known would someday be his fate.

What a waste.

Dangers of democracy

POETRY

Various

A brief explanation of paternalistic welfare reform following the 2011 Budget

And the wise
men and women came along and looked
over the tops of their glasses at
the people who were outside
the fence and they
said, smiling, kindly, knowingly: ah,
we
know what's
good for you. We're going to
strengthen you and make you strong and even moral and up
right. You don't
know better. You
won't even really notice if
at first

we put you down.

—John Falzon

Uncommon good

(after reading Shaun Carney's article, 'Complacency may yet undo lucky country', The Age, *9 March 2011)*

Shaun Carney and Ken Henry share my swim
A journalist and treasurer who think
The common good is their uncommon Hymn

Today let's hear John Donne's sad tolling ring
Without that tune we all of us might sink
Shaun Carney and Ken Henry share my swim
Each stroke for carbon tax I splash and sing
Our time on earth goes like a watery blink
The common good is their uncommon Hymn
Ken's tenderness for wombats it could bring
Rare insight that such creatures form a Link
Shaun Carney and Ken Henry share my swim
Our wealth drowns words like Shaun's pool-sunk and dim
We buy white goods enjoy the salesman's wink
The common good such an old-fashioned Hymn
And some say let's be cool leave folks their fling
Their harmless habits wash quick in their drink
But I hear Shaun and Ken they share my swim
The common good it's real a cogent Hymn
—Jill Sutton

Listening to 774 ABC Melbourne

Black Saturday, 7 February 2009
Kylie rang and asked —
Should I evacuate?
Where should I go?
And he said — *Kylie,*
your fire plan should be in place.
Like the headmaster of the world.
I glanced at the nervous husband sitting

at the foot of the table opposite from me

and I said — *If I was Kylie I would sue him*

for being an utter prick when I needed him.

—Jennifer Compton

El Caudillo speaks to John Howard (2007)

You too, Juanito, are a man of steel

with an impotent nation in your care:

'talk peace; but make strong allies everywhere'

is the best policy, and I think you feel

you've managed that with nothing to conceal:

for Fuhrer and Il Duce, Bush and Blair.

It seems all so straightforward; but beware —
the dangers of democracy are real.

I never joined them in their great disaster

and never suffered their humiliation:

through a long life I kept myself afloat.

Will you remain the smirking little master

though propaganda suffer such deflation;

or will you simply sink in the next vote?

—Evan Jones

Bishops sad not mad over Morris sacking

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

The sacking of Bishop Bill Morris by Pope Benedict XVI could well become legendary in the way that the dismissal of the Whitlam Labor Government by Governor General Sir John Kerr in 1975 has become part of Australian folklore.

There are surface similarities, in that they are both polarising events that evoke considerable passion. And they both represented the use of reserve powers in a manner that was felt to be out of order by people at the grass roots level.

But there is an important difference. Gough Whitlam was nothing if not angry. Bill Morris, on the other hand, declared , in one of his first interviews after the sacking, that he was not angry, just very sad.

In so doing, he set a tone that was reflected in the media release of the National Council of Priests (NCP), and then the letter of the 40 Australian Catholic bishops, written in the name of their Conference President Archbishop Philip Wilson, and issued on Thursday.

The NCP detailed what it found 'appalling' about the circumstances of the sacking, but acknowledged the Pope's role as 'first among equals and the source of *communio* within the Church'.

Similarly, the bishops stressed their respect for the office of the Pope. They explained he had 'found it necessary to exercise his Petrine care for the whole Church' (*Petrine* refers to the acknowledged lineage from St Peter, the first Pope, who is believed to have been anointed by Jesus Christ himself).

Notably *The Australian* newspaper got it wrong, and misrepresented the bishops, when it reported on Friday that they were 'locked in behind the Pope's sacking of former bishop of Toowoomba William Morris'. The bishops were undeniably 'locked in' behind the Pope (the 'Petrine' office). But that is not the same as being 'locked in' behind Morris' sacking.

The office itself has a divine lineage, and bishops would support that because it's the foundation of their own ecclesiastical authority. However positions arrived at by the Pope's advisors are humanly fallible, and often politically motivated.

That is surely the explanation for how one bishop who mentions women's ordination can be sacked while others who protect priests accused of sexual abuse priests remain in office. Earlier this month, Cardinal Angelo Sodano , who would be in charge if the Pope died, dismissed church sexual abuse as 'peripheral'.

While the letter indicates that the Australian bishops *accept* the decision to sack Morris,

there is nothing to suggest that they agree with the assumptions and reasoning on which it was based.

In fact they carefully distance themselves from the decision, and indeed disown it. Their letter reads: 'It was judged that there were problems of doctrine and discipline.' If they *were* 'locked in' behind Morris' sacking, they would have simply declared: 'There were problems of doctrine and discipline', without the qualification that 'it was judged'.

The Australian wrongly portrays the bishops' reaction as combative, in that it implies a censure of Morris by his brother bishops. In fact it was an exercise of religious obedience in a sense not widely understood. That is, an obedience that is humble and respectful, but not mindless.

Sister Clare Condon, leader of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan, put it well when she wrote last week in her congregation's online publication *The Good Oil*. Reflecting on obedience — though without specific reference to Morris — she said it 'does not come from a battle of opinions, or a superimposing of one will over another, but from a place of profound humility and respect'.

She refers to the damage caused by medieval and hierarchical structures that can distort the true meaning of obedience.

'In such a structure of power and dominance, reinforced by a divine legitimacy, obedience can be seen to be simply saying yes to the 'magisterium' or the 'lawful' authority, in an unthinking and unintelligent manner. The Latin foundational word for 'obedience' is *oboedire*, which correctly translated means — 'to hear or to listen'.'

Most importantly, she says, this translation implies that the listening is mutual.

However at this stage there is little indication that Bishop Morris has been listend to. As indicated in last week's letter, the Australian Bishops intend to raise questions with the Vatican authorities when they make their *ad limina* visit to the Vatican in October this year. We can only hope that they will find evidence that Bishop Morris has been heard. If not, the sadness may well turn to anger.

Trust at stake in Toowoomba

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

The Australian Bishops' response to the forced retirement of Bishop Bill Morris was as good as could have been hoped. It affirmed the Pope's right to dismiss bishops, affirmed the personal and pastoral qualities of Bishop Morris, simply reported the situation that led to the dismissal, and promised to take up the question of the process with the Pope.

The kindly tone of the letter offers good hope that the bishops will maintain the personal links with Bishop Morris that matter more than words.

It may be helpful to look at what happened in Toowoomba against the much larger question of trust in governance. Significant cultural changes have affected all institutions, including national governments as well as churches.

All governance relies on a passive trust on the part of the people if it is to function well. If trust is not given, laws will not be obeyed. When trust is withdrawn, societies stagnate because they lack any sense of the common good. They become polarised, and governments often rule by repression. The officials responsible for day to day governance become demoralised and unenthusiastic.

In Eastern Europe, and now in the Middle East, apparently impregnable regimes can be brought down because trust is lacking.

Traditionally, institutions have encouraged trust by depicting their rulers as strong and benign and as guided by the best of values. But these images, and the trust they engender, have been put under pressure by the development of communication technologies and the lack of control over them. Images have become personalised.

Leaders of institutions must use sophisticated means of communication to project their own image and the values they represent. Their personalities become the face of the institution and the guarantee of good governance.

But the inability of institutions to control communication leaves them vulnerable. The link between the projected image and values and the reality is constantly tested by a stream of information and of critical judgments. The strong leader is shown to bow to pressure groups; the defender of family values is revealed to be a philanderer; the exact administrator is shown to run a shambles.

This erosion of trust results in a general public disillusionment with leaders and their professed programs. It also encourages the political paralysis visible in Australia, Europe and

the United States.

We might expect to see two responses to this challenge. The first will be to look for substance rather than style in leadership, and to ensure that the fit between the image of leaders, their stated values and their governance is so adamantine that exposure will not corrode the image. The second is to control the image by controlling communications, marginalising critics and criminalising leaks. This hard choice underlies the anxieties revealed by the debate over Wikileaks.

The retirement of Bishop Morris is illuminated when seen against this broad context. The Catholic Church has also been affected by the changes in communication. Particularly during the pontificate of John Paul II, whose travels were carefully choreographed, it has promoted the image of the Pope and the values he professes by focusing on his personality.

This focus also inevitably leads to speculation about the match between the image of the Pope and bishops and the reality of their commitment to the values of the Gospel they profess. The image becomes uncontrollable.

The catalyst for a widespread perception that in the Catholic Church image and reality do not match has been the publicity given by the media to widespread incidence of sexual abuse in the Church and to its mishandling by bishops, including by Pope John Paul II. It seemed that human beings mattered less than the institutional interests of the Church.

The treatment of Bishop Bill Morris risks further blurring the image of the Catholic Church. The story told of a good man who encouraged his church, who was resolute in dealing with sexual abuse, but was removed in an untransparent process, will confirm many in their distrust of the Catholic Church. They wlll conclude that it has taken the authoritarian option.

We may ask, of course, whether this matters.Such judgments can be represented as simply a matter of public relations, without anything to do with truth and reality.

This argument has some weight. For most Catholics, bishops and popes are not central in their faith. They remain committed to churches because they find God within face to face connection with other Christians. They presume that their bishops and the Vatican will tend to the good of the Church, but are not much interested in their interrelationships.

But for many people, especially those living in Bishop Morris' own church and those who are well-read, it will erode trust in Pope and bishops.

Pope and bishops are images of the Church and of its commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It matters that the values of the Gospel and the best values of our society are reflected in the way in which they act. It is a condition of commending the Gospel and its values within a sceptical society.

The Scots' war on everything British

POLITICS

Duncan Maclaren

When I was a schoolboy in 1967, I campaigned for Winnie Ewing, the Scottish National Party (SNP) candidate in the Hamilton by-election. She won, ushering in a new era in Scottish politics where the independence question was never far away. The next day at school, my French teacher, Miss Mosen, asked me what would happen now. 'Oh,' I said breezily, 'independence is just round the corner.'

Forty-four years on, following the SNP's landslide victory in the Scottish parliamentary elections last Thursday, my youthful words have the best chance yet of becoming true.

The SNP won 69 seats in the Scottish legislature, giving the government of First Minister Alex Salmond not only a second term but an absolute majority over Labour with 37 seats and the Conservatives, Liberal Democrats and Greens trailing much farther behind. It managed that result in an electoral system set up by the UK government to prevent the, for them, nightmare scenario that has just occurred.

The Scottish Labour leader, Iain Gray, only won his own seat by just over 100 votes while many of his shadow cabinet members were swept away in a wave of support for the SNP that spread over the Labour heartlands, including the seat of the late Donald Dewar, the revered Labour architect of devolution.

For the first time in history, the SNP holds the majority of seats in Glasgow, formerly Labour's prime fiefdom. Yet in England and Wales, Labour did much better. What happened in Scotland?

Apart from the negative campaign run by Labour which, as usual, treated the Scottish people as vote fodder, plus a leader who wasn't, the SNP had done a good job of administering Scotland as a minority government, using a mix of social justice and common sense business acumen.

Alex Salmond, the SNP's highly articulate leader, a former economist with the Royal Bank of Scotland, cut local business taxes but opposed private sector involvement in public services. He froze the council tax, and got rid of prescription fees and provided free bus travel within Scotland for over-60s. He opposed nuclear power and outlined a shiny new future for Scotland as a leader in renewable energy.

The Scottish economy continues to have higher growth rates than the UK's which is on the slide.

Salmond, looking like a statesman rather than a town councillor, gave a vision to the people whose anti-Conservatism is in their DNA and who view David Cameron south of the border with the same distrust as Gordon Brown was viewed by the southern English.

The SNP government has rid Scots of the Scottish cringe — the fear that they are too stupid to rule themselves, hammered into them by a Machiavellian British state desperate to keep a Union together for economic rather than sentimental reasons.

Australians, given their outrage over the monarchy's ban of The Chaser's royal wedding commentary, probably know something of how this feels. The British state and the monarchical nest of privilege and elitism are past their use-by date — for both of us.

By showing that Scots not thirled to a Westminster party can rule and rule well, the SNP government has given the Scots confidence to think of a visionary alternative for the future.

Will this automatically lead to the breakup of the UK? There is not much left to break up. Most domestic Scottish legislation is dealt with by the Parliament in Edinburgh. Brussels is more important than Westminster for defence, foreign and social policy. Scotland would be a more enthusiastic member of the European Union (EU) than the UK or England as, in Europe, small countries are the norm and Scots are less imperially minded.

Even the word 'British' is used less and less, especially by young people in both Scotland and England who really don't relate to the term. So what's the problem?

The SNP has pledged to hold a referendum on Scottish independence during the current mandate. The UK PM, David Cameron, has been forced to admit that the SNP government has the mandate to do so even though he will fight it. According to polls, around one third of Scots regularly support independence — though it has been 50 per cent in the past.

In the meantime, the UK Government will have to hand over more and more power to the Scottish Government as it at least has the legitimate backing of the Scottish people. When the referendum comes, there won't be that much less to devolve and the dream of a young schoolboy over 40 years ago will have come true.

Good news about the Malaysia solution

HUMAN RIGHTS

Caz Coleman

The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship Chris Bowen has conceded that implementing the recently announced Malaysian agreement relating to asylum seekers will be tough. He has already seen resistance from the refugee sector and is likely to get the protests and legal challenges that he anticipates.

But there are opportunities in the announcement that may also deliver good news for some asylum seekers and the refugee sector.

Firstly, for years refugee advocates have lobbied for an increase in the annual quota of refugee and humanitarian entrants from the current rate of 13,750 to 20,000 or more. While the increase in resettlement places that accompanies the Malaysian agreement falls well short of this, nonetheless it is an increase.

It also couldn't come at a better time. With the linking of offshore and onshore places within the humanitarian program, increasingly the numbers arriving in Australia by sea is limiting those places available for offshore resettlement. Family members and community groups trying to bring refugees to Australia who are languishing in camps around the world have been frustrated by the shrinking proportion of offshore places available for applicants to enter Australia.

While the increase will specifically target those in Malaysia, it is at least a step in the right direction for Australia to continue to expand what is a highly valued offshore re-settlement program.

Secondly, while the conditions for asylum seekers in Malaysia have been a human rights concern for many years, not much has happened to create positive change. Minister Bowen has made a commitment that the Australian Government will have oversight with the Malaysian Government, UNHCR and International Organisation for Migration, and that the Prime Minister of Malaysia has given a firm commitment that asylum seekers sent by Australia will be treated with dignity and respect.

There is no question these commitments mean little without evidence in what is a very concerning protection environment for asylum seekers in Malaysia. However, with Australia providing such oversight and the public exposure of the human rights context for asylum seekers in Malaysia, opportunities could come for change.

If this announcement could create a model for effective and safe care of asylum seekers in Malaysia it could also engage a greater proportion of civil society in community based care. Such a model may have positive flow on effects for other asylum seekers not involved in the

Australian agreement as civil society in Malaysia is empowered and funded to establish expertise in asylum support services.

This will take time and will not extend to all the 90,000 or more asylum applicants currently feeling unsafe in Malaysia, but it could be the small beginnings of alternative care arrangements in a vexed environment.

Thirdly, there is, to date, no mention of detention for those who will be transferred to Malaysia. If such plans do emerge in the details being formulated by Australia and Malaysia, this should be widely criticised.

Yet unlike other options canvassed by both sides of government, which involve closed detention centres in offshore locations with few resources and even less access to quality legal advice, if done well, this could be the beginning of community based support and monitoring that should form the nexus of any regional cooperation agreement.

I recognise there are lots of 'if's in this review of the Malaysian announcement and any opportunities will only come to fruition with honest and careful planning by both governments.

However, just as it should be the role of lawyers and refugee advocates to analyse the disadvantages and possible unlawful elements of this announcement, we must also consider the opportunities. After all, without a serious legal challenge, it would seem the agreement is forging ahead and opportunities are best captured early.

Bulldozing famous backyards

BY THE WAY

Brian Matthews

No doubt it seemed like a good idea at the time. Sometime in 2007—8 Michael Younes was looking for a development opportunity and felt he had found one at 5 Sutherland Road North Parramatta. For $689,000 Younes took over the property from previous owners David Borger and Paul Barber and applied for a demolition order that would allow him to replace the venerable suburban, bungalow-style house with what was variously described as 'a two-storey duplex', 'town houses' or 'a dual occupancy residence'.

Younes might have recognised that there were potential complications in the deal but these seemed to have been defused when the demolition order — the most vulnerable and perhaps controversial part of his program — was successful. Knocking buildings over had become in recent decades a highly fraught endeavour in all of Australia's capital and regional cities.

But, as Younes would discover, the devil was not so much in any particular detail of his plan as in certain events and characters which his seemingly straightforward developmental bid resurrected from the past. David Borger, for example, was no ordinary vendor.

Borger had been Mayor of Parramatta — the youngest in the council's history — from 1999 to 2007. He left local government to become the Labor member for the state seat of Granville and in that capacity served as a minister in the Rees and Keneally administrations.

Not only as a vendor but as a concerned, informed citizen, and Member of the NSW Parliament, Borger might have been expected to be very conscious of the cultural provenance of the property at 5 Sutherland Road and its claims to being worth preserving. It would not have been difficult for Borger to recognise that, when in 2003 he paid $600,100 for the house, he was dealing, as Younes would be some years later, with 'no ordinary vendor'.

The house was sold to him by the Benaud family. It had been in their possession for some 65 years and had been the boyhood home of Richie and John Benaud.

It was the house to which, for example, the boy Richie and his father, Lou, returned on Saturday 13 January 1940 after a day at the SCG where they saw Clarrie Grimmett dismiss, among others, Arthur Chipperfield and a young up-and-coming Sid Barnes. Both these wickets fell to Grimmett's newly perfected 'flipper'.

In that Sheffield Shield game between New South Wales and South Australia the spinners took 34 wickets but one day's worth was enough for Richie. He was hooked.

The young Benaud was enchanted by the sight of the spinners weaving their magic and was up early on the following day bowling at a brick wall. Lou, himself a fine cricketer and a

handy spinner, tutored the boy in the art of the leg break. Richie bowled and bowled — prefiguring as a mere boy the awesome capacity for work, attention to detail and physical and mental stamina that would distinguish his approach to the game as he matured — and by the end of that Sunday he was bowling a passable leg break.

The flipper was another matter. Grimmett would have no opportunity to bowl the flipper in a Test match but he taught Bruce Dooland how to bowl it and Dooland later taught Benaud who was the first to use it in a Test.

It was on to this historic back yard that Younes was going to land a few hundred tons of rubble before obliterating it entirely. *The Daily Telegraph* was only one of many newspapers that were shocked: 'He grew up practicing his googly and top-spinners in his western Sydney backyard but developers want to bulldoze Richie Benaud's family home' it proclaimed incredulously.

As the debate heated up, Younes offered to build a sandstone monument to the Benaud family on the site after the demolition was complete, but Parramatta Mayor Paul Garrard rejected this proposal. 'We can't have developers coming in and saying "we'll do this if you let us knock it over"', he said while conceding Younes's right to proceed. 'He can knock it over today if he chooses to,' he admitted, knocking over his own argument in the process.

Great sports men and women have emerged from Australia's suburban backyards and the tutelage of their parents on the rapidly wearing lawn, with the chooks clucking in the background, the family dog being a nuisance and the collapsing wire around favourite plants failing to stop straight drives or bullet-like passes. Occupants change, the years roll by, and the great Australian backyard 'arena' lives innocently on.

Younes was unlucky: the backyard he had his eye on had become part of history. He offered to build a monument but he didn't seem to realise he was pulling one down.

Why Malaysia is no solution

HUMAN RIGHTS

Andrew Hamilton

The structure of the Government's latest improvisation in asylum seeker policy is familiar.

It has agreed with Malaysia to accept 4000 refugees in exchange for sending 800 asylum seekers to Malaysia. In addition it is working with Papua New Guinea to open a regional processing centre there. Like the original proposal to open a regional processing centre in East Timor, it involves offering a posy of attractive promises that conceal the thorn of the surrender of principle.

It will appeal to those who are politically numerate and ethically illiterate.

The principle that is breached in the Malaysia deal is the Government's commitment through the Refugee Convention to provide asylum to refugees who claim protection as refugees in Australian territory. The Convention also commits Australia to prevent the return of refugees to the nations in which they faced persecution.

This principle should be non-negotiable, and buttressed by the refusal to send asylum seekers to nations that have not signed the Convention. Malaysia has not done so. No international agreements prevent it from returning refugees to death or persecution.

The Government argues that the Malaysian Government has offered guarantees that the 800 asylum seekers will be well treated, and that they will be documented and processed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The UNHCR judgment of refugee claims, however, is not well resourced. Nor is it a statutory process subject to the rule of law. So it is inferior even to the process available to the asylum seekers who at present claim asylum in Australian waters, unsatisfactory though that process also is.

Nor can weight be placed on the promise of the Malaysian Government to treat the exchanged asylum seekers well, unless the promise is guaranteed by legislation. Malaysia already regards the presence of asylum seekers and illegal immigrants as a problem.

The problem is addressed locally by dissuasion. Asylum seekers, even those designated as persons of interest to the United Nations or who have been found to be refugees, together with illegal immigrants and those who have overstayed their visitors are routinely stopped, searched and beaten, and are subject to extortion, jailing, caning, and often deportation.

Indeed, some asylum seekers who spent some time in Malaysia before fleeing to Australia have made a claim for protection from persecution in Malaysia as well as in their home nation.

Given the indiscriminate, and often extra-judicial, violence that illegal immigrants and asylum seekers face, it is unlikely that asylum seekers sent there by Australia will be exempt from it unless given special legal protection. If they are placed in detention centres, they will also live in impoverished and unhygienic conditions.

Of course Australians who place their trust in deterrence may well see in this account of the conditions that asylum seekers may face in Malaysia the answer to Australia's problem with boat arrivals and people smugglers.

Ethically, however, the great difficulty of the Malaysian solution is that it treats people as pawns. It assumes that Australia can be absolved from dealing with the claims of the persons who come directly to us by the fact that it chooses to accept another larger group of people. The tears of the 800 who are rejected can be ignored in the rejoicing over the 4000 who are chosen.

The acceptance of the 4000 refugees, of course, is to be welcomed. Such gestures form an essential part of any regional solution. But it cannot be a trade-off for sending away people who are Australia's responsibility without explicit guarantees that their human dignity will be respected.

Respect for the human rights of refugees to security, food, shelter and medical care and to plan their lives must be non-negotiable in any regional agreement.

Anne Frank, the Jewish girl who died in the Holocaust, described a refugee as a parcel that is stamped and sent from post office to post office. That is the case with asylum seekers in Australia, who are taken without notice from Christmas Island to Darwin, then perhaps to Melbourne, to Sydney and back to Darwin. All the things that constitute respect for humanity are lacking in their treatment.

But the Malaysian solution adds another dimension to Anne Frank's analogy. It is like solving the problem of overloaded post offices by sending incoming parcels straight to the shredder. Not really fair, even for parcels. And certainly not for human beings.

South Australia's mundane horror

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Snowtown* (MA). Director: Justin Hurzel. Starring: Daniel Henshall, Lucas Pittaway, Elizabeth Harvey. 120 minutes**

Two scenes prompted audience members to flee the *Snowtown* screening I attended. One involved the slaughter of a household pet. The other, the prolonged torture and murder of a human being.

No one could be blamed for finding such images impossible to endure. But I'm not sure what these people expected. This, after all, is a film about horrific true events that culminated in 1999 with the discovery, in a South Australian small town, of eight human bodies stuffed into drums of hydrochloric acid and secreted in an abandoned bank vault. What could it be but the stuff of nightmares?

No doubt the phrase 'torture porn' will be tossed about by some who wish to dismiss *Snowtown* and its sordid content. But this does no justice to the remarkable, if gruelling, achievement that is director Justin Kurzel's debut feature, a cinematic retelling of the infamous 'Snowtown murders' (most of which occurred in Adelaide's northern suburbs, with the bodies transported to Snowtown at a later date).

This is not so much a document of facts. On the contrary, one of the film's shortcomings is that it at times sacrifices clarity to ambiguity. It is, rather, a bleak and grimy portrait of the evil that humans are capable of under the most mundane circumstances; of the fragility of innocence when exposed only to corrupt role models; and of the devolution of morality when it is nourished by sick ideologies.

Those two aforementioned, repulsive scenes are vital to this thematic make-up. They are watershed moments in sadistic but charismatic serial killer John Bunting's (Henshall) grooming of his young protÃ©gÃ©, James Vlassakis (Pittaway), which gradually transforms the boy from observer to participant.

It is right that we, the audience, are appalled; it means we relate more to the boy's disgust, than to the cold detachment — even quiet pleasure — of the man. It means our moral compasses are in sync: we recognise the monster in the room, and the means by which he exerts his evil influence.

Perhaps Kurzel followed the lead of last year's superb crime drama *Animal Kingdom* by taking as his focus the corruption of an adolescent by amoral adults (Bunting is not the only character to misuse James). Certainly it is a gift to the audience that we have this central tragedy to sympathise with.

Most shocking in both life and film is how fruitfully the evil borne by Bunting — who appears to have neither conscience nor empathy — takes hold and thrives amid mundaneness.

In Kurzel's vision, the ritual of eating is juxtaposed easily with the ritual of slaughter. James first encounters Bunting, a new friend of his mother's, in the family kitchen, cooking breakfast. (Bunting is a *provider*, which goes some way to explaining the attraction he holds for this downtrodden family.)

Hatred against homosexuals and paedophiles (one of the pretexts for Bunting and Co.'s murders) is stoked by gossip and speechifying around dining tables and in suburban kitchens, along with fantasies of violent retaliation that are later made reality.

Meals resonate with a cacophony of chewing, and the clink and scrape of cutlery and crockery. These sounds seem strangely to echo the crunch of a toe bone between pliers, or the creak of a garrote around a victim's throat, so that all become familiar motifs in a single, disconcerting soundscape.

In *Snowtown* the discoloured suburban setting is tangible (filming took place in and around the areas where the actual murders occurred), but is imbued with a surreal, ominous atmosphere; evident as much in the image of a backyard lawn party centred on the spectacle of two men digging a hole, as in the sight of a Mr Whippy van rolling disconsolately past a vacant block.

With the exception of Henshall, a professional actor from Sydney, Kurzel and his casting director selected amateur actors from the Adelaide suburbs. This only enhances the film's shocking realism.

Among a number of remarkable performances (notably Harris as James' fiercely devoted mother, who is nonetheless equally susceptible to Bunting's charisma), the central roles of Bunting and Vlassakis are perfectly cast. Henshall displays the perfect mixture of fatherly charm and cold brutality, and Pittaway's introverted performance captures every nuance of James' horrific inner turmoil.

It is unfortunate that more time is not spent on building sympathy for the victims, many of whom are acquaintances or family members of the killers but are only seen peripherally. In this respect, the film does skid dangerously close to sadistic voyeurism. That said, *Snowtown* at all times regards the taking of human life as a fundamentally immoral horror. It is only right that we be shocked.

Record store pilgrim

NON-FICTION

Vin Maskell

I've got to be careful when I visit my CD shop.

I've got to make sure I don't reach for my wallet.

Lunchtimes on Friday, usually.

The weekly visit takes me down from my city office on the 16th floor, into a side street and then a laneway .

I've got to resist buying some bargain bin CDs, a few new releases, some T-shirts, a couple of DVDs and maybe even vinyl albums.

I've got to tell myself that such purchases would be indulgences rather than imperatives. No, I don't need the latest Martha Wainwright album. No, I don't need another Leonard Cohen concert DVD. No, I don't need a T-shirt with a picture of a record.

I've got to be careful. What does Springsteen sing on *Nebraska* (in the $10 bin): 'I've got debts no honest man can pay.' I'm lucky enough not to be in quite so deep but, nonetheless, as Kelly sings on *Stolen Apples* (Australian artists, under K), the bills 'just won't go away'.

I've got to remember those bills piling when I'm browsing, say, the vinyl albums. I could buy an album right now, just for the fun of walking back to the office with it under my arm, just for the heck of placing its large cardboard cover, so much more visible than colleagues' iPods, on my desk, beside the humming computer, the blinking phone and the never-empty in-tray.

But, no, I'm only here to look, to breathe in enough to keep me going until five o'clock.

Standing in anonymous office clothes I flick through the shop's T-shirt collection, thinking: I'd like to wear my music this close to my chest every day. I could buy a pile of these T-shirts for a year of casual Fridays but I don't even check their sizes, because then I'd start reaching for my wallet.

As the lunchtime ticks away I notice other customers, some in suits, some in neat-casual. All of us are revealing a little of our non-work selves, latching onto something invisible — a riff, a chord, a chorus; holding onto something intangible — a melody, a key change, a lyric.

To thine own self be true, before returning to the desk. But is the visit, the pilgrimage, a simple break from a satisfying working day or an all too brief respite from fading dreams, from ambitions gone astray?

We each have singular reasons, I suppose, as well as a collective constant craving.

I've got to be careful when I'm in my shop's DVD corner. I've got to tell myself that watching Woodstock at home can never be the same as sitting at the Ballarat Rd drive-in all those years ago, gazing through the windscreen at the stars.

And as my hand reaches for the DVD of George Harrison's 1971 Concert for Bangla Desh I've got to realise it won't be the same as watching the concert movie at the Pix Theatre in West Geelong in the mid-1970s with the massive silhouette of Dylan's mop of curly hair filling the big screen.

No, content yourself with very occasionally playing the Dylan songs in the three-album box-set at home held together by sepia-toned sticky tape.

Sometimes — birthdays, Christmas, and those weeks when I've gazed out the 16th floor office window too long at the lost horizon — I do reach for my wallet. I might buy a $10 CD, a new release, and maybe even an impulse buy. But I'm careful to measure out my indulgences.

There was a time when I soaked up so much music it seemed to seep from my pores: a time when a week wasn't complete without seeing a few bands, talking music with mates until dawn, watching *Night Moves* and *Rock Arena*, reading *Juke* and *Ram* and *Rolling Stone*. Without going to the local record shop and buying a few albums: new, second-hand, imported.

And now? The clichÃ©s come true, as they always do. A family, a house, a job. Bills. Love. Tiredness, weariness, poor hearing.

But one day I just might give in to temptation. I just might yield. I just might crack (isn't that how the light gets in, Mr Cohen?).

I just might put a big pile of CDs and records and DVDs and T-shirts on the counter and reach for my wallet and forget about all the bills falling off the kitchen bench, and swipe my credit card and press my PIN and watch the shop assistant neatly package everything and then I'll pick up the riffs and the chords and the choruses, the solos, the key-changes and the middle-eights and head out the door.

I won't turn the corner to the office. I won't ring the boss. I won't look back. I'll just go home with my music and my hopes and my dreams.

I should be so reckless. I should be so careless.

Mixed Budget blessings

POLITICS

Paul O'Callaghan

The stand-out item in this year's Federal Budget is the long overdue upgrading of support for mental health. The increase in funding for this program and commitment to put in place a 10 year roadmap this year are most welcome. This will enable expansion of services, additional prevention and early intervention for children and young people and improved access to the primary health system for people with a mental illness.

As foreshadowed by the Prime Minister and Treasurer over the last month or two, a major thrust of this Budget is to promote increased engagement of people who have been excluded from employment and training into a pathway for skills development and, where possible, employment. The scale of the investment in training is substantial, with a National Workforce Development Fund being created to deliver 130,000 new training places and $1.75 billion being allocated to improve vocational education and training programs.

A further $143 million is provided for a literacy, language and numeracy program, reflecting evidence over recent years that such programs require substantial investment in order to assist job seekers.

In contrast, too little attention has been given to the complex needs of the very-long-term unemployed. While a $95 million wage subsidy component is designed to assist employers who hire a very-long-term unemployed person, this alone is unlikely to address the pre-employment needs of many job seekers in this situation.

In addition to the literacy, language and numeracy issues faced by many jobseekers, achieving a successful job pathway for many long-term unemployed people requires a range of intensive support programs and intermediate labour market programs. Moreover, the history of employer subsidy schemes in the past is patchy.

I also fear that, despite good intentions, the shift in work experience requirements for this group from six to 11 months could lead more job seekers to drop out of income support payments altogether.

Amid a number of positive employment-focused initiatives, it was a significant missed opportunity for a Welfare to Work reform agenda not to bring Newstart and Youth Allowance payment levels up to a minimum standard to cover essential living costs. An independent Entitlements Commission should be established to make objective recommendations about adequate levels of payments.

The disability support pension was another focus of this budget. It was pleasing that DSP recipients can now work up to 30 hours per week and keep their benefits. At the same time,

the introduction of regular, compulsory Centrelink interviews for those under 35 years of age with a capacity to work and stricter requirements regarding work capacity are not guaranteed to achieve the desired results.

The introduction of two wage subsidy programs to encourage employers to take on people with a disability has potential, but, as with other wage subsidy programs, it remains to be seen whether this will be a success.

The decision to create the Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission, as recommended by recent Inquiries, is also welcome.

After recognition of a need for much improved regulatory arrangements by successive Inquiries over the last 20 years, the new Commission has the potential to generate important improvements. This would mean the sector would have less onerous administrative costs and that it could deliver more services to those in need.

Overall, the Budget presents a mixed picture. It contains a number of positive measures to promote mental health, employment and training. But without greater investment of resources in individualised support for job seekers and those on DSP to assist their transition to work, we are not likely to see major change.

The other me

POETRY

Various

Still nouns

this is a poem
that will choose its words slowly
because too much haste
will have it galloping off
with foam-flecked flanks across an
infinite desert
of despair searching for verbs
and adjectives to
fill the pitiless blankness
that might open beneath its
stalled and lonely feet
instead it might breathe
trembling and still all the nouns
that hold themselves here
it could observe each sand grain
it would feel each wind ripple
and smell every beat
of the sun and in further
stillness a single
raindrop just one slow raindrop
whose silver heaviness will
promise everything

—Debi Hamilton

The talks fail

Words should not be loved so much.
We ought to see through them
to some other place, but instead
we are mad for them, booming at us
from speakers, spitting as we pass.
See me! Buy me! Love me!
Lives revolve around such baubles.
Monkeys know how to throw the stuff
so it sticks. That's what you want
— congealed essences, stories
you can taste as well as read.
Just like carbon
poetry makes the world hotter.
What's wanted is meaning; we get
emissions, radiating from scalps
too thin to hold the gasses in.
Every last line
escapes into the too-heavy sky,
like a problem we do not believe in enough.
Will we make it to higher ground?
Or will our nightmares drown us,
our throats awash with useless sound,
gurgling into oblivion?

—Jeff Klooger

Distracted muse

Isn't it amazing, poets,

what comes between us and

poetry?

That privet root I didn't notice

till I was hanging out the washing.

And the car registration —

Gods! they'll never give me another pink slip.

No, I am not going to do another load of washing

or pick up that piece of old spaghetti

(Even the lizards are trying to hypnotise me)

or think about the dog's fleas

or the two mice

that went walking in the kitchen last night.

Only a strong coffee can get me started now.

If I could just track down that green folder

or is it the blue one?

No, lizards, you will not have your way

for I must needs reflect on

my poet's epitaph.

—Brendan Doyle

The other me

The other me

Finally free

No longer on useless shopping sprees

No longer overeating

Knowing the difference between right and wrong

Singing a happy song

Bright and cheery

No longer dull and dreary

A brand new woman

Now packing to go on great holidays

Wanting to live life to the full

No longer tied to ones obsessions and possessions

Like a lonely boat tied up at sea

—Isabella Fels

Border Protection's selective rescue

POLITICS

Tony Kevin

Disturbing evidence is emerging of moral confusion and a propensity to hide embarrassing facts, within Australia's Border Protection Command system, on its obligations to protect lives of people on suspected illegal entry vessels (SIEVs) passing through Australia's northern maritime surveillance areas.

A powerful investigative report by Natalie O'Brien led the Sydney *Sun-Herald's* 'Extra' lift-out section on Sunday (a shorter version of the article is online in *The Age*). O'Brien set out a convincing case, assembled from many grieving relatives in Australia, that a boat which left Indonesia on 13 November 2010 with 97 passengers on board, never reached Christmas Island.

None of the passengers has been located, despite exhaustive enquiries in all relevant refugee care and detention agencies in both countries. We must assume the boat was lost at sea with no survivors.

The Minister for Home Affairs Brendan O'Connor advised George Newhouse, a lawyer representing the families in Australia, that:

Neither Border Protection Command nor the Australian Maritime Safety Authority have any information relating to a venture that matches the details of your correspondence.

The Minister's office did not offer to make any further enquiries.

At the same time, Border Protection Command (a joint interagency command comprising ADF, AFP and Customs elements) faces two public enquiries — a coroner's inquest in Perth and a Parliamentary Joint Select Committee enquiry in Canberra — into the shipwreck of SIEV 221 at Christmas Island on 14 December 2010, drowning about 50 people.

I wrote an initial comment in *Eureka Street* on 19 December 2010 and have made submissions to both enquiries. My concerns on this complex issue require a bit of reading and thought. In sum, I believe the following propositions to be true.

Many SIEV boats — small wooden ocean fishing boats, with motors and essential navigational aids — come to Australia from Indonesia. Relatives in Australia usually know from phone calls when boats are on the way.

Most arrive safely under their own steam, usually in the vicinity of Christmas Island or Ashmore Reef, one to three days' motoring from Indonesian departure points. These are short, normally safe crossings unless the boats are overloaded, defective or encounter exceptionally

bad weather. Over 220 such boats have officially been listed as arriving since 2001.

BPC prefers, for reasons of safety, law and public image, to intercept SIEV boats at sea in a zone 12—24 miles offshore. A public impression is nurtured that SIEV boats are detected at sea by BPC vessels or aircraft, visually or using shipboard or airborne radar, and that these small wooden boats can sometimes be hard to find in the vast seas to our north, especially in bad weather.

Despite a 99-plus per cent safe SIEV arrival record, it suits Government, Opposition and some refugee activists to foster a public myth that these crossings are highly dangerous, when all known facts indicate they are normally quite safe and successful.

Boats are well enough equipped and crewed for these voyages, and BPC has access to reliable information on where they are heading. Meeting them on arrival is a routine professional process of interpreting what BPC calls 'cueing data and intelligence', and positioning BPC assets accordingly.

The Jindalee Operational Radar Network (JORN), a land-based system for radar surveillance of 9 million square km of Australia's northern maritime approaches, is designed to detect every kind of aircraft or vessel passing through this vast region. The system undergoes constant improvement. It was modified some 12 years ago to improve its detection capability for people smuggling boats.

JORN, as described by senior RAAF commanders, is the 'tripwire' in Australia's northern surveillance system. There is nowhere to hide from the Jindalee system, because its radar 'sees' a boat from above, bouncing signals off the ionosphere. One may safely surmise that most detections of incoming SIEV boats over the past 12 years were triggered by initial JORN-based data traces.

The Government and BPC find it politically expedient to try to hide the existence of JORN. To admit JORN's major role in detection and interception of SIEVs would bring into question BPC's claims that it has no radar information on SIEV 221 during its two-day voyage in December 2010 from Indonesia to Christmas Island, or on the boat that left Indonesia on 14 November 2010 whose passengers have never been heard from since.

I do not believe JORN was switched off, or that its technology could have failed to detect these boats. But, in the long chains of data-interpretation and decision-making within the organisationally complex border protection system, there is much scope for human error or misjudgement.

While the BPC system continues to obfuscate and to avoid giving straight answers at every level of public response, suspicion grows that something quite unpleasant is being hidden from us in respect of the loss of these two boats. I see no national security reason for this.

The Australian Customs and Border Protection Service submission (no 8) to the

parliamentary inquiry, apparently submitted on behalf of BPC, does not mention JORN at all (though JORN appears once as a glossary entry, suggesting it may be addressed in a confidential attachment), and the tone of the submission is decidedly defensive.

I fear that there may be people within BPC whose disposition is to 'rescue by choice' — to assist SIEV boats which have signalled their distress at sea, but to look away in cases where there are doubts as to whether boats entered the surveillance zone or may have turned back to Indonesia.

In my book on the SIEV X, I asked how hard BPC tries to find and help SIEV boats in possible distress that it believes are unlikely to arrive at their Australian destinations. It is time for parliamentarians who are serious about protecting human life at sea to ask the same question.

How to measure a teacher

EDUCATION

Fatima Measham

One of the teaching philosophies that currently prevail is the idea of differentiation. It recognises that children do not enter the classroom a blank slate, but bring with them a wide range of knowledge, skills, interests and experiences.

The idea that any group of individuals can be intelligent in different ways — and thus have varying learning modes — is a positive move away from the 'one size-fits all' approach that has alienated generations of students.

Teachers are thus expected to modify work in order to meet the needs of each student. This may mean advanced work for highly capable students and simplified tasks for those who struggle.

Unfortunately, such differentiation has not applied to teachers themselves. The truth is, there is also a wide range of knowledge, skills, interests and experiences within the profession. Any good principal could quickly tell apart the bright sparks from the lacklustre layabouts. But at present, said principal cannot reward those who perform well while providing explicit support structures for others.

This has led to artificial differentiation, calculated in years of teaching experience. We assume that the longer a teacher stays in the classroom, the better they become at their craft, and so the more they get paid.

For the most part, it is true that seasoned teachers are more effective. Longevity can only mean that they kept trying new tricks and got better at old ones.

However, just as we no longer assume that all students always learn in a similar fashion, we cannot assume all teachers are equal. This is precisely how mediocrity sets in, when there is neither reward for being excellent, nor consequence for not trying.

In this light, the Federal Government's plan to include performance pay for teachers in the coming Budget deserves some kudos. From 2014 to 2018, one in ten primary and secondary teachers will be entitled to extra pay as acknowledgement of their performance. Such bonuses would signal that mediocrity has no place in the teaching culture. Our young people absolutely deserve better.

Regrettably, a merit scheme also signals a number of other things that may be counter-productive to meaningful education. The proposed teacher evaluation takes into consideration student performance data, classroom observations, parent feedback and

professional qualifications.

Such criteria will be predisposed towards academically-inclined and motivated students, engaged and orderly classes, parents who are ambitious about their children's education and committed to it, and schools with the time and money to allow teachers to undertake further training and development.

Where do teachers in disadvantaged suburbs fit into this picture? Or those who voluntarily teach in remote regions?

The fact that NAPLAN data forms the 'hard' evidence in assessing teacher merit is also troubling. Summative tests, by nature, lend primacy to what we remember at the time of testing. Our conception of student achievement and teacher effectiveness cannot be so narrow.

By relying on NAPLAN data, we are limiting our definition of an effective teacher to a set of time-bound, context-free numbers. This damages the profession and is a disservice to students.

High-stakes testing does not improve teaching practice on the whole, because it deadens pedagogy. You can imagine teachers in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 favouring practice tests and drills in the lead-up to NAPLAN — activities that are often disengaging and reinforce a sense of failure in those who already struggle. This is not how our places of learning ought to be.

The real difficulty with teacher merit schemes, as opposed to bonuses in other industries, is that teacher effectiveness is a lot more complex than whatever snapshot we can take of students while they are at school, whether in class, during a test, or through conversation with parents.

In order to find the algorithm for rewarding effective teachers, we first need to agree on what teachers are actually there for, and what they're not. If schools are merely factories that churn young people out into the workforce, then maybe we merely do a headcount of year 12 graduates.

But if teachers are there in order to facilitate the development of future citizens — not just literate and numerate individuals, but critical thinkers, socially just actors, and innovative creators — then perhaps there is no real way to measure their effectiveness while their students are still at school. Perhaps, in the end, our alumni are actually best placed to nominate our best teachers.

WikiLeaks and the killing of bin Laden

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

Last Wednesday, Human Rights Watch issued a statement denying media reports that it had condemned the killing of Osama bin Laden.

Human Rights Watch has said that we do not have enough information about the killing to draw conclusions about whether it was lawful or not. Human Rights Watch calls on the US government to provide that information.

White House press briefings over the past week suggest the US Government has not become more transparent since WikiLeaks. The information that it provides remains at best unreliable, at worst deliberately false and misleading.

One day we're told that, at the moment of death, Osama bin Laden was armed, and he used his wife as a human shield. The next day, we're told he was unarmed, and his wife, also unarmed, rushed at a US attacker. What are we to believe?

If we have learned our lessons from WikiLeaks, we should be wary of believing anything we hear from White House Press Secretary Jay Carney, or President Barack Obama himself, except perhaps his patronising assurance : 'You won't see Bin Laden walking on this earth again.'

Paradoxically President Obama issued a statement for World Press Freedom Day last Tuesday pointing the finger at the governments of countries such as Bahrain, China, Syria and Venezuela. As for the US, he said: 'We rededicate ourselves to the basic principle enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that every person has the right "to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas".'

In reality it seems WikiLeaks could be the only organisation we *can* expect to furnish us with reliable information on important high-level events and utterances that take place behind closed doors. We do understand that what we're told is often necessarily incomplete. We also excuse the fact that occasionally what we hear through official channels is *unintentionally* inaccurate or misleading.

Also, at least prior to WikiLeaks, we were prepared to accept that some information was 'classified' for security purposes and needed to be kept from us *for our own protection*. But now, we know the security purposes are often mixed with political purposes, or are merely spurious. That is not good enough.

Why does knowledge matter? It matters because we are all rational actors on the stage of human life, and we need reliable information in order to draw conclusions that help us decide

how we act on all matters of life and death.

We *need to know* before we're able to see, judge and act . If we don't know about things, we're diminished as human beings. We're blindfolded and not free. Actors handicapped, captive to those who do know.

If we're told Osama was armed, our judgment is that the US operations personnel killed him in an act of legitimate self-defence. If we're told that Osama was unarmed, we conclude that it was an assassination, which is antithetical to the rule of law.

It is our business because our society is based on the rule of the law, and we could well conclude that the US President is acting against it. If that is the case, we might want to request our government to review its alliance with the US, possibly establishing some distance, as New Zealand has in the past.