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PO Box 553
Richmond
VIC 3121
Australia

Responsibility for editorial content is accepted by the publisher.

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Tel +61 3 9427 7311
Fax +61 3 9428 4450
Eureka@eurekastreet.com.au

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To remember is to pray

POLITICS

Brian Doyle

We watched the towers fall on television. Perhaps a billion people watched. We all saw the same thing at the same time and have the same twin scars burnt into our brains.

The burning and then another burning and then the incredible collapse and then another collapse and meanwhile people jumping out of windows and being crushed by concrete chunks the size of trucks and choked to death by ash so dense that you couldn't see your hand in front of your face, and firemen sprinting up the stairs as people sprinted down, and the picture on the television cutting back and forth from New York City to the burning Pentagon.

And then there was the news of the plane that the passengers forced to crash in a field so it wouldn't kill their countrymen, the plane in which the passengers, led by dads and college kids and a rugby player, stormed the pilots' cabin where the murderers had slit the throat of a stewardess.

Right about then we turned the television's sound off and just sat there staring. All the rest of my life I will remember my children's faces staring and outside the sound of blue jays as the bright morning began in the West. It was the most brilliant crisp clear morning ever; I remember that.

For Americans there will always be the time before September 11 and the time after. The late assassin Osama bin Laden, son of Alia Ghanem and Muhammad bin Laden, got at least *that*, of all the things he wanted. He didn't get his holy war between East and West, he didn't get a world where women are enslaved and education is a crime, he didn't get a world where his idea of God was forced upon everyone, but at least he delivered a blow that will never be forgotten, not in America.

People from other countries have asked me quietly sometimes, in the ten years since that morning, if maybe Americans are a little self-absorbed about September 11, *I mean in the end only 3000 people were killed, tsunamis and your bombs have killed many more than that*, and they say this gently, not accusingly, just a little puzzled that it's such a ragged raw wound for Americans; but it is.

We were attacked, literally out of the blue, by a brilliant thug with squirming dreams of blood, and he caused children to roast, and moms and dads, and a baby in her mom's lap, and he cackled over their deaths, he laughed out loud, he chortled in his dank cave when he heard the news. I won't forget that chortle, either, not as long as I live.

To remember is to pray, says my dad, and who will gainsay my dad, age 90, who served in two wars? Not I. The lieutenant knows whereof he speaks. He says that if we forget, that is a

sin. He says that remembering the incredible grace and roaring courage that day is the way to remember.

He says that to remember the roaring courage of the people who rushed to help, and the people who helped others out of the fire and ash, and the people who used their last minutes on earth to call their families and say *I love you I love you I will love you forever*, is to pray for them and us and even for the poor silly murderers, themselves just lanky frightened children, in the end, bloody boys terrified of a free world.

He says to remember the greatness that day, the raging love and unimaginable courage, the firemen who ran up knowing they would never come down, the passengers storming the cockpit, the sergeant who ran out of the Pentagon to catch women leaping from high windows, is the way to erase the name of the chief murderer. He says that if we remember right, if we pray with our hearts in our mouths, maybe someday no one will remember the architect of ruin, but everyone will remember a day that the courage and mercy and glory of human beings rose to such a tide that no one will ever forget. That could happen, says my dad, and who will gainsay my dad? Not I. The lieutenant knows whereof he speaks.

America changed and still the same

POLITICS

Jim McDermott

Walking down the streets of any city of the United States today, most everything seems just as it was ten years ago. The same honking horns, hustling crowds, mundane and sometimes myopic worries and preoccupations propelling us.

I note this with gratitude — our fears have not overcome us. Indeed, for a moment during those weeks following September 11, there was a glimmer of something new, a social civility and mutual concern that showed us what we are capable of as a people. We looked at one another and the world differently, treaded more gently and kindly.

Ten years later we find ourselves trying to make up for intervening bad choices, from the invasion of Iraq and the installation of inhumane antiterrorism tactics to the continued weak regulation of our financial sector. And the streets and subways of New York again require the broad shoulders and strong will of a footballer to force one's way through the unseeing crowds.

It's like the aftermath of any personal tragedy, really. In the early days, we gain the frightening awareness of how truly fragile (and blessed) is everything we hold certain. But often enough we soon slip back into sleep. For most of us true conversion entails countless relapses.

Barack Obama's speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention and his subsequent ascent to the presidency seemed a hopeful sign of a permanent shift in the national temperament. Obama's refusal to fall back on old tropes of Republican vs Democrat or USA triumphant, his unwillingness to use dog whistles or chest thumping to make policy were refreshing in the fullest sense of the word.

Today some historians are noting that the bills passed in Obama's first two years as president constitute the boldest and most far reaching set of legislation in a generation. His presence on the international stage has likewise offered a more adult form of leadership and respect.

At the same time, in the three years since the financial crisis began Obama has proven largely unable to stop the corporate and financial sectors from having their way. The Obama administration has likewise been slow (or unwilling) to pull back from many of the draconian Bush-era policies towards captives who may or may not be terrorists.

And Obama has shown a strange tendency, most recently in the debate over raising our national debt ceiling, to enter the fray too late. He relies on his own ability to salvage situations both too often and, paradoxically, not enough.

Admittedly, none of this seems directly connected to September 11. But with the perspective of ten years September 11 itself is just one of many dominoes, from the global financial crisis and the now-deepening international debt crisis to the natural disasters in places like Indonesia, New Orleans, New Zealand, Japan, Queensland and the Midwest of the US, that have left our world a far more uncertain place than we would like or have imagined.

More and more, we become aware that the instability that erupted into our lives on September 11 might not be a passing phase, might be the new norm to which we must all adjust.

Obama has talked often of the audacious hope that things can change for the better. But alongside hope we need steely-eyed humility to see things again as they truly are. Perhaps our ever-more-super-heated and surreal political climate is an indication of our desperation to avoid that truth.

September 11 has given Americans a greater sense of the world that exists and struggles and rails beyond our shores. It's also given us an appreciation of Islam, both positive and negative, accurate and prejudiced, that we as a country never had before.

But the deeper, lasting conversion remains elusive. It always does.

Muslims' Ground Zero home

VIDEO

Peter Kirkwood

A decade ago, Daisy Khan found herself at the centre of the storm that broke in New York with the tragedy of September 11. Along with her husband, Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, she is among the leading spokespeople for the American Muslim community. Over the last ten years this dynamic couple has worked tirelessly to heal the wounds inflicted that terrible day.

In this interview recorded in New York City for Eureka Street TV Khan speaks candidly about the effect of September 11, both on her personally and on the local Muslim community. She talks about changing perceptions of Muslims, and the controversy that flared with recent attempts by her organisation to open an Islamic cultural centre near Ground Zero.

At the time of September 11, Imam Feisal led al-Farah Mosque at Tribeca in Lower Manhattan. He and Khan had founded the American Society for Muslim Advancement (ASMA), a leading organisation trying to help the largely migrant Muslim community integrate successfully into American society.

Imam Feisal was born in Kuwait and came to the US as a teenager. His father was an Islamic scholar who had been imam at several major mosques around the world. Khan was born into a devout Muslim family in Kashmir, India, and came to the US as a young adult to study architecture.

From the day the Twin Towers fell, their lives changed dramatically. Rather than working mainly with American Muslims, trying to foster an American Muslim identity, they began to focus on outreach to the broader community, meeting demands to speak, teach, and answer questions about Islam.

Shortly after September 11 Imam Feisal began the Cordoba Initiative , 'a multi-faith organisation whose objective is to heal the relationship between the Islamic world and America ... through civil dialogue, policy initiatives, education and cultural programs'. It takes its name from the city in medieval Muslim Spain where Jews, Christians and Muslims co-existed in relative peace.

While ASMA and the Cordoba Initiative have been universally lauded, a more recent project has provoked ire and controversy. In 2009 the couple spearheaded a consortium that announced it would establish an Islamic centre in Park Place near Ground Zero. It would be situated on the site of a building that had been damaged in the September 11 attacks. Initially they called it Cordoba House.

There were protests. Various polls consistently show that most Americans are against establishing any Muslim centre or mosque near Ground Zero. A group of victims' relatives

issued a statement against it, saying the proposal is 'a gross insult to the memory of those who were killed'.

High profile Republican Senator Newt Gingrich said 'Cordoba House is a deliberately insulting term. It refers to Cordoba, Spain, the capital of Muslim conquerors, who symbolised their victory over the Christian Spaniards by transforming a church there into the world's third largest mosque complex.'

The site has since been renamed more neutrally as Park51 , referring to its address on Park Place.

Barack Obama spoke in support of the project: 'Muslims have the same rights to practice their religion as anyone else ... that includes the right to build a place of worship and a community centre on private property in Lower Manhattan.' The next day he backtracked though, clarifying that he was speaking about legal rights, not 'the wisdom of making the decision to put a mosque there'.

New York Mayor, Michael Bloomberg, has consistently endorsed the project. 'The government should never, never be in the business of telling people how they should pray, or where they can pray,' Bloomberg said. 'We want to make sure that everybody from around the world feels comfortable coming here, living here and praying the way they want to pray.'

Some relatives of September 11 victims have supported it, too. Ted Olson, a senior member of the Bush administration, whose wife died in the plane that crashed into the Pentagon, said 'we don't want to turn an act of hate against us by extremists into an act of intolerance for people of religious faith'.

Khan is quietly confident the new centre will be built, and will be beneficial for the whole community; a place that will promote healing of the wounds of September 11. As yet no work has commenced on it.

What was left behind

POLITICS

Catherine Marshall

This is what was left behind when the clouds of debris finally settled: a child's soft toy — a lamb — sitting atop the rubble and looking heavenward as if with bewilderment and disbelief; a menu from the Windows on the World restaurant, whose staff was a rich, ethnic mishmash, lying discarded on the street; a business card that wafted over the Hudson River from the crumbling towers and was picked up in Brooklyn; a set of miraculously-preserved dictionaries, their languages — German, French, Russian, Spanish, Dutch, Italian — a symbol of unity against the malevolent events of that day.

There were also things you couldn't see: the gaping hole in New York's skyline; the acute loss of those twin towers — the biggest building project since the pyramids at the time that construction on them began in the 1960s; an agony so great it broke through family and borough and city containment lines and rushed outwards until it had swamped an entire world.

A decade later, that sweet lamb looks up at me from within its protective glass case inside a building on Liberty Street in New York. It reminds me of lost innocence, and of my six-year-old son who had stayed home from school sick on that day and had continued watching TV as the events in New York replaced his afternoon cartoons.

He was transfixed by these movie-like stunts that beamed into our living room in South Africa even as they were happening half a world away; his big eyes grew ever larger as a plane arced towards the second tower and disappeared inside it, releasing a violent outburst of tremor and explosion. He was witnessing the very first imprint of history.

Nearly ten years later he stands silently beside me in the Tribute WTC Visitor Centre, across the way from Ground Zero. The centre has catalogued September 11 through the minutiae of everyday life, displaying relics that have been carefully collected and preserved, as though in lieu of the incinerated bones of those who died. There are twisted forks and spoons, computer fragments, a sprinkler valve sign, elevator floor plaques and two 357 magnum revolvers encrusted in molten concrete.

My son is processing the event through the lens of a teenager whose era has been thoroughly defined by it, and by the War on Terror that it spawned. He knows all too well the enactments of a society doomed to fear and retribution: the endless, bloodletting crusade in Afghanistan and Iraq, stories of which stream into our home from the radio and the TV; the vilification of Muslims; the mistrust that infuses our society; the alarming erosion of civil liberties.

Al-Qaeda, jihad, bin Laden, terrorism, Taliban, Islamic fundamentalist, Guantanamo Bay: these words slip easily off the tongues of my son and his contemporaries. He has seen John Howard's fridge door terrorism kit, and he has been taken aside by overzealous airport officials, suspicious of his long hair, tall frame and subversive T-shirts. He knows not to say the word 'bomb' in jest, and ensures that there are no bottles of water or pen-knives in his backpack.

At security checkpoints he obediently removes his belt and shoes, the coins in his pocket, his watch and leather bangles, and lopes through the cordon holding up his loose pants. He doesn't question this procedure, nor the curt, disbelieving tone of those who are in charge. This is how it has always been for the people of his generation.

It's these young ones who reflect their solidarity most poignantly at the Tribute Centre on Liberty Street, through the 10,000 paper cranes created as a symbol of peace by Japanese school children and their families, the quilt made by a fifth grade class from Shumway Elementary School in Arizona as an expression of their grief over September 11.

There are reminders of children who would accompany their parents to work at the WTC, from whose lofty windows they would peer through pillows of fog to the matchbox cars on the streets below, and lamentations from youngsters unable to protect themselves from the horrors of an adult conflict. 'It is unfortunate that it took a tragedy such as the terrorists' attacks to bring about the compassion that people should have for one another on a daily basis,' wrote a ninth grader from Rhode Island.

My son writes his own tribute and slips it into a Perspex condolence box. Two weeks later he sits in a Las Vegas motel room beside his sisters and watches as Barack Obama announces the death of Osama bin Laden. The jubilation on the streets outside is peculiarly unsettling, at odds with the strength and dignity conjured at the Tribute Centre.

This is a new and heavy milestone, for while America was hunting down bin Laden my son and his contemporaries grew up, and inherited a world irrevocably changed.

Workplace bullies face to face

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Face to Face* (MA). Director: Michael Rymer. Starring: Vince Colosimo, Sigrid Thornton, Luke Ford, Matthew Newton, Lauren Clair, Christopher Connelly, Robert Rabiah. 88 minutes**

Director Rymer describes *Face to Face* — an adaptation of the David Williamson play of the same name — as a 'little film with big ideas'. Central is the idea that conflicts can be better resolved, not by punishment or retaliation, but through dialogue between victims and perpetrators. This allows each to be heard, reveals layers of complexity, and opens up the possibility of mutual empathy.

Face to Face takes place (mostly) within the confines of a single room and the duration of a single mediation session, where ten people have gathered to decide the fate of one angry young man.

Deceptively childlike construction worker Wayne's (Ford) guilt is not in question. He has admitted to assaulting a co-worker, Richard (Connelly), and to ramming the luxury car owned by his former boss, Greg (Colosimo), in a fit of rage over losing his job.

A prison sentence would, clearly, have significant bearing upon Wayne's ability to lead a secure and productive life in the future. The purpose of this session, then, under the direction of seemingly mild-mannered mediator Jack (Newton), is not to mete out blame and punishment, but to resolve underlying conflicts, and reach a mutually agreeable outcome — perhaps a form of restorative justice.

The film's success stems not just from its strong and nuanced performances, but also its confronting and surprising script (Williamson drew upon real-life mediation cases). It excels not just in the dialogue, which, apart from the odd clunky moment, is sharp and authentic, but in the way it teases a thematically layered backstory and character depth out of a single, highly charged group encounter.

What starts out as an ostensibly straightforward scenario — disgruntled former employee expresses his frustration through violence — is shown to be the end result of a cruel and systematic process of workplace bullying. This, we find, in fact stems from a pervasive culture of bullying, which, in turn, is the result of general low morale that has its roots in Greg's business practices and personal foibles.

Wayne is certainly not innocent. But definitions of 'victim', 'perpetrator' and even 'bystander' begin to blur. Lead bully Hakim (Rabiah) turns out to be one of the more sympathetic characters. Affable Richard is gracious towards Wayne, but his passivity emerges

as another form of violence. Greg, who has the greatest claim to blame against Wayne, must also confront questions of his own culpability.

This is one of the stronger Australian films of recent years, resembling a modern Australian retelling of the 1957 American classic *12 Angry Men*. That film portrayed a jury's slow-boiling deliberations over the case of a young Spanish-American man charged with murder. Class and racial prejudices rise to the surface, but ultimately the film paid tribute to this fundamentally democratic legal process.

Face to Face, too, plumbs a variety of social and ethical issues, and in the end displays great faith not only in the efficacy of mediation as an alternative to legal action, but in human beings' capacity for mercy and grace — if they first make the effort to confront and truly listen to 'the other'.

Arrogant ethics

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

Terms of opprobrium are packaged for different recipients. People who defend the rights of people who are unemployed, refugees or Indigenous, for example, can be called chardonnay sipping socialists or bleeding hearts.

Why one particular variety of a substance whose whole *raison d'Ãªtre* is to sozzle should be so disdained is a mystery. Nor is it clear why a bleeding heart should be regarded as a more fatal condition than a bloodless heart. The core business of hearts, after all, is blood.

These phrases are standard ordnance in knockabout polemic. Things get more serious when critics lower their voice, adopt a serious mien, and warn you against claiming the moral high ground, or even blame you for taking it. It's as if, like Odysseus chained to the mast, you must take drastic steps to avoid seduction by the siren voices wafting from the mist-shrouded moral high ground.

Yet just what the moral high ground is, how you would claim it or be claimed by it, and why its possession should put at risk your right to be heard, are rarely specified. We clearly need a handbook that will enable us to recognise the moral high ground and detour around it.

The moral high ground is a military metaphor. To take the high ground gives your forces an advantage because they can look and fire down on the opposition. In the same way, to take the moral high ground is believed to give you a decisive advantage in an argument.

You can achieve this highly desirable state of affairs in two ways. The first is to display the coherence between what you argue for and how you live your life. If this harmony contrasts with the dissonance between your opponent's actions and words, they cede to you the moral high ground.

Dissidents who argue for a democratic and peaceful society, for example, may come into conflict with an authoritarian government that pretends to benevolence. They may then commit themselves to demonstrations that embody the peaceful and consultative values of the society they call for. If the government employs violence against the protests, it undermines its claim to benevolence and ultimately its legitimacy. The dissidents occupy the moral high ground.

They will be accused of doing so, too. In this case the accusation is simply a frustrated tribute to the effectiveness of the dissidents' argument and an acknowledgment of the ethical poverty of the government's position.

The witness of people with evident integrity embodying their cause in their acceptance of

punishment at the hands of those whom they challenge is always difficult for heavy-handed institutions to counter. It reveals the brutality concealed behind the spin that the institution promotes.

The second way of claiming the high moral ground is seemingly less demanding. It is to claim ethical support for the position that you take, with the corollary that the opposed positions taken by others are ethically defective and inferior. Your ethical argument entails you claiming the moral high ground.

When I argued, for example, that the Malaysia solution was ethically flawed on the grounds that it failed to respect the human dignity of those who were due to be swapped to Malaysia, I necessarily implied that ethical arguments in favour of the solution were flawed and unsupportable. The argument also implied that those who disagreed with me really should consider their position, change their views and perhaps their behaviour.

That may seem arrogant, but it is the nature of any ethical argument about right and wrong. Those who disagree with my argument would similarly imply that my argument was ultimately unsupportable and that I should desist from my criticism of the Malaysia solution. If moral argument is seriously entered into and not simply an intellectual game, the stakes are high. Both sides must begin by claiming the moral high ground. But only one side should ultimately be left in possession of it.

It is precisely the seriousness of moral argument that underlies some objections to claiming the high moral ground. It demands that others examine their own ethical framework and are ready to change their behaviour. This can be unwelcome. Socrates met this kind of resistance when he disturbed people from their unconsidered way of life. But ultimately no one has a right never to live undisturbed by moral discomfort.

We would be rightly open to criticism, however, if we claimed the moral high ground presumptuously. We could simply declare that the course of action that we support is self-evident, refuse to consider opposed positions, and regard our opponents as knaves, cowards or fools.

This claim to the moral high ground fails because it does not respect the demands of moral argument. Those who engage properly in moral argument assume that they may be wrong. So they are open to persuasion by opposed arguments. They also recognise that others can in good faith differ from them on moral issues. Moral argument assumes only that both sides commit themselves to seek the truth of the matter and to follow it.

There is nothing wrong about claiming the moral high ground. But claiming it makes its own demands. Modesty, courage and generosity of spirit, for three.

Sects and power in the Arab revolution

POLITICS

Shahram Akbarzadeh

Commentary on the Arab revolution has been marked by a mix of hopeful anticipation for the triumph of democracy over tyranny and reserved trepidation about the challenge of Islamism.

There is widespread consensus that the opening up of the political space will benefit Islamist forces. Once suppressed by authoritarian regimes, Islamist forces can now use tools of public representation to gain a significant foothold in the emerging political system.

This may be most evident in Egypt where the Muslim Brotherhood (the most organised grassroots Islamist organisation — banned under Hosni Mubarak's rule) and a host of Salafi groups took to the central Tahrir Square to demand an Islamic constitution.

The growing assertiveness of Islamist forces is cause for concern in Israel as it puts the Israeli-Egyptian peace of 1979 under serious strain. The recent border clash which resulted in the death of five Egyptian security personnel is a bad omen.

It is clear that with the opening up of the political space in the Arab states, Israel could find itself even more marginalised because of its refusal to allow sovereignty for the Palestinians. This is a challenging situation, but it is very much within the domain of state affairs and international relations. The problem may be hard to resolve, but it is not a novel challenge to the international community.

What is new and generally less appreciated is that sectarian fissures, now opening up, threaten to drag some existing states into a cul du sac of chaos and violence.

This is emerging as a critical factor in Syria where the ruling regime represents the Alawite minority, a form of Shi'a sect that deviates from the dominant Sunni belief in Islam. Any form of political openness would allow the Sunni majority which constitute around 90 per cent of the population to wrest power from Alawites.

This explains the ferocity of the state response against popular calls for political accountability. Bashar al-Assad feels he has no room to concede anything. This is a zero-sum game, and the experience of revolution in other Arab states has convinced him that any attempt at reconciliation will be seen as a sign of weakness and exploited to depose him and his Alawite allies from power.

A similar dynamic seems to be at play in Bahrain, where the Al-Khalifa Sunni kingdom rules over the Shi'a majority. When faced with the growing tide of popular demand for political openness the Al-Khalifa regime sought help from Saudi Arabia to keep the situation

under control.

In March 2011 security forces from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates entered Bahrain to deal with unrest — an action sanctioned by the Gulf Cooperation Council. The same GCC had endorsed Saddam Hussein's war efforts against Shi'a Iran between 1980 and 1988.

There is little to suggest that the popular swell of early 2011 in Bahrain was inspired by sectarian motivations. But the heavy handed response and the regional mobilisation to snuff it out have certainly put the events in an unmistakable sectarian light.

The Saudi reaction highlighted the ease with which the sectarian factor in one state could embroil neighbouring states into the fray. The use of Saudi and UAE security forces was duly criticised by the two Shi'a regimes in the Persian Gulf. Iran and Iraq criticised the GCC for interfering in the internal affairs of Bahrain and suppressing a popular movement for change.

Leaving aside the hypocrisy of the Iranian regime's protest, when it has shown no mercy to its own political opponents, the shared Iranian and Iraqi position points to a larger issue. The position of Saudi Arabia as a regional heavyweight is being challenged, most forcefully by Iran and its version of Islamic revolution. This regional rivalry threatens to reinforce latent sectarian divisions and derail the Arab revolution.

Suddenly, the unfolding events in the Arab world are not simply about finding a path to democracy and political openness, but a maze of sectarian tensions and regional power-plays.

Australia underwater

EUREKA STREET/ READER'S FEAST AWARD

Selma Sergent

Bluebird in her heart

'I wish I was beautiful.' Lilia knew her nieces had found the contraband she kept in an old suitcase under her bed. *Vogue*. *Marie Claire*. *Elle*. Magazines — women, clothes, make-up. Desirable things, giddy things that were frowned upon now. Fashion wasn't something that was talked about anymore, not in the wake of environmental catastrophe.

Lilia knew she shouldn't have kept the magazines. The paper was so valuable now — she should've handed them in to the Paper Corp with a scoffing, dismissive gesture. 'Imagine anyone wasting their time looking at fashion, using precious paper so selfishly, so frivolously,' is what she should have said. 'No wonder the world got in such a mess.'

When the sea levels rose nearly 20 years ago and most of her house ended up underwater Lilia had found boxes of magazines in the attic. The only place that was dry. *National Geographic*s, mostly. She'd given them to the Federal Archive for educational use; except for the fashion ones. She looked at them when the import of what had happened became too much. When she couldn't handle the new world order of frugality, selflessness and self-correction. When she caught sight of herself in spotted mirrors and realised fear wasn't beautiful.

'I wish I was beautiful too,' she whispered.

'For the greater good.' It blared from every billboard. It was on the side of buildings, on baseball caps, on T-shirts. People used it as a greeting instead of *good morning*. It was an initiative of the Social Welfare Org designed to make people feel better for everything they had to give up.

When Lilia thought of the days where she hadn't had to work for Soc Cap Net and surrender 75 per cent of her income; where she'd had her little house near the bay that led off Sydney Harbour; when she'd had a car and a dog and a cat it sometimes became too much for her. She grew anxious and teary and felt there was no point in going on. There was no fun anymore; just hard work and thinking of the consequences of one's actions all the time, day in and out.

The magazines helped her — the fresh, clean images of carefree days where money was no object and seeking to be beautiful was actively encouraged. It was a dream of another world.

The old world had disappeared more quickly than anticipated. After the US economy crashed in 2013 due to a right wing fundamentalist Christian group bombing ten nuclear

reactors across the country as a protest against a universal health care system and the legalisation of gay marriage; much of the Midwest and all of New York and California became radioactive and uninhabitable. The fallout was worse than Chernobyl and Fukushima combined.

Lilia still cried about it; she had always wanted to go to California. And now she would never get to see the hummingbirds who lived in Orange County. The hummingbirds were gone.

After the US economy crashed there was a push from the other big economies — China, Indonesia, Brazil — to be the next big economic superpower. Over the next five years oil consumption increased and so did carbon emissions. After the northern hemisphere experienced three of its coldest winters ever in a row and the southern hemisphere slipped into perpetual summer, the reality of climate change became undeniable.

On the day the World Trade Organisation announced there was no oil left the sea levels rose. Lilia still thought of that day as Mother Nature flipping the bird at the human race. 'We hadn't listened. We hadn't listened. Raping, pillaging, polluting the planet until there was nothing left. And as if it wasn't enough to let us squirm in the ramifications of our greed, Mother Nature sent the seawaters to reclaim the broken land.'

Lilia had a compass. A 1941 Royal Navy solid brass compass. Her grandfather had used it in the second world war. Lilia wasn't much of an explorer but she loved that compass. On starry nights she used to pull it out and plot the points on the Southern Cross. She used to find North and just walk, imagining the vastness of the world stretched out before her.

On the day the Mertz glacier in Antarctica melted the needle on Lilia's compass couldn't find north or south. It just kept spinning. Lilia figured that it had finally given up the ghost, being so old, but when she heard on the news the Petermann glacier in Greenland had also melted she knew why the needle was spinning. The poles had been compromised.

Lilia still dreamed about the waters coming. Everybody did. It was a collective post traumatic stress disorder syndrome they all had to endure.

It hadn't happened as expected. Not in a rush like a flood or as dramatically as a tsunami. It was as if someone had left the garden tap on overnight and when you got up in the morning the garden beds and lawn and the little place where you drank your morning coffee and watched the rainbow lorikeets frolic in the bottlebrush trees was half a metre under water. And the next day there was more water. And the next, and the next.

A lot of people refused to leave their homes. Sydneysiders in particular loved their waterfront properties and many of them could not fathom that the mansions that had cost them millions of dollars were going to be permanently under water. There were stories of elderly eastern suburbs socialites loading their antiques into the water taxis that seemed to

have popped up all over the place. And drownings. Lots of drownings.

The rich people had the most trouble running for their lives. Their lives were things, assets, collections. Who were they if they had to run and leave them behind?

Lilia remembered two sounds in the aftermath of the waters rising: the endless lapping and drip of murky water, and the sobbing. She joined the search and rescue teams and everywhere they went the sobbing assailed them. But it wasn't the kind of sobbing one partakes in when one is in physical torment, in pain — people were in pain, of course they were, but it was the kind of pain they had never imagined. A hollow desolation that scraped them raw from the inside out.

It was disbelief and regret combined — they had known better and had done nothing and now they had lost everything. It was a 'facing the truth of the situation' kind of pain. And it was worse than any kind of remorse.

As the waters continued to rise Lilia took all she had left and moved to her brother's house in the Blue Mountains — the magazines, three teacups with tiny birds painted on them, some old clothes and a photocopy of a poem by Bukowski. She didn't know where it had come from or why she'd kept it but there it was, scrunched inside one of the teacups.

There's a bluebird in my heart that wants to get out

but I'm too tough for him,

I say, stay in there, I'm not going to let anybody see you.

Lilia couldn't bring herself to think about it — the sadness in the poem. Tight-fitting. Holding out its arms like a vortex and sucking everything in.

The birds were gone. Their trees were dead, brittle in the salty, dirty water. It was the thing that Lilia found hardest to bear. She thought that maybe she would have to be like Bukowski to get through the emptiness, to hold a bluebird or a honeyeater or a willy wagtail in her heart and not let it go. Never ever. If she held it, if she kept it, if she never let anyone see it, then maybe a spell would be cast. Maybe one day the birds would return.

The people in the mountains were now the ones with all the power. They were safe all the way up there in their strongholds that used to be called bohemian, places for dropouts, but were now seen as being the most sensible of investments.

The banks were dismantled, the enormous corporations that had more wealth than entire countries were a distant memory. The stockmarket was nonexistent. Psychiatric hospitals were set up to house those who had been rich before, run by the Socialist Capitalist Network, the new form of government that took all your money but gave you everything you needed. Except for birds in the morning.

Lilia worked as a counsellor, holding the hands of people who'd lost millions of dollars. It seems the former rich coped worst with environmental disaster. There were thousands of suicides a week from people who couldn't face life without Dolce and Gabbana and pedicures once a week.

By contrast, the former poor mucked in and sorted things out. Building entire towns in the far reaches of the mountains, planting gardens, selling vegetables and livestock. They generated energy from the waters, restoring the internet and cable television. They were thriving, coming into their own. Their lives were better than they'd ever been. They weren't judged for what they had but for who they were and what they contributed to society.

Lilia heard them singing as they worked. The former poor who were now rich in ways they had never imagined. Even in the stinking, tropical heat they sang — for the world was theirs.

In spite of the singing Lilia's heart ached. She missed the butterflies — wiped out by the increase in temperature — that used to flit about the garden in spring, their movements choreographed with such delicacy and skill that she could have sworn someone, somewhere was waving a baton, casting directions.

She missed things that were so much a part of city life — the smell of croissants baking in the mornings, the doors of delivery trucks opening and closing, the thud of the morning paper as it hit the front door, and car horns. It had been many years since Lilia had heard a car horn blaring.

She liked her life in the mountains. It was peaceful, it was busy, it was a sanctuary, but she missed the city. She missed the mix of industry and nature. She missed the architecture, the feats of engineering. She missed the rose gardens. She missed the birds.

The trees in the mountains still stood. Stalwart. Ramparts against the salty water. Old trees. Aussie trees. Trees that spoke in the wind, that took the never-ending heat and flung it beyond imagining where it dissipated and faded to nothing.

Casuarinas, acacias, melaleucas, the eucalypts. Scented paperbarks, mallees, blackbutts. Stoic. Trustworthy. The sight of them as welcome as a lighthouse at sea. They thrived and they endured, providing food and shade and a sense of hope. They watched the world with a deep knowing and at night Lilia became convinced they moved in concert with the moon and stars.

One day there were cockatoos in the grevilleas near Lilia's brother's house. Only two of them and only there for an instant but enough for grace to descend and possess the spirit. Lilia waited all day the next day for them to return and they did in late afternoon when the ground was turning purple. This time there were four.

She planned with her brother to plant the salt resistant trees in the city areas not decimated by the water — to try and give some life back. So they did. Over time the trees grew and the waters were cleansed and slowly the small animals and the birds returned. Low in numbers

but enough to flatten the despair in the soul.

Lilia found she could now sing with the former poor, their songs of praise and joy and laughter. Her prayer, her spell, the bluebird held in her heart had worked its magic. She no longer wished to be beautiful, holding onto the past. The new day was all she wanted. For there was beauty all around being born again.

Future bites for theological colleges

EDUCATION

Neil Ormerod

The Melbourne College of Divinity has always been the gold standard of theological consortia in Australia. Initially established by an act of the Victorian Parliament in 1910 it has enjoyed a status and solidity unrivalled by other such consortia. While others have waxed and waned, and even gone out of existence, MCD has stood firm, protected in large account by its founding act.

To mark its centenary, MCD took the bold step to attempt to make use of a new category of higher education institution, opened up by the new higher education protocols. It made a bid to become a specialised university.

While a university was generally deemed to have at least three major areas of study, the new protocols allowed for a 'university of specialisation' which may have only one such area. MCD made a bid to become a 'university of divinity'. It now seems that this opportunity is about to be realised.

The Victorian Government Gazette has listed the approval by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) for the Melbourne College of Divinity to operate as a specialised university under the title 'MCD University of Divinity'.

While this approval may be vetoed by the Parliament (a most unlikely affair given the financial support of MCD's application by the Victorian Government), it is for an initial five year period. In granting this approval Victoria will have established Australia's first specialised university.

In some ways this step by MCD is a leap of faith. No-one quite knows what the implications of being a specialised university are. There are no precedents for such a structure in Australia and it is not clear what extra freedoms and responsibilities it will present to the College.

Certainly this achievement is a tribute to the college, its strength and reputation, and to its dean, Paul Beirne who has steered it though the arduous process.

The timing of the Victorian Government's action is significant. State governments are about to close their higher education offices to make room for the new federal body TEQSA, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency. From January 2012 TEQSA will be taking over all the major functions of state registration and accrediting authorities; it will be a one-stop-shop for higher education.

Some have described it as AUQA on steroids. AUQA (Australian Universities Quality Agency) ran regular quality audits on all approved Higher Education Providers, including

colleges such as the MCD. TEQSA will have wide ranging authority over registration of institutions, accreditation of programs and quality assurance covering teaching and learning, research, administrative processes and so on.

Unlike AUQA however, TEQSA will have real teeth, the power to deregister institutions.

In a sense establishing the MCD University of Divinity is the last hoorah of the VRQA. It will soon go out of existence, at least in its present terms of operation. In putting a five-year timeframe on the registration of the college as a university of specialisation, they are leaving to others the process of reassessing MCD in five years' time. And TEQSA will be a very different beast to the VRQA.

TEQSA will operate on the basis of a risk analysis of institutions. The rule of thumb is that they will devote 80 per cent of their energies on the top 20 per cent riskiest institutions. This should leave our traditional universities pretty well free to continue business as usual. However, those deemed most at risk will be under fairly regular scrutiny. Such risk assessments will be made on a continuous basis.

Theological consortia such as MCD, the Sydney College of Divinity (SCD) and the Australian College of Theology, the only three really left standing, all have risk management issues. The member colleges are beholden to church constituencies which can make decisions regardless of the wishes of the colleges themselves — this has been demonstrated in both Brisbane and Adelaide.

For example, according to audited figures available on a Federal Government website, SCD had a decrease of more than 50 per cent in its total student load from 2009 to 2010. This is simply because two of its largest colleges pulled out of the consortia, one becoming stand-alone, the other joining a university. This type of risk is impossible for consortia to 'manage'.

Of the three major consortia MCD has been the most stable. Still it is facing its own challenges. The new regulatory environment will be costly; and the greater the degree of scrutiny from TEQSA the more costly it is likely to be. Churches may grow weary of the increasing cost of higher education and look for alternatives. Much will depend on how TEQSA will assess the risk of consortia.

Overall TEQSA will transform the higher education landscape for all such colleges and possibly also for our universities. When the MCD University of Divinity seeks to re-register as a specialised university in five years' time it will face a very different higher education world than currently exists. We shall then see if its leap of faith has been worthwhile.

Sun blast Eucharist

POETRY

Rory Harris

the long ago

in the slow cat's bowl

soaking days

wild bird seed

on the porch

you wipe down a kitchen
where you are now finally dominant

heavy days ordering joy

in wild bird flight

& a cat too well fed

to chase, & a son

at one end of the table

how tomatoes tasted

in the long ago

from a mother's garden

mast

leaves fall form sails a vein of purchase

in the wind & in the gutter

twigs on a stick rattle bone

Eucharist

& it is here we have staked a life

counted off the steps & measured

what it is we need

a sun blast under the tongue

as hands dissolve in prayer

a beat of rain on rooftops

weatherboard

road wraps ribbons bowed to a future

spread through a planted forest

& then the open palm of grain

trucked in tight on the corners

the rub of tyres to a broad sweep weatherboard

& blocked in five hectare dreaming

patterns disappear out the window

the awkward stiffness of the hotel's stairs

a rattle of routines

boutique designs at the feet of mountains

a hand painted even blue of cotton wrap sky

the railway station is air con cool

soft seats & the cricket is on television

England is winning

soft light the river rises

to the stumps of peeling weatherboard

cutting a sway along these thin back roads

drive on the crest

& drop to the left over a verge of cut grass

when something bigger then you approaches

hold tight

the coast is jagged like a weeping cut

the high end of town

pizza beer dusk

the evening is a take away vacation

the net has holes as big as fish

hands salt stained swim slippery wet towards each other

the hotel's curtains hang flat

against the open window's main street

petals

for Helen

maybe it takes something

the death of a father

to get a handful of grand children

onto an out of season beach to scatter petals

in the shallows which roll around their limbs

prickling needle points of cold

under a blank sky

while their parents punch out & punch through

their eyes pinched against the wind

& the ashes

south

flat line horizon

at the end of a graze

a floating dream

smoke stacked

& silently sailing south

The twin terrors of 2001

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

Ten years gives perspective on the 'twin terrors' of 2001; the Tampa rescue and 9/11. The juxtaposition is especially poignant.

On 25 August 2001, 433 asylum seekers from a stricken vessel in the Indian Ocean were rescued by the captain of the Norwegian cargo ship *Tampa*, who was subsequently denied permission to enter Australian waters. On 11 September 2001, al-Qaeda launched four coordinated suicide attacks on US buildings using hijacked passenger aircraft.

Jesuit Refugee Service Australia director Father Aloysious Mowe referred to Tampa as the marker of a fundamental shift in the way refugees were regarded in Australian society.

The 9/11 attacks occurred as Australians were attempting to make sense of Tampa which, said Mowe, 'allowed former Prime Minister John Howard to treat asylum seekers as a national security issue that affected Australia's sovereignty rather than an issue regarding Australia's obligation to extend protection to people who are genuinely in need of such protection and who arrive in its territory.'

Before Tampa, refugees had been regarded as part of the general migrant population arriving in Australia and adding value to the country's economy and community life. After Tampa they were a threat to our sovereignty that was somehow grafted on to the sense of public malaise prompted by the 9/11 attacks on the sovereignty of the United States.

The irrational fear that was spawned ten years ago developed a life of its own, which politicians have variously kept alive and tried to contain. The asylum seekers, whom Australians might have reached out to with a sense of compassion, became objectified threats to our sovereignty that needed to be locked away or, better, prevented from reaching our borders by being placed in offshore detention.

The Gillard Labor Government had taken the political option to play to the fear by continuing the Howard Government's policy of offshore detention. It adopted the rhetoric of the Coalition that was part of a determination to 'stop the boats'. But the strategy came unstuck last week when the High Court ruled that the deal with Malaysia, and most likely other offshore arrangements, were illegal.

After the High Court ruling on Wednesday, Immigration Minister Chris Bowen struck a defiant tone, 'not ruling anything in or out in terms of our response'.

'While this is a blow, it does not undermine our resolve to break the people smuggler's business model through a regional arrangement.'

What was missing from the Government's response was acknowledgement of the asylum seekers as human subjects, rather than objects of a political strategy. They — not Labor's fortunes — are the real casualty. In the Afghanistan and Iraq wars which followed 9/11, the human casualties were referred to as 'collateral damage'. The main game was the nurturing of public fear. The humans caught up in it remained incidental.

Perhaps the Gillard Government's withering response to the High Court judgment showed that Australian politicians have learned nothing after ten years. The test for the United States might be whether the focus of Sunday's commemoration is the individuals who died in 9/11, or a renewed determination to beat Al-Qaeda.

The reluctant Australian citizen

MULTICULTURALISM

Fatima Measham

I knew something had shifted when I caught myself referring to Australian competitors at the last Commonwealth Games as 'our athletes.'

I had been living in Melbourne for nearly six years by then, long eligible to apply for citizenship. When so many people would envy this privilege, why did I not jump at the chance as soon as I could?

It was because I was still feeling caught in an imaginary homeland. Salman Rushdie refers to this peculiar space in which migrants dwell, where they no longer feel entirely at home in their native land yet remain somewhat an outsider in their adopted one. It is not an easy landscape to navigate.

Certain things made it harder for me.

I arrived in December 2000. The following year, a Pakistani refugee self-immolated in front of Parliament after his application for his family was rejected. A Norwegian freighter was refused entry after rescuing hundreds of Afghans in international waters. Not long after this, asylum seekers were accused of throwing children overboard.

It was also the year when two planes slammed into the World Trade Centre in New York. The seismic waves spread outward. In broad daylight on an inner Melbourne street, a woman had her hijab yanked off her head by a stranger. Such tensions erupted a few years later on the beach of Cronulla.

These events had nothing to do with me, but I absorbed them. I am brown-skinned. Though not a Muslim, I have an Arabic name. Most of all, I was not born here.

I was eligible for citizenship, and on some level desired it, but was equally certain that it would be no protection against somebody on the street who decides that I do not belong. The political language at the time did nothing to invalidate such views.

Thus, my initial vision of a sun-dappled, enlightened country was replaced by shadow. It darkened further in my readings about the Stolen Generations and the conditions in which many Indigenous Australians live. I encountered the urban poverty that lay hidden.

I grappled with these things as I made a life for myself. I got married, worked for youth organisations, gained a teaching qualification, and started teaching at a state school.

I was politically aware but detached, standing at a distance in the cold of disillusionment. When terrible things were done or uttered, I had the luxury of saying, 'That is not my prime

minister. This is not my government.'

Yet it became impossible to remain detached for long. As a teacher, I became conscious of my role as a conduit between my students' suburb and the rest of the world. I wondered about their future. Then I became a mother and worried about my son's.

I attended rallies, convinced I also had a stake in the issue. I started caring about what we stood for as a nation and how we fit into the international community.

In other words, my perspective shifted from the outside looking in, to inside looking out. My sense of injustice shifted from a broad, humanist understanding to a parochial concern: Australia could be better than this. We should be better people.

In the end, I decided to apply for Australian citizenship as a matter of authenticity.

I could no longer pretend the shame I feel over the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is the shame of an outsider. I could no longer pretend that the anger I feel over the treatment of asylum seekers comes from an observer.

The moment I felt that the government was accountable to me on these matters, was the moment I realised that I needed to be able to vote. To have my voice amplified by the ballot box.

My journey to citizenship had to happen this way.

If I can comfortably refer to Australians in the international arena as 'our' athletes, actors, musicians and writers, then I must also take possession of everything else, the history and politics, the inequities. Once, I had the luxury of being able to say 'This is not my government.' But now it rings more truly for me to say 'This is my country. I need to help make it better.'

I take both the light and the dark, and walk forward in full.

Steve Jobs' gift to the Church

MEDIA

Michael Kelly

Rupert Murdoch may well outlive Steve Jobs, who last week announced his resignation from his role as CEO of Apple due to declining health. But Murdoch won't outlast the impact Jobs has had on the media and the communications industry.

Jobs has made five critical contributions of enduring importance. Apple II was the first personal computer, and with it came the transformation of publishing, thanks to software that allowed you to do it on your desktop. Apple also transformed film and video editing, producing affordable and accessible software that meant anyone could perform tasks that had previously been the preserve of professionals.

Later, the iPod transformed the music industry and saw an end to many revenue models. The iPhone changed telephony and the ways in which we access that ubiquitous source of information and exchange, the internet. And the iPad has transformed computing, by making that critical thing that the internet brings to computers — interaction — affordable and mobile.

Not bad. But what is even more significant than these breakthroughs is how Apple, under Jobs' direction, has led innovation and directed media innovation.

I'm old enough to remember what the publishing world was like before the advent of desktop publishing. That development compressed the work of five people — typist, compositor, editor, proof reader and layout artist — into the work of one.

This put publishing in the hands of any individual or institution that wanted to become its own information source, and produce its own material independent of production houses and printers. It also fuelled the rise of publishers, mastheads and brands that later held complete sway in the print media.

Add the internet to the mix and you can bypass established channels in order to distribute your own material. Everyone becomes their own publishing hub. The capacity that Apple brought to editing and producing audiovisual content meant that everyone could be a telecaster, too.

Most remarkably, Jobs and Apple have created tools for bulding things the world badly needs: interaction, connection and community. There are forces at work in modern culture that break relationships and divide communities. The tools Jobs and Apple offer, married to the channels of online communication, from email to Facebook, provide tangible means of building community upon positive, shared purposes.

Never mind that they can also be used to isolate individuals or provide a platform for the pompous to declaim at will. Religion can also be used to destroy community and human flourishing, falsifying the very purpose it was invented to foster. The potential for misuse does not negate the inherent benefits.

The developments initiated but not exhausted by Jobs and Apple are of profound significance for the Church. The Church is a community of relationships gathered about some central beliefs. Here is a virtual mechanism that can be used to build both: relationships, and a shared understanding of beliefs.

The US leads in all things IT: purchasing of equipment, web traffic, innovations. People adopt the technology differently from place to place, but they do adopt. For Australia, these tools and platforms provide an unmatched opportunity for groups, political movements, the Church, and anyone else who is interested in fostering a community of interest.

But these tools are also a threat for entities like political parties and the Church, which are more comfortable in less interactive contexts. The new technologies put the tools of communication in everyone's hands. Moreover, the social media so enthusiastically embraced by the Vatican and by others in political leadership, bring with them something that hierarchies are rarely comfortable with: feedback.

Facebook and other social networking platforms expose the leadership in any group to what people out there — in the suburbs, in the pews and beyond — actually say, think and feel. Nonetheless, the creation of a vibrant, participative and interactive community — something in which Steve Jobs and Apple played a key role — is just what democracies need, and what Vatican II envisaged for the Church.

Book junkie's detox nightmare

BY THE WAY

Brian Matthews

My wife and I have embarked upon and are now fatally committed to a difficult, sometimes heart-rending task: we are culling our books.

There are thousands of them, distributed on shelves throughout the house and stacked in the shed in boxes some of which were closed, sealed and labelled 25 years ago. Many of those boxes have been as nomadic as we were — London, Lara, Little River, Anakie, Emu Flat via Clare — and, like us I guess, are a bit battered, threatening to come apart at some seams and, well, not to put too fine a point on it, older.

The less travelled boxes have simply sat in this or that shed, submitting mutely to move after move, waiting their hour. And that hour has come. Amid volcanic explosions of dust and the accusatory, rending sound of long-sealed tape being ripped from ancient cardboard, the literary treasures are revealed — except that 'treasures' is pushing the definition a bit.

What on earth possessed us, you wonder, either to buy, accept or keep *Methods of Book Design*? It emerges from its long exile into a world when the book and its design are bloody nearly dead. Or *The British Way of Life*, just on 60 years old and chronicling an England long gone and spectacularly further dismantled only weeks ago.

Or *Architecture for Beginners*? We were never architectural beginners, our structural monuments in various places being confined to a few chook houses and the odd, slightly off-square garden shed. Then there's *Coming of Age in Samoa* (or, as S. J. Perelman memorably added, 'Growing up in New Guinea or whatever the hell I was doing when I was 18').

A Writer's Notes on his Trade and *A Bibliography of Anglo-Irish Literature* fall uselessly from the same chaotically spilling box adding more intrigue to the mysterious book buying past.

Confronting the shelves inside the house is no easier. There are many books here that one or other of us — but rarely both — want to keep, yet decisions must be made and the cull must be ruthless. Speaking for myself, I know who to blame, who set me on this path that would land me in front of heavily populated shelves of books, torn wretchedly between this one and that one. It was Mrs Murphy.

As a small boy, I lived in Havelock Street, St Kilda: down one end of our street, you came to a wide, almost European looking square which sat well with the cosmopolitan aspect and shops of Acland St. The square opened on to the Esplanade and the wide flat waters of Port Phillip Bay. All of this was presided over by the mad, half-jolly, half-sinister guffaw of Luna Park.

In my boyhood days, there was one bookshop in Acland St, the books in which were either interestingly graphic about the mysterious female body (which, however, remained deeply mysterious because annoying small forms of life like me were chased out before we could get a really good glimpse of the various creases, folds and curves that so puzzled and excited us), or were in various foreign languages.

The other end of Havelock St was even less promising bibliophile territory. First of all there was Barkly St — legendary haunt of infamous violent luminaries of my childhood, like 'Redda' Lewis, George 'the Butcher' and Pretty Dulcie Markham. And then there was Grey St, which was well named: it seemed always cocooned in a cloud of smoke from the Council Dump and thick black exhalations from the big green buses that trundled off to the Government Aircraft Factory at Fisherman's Bend.

There were only two good things in Grey St: Smith's pastry shop was one of them. As an altar boy at the Sacred Heart Church I would repair to Smith's most mornings with a street-wise deceptively cherubic looking fellow server. We would 'do' the six o'clock mass and then — funded by his largesse, since he always had money and I never had any — we would have two custard tarts and cream each at Smith's.

The other good thing in Grey St, and the one that certainly made a profound and lasting impact on my life (even if that's not the way I necessarily would have seen it while in mid-custard) was Mrs Murphy's Penny Library, which had about 200 books.

I became a fully paid up member when I was about nine years old. I immediately read all her Biggles and all her Williams and borrowed both Encyclopaedias and it is to this crucial and formative membership that I confidently attribute my subsequent literacy. Thus, it was at Mrs Murphy's Penny Library that I began the habit which has caused my present agonies so many years later.

Mrs Murphy is long gone but, like Julius Caesar's, 'her spirit walks abroad', her minatory gaze reproves and threatens as the culling hand wavers with indecision, and ruthless determination is enfeebled by sentiment and the tug of the past.

Life and death on YouTube

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Life in a Day* (PG). Director: Kevin Macdonald. 91 minutes**

'Life-affirming' is one cliche I have never used in a film review. Yet in the case of *Life In A Day* — a documentary described in promotional material as a 'historic cinematic experiment' — life-affirming is not a cliche but a literal fact: the film explicitly affirms the innate value of human life.

Producers Tony and Ridley Scott effectively execute an intriguing concept. Members of the public were invited to film themselves over the course of a single day (the calander date 24 July 2010), and upload the footage to YouTube. This wealth of material (80,000 videos representing more than 4500 hours of footage) was then whittled down into a compelling 91 minutes.

As viewers, we traverse the globe in this short time. One of the film's great strengths is that, perhaps more than any other film to date, it reflects the ways in which the internet and social networking can bring human beings into communion regardless of geographically distance. It implicitly credits the online world as a physical space cohabited by many and varied individuals the world over.

For some of the subjects, the camera finds them on one of the best or most significant days of their life. A man proposes to his girlfriend. An elderly couple renew their marriage vows on their 50th wedding anniversary, with a few cheeky variations. A young gay man comes out to his grandmother over the telephone. An Australian man recovering from major surgery laughingly tells an anecdote about a nurse having to clean up his 'poop', then weeps as he speaks of how well he's been treated.

For others, it is one of the worst days. We see the nervous build-up to a teenager's confession of love to a close friend, and share his devastation when he is rejected. We visit a man whose wife is sick with cancer: asking their young son to behave for the camera, he insists, with some irony, that 'this is a happy film with a happy ending'. Amid their palpable tragedy there is transcendence, too: he reflects that since his biggest fear — the return of the cancer — has come true, he is now fearless.

It's astounding how quickly we are drawn into the characters' lives. Most stories get no more than a few minutes attention. But these glimpses are so frank and empathetic we feel instant attachment and emotional response.

For many of the subjects this is just an 'ordinary' day. But 'ordinary' days are not insignificant. One woman reflects that 'even though nothing great happened today', she can't

help feeling as though something great *did* happen. That's the point of *Life in a Day*: that they're *all* great days.

As mantras go that sounds trite on paper, so it's a credit to the filmmakers that they communicate it with more profundity than sentimentality. The most mundane aspects of human reality seem here to be rendered mystical by the cinematic gaze. Harry Gregson-Williams' and Matthew Herbert 's music, and Joe Walker 's editing, deftly coordinate the pace, mood and thematic structure of the film.

In the end it's impossible not to feel inspired by all this ordinary and wondrous life.

High Court grounds Malaysia Solution

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan

The Government has taken a 6-1 drubbing in the High Court of Australia. Many lawyers, myself included, are surprised, and some of us delighted. Offshore processing of asylum seekers has become a legal minefield for government. The judges have erected three obstacles for any government wanting to ship asylum seekers offshore before attending to their claims.

First, from now on, government will have to process boat people onshore in Australia unless they are certain that they can line up a processing country which provides appropriate access and protections 'as a matter of legal obligation' either under international law or under the domestic law of the country.

Second, the government can no longer rely on the general power to remove an alien when wanting to remove from Australia someone who is seeking asylum. The government will be able to remove asylum seekers prior to the determination of an asylum claim only to a country which is legally obliged to process the claim and to provide protection.

Third, no Commonwealth official will be able to remove unaccompanied minors or other children of whom the Minister is the guardian without the consent in writing of the Minister. The High Court has noted that the minister's decision to grant consent to removal of each child would be a decision which might require 'the giving of reasons as well as the availability of review' by a court.

Though Chris Bowen and Julia Gillard will wear the political wrap, their legal problems were created for them by John Howard and Philip Ruddock who legislated with such indecent haste after the Tampa incident. It's just that the law was never tested.

In order to send the next 800 boat people to Malaysia, Chris Bowen purported to make a declaration under s. 198A(3) of the *Migration Act* declaring that Malaysia provided access to appropriate asylum procedures, and protection to asylum seekers and proven refugees awaiting resettlement, while meeting relevant human rights standards.

The Commonwealth Solicitor General, Stephen Gageler, had submitted to the court that the Minister need only act in good faith, asking himself the right questions, and that there was no need for judges to trouble themselves with second-guessing the answers. After all, s.198A(3) had been introduced post-Tampa for the purpose of sending people off to Nauru which had signed hardly any international human rights treaties and which had almost no domestic law providing these protections.

Gageler told the court that the statutory language of 'protection' and 'relevant human rights standards' was 'meaningful but lacking in precise legal content'. The judges were not

impressed; they have insisted on precise legal content for these notions so that Australia might continue to comply with its obligations under the Refugee Convention.

Four judges noted, 'The observations and judgments made in the DFAT advice demonstrated that none of the first three criteria stated in s 198A(3)(a) was or could be met in the circumstances of these matters.' If Ruddock's Nauru declaration had been challenged in the High Court, most lawyers thought that there would have been no dispute. On the Gleeson Court back then, Justice Kirby might have raised a cry. But judicial deference to the Executive on these issues was the more likely outcome.

The Commonwealth submitted that s.198A was enacted with a view to declaring Nauru as an appropriate country for offshore processing in 2001. Four of the High Court judges conceded that this might have been the hope or intention of the legislators but this did 'not bear upon the curial determination of the question of construction of the legislative text'.

Perhaps pointing a way out for a government of either political persuasion in the future, these judges did observe that the 2001 arrangements with Nauru 'were very different from those that are now in issue. Not least is that so because Australia, not Nauru as the receiving country, was to provide or secure the provision of the assessment and other steps that had to be taken, as well as the maintenance in the meantime of those who claimed to be seeking protection.

'Thus it was Australia, not the receiving country, that was to provide the access and protections in question. Further, although the arrangement between Australia and Nauru was recorded in a very short document, the better view of that document may be that it created obligations between the signatory states.' The document drawing up the Malaysia solution specified that it was not legally binding.

The only dissenting judge was Justice Dyson Heydon who was appointed to the court by the Howard government a year after the Tampa legislation was passed, and just a couple of months after he gave a censorious political speech at the *Quadrant* dinner decrying the judicial activism of the judges who participated in judgments such as *Mabo*.

Heydon harked back to the halcyon days of Sir Owen Dixon pointing out that Dixon would not have 'found much profit in (a) source of law to which advocates of judicially changed laws increasingly look — international law or international expectations'.

In his judgment, he had a gratuitous go at Catherine Branson a former Federal Court judge and now President of the Australian Human Rights Commission for describing the commission as 'Australia's National Human Rights Institution'. He now finds himself in the judicial wilderness giving undue deference to the intention of politicians when introducing and passing legislation.

He says: 'In the context which existed when s 198A was introduced, the language employed

by those who procured its enactment had, on its true interpretation, an application to the Republic of Nauru. That was so despite the fact that the Republic of Nauru was not party to the listed treaties and despite the state of its domestic law.' His fellow judges will have none of that.

From now on, the High Court will apply a very fine tooth comb to any legislation allowing ministers to ship asylum seekers offshore. Manus Island and Nauru may still be legal options under an unamended *Migration Act* (though there is no guarantee of that), but not even they will be workable options if every child arriving on a boat has the right to full blown judicial review of any decision to remove them from Australia.

Unless there were to be a bipartisan agreement in the Parliament or a government deal with the Greens, asylum seekers arriving by boat now need to be processed fairly, promptly, on our terms and on our turf. And that's the way it should have been all along.

Revisiting South Africa

COMMUNITY

Duncan Maclaren

My last visit to South Africa was in 1989 when apartheid was in its death throes and Mandela was about to be freed after 27 years of incarceration. At that time, I was accompanying the late Archbishop of Glasgow, Cardinal Thomas Winning, to show solidarity with the churches opposing apartheid. In one of the iconic sites of the anti-apartheid struggle, Regina Mundi Church in Soweto (site of Madonna and Child window, pictured), he preached about freedom. Outside, my abiding memory is of his beaming face in a sea of joyous African women, ululating to heaven.

The Cardinal's joy returned to me when I went back to a renewed Soweto where small but decent houses had replaced many of the shacks and where memorials to the struggle peppered this home to one and a half million people. The atmosphere of fear and oppression had been substituted by one of limited hope — 'limited' because a democratic South Africa is still faced with huge challenges. Dehumanising poverty is still endemic. Half of the young people between 15 and 24 are unemployed. The only difference between then and now in the gap between the poor (mostly black and so-called coloureds) and rich is that some blacks have become the 'nouveaux riches' of the new South Africa.

Xenophobia against those fleeing war and oppression in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe and other African states on the verge of failing is widespread and deaths have resulted from clashes. Many young, professional whites whose parents fought against apartheid in the ANC are leaving as positive discrimination for blacks in white collar jobs limits their chances of employment. 20% of the population is living with HIV or AIDS. Corruption is, Italian-style, everywhere — from the top echelons of society to the humble worker. Crime is so bad that thieves even stole cables from the new train to the airport, grinding the service to a halt.

Education as a source of empowerment has not been stressed. One student in a shantytown showed me his science assignment from his teacher — impossible for him to do without a computer (they had been stolen from the school months earlier) and a laboratory (not existent). I naively said to him that he should tell his teacher it was not possible to complete it. He shrugged and said 'She will say she has done her job by giving the assignment. She didn't even go through it with us. She doesn't teach us anything'. Yet his hunger for a decent education was palpable.

I visited a facility in KwaZulu-Natal for orphans and the 'chronically sick', a euphemism for the mentally impaired and young people and adults so severely handicapped that they could

only lie in beds, staring, and wait for the sisters to feed and stimulate them. It was an apocalyptic scene. This project, as with too many others, is reliant on the occasionally fickle responses of NGOs or donors who forget that the schools or clinics they construct need funds for maintaining services beyond the initial building.

The 'rainbow nation' contains an undercurrent of danger, brought to the boil occasionally by politicians who, to massage their own egos or to hide their own incompetence, stir up ethnic or racial tensions — total craziness in a country as diverse as South Africa.

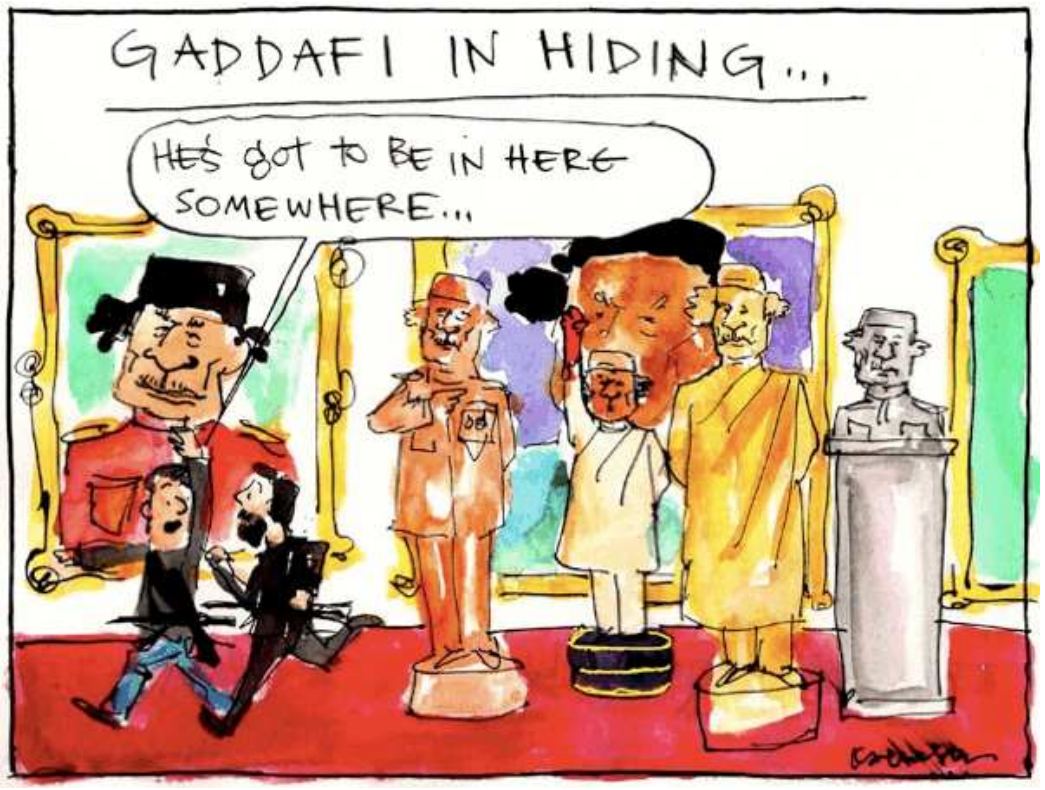
But despite all that, there was hope in the air. We must remember that you don't get rid of the consequences of an inhuman system like apartheid in the space of the seventeen years that separate Mandela's victory in the first democratic elections from today. We outsiders underestimate its pervasiveness and its depth of depravity. A tour round Johannesburg's gut-wrenching Museum of Apartheid shows that the system was more akin to the Holocaust than a 'mere' colour bar.

Yet it was in the museum, that place of the systematic record of humankind's capacity for evil, that I saw a real symbol of the new South Africa. A young white man wandered round hand in hand with his black girlfriend, their caresses undermining a system which barred love between races. That became for me an icon of hope for the country and, since I was there to do some work for the Dominican Order, the words of that great Dominican laywoman, St Catherine of Siena, came down the centuries to me from medieval Tuscany: 'Be up and doing for there is no cause so difficult, no stronghold so impregnable that it cannot be broken down — and you built up — by love'.

Libya's most (and least) wanted

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas



My Australian Muslim story

MARGARET DOOLEY AWARD

Nadine Rabah

So what is my Australian story? My Australian story began in 1982, with my mother migrating to Australia when she was 11 years old. My childhood memories are filled with stereotypical Aussie pastimes, backyard cricket and playing footy in the middle of the road. I played with my two brothers and what seemed to be countless cousins (and yes I was the only girl).

Simple things like these are what make up my identity. They are what make me Australian. Having a BBQ every AFL Grand Final (watching the footy as a family) makes us Lebanese with a difference: we are also Australian. I laugh when I see my dad (with his broken English accent) talking to the neighbours about how the Blues are going this year and how Chris Judd is an overrated superstar. "Its derr year dis year" he says. Football is a huge part of my upbringing. It was a foreign sport to my dad when he came out here until my mum introduced him to 'Our Game'.

It can be argued that I've had a very Australian upbringing. Yet I've remained respectful towards my Lebanese and Muslim heritage. I fasted the entire month of Ramadan, but also played every round of football last year.

Being a Muslim I do feel like an outsider at times. Why do we constantly have to be portrayed as evil people? 'We're not all like that', I find myself shouting at certain news stories. 'Those extremists should just keep their mouths shut', I tell my mum. They're not talking on behalf of me or my family. At times like these I feel as if there is a great divide between myself and 'Australians'. Just as we get closer to assimilating, something else comes up. I find myself thinking that I'm not Australian. I don't belong. My mum only came here because she had nowhere else to go. She was an orphan at the age of 8 about to head to an orphanage and this was a great land. It was where lives were made. Sometimes I think to myself 'Why couldn't we just be like them? Why do we have to do things differently? Why can't we eat pork?' Then I think to myself that I should appreciate where I'm from, what I believe in and how fortunate I am.

Yes I am Lebanese. But no, my brothers don't speak like 'Fully sick bros' and they don't walk around as if they own the place. We don't get into any punch-ons and every second word we speak is not a swear word. Yes I am also Australian. But my family doesn't drink VB's and we don't own towels with the Aussie flag printed on them. These images are stereotypes and my immediate family does not fit into them. We are unique. So are the 22 million or so people around this country. We all have a different Australian story.

About 2004, my older brother played in a local footy team. There was an Australian girl in

his team. She was blonde and had light coloured eyes. I was 9, had dark features and I'd always wanted to play. But I was a girl. After years of convincing my dad to let me play football, he reluctantly gave in. I played football in an all boys team and this was frowned upon by many cousins and family friends. You're a girl, you shouldn't be playing footy. My dad would cop a lot of flack because he was supposed to be the 'man of the house'.

But this wasn't a village in Lebanon where girls lived in the kitchen. This was Nadine Rabah, the daughter of a modern woman, who from a young age had a passion to play football. From the day I joined I knew that I had a point to prove. At the age of twelve I had to show them all, including my dad that, hey, I'm better than your son at football, and I don't want to live the life that so many Muslim girls and women were used to. I won the Best and Fairest award at the end of that year, in an all boys team, many of whom were Lebanese Muslims. My picture still hangs in the Glenroy Football Club rooms.

From that time I gained the respect of an entire community. They understood that we are no longer just Lebanese. This is Australia and we are Australian. Girls could do way more than just cook and clean. Today, instead of frowning, many older men and women ask me how my footy is going. Or they say 'So I've heard you've started umpiring; you gonna make it to the AFL one day?" They are also full of praise to my parents. I was told that I am a pioneer to many Lebanese and Muslim girls. I have broken many boundaries which girls in Middle Eastern countries would never even have imagined doing.

My Australian story continues. Some days it'll feel like I don't belong. Sometimes I'll get upset that I am Lebanese, I think that life would be way easier to be an Aussie. But hey, if I go to Lebanon they'll call me an Australian, and in Australia they call me a Lebo. So what am I? I personally believe I am an Australian with a Lebanese background.

It is difficult to put a finger on what it means to be an Australian. No one has a country like we do. I love the tapestry of life that is Australia. It doesn't matter where you come from, being an 'Australian' (for me) means wanting to be 'mates' with everyone, harbouring no ill-will towards others. It means wanting to live in peace and harmony (with each other), being free and independent, giving a helping hand when needed, treating everyone fairly *and* enjoying the great game of football. I can confidently say that I am an Australian. A proud one too.

Australia flouting international law over refugees

POLITICS

Justin Glyn

What does the Malaysian solution mean for those being sent back to Malaysia and for international law in general? Although human rights concerns have been high since the deal was first proposed, the issue has become urgent in light of recent allegations that Malaysia has returned refugees registered with the UNHCR to China. I would like to suggest that what is now at stake is Australia's commitment to international law more generally. To clarify this claim, a little background is in order.

International law does not promise refugees 'asylum'. What it does promise is non-refoulement. A state will not send back a refugee to the borders of a country where their 'life or freedom would be threatened' on one of the grounds in the Refugee Convention (race, religion, nationality, social group or political opinion).

This is the core principle of modern refugee law which emerged from the horrors of World War 2. States saw the atrocities of the Nazi death camps and were determined to ensure at least a minimum level of protection (albeit at second hand) for the victims of persecution. The non-refoulement principle is now enshrined in Art. 33 of the Refugee Convention (to which no reservations are permitted).

Whether one is a refugee in international law is a question of fact. Asylum seekers must therefore be presumed refugees for the purposes of Art. 33 unless and until their claims are finally rejected on their merits.

A refugee may be removed from the country in very limited circumstances only. These are where refugees have been 'convicted in a final judgment' of serious offences committed in the receiving state or where there are 'reasonable grounds' for regarding them as a danger to the security of that state. Since those to be deported to Malaysia will never leave detention while they are on Australian soil, these grounds are clearly not applicable.

If reports alleging that UNHCR-registered Uighurs are being returned to China are true, then the possibility of threats to life or freedom of refugees sent to Malaysia is very real.

Because non-refoulement enjoys almost universal support and admits of no exception, there is a large and growing body of authority that it is a peremptory norm. That is, a rule which is agreed on by the international community as a whole and from which no derogation is permitted.

Even most non-parties to the Convention have signed instruments which prohibit refoulement. Malaysia, for example, is a party to the 'Bangkok Principles' on the Status and

Treatment of Refugees — although, as the UNHCR notes, it has not enshrined those principles in domestic law.

Peremptory norms (also called *jus cogens*) can only be modified by other norms of the same status. Under the Vienna Convention 1969, treaties in breach of peremptory norms are void (i.e. of no effect). This is because these are the most fundamental norms in international law.

Other norms usually agreed to be peremptory include the prohibitions on torture, genocide and the slave trade. Some commentators suggest that non-refoulement is peremptory precisely because the prohibition of persecution is peremptory — you may not persecute, so you may not send someone to persecution elsewhere.

This would apply if Australia sent refugees back to their persecutors directly, or if they did so via a third country. (Indeed, the prohibition on refouling people to torture does not even allow for the limited exceptions in the Refugee Convention — Article 3 of the Convention Against Torture.)

If there is a risk of returnees facing ill-treatment in Malaysia — let alone any prospect of deportation to the country from which they originally fled — any refoulement by Australia would be absolutely illegal under international law, as would any agreement to do so.

It goes without saying that any refoulement by Malaysia would also be illegal. The fact that it may already have happened should give the Australian Government pause in its assessment of Malaysia as a safe destination.

If Australia breached this norm it would signal not merely a weakening of the refugee protection regime (as Andy Hamilton recently noted) but also that Australia was not minded to respect one of the most serious prohibitions in international law.

This raises the question of what Australia's attitude is to the other norms in this class — a question that goes well beyond issues of refugee protection. At the very least, any Australian protest about human rights abuses in other countries (of whatever kind) would sound hollow.

Spider monk

POETRY

Grant Fraser

Autumn spider

Overnight, on some great whim, he went careening down the coast of Africa

And snared the cape of a whole new continent;
And I might have caught him in the act

As you might catch a stagehand scrambling into the wings

At the first note of an overture,

But I didn't.

Now he is pursed within the curl of his leaf,

A monk at watch for those lost souls

Whom he might trap in the sneer

Of his silken intentions:

A trappist pehaps.

But, soundless as a lawyer plotting,

His mind still spins

With subtleties that cling and bend:

If pale winter were not wheezing

Just beyond the horizon,

We might, each of us,

Be trussed in the spider's galaxy of contiguous things,

An ounce of thinking muscle

Left to sweeten on the bone.

Morning Star

Minus two.

Winter solstice just days away,

And, turning out of a frosted dream,

The slow, reluctant dawn.

On the South Geelong station

We shuffle

In a slow wintrum of dance;

Froid Astaires.

Cartoon breaths,

But too cold for words.

The man who coughs,

And the last star

In its fixed adventure fading;

And so we begin to drift

Into the dim scrutiny

Of those inner stars

Of our mortal navigations.

Longing

It is the lightness of a hawk

That dresses the wind,

The tracings found

In crushed elegies of frost.

It is the shade that disappears

Into summer's resinous hum,

The sigh contained in all rapt silences,

The shudder in the belly of a rose.

It is follies of henna

Tracing their whims

From hand to arm,

It is the hesitations

That we make our walls.

It is affection's shy, insistent cousin,

The companion word to the verb, to love,

The blessing held

In the soft benediction of other eyes.

It is the slow, consensual, untouching dance

That steers toward the rising of all our tomorrows,

And, it is the aching moment

That begins
The quiet dawning of the heart.

Lessons from Bluescope's human crisis

EDITORIAL

Andrew Hamilton

Bluescope's announcement that it would close its steel making industry with the loss of about 1500 jobs is rightly seen as a crisis. Although the closing was a disaster that entailed massive harm to Australia, it was a crisis in the sense that it invited serious judgment of Australia's directions.

Most comment has been on the economic implications. These are fairly simple. Any Australian plant that makes steel faces higher costs than many of its competitors. These costs are magnified by the high exchange rate of the Australian dollar that makes imports cheaper. The high exchange rate in turn reflects the risk of inflation associated with the mining boom. Under these conditions Bluescope made losses that could not reasonably be sustained.

The economic crisis therefore is posed as the need to restructure the Australian economy so that it supports profitable industries. The options offered are to protect Australian businesses or to increase productivity by lowering costs, usually those associated with employment.

But this crisis cannot be seen simply in terms of economic abstractions. It has to do centrally with human beings. The loss of jobs immediately affects the employees. The ways in which Australia shapes its economy also creates a society in which human beings may flourish or be diminished. Bluescope and similar events invite reflections on the ways we can shape a humane society.

We should think first about the workers and their families. But the closures affect neighbourhoods and cities, too, because the workers' ill fortune will be visited on local shops and businesses and be felt in community organisations. It will be translated into depression whose results will be seen in families and schools. Bluescope and government have a responsibility to mitigate these ills.

The closure also raises larger questions about how the economic arrangements of society support human development and humane relationships. Economic efficiency is not the sole or decisive value. Particularly in times of economic restructuring it is essential to ensure that those who are unemployed receive a living wage that is adequate to support families.

The structuring of a humane society also involves encouraging people to connect with one another in local communities. This can conflict with maximum economic efficiency. The transformation of Australian rural life has led to more economically efficient production. But it has also hollowed out rural communities and the resources available to them.

It is not self-evident that the quality of Australian society has been better served by this process than has France by the protection it offers to its small farmers. The social justification

of withdrawing support from small, remote Indigenous communities in the name of economic efficiency is even more questionable.

Similarly it is proper to ask what range of industries in Australia will best serve a humane society. It is not clear that this question should be resolved solely by the market. One does not have to believe in protecting all local industries to ask whether a healthy Australian society will be one in which some manufacturing industry is maintained.

At one level the call for increased productivity is common sense. But the question of productivity needs also to be set within the building of a humane and productive society. To treat human beings and their labour as simply costs that must be lessened to increase productivity diminishes human beings. It leads to infringing on time spent with families, on the right to negotiate collectively for conditions of employment and on the guarantee of justice in case of dismissal.

Identifying increased productivity with removing the rights of workers also ignores the obvious. Most gains in productivity have come through advances in technology. So the human question to ask is how we can build an educational system and a business culture that encourage people to be curious and to innovate. That means seeing workers as subject of the economy, not as objects, as the central assets of companies and not as instruments.

Finally, the link between the mining boom and the pressure experienced by the manufacturing industry also raises questions about the quality of Australian society that we are building. Is encouragement of unrestricted mining in the best interests of Australian society? Should the rent that mining companies pay for Australian resources be substantially increased to shape the future educational and industrial culture of Australia?

The loss of jobs at Bluescope is a crisis. Respect for the human beings whose lives it will affect should lead us to ask wider questions about the society their children will inherit.

Rallies take the good fight to Canberra

POLITICS

John Warhurst

Political rallies are on the rise. People are on the move and the destination is Canberra. That is a good thing. Democracy means more than just casting your vote. No one should object to citizens becoming more active.

The relatively small Convoy of No Confidence descended on Canberra from rural Australia last week to rally in support of country interests generally, against the ban on live cattle exports, the carbon tax and a whole catalogue of the Labor Government's alleged sins.

There are alternative democratic options. What can rallies do that voting or focus groups and public opinion polls can't? What can citizens achieve by travelling to Canberra that they can't achieve by going to see their elected representatives in their local electorate offices?

First, the rallies are cathartic, even a bit of fun, for those involved. They enable participants to let off steam and to release their frustrations. Liberal Senator Chris Back from Western Australia said of the convoy idea that it was 'driven by sheer frustration' that those involved are not being heard. Whether they are or not is not the point; they don't believe that they are.

Importantly such supporters are given something much more active to do than the parliamentary system generally allows. This is a welcome change. Inside the Parliament House chambers the rules strictly specify that citizens may be seen but not heard. Even outside the building and on the lawns there are strict rules and permissions to be obtained by any group wanting to stage a rally.

Action is something that both the old and new social movements have always relied upon to invigorate supporters. It beats attending a dry party branch meeting in order to get a motion passed.

Secondly, the rallies offer a collective voice. One pamphlet emphasised that 'it's crowds that talk'. That doesn't mean they necessarily represent a majority voice; minorities can organise a good demonstration too. But they enable individuals to magnify their voice. The downside is that people sometimes do and say things in groups that they have the good sense to avoid as individuals.

Thirdly, the rallies try to influence the politicians gathered inside Parliament House. Most rallies try to appeal to politicians' self-interest. They want politicians to be afraid of losing their seats. The National Marriage Day organisers, for instance, warned all politicians not to take them lightly and pointed to the success of a previous rally in 2004.

They try to seduce ministers and shadow ministers into making commitments. Those

momentary lapses can then be used repeatedly in subsequent political argument and in election campaigns.

Fourthly, rallies attract media attention, often, like the recent convoy, beyond what they numerically deserve. Their colorfulness is always more attractive to the media than a quieter, more private event. If the rally can generate a counter-rally leading to harsh words being exchanged by participants then so much the better for the media.

Finally, they demonstrate intensity of commitment. This is an often forgotten element of politics. Those who participate in rallies may make efforts above and beyond the so-called passive 'silent majority'. They leverage their numbers and try to multiply their impact.

Senator Back said of the convoy members: 'Everyone will be making a significant sacrifice in terms of time, money and energy.' Rally-goers hope that intensity will impress the rest of the community, therefore advancing their cause directly and indirectly with Government and Opposition.

Detailed analysis of those who participate in rallies is rare. But MPs make their own judgments. Many rallies contain lots of true believers with predictable political commitments. In other words they are the usual suspects.

The ones that really make governments sit up and take notice are those that contain not just rusted on party supporters, as some of the organisers are, but people who really are considering changing their vote; that means not just changing from how they voted in 1972 or 1983 but from the Gillard-Abbott election in 2010.