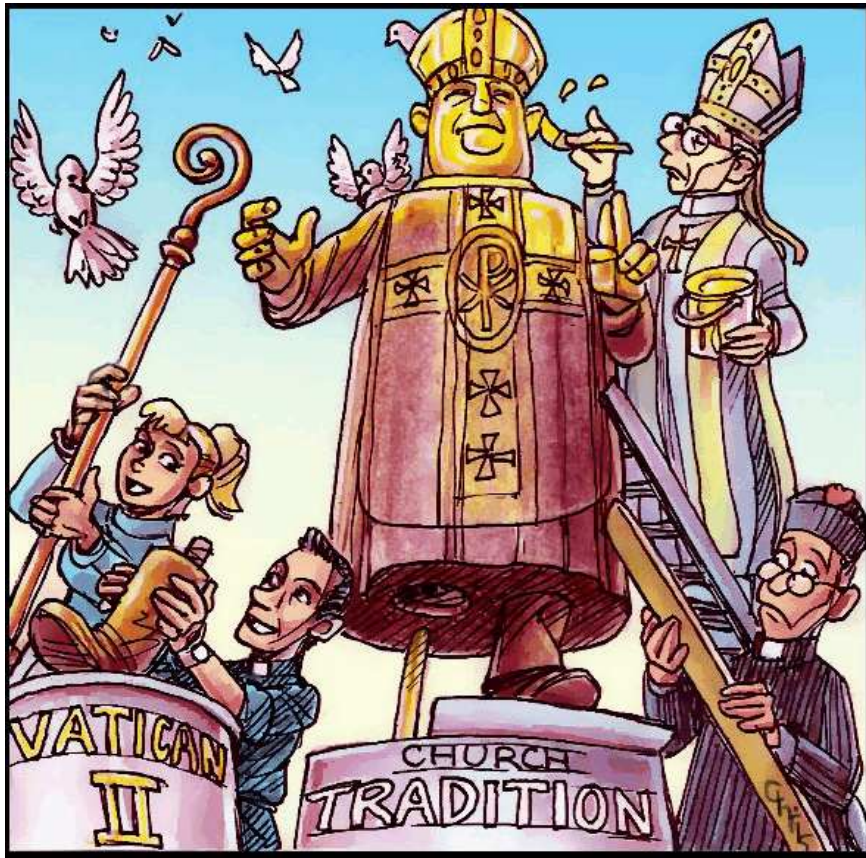


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Eureka Street is published fortnightly online, a minimum of 24 times per year by Eureka Street Magazine Pty Ltd

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

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Responsibility for editorial content is accepted by the publisher.

Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned.

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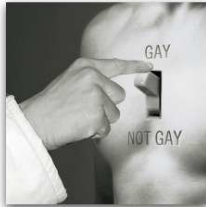
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Dangers of gay conversion

COMMUNITY

Luke Williams



My first encounter with gay conversion or gay reparative therapy (GRT) was the day I finally summoned the courage to ask a friend about the cluster of scars on his wrists.

'Gary' explained that when he was 15, his parents took him to a place called Exodus International where a group leader would try to persuade participants of what an awful life they would have if they were gay'. His parents rushed him to the centre after finding gay porn in his room. He was so upset by the experience he later took to his wrist with a razor.

Gary was just 15; legally not even an adult.

Late last month California's state Assembly approved a bill prohibiting children and teenagers from undergoing GRT. The legislation prevents licensed psychologists and therapists from seeking to change the sexual orientation of children under 18.

But in Australia GRT of minors is unregulated — there are no age restrictions or safeguards for minors entering an ex-gay ministry. About ten ex-gay Christian ministries around the nation offer GRT counselling.

In an ex-gay ministry, often run out of a church-run function centre or café, homosexual attraction is treated like an addiction. Participants are given a range of techniques to help them deal with the 'affliction'. Group members have individual counselling sessions and meet in small groups to discuss the 'struggles' they have had that week in containing their urges — often to be told 'God forgives your sins' by the layperson who runs the group.

GRT is not recommended by any secular health organisation; the Australian Psychological Society says there is a lack of evidence for the usefulness of conversion therapy, and that it can be harmful for the individual.

If a minor was to walk into a GRT centre in their local suburb today, they would not be required to gain their parents' consent, nor are they given any sort of disclaimer explaining the official medical position on GRT.

This is concerning when you consider the conclusions of the world's largest ever sexual orientation-change efficacy study, the American Psychological Association's 'Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation', which found that 'aversive and behavioural interventions' caused 'harmful mental health effects such as increased anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and loss of sexual functioning in some participants'.

Group leaders and administrators of ex-gay groups are not required to — and generally do not — have any health qualifications. Yet group leaders place themselves in an extremely powerful position, asking often very young teenagers what they fantasise about, who they have had sex with, or how often they masturbate.

This week *Crikey* revealed a University of Canberra doctor [advised a gay student](#) to undergo hormone treatment for his homosexuality. Remarkably, the president of the university's student association, James Pace defended the doctor saying 'We don't feel we should discriminate against her because of her faith.' On the face of it this is tantamount to saying that her right to share her beliefs negates her duty of care as a medical professional.

The Australian Medical Association opposes the use of reparative or conversion therapy that is 'based upon the assumption that homosexuality is a mental disorder and that the patient should change his or her sexual orientation'. Sure enough in August Sydney Exclusive Brethren Doctor Mark Christopher James Craddock was [banned from practise](#) as a GP after he prescribed 'treatment' hormones to a gay patient.

Indeed, ex-gay ministries are becoming increasingly fringe. Exodus International, formerly the world's largest ex-gay ministry, has announced it will no longer associate with or promote therapy that focuses on changing sexual attraction. Former ex-gay group member Ben Gresham is part of a growing push within the evangelical movement who seek to integrate faith with their gay identity. At 24, Gresham is now part of the Hillsong church, whose founder Brian Houston said on Gresham's website that Hillsong no longer supports GRT.

But the debate around GRT is very much alive. Liberty Christian Ministries Incorporated, which 'offers support to men and women who struggle with unwanted same-sex attractions', has travelled five times in the past two years to Toongabbie Christian School in Sydney's outer north-west. A representative from the group has been into the school to discuss 'care' for same-sex attracted youth with staff, and offers students one-on-one sessions.

The Daily Telegraph's Miranda Devine this week [attacked a pilot anti-homophobia program](#) for NSW schools saying parents 'don't expect their values should be subverted by homosexual or any other propaganda'. Devine's story made the front page, but the practice of ex-gay therapy in Sydney high schools barely rates a mention.

It seems at the very least that teenagers should be told explicitly and clearly that recognised psychological and medical organisations warn of the potential health risks of GRT when entering an ex-gay ministry. Furthermore, both the minor's and their parents' written consent should be prerequisite.

Arresting Australia's religious decline

VIDEO

Peter Kirkwood

According to 2011 census data, since 2001 the proportion of the population who belong to a Christian church fell from 68 to 61 per cent. This is evident in all denominations, including the three largest: the proportion of Catholics fell from 27 to 25 per cent, Anglicans, 21 to 17 per cent, and Uniting Church, 6.7 to 5 per cent.

Meanwhile, those reporting 'no religion' increased markedly, from 15 to 22 per cent. This was most evident among younger people, with 28 per cent aged 15–34 saying they had no religious affiliation.

The man featured in this video is a leader in analysing and addressing this problem for Australian Christianity. Adrian Pyle is director of relationships and innovation for the Victorian and Tasmanian Synod of the Uniting Church of Australia, in the Culture and Context Unit of the Uniting Church's Commission for Mission.

[According to its website](#), this new unit contains a number of projects, 'each of them a serious exploration of what theology, spirituality and transformative community looks like in places that the church often doesn't reach, or where it doesn't know what to do when it's there'.

As well as an interview with Pyle, the video contains excerpts from a talk entitled 'Awakening Faith in an Alternative Future' he gave recently at the annual gathering of the [Sea of Faith Network](#) on the Gold Coast. This progressive group describes itself as 'Australians of widely different backgrounds who are interested in the open exploration and non-dogmatic discussion of religion, faith and meaning'.

After finishing high school in Ipswich, Queensland, Pyle studied commerce and economics at the University of Queensland. After completing his degree he worked with business management consultancy firm, Accenture, then as an executive with Telstra and ANZ Bank.

Following this, in 2004 he moved into work as a lay person with the Uniting Church, first in a parish with the job title of community interaction coordinator. He built links with the local community, and sought to break down stereotypes and barriers in communicating with those outside the church.

After this he became director of the Mission Participation Resource Unit in the church, and in 2009 took up his present position as director of relationships and innovation. The brief is community development, fostering relationships with groups outside the church, and bringing innovative thinking and approaches into the church.

Ways out of economic depression

ECONOMICS

Bruce Duncan

Australia has so far escaped much of the havoc caused by the global financial crisis, but it is not immune from the effects of economic ideology, particularly free-market neoliberalism, which typically calls for reduced public spending, balanced budgets, wage and tax cuts, and a smaller role for governments.

We can see the effects of these views, with the Victorian government recently announcing cuts of 4200 public service jobs, and sharply reduced spending on TAFEs. The Queensland government is abolishing 14,000 public service jobs, many in health services, and reducing spending on social services and housing. Even the Commonwealth government is not immune from pressure, as it struggles to produce a surplus budget.

Political hype about balancing budgets can go to absurd extremes. Tony Abbott warned that Australia could go the way of Greece with excessive debt. Such claims reflect a climate of exaggerated concern about debt. Instead Australia could be taking advantage of historically low interest rates and embark on major infrastructure projects, increasing employment and laying the basis for sustained growth in productivity.

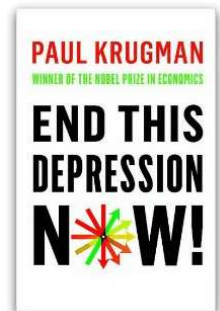
Today's economic debates are similar to those of the 1930s, when people thought of a national economy like that of a household. If you fell into debt, you had to trim back spending. During the Great Depression, governments cut spending as markets collapsed, and sent their economies into a downward spiral only arrested by world war.

Today we face a not dissimilar political climate, with obsessive demands that governments balance budgets by reducing public spending. But cutting budgets will not revive economies.

In the early half of the 20th century, British economist John Maynard Keynes argued that governments could stimulate growth and employment, putting economies back on a growth path. Today one of the clearest voices calling for a return to Keynesian economic policies is Paul Krugman, professor of economics at Princeton University, who won the Nobel Prize in economics in 2008.

In his recent book *End this Depression Now!* Krugman argues that austerity will only impose more pain, entrenching unemployment.

He argues that the US must vigorously revive its economy, and that warnings about a debt crisis are greatly overstated. US borrowing costs are very low, and have in fact been negative. The US had borrowed \$5 trillion in additional debt by



early 2012, which meant an interest burden of \$125 billion a year. In an economy of \$15 trillion a year, this is easily manageable.

Likewise, the European drive to greater austerity is 'deeply destructive'. Krugman says fears of inflation are deluded in such a deep depression, and he suspects that fear is simply a disguise for creditors to insist that governments fully honour debts, and not allow inflation to erode the value of those debts.

Greece aside, the problems of Southern Europe largely stemmed from German capital flooding into Spain and Italy, causing a huge housing bubble, and inflating wages and prices, leaving their industries uncompetitive. Ireland, Spain and Italy had not been profligate, and before the crisis were running budget surpluses, Ireland and Spain with low debt and Italy reducing its debt.

Krugman argues that the way out of the crisis is to allow 'moderate but significant' inflation in surplus countries, and to increase inflation to 3–4 per cent for the Euro zone as a whole, which would gradually erode the public debt. This was how the United States managed its debt after the Second World War. Germany and some smaller countries today need to provide fiscal stimulus, not prolonged austerity.

Other economists support stimulus policies. In early October, the chief economist of the International Monetary Fund, Olivier Blanchard, said it was necessary for Germany to allow higher inflation for relative prices to adjust among struggling Euro countries, lest the crisis continue to drag on for years.

Writing in the *Australian Financial Review*, the economic and political commentator Max Walsh quoted the former chief economist of the IMF, Kenneth Rogoff, that 'a sudden burst of moderate inflation would be extremely helpful in unwinding today's epic debate morass'.

Krugman considers the depression is 'essentially gratuitous: we don't need to be suffering so much pain and destroying so many lives'. He thinks we could end the distress and return to full employment 'very fast, probably in less than two years'.

Alone in Obama's America

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Killing Them Softly* (MA). Director: Andrew Dominik. Starring: Brad Pitt, Ray Liotta, Richard Jenkins, Scoot McNairy, Ben Mendelsohn, James Gandolfini. 97 minutes**

On a television in a grimy bar, freshly minted US president Barack Obama waxes lyrical about the unity of the people. In the foreground, Jackie Cogan (Pitt), a brutal and enigmatic enforcer of the criminal underworld, scoffs at Obama's nice words. America is not a community, he counters — it's a business. And Cogan just wants to get paid. 'I'm living in America,' he has grumbled previously, 'and in America, you're on your own.'

Such is the vision of the decrepit American Dream proffered by Australian filmmaker Dominik (*Chopper*, *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*) in *Killing Them Softly*; a violent parable about American capitalism and the ignorance and incompetence born in bureaucracy.

It takes place in a New Orleans underworld run by a loose committee of mafia 'middle managers'. There's a high-stakes card game in this town run by local mid-wig Markie Trattman (Liotta), where the wiseguys go to throw their cash around. One local gangster comes up with a scheme to rob the game, employing two small-time crooks (McNairy and Mendelsohn) to do the deed. The fallout from their 'perfect plan' is both costly and brutal.

There was a lot of money to be made on the card game, so the main objective is to ensure that the game keeps going. The only way to do that, Cogan explains to the mob lawyer (Jenkins) who enlists his services to help set things to rights, is to restore confidence. Confidence, after all, is key to economic order, as we are reminded by one of the political speeches that are woven, via radio news broadcasts, throughout the film's soundtrack.

These broadcasts underline repeatedly the fact that Dominik's fictional scenario is not just an economic crisis in miniature — it is the Global Financial Crisis rendered as bloodsoaked morality tale. Its characters operate in a moral vacuum according to the dictums of the free market. It is survival not just of the fittest but of the one who best understands and adheres most slavishly to the principles of dog-eat-dog capitalism.

Restoring confidence entails making an example of Trattman. Cogan knows Trattman isn't responsible, but the gangster's peers have placed the blame squarely in his corner. He must be seen to pay. On the question of whether a beating will suffice or if Trattman must die, Cogan and the lawyer do not agree, and they debate the point as coolly as bankers in a board meeting. (Frequently, Dominik's script is wickedly funny as well as shrewd.)

Subsequently Trattman is subject to two acts of violence: first, a beating by henchmen, played out in gruesome real time; then, a shooting by Cogan, portrayed in highly stylised super-slow-mo. The contrast reinforces the cold-bloodedness of Cogan's commitment to the market forces; he prefers to kill from a distance, without the emotion of human entanglements. In the cynical world Dominik has created, this fact puts Cogan in good stead.

Dominik's point about dehumanisation and the market is salient, but he labours it. Gandolfini appears as a once formidable wiseguy, Mickey, now bloated and despondent on the excesses of criminality. Cogan summons him to share his murderous assignment. But far from being ready to spring into action, Mickey swills martinis and beer, courts prostitutes, and soliloquises at length on the impact the demands that his career have made on his marriage.

Dominik's taut and thoughtful thriller slackens through these scenes. It's easy to infer that Mickey has sacrificed personal relationships in favour of material gratification, and is worse off for it. In fact his extended monologues appear to be an attempt to connect on a human level with Cogan, though Cogan can countenance this only as far as it furthers his economic objectives; in the end he is all about business.

But you can't help but think that someone like Quentin Tarrantino (to whom Dominik owes a stylistic debt) might have pulled this off better. In his hands the monologues would have been riveting; Dominik's writing just isn't as sharp, and so these scenes add flab rather than muscle to the film. A lost opportunity perhaps, given the coup of having Pitt and Gandolfini — both very good actors — in the room together.

Killing Them Softly is a political but not a partisan film. Obama is portrayed, through the lens of the characters and their experiences, as an idealist but not an ideologue. To them he is but the latest leader whose nice words about solidarity are not reflected in their ordinary reality, where it is indeed dog eat dog and the spoils go to the most calculating and vicious. As a morality play the film is steeped in but implicitly rebukes such cynicism.

Worshipping Princes Romney and Obama

POLITICS

Zac Alstin



Whatever happened to American Christians' concerns over Mitt Romney's Mormon faith?

Like concerns about Romney's conservatism and pro-life record, theological issues have been brushed aside in anticipation of November's election.

[According to Tony Perkins from the Family Research Council](#), 'growing enthusiasm' for Romney's campaign has much to do with the Obama administration's support for same-sex marriage and his Contraceptive Mandate, which forces religiously affiliated organisations such as hospitals and universities to include coverage for contraceptives in their health insurance plans.

The Contraceptive Mandate's implications for religious freedom have convinced some to vote for Romney despite doubts about his pro-life record, and broader concerns about the 'marriage of convenience' between pro-life Christians and the Republican Party.

Prolific American Catholic blogger Mark Shea has been especially critical of the Republicans' failure to represent the pro-life movement. [Shea sees Romney as merely](#) the most recent and lacklustre avatar of a Republican Party in which 'the so-called 'pro-life Republicans' regard proliferators as useful idiots'. Shea views Romney's pro-life 'conversion' as suspect and his support for torture as typical of a moral decline in the conservative movement.

Shea cops some criticism for his position, ranging from 'Obama thanks you for your vote, your check is in the mail' to 'Evidently, there is no candidate pure and correct enough for you', and even: 'It's not that complicated: Obama wants to kill the Church and Romney doesn't. Anything after that is simple posturing.'

While Obama's attack on religious freedom might justify voting for 'the lesser of two evils', let's not forget that the lesser of two evils is still an evil. Shea concedes he respects the 'I have to vote Romney because Obama is an open and naked enemy of the Faith', but he is 'not going to pretend this makes Romney/Ryan a good ticket'.

This attitude of reluctant support can be hard to maintain in the fiercely oppositional atmosphere of partisan politics, especially in the prelude to an election. Elections demand more than a reluctant vote. They demand professions of support aimed at winning further converts. Elections are a battle in which *esprit de corps* outranks careful consideration. There are no bumper stickers extolling 'Romney 2012: not as bad as the other guy!'

An American Christian who rejects Obama yet has serious misgivings about

Romney, might choose to vote for neither. But refusing to vote will still leave one open to accusations of supporting Obama. [According to one blogger](#), 'A Christian nonvote is a vote for Obama in that it fails to affirmatively cancel out an Obama vote. Furthermore, any Christian who votes for Obama will get to take that up with God.'

The implication is that God wants you to vote for Romney, though lobby group ['Catholics for Romney' suggest you go further](#), giving 'full-hearted effort to elect Mitt Romney as the next president of the United States'.

The anomaly from this outsider's perspective is that despite a religious tradition [warning](#): 'Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save', seemingly devout religious believers are emotionally invested in, and hoping for the victory of Romney over Obama, despite the fact that both men, by their wealth and political power, are surely princes in a modern guise. Does God truly command full-hearted support for Prince Romney?

Even reports of 'growing enthusiasm' for Romney betray a religious undertone. [Enthusiasm](#) is literally 'divine inspiration', 'en-theos'; to be 'in God', with the modern definitions: 'excitement' or 'zeal'. Ought a religious believer be excited by a political campaign? Historically, the idea of *contemptus mundi* or 'scorn for the world' reminded Christians that worldly affairs were not worthy of excitement or trust. Perhaps a little scorn for the world can help keep us all sane?

The temptation to trust the governance of Prince Romney or Prince Obama is magnified by modern democracy. It is easier to 'render unto Caesar' when Caesar rules by might or monarchy, because then Caesar is not our problem. But representative democracy gives us the illusion of control and responsibility. We succumb to the idea that democracy changes the world on a spiritual level, that presidents and prime ministers are entirely different from kings and princes. It's hard to have scorn for the world when you feel directly responsible for how it is run.

The problem is not voting for Romney, but trusting in him. Devout people may vote according to conscience and duty, but ought not submit their hearts to the shame of hoping and trusting in princes and men.

Cat's eye view on Australia's poor

POLITICS

Fatima Measham

The very first article I wrote for *Eureka Street* reflected on [the interaction between attitudes to poverty](#) and public policies around it. It was published in 2003. It rose out of an unsettling encounter with a level of privation that I thought did not exist in my adopted country.

I had gone to a house in the northern suburbs to collect a cat. A colleague at a mentoring program had told me one of her case-families had kittens they'd be glad to give away. And so we found ourselves, in a house with only an armchair and a mattress for furniture, surrounded by five unkempt kids, speaking to a woman with a shy, weary face.

We selected a male tabby and gave the kids a box of chocolates. The eldest boy carried the kitten for us as we walked to our car. 'You'll take care of him, right?' he asked, his gaze direct and serious, the question tugging inexplicably deep. It wasn't until we drove away that it sunk in — where I had just been. I felt the weight of it.

I had worked in areas of disadvantage in my native Philippines, as a student volunteer and as a staff member at a social research institute. It was completely unnerving to recognise poverty in a quiet suburban street in Australia.

Until then, I'd thought everyone was fine. That in fact everything was great — universal healthcare, employment assistance, family benefits, subsidies for tertiary study. I had driven past street after street of brick houses, assuming there were well-fed, well-clothed families in all of them.

I discovered instead that there was a layer of Australian society that was largely invisible. If the poor ever appeared in media discussions, loaded terms were used: 'dole bludger', 'welfare dependent', 'undeserving' — all of which signified blame. I struggled to reconcile this negativity with the kid who had just given me a kitten, probably one of the few things he could call his own.

It is disheartening to see that negative attitudes toward poverty remain unchanged and continue to shape public policy.

When I wrote that article, there were an estimated 1.5 million Australians living in poverty. The Australian Council of Social Service reported recently that there are now more than 2.2 million Australians living on less than half the median wage. The poverty line for a single adult is calculated at less than \$358 weekly disposable income, at a time when the median weekly house rent in Melbourne is \$360 (the cheapest compared to other cities).



The anodyne response to these issues suggests that people are either in denial, or are falsely comparing poverty here to the absolute poverty experienced overseas. Of course, they may simply not care.

The recent downgrade in sole parent payments to lever 'workforce participation' is symptomatic of a welfare system that elevates individual agency above the social conditions that inhibit it. The very things that had led to my naïve perception that everyone was fine are the same things that are used against people who are not fine.

Yet it is clear that specific groups are meeting obstacles that they cannot hurdle, or that are not present for other groups. Sole parents (mostly women), elderly singles and social security-reliant families are at high risk of poverty. The idea of individual agency becomes inadequate against such patterns.

The notion that people need 'incentives' to work — namely, cuts to government assistance — is also inadequate when one considers that such payments are precisely enabling many Australians to work part-time while raising families or study in hope of a better-paying job.

In any case, it is one thing to lever workforce entry, and another to guarantee that suitable jobs are in place and that jobs growth will match increased participation. Without the second half of the equation, government erodes dignity in the name of empowerment. It strips work of its humanising properties, reducing it to a number of hours that satisfy malleable criteria.

It defies good sense, as does the idea that individual agency, or lack of it, is an obstacle to participation. In order to argue that people only need to pick up their bootstraps to be completely self-reliant, one would have to assume that everybody starts out on a level field.

This would be an outright denial of the truth: that we do not get to choose the circumstances of our birth and childhood, though these have the greatest impact of our life; that these circumstances vary widely and may cast a shadow across generations despite individual efforts to step away; that even those of us born in the best circumstances can make life-changing mistakes, fall ill or experience accidents that leave us no choice but to rely on government and hope that policy changes will not leave us worse off.

Denial of these truths lies at the heart of negative attitudes toward people living in poverty, and influences many of the policies that affect them. It is an abdication of our responsibility to vulnerable members of society. This is unacceptable in a country with the means to support them.

Scene from an Athens newspaper office

POETRY

Jena Woodhouse

Feeling the heat

Scene from a newspaper office, Athens

The sports reporter scoffs French fries
as if his life depends on it, and sated,

falls asleep on his computer.

The music expert spends the nights

in lonely bars, disconsolate;

the women almost work themselves to death.

The pagemakers wear masks

of chronic weariness, and stubbled cheeks:

stoics conditioned by a heartless press.

The ringmaster, once leonine,

a lean and mean and hungry beast

whose twitching tail is feared more

than the lash, bares yellowed teeth.

Smoke rises from untidy desks

as from a ship that's sinking fast,

taking all hands on its burning deck ...

On Likavittos

Athens 18/10/11

Attenuated spires of cypress,

spiky octopus of aloes,

cyclamen the earth hoards

for the autumn,

precious golden crocus;

old woman who tends St George's,

stringing beans contentedly;

friendly tortoise, ambling
to meet me on the dusty crest;
cicadas chanting their vibrato
to the noonday sun,
as for millennia their kind has done;
streets leading to Syntagma Square
choked with banners, protesters;
graffiti on a wall in Ambelokipi:
silence is violence.

Early cyclists

Any moment now, I'll glimpse
the skimming Cyclops eyes;
they'll hurtle past
in cohorts riding three abreast,
bug-headed creatures of the dawn
and twilight,
black with neon stripes,
leg-pistons pumping whirring wheels,
words snatched by slipstream's
ripping sound
along the cusp of dark,
unzipping daybreak.

Surgeon

Each time I glimpse the surgeon
there seems less of him:
thin as a whippet's shadow,
wafer-passenger in lifts,
between sightings he seems to wane;
only his eyes and lips
bear intimations of vitality,

as if those lives
he wrests back from the brink
have sapped his strength.
Yet I sense he will not cease
to grapple with those toxic seeds.
Emaciated to the bone,
quietly he carries on,
and life keeps taking from him
for its needs.

Spitfire Girls*

Suddenly the sky became their space,
the air their gauge,
rushing past the Spitfire cockpit's
bubble and the fuselage;
the lives they had been groomed for
sloughed off like constricting, outgrown skin
as chrysalis gave way to wings,
strictures sank in slipstream.
Powder puffs and lacquered nails
were not anomalous to this:
glamour helped to steel the nerves,
the better to remain aloft
in aircraft you had never flown
in practice tests — fledgelings
in control of Blenheims,
Wellingtons and Tiger Moths —
antiquated rigs; new models
fresh from the assembly line;
pristine manual tucked into
boot-top fleece for reference:

no aviation charts or navigators,
just the naked eye
alert for landmarks far below,
hills camouflaged by cloud ahead.
Then came vicissitudes of peace
when Spitfire women dreamed of flight,
never to regain the skies:
shackled to the earth by red tape,
gender, dearth of openings,
caught between the thermals
of intense desire and irony —
birds of diverse feathers, born
for heaven's gate, only to find
the leather glove and tether of the falconer
had realigned, to redefine their sense
of time untrammelled within boundless space,
pulsing like adrenalin from fingertips —
and rein them in.

**The women of the ATA, Britain's Air Transport Auxiliary, 1939—1945*

Gender and class equality should go hand in hand

POLITICS

John Falzon



Last week we witnessed one of the most [powerful articulations of gender equality](#) by any prime minister. It was heartening that so many women felt the prime minister was giving voice to their experience of gender-based oppression and discrimination. And it was significant that we have reached a stage in our evolution as a nation where feminist analysis is not marginalised even though the reality of sexism is still with us.

But it was saddening that on the same day the Government and Opposition pushed through legislation to force more than 140,000 sole parents onto a Newstart Allowance that has seen no real increase since 1994.

There was no articulation of gender equality in this action. Rather, there was an expression of a warped political consensus that these households, predominantly headed by women, are fair game; that it is alright to put the boot into these families because they are purportedly outside the moral boundaries of the sacred labour market.

No one is questioning the logic of employment participation as a policy objective. Indeed, around 50 per cent of the affected sole parents are already in some form of paid work. We do, however, need to note the inaccuracy of describing these parents as 'jobless' or 'workless'. This assumption bespeaks a real lack of understanding of the value of caring as a social good that goes way beyond the bounds of commodification.

The fundamental flaw of this legislation is that, though it will result in a saving of \$728 million over four years, it will do nothing to assist sole parents into employment. It will result in a decline in the availability of some of the supports that might have been available on the Parenting Payment, and a weekly cut of between \$65 and \$115.

You don't help people into jobs by forcing them into poverty. You don't build people up by putting them down.

We can only hope that this cut does not result in homelessness for some of these families. A weekly cut of \$100 could easily mean the difference between paying the rent and having to sleep in a car.

The Parliament's own Human Rights Committee was unconvinced by the Government's assurance that these families were not going to be pushed into poverty. In a worrying sign of the Government's lack of respect for the Committee's recommendations it pressed ahead with the legislation, employing the rhetoric that this was a measure designed to lift women out of poverty by

moving them into paid work. If only that were true!

In an [excellent analysis of that day of contradictions](#) , writer Stephanie Convery declares that 'standing up for women's rights is not just about calling sexism for what it is':

It's about agitating for specific change. It's about making concrete demands of society and of the government ... I don't care how many sharp speeches [Gillard] makes: her government is making life for some of the most vulnerable women in Australia even harder than it already is, and I want no part in it ... If we want to stand up for women, let's start by standing up for these women.

It is time to reject the consensus that it is okay to make people experiencing poverty bear the brunt of fiscal austerity; that a chunk of the surplus should be skimmed from the pockets of single mums and their children. It is time to lift the Newstart Allowance, and it is time to stop blaming people for being left out or pushed out.

As the groundbreaking 1996 Australian Bishops' Social Justice Statement declared: 'In the main, people are poor not because they are lazy or lacking in ability or because they are unlucky. They are poor because of the way society, including its economic system, is organised.'

Anti-Poverty Week (14—20 October) exists so that more of us will be impelled by solidarity and compassion to make poverty eradication a reality, by addressing its structural and historical causes; so that the mainstreaming of gender analysis will go hand-in-hand with the acknowledgement of the necessity of class analysis, and so that none of us become silent about the fact that poverty is caused by bad policy, not bad behaviour.

Communist China keeps a grip on the gun

POLITICS

Jeremy Clarke

These have been difficult times to be a diplomat. First there was the death in Libya of the US ambassador, Chris Stevens; then there were protests in Sydney outside the US consulate. Recently the streets of China have been filled with protestors outside the Japanese embassy.



Whereas diplomats in Sydney and Benghazi might have felt scared, this was most likely not the case in Beijing. That says much about the political situation in China, both in general and especially this year.

Many people know the first part of one of Mao's most famous dictums: 'Power comes from the barrel of the gun'. The truth of this has been shown often in post-1949 China, including during the democracy protests in Tiananmen in 1989. Fewer people know the second part of Mao's dictum: that 'the Party must control the gun'.

The Communist Party of China's approach to governance rests on maintaining control, on ensuring that the Party has the ultimate authority and the means to exert it. Allowing the army's guns to fall into the hands of others, or of having their own grip on those guns weakened, is the ultimate threat to the Party's longevity — and it knows it.

Thus 1989 was seen as a problem needing a drastic solution because it appeared that the Party was losing control. The use of guns allowed the Party to maintain power in the heat of the moment. It also bought them time to implement economic reform policies even more strongly and thereby satisfy many of the complaints of the protestors, ultimately restoring the Party's long-term control.

This year two events have challenged the Party's grip on the gun, and raised a more fundamental question about who is actually in control of the Party.

First has been the lead-up to the Party's 18th National Party Congress. At this meeting, on 8 November, the installation of the next generation of leaders will take place. This leadership transition has seen much jostling behind the scenes and brutal intra-party politics, as faction takes on faction, and patrons call in favours.

Usually most of this is beyond the view of outsiders but this year the amazing case of former high-ranking leader Bo Xilai has brought these internecine fights to the fore. The fact that the Party has now convicted his wife, tried his police chief Wang Lijun and expelled Bo from the Party to face charges means the infighting has reached a kind of resolution. The grip has firmed again. Or, at least, Party

leaders are once more trying to show a united face.

Second, the Party has again been able to play the patriotic card as a convenient distraction, thanks to the flare-up over the [Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands](#) . In this instance, the card was first played by the Japanese; it is unclear why the Tokyo governor acted provocatively when he did, but at any rate, Japan purchased the islands and relations between Japan and China reached a new low. This led thousands to protest on the streets of China's cities.

What was most noticeable in Beijing was that there were also thousands of police, soldiers, fire brigades and public security officials on the street. For all that protestors held signs that read 'Choose war with Japan', 'Get lost Japanese dogs' or more simply 'Kill, Kill, Kill', there were police corralling groups of protestors along the streets, standing guard in front of businesses and protecting the embassy. There was no loss of control.

The Party could allow a street protest because it unified the people against a hated enemy (the wounds of the Second Sino-Japanese War run deep) and because it took focus away from their internal troubles. But it would not allow the protests to get out of hand as that could spiral too quickly into an assault on the Party's grip on the gun.

Thus for a Japanese embassy official these were difficult times but not deadly ones. For the Party they were yet more challenges in the difficult leadership transition, which might not even be resolved by the Congress.

Bringing Parliament out from behind the school toilets

EDITORIAL

Andrew Hamilton



The last two weeks of Parliament have been dispiriting. We have the right to expect that when our representatives gather in Parliament they will discuss what matters to Australian society and to human beings. That they should waste their time talking about a radio announcer, the party leaders' appeal to the other sex, and the sexual behaviour of one of their members is a betrayal of whatever trust we have in them.

Whatever primary school children may talk about behind the school toilets, we would expect them to attend in class to what matters more seriously than politicians have done in Parliament.

Such self-indulgence has consequences. It breeds cynicism, the belief that what we have seen recently in Parliament is all there is. It encourages us to believe that a sufficient explanation of why policies are adopted and executed can be found by asking whom politicians hate, who is in bed with whom, and who has paid off whom. If that were all there is, then it would not matter that Parliament is scripted like a reality show.

It does matter, though, because Parliament holds up a mirror to our society. Cynicism is not destructive simply because it makes us accept bad behaviour as normal. Even worse, it makes us automatically dismiss any acts of apparent generosity or self-sacrifice. Instead of admiring and being encouraged by them, we immediately ask what were their real and base motivations. We assume that public life is a moral wasteland in which ethics are relevant only as a source of tropes for spin.

Once cynicism reigns in our view of public life we almost necessarily lose sight of what really matters: human dignity. When we are convinced that public conversation and the development of policy reflect only politicians' private agendas, it becomes painful to look steadily at the faces of those who are the victims of public policies. It is easier to look away and to become detached. Respect and honour are reserved for our private lives.

There is a close connection between respect for human dignity and dignified and respectful behaviour in Parliament. The former means that each human being is precious and is not to be used as an end to others' goals. That basic attitude is embodied in respect for the human beings to whom we relate in daily life.

Where respect in ordinary human relationships fails, as it has in Parliament these last weeks, we lose confidence that other human beings will not be used as means for political goals. The path that leads from Parliament to the brutalities suffered by asylum seekers in detention centres, Nauru and Manus Island is direct

and well paved.

The reasons why Parliament has descended to its current depths have been well canvassed. They are not unique to Australia. The remedy is often sought in inspiring leadership. But leadership does not come out of a moral vacuum.

The present crisis invites us all to ask ourselves what matters, to resist the temptation to say of our private lives or of public life, 'That's all there is', and to protest when human dignity is infringed, both in the lesser sense of respectful behaviour and in the fundamental sense of the brutal treatment of those considered dispensable.

Those of us who believe that it would be craven to accept what we have seen in Parliament this week cannot expect a quick fix. We commit ourselves to serious labour.

Before and after Bali's searing flash

POLITICS

Pat Walsh

Over 200 people, many of them Australians, died horribly on or following the night of 12 October 2002 in Bali, wiped out instantly in a toxic flash of chemicals and hate or perishing later from ghastly burns and injuries. This mini-Hiroshima also injured many and left them and the relatives of victims, Indonesians and foreigners alike, bleeding deep inside.



The bombings in Kuta ten years ago were a defining moment. For all involved with Bali, though most particularly victims and their families, time in Bali is now divided into before and after that searing flash.

For most, 'before' is shorthand for an imagined golden age of non-violence and peace. Seductively packaged by the tourism industry, Bali was, and is, marketed in picture-perfect images as a paradise. Bali is 'the morning of the world', innocent and fresh, a window onto life as it should be before being exposed to the cruel light of day.

That powerful image brought both revellers and Indonesian hospitality workers to the Sari Club and Paddy's Pub that fateful night.

'After' is the rude realisation that Bali is vulnerable and not all it appears to be. Globalisation, deregulation of the Indonesian economy, and Bali's insatiable appetite, if not addiction, to tourism have exposed this delicate organism to powerful, sometimes destructive, forces.

The bombing did not target Balinese directly but the collateral damage to tourism, their bread and butter, was taken very personally by the Balinese. Drawing his finger across his throat in a slitting motion, a smiling Balinese told me he is happy the bombers have been executed. Tourism has since recovered and Bali's economy is growing faster than the national average.

Though perpetrated by non-Balinese in the name of Islam, the bombing is also an unpleasant reminder that Bali is much more complex than the smiles of its people and commercialised image suggest. The massacres by Balinese in 1965 of some 100,000 fellow Balinese demonstrate that, like other societies, Bali is capable of extreme violence when it feels threatened.

Then it was the spectre of communistic atheism. Today other forces threaten the balance and sense of control so highly prized by the Balinese. Islam, colonisation by Jakarta, and economic inequity are cited as examples.

The shock waves from the bombing rippled far and wide, not least to the 22 countries outside Indonesia whose nationals died. Working in Timor-Leste at the time, I recall fears that Dili could be next, given the presence of a large expatriate

community and reported claims by Osama bin Laden that Australians were targeted in Bali because he (wrongly) held Australia responsible for Timor-Leste's liberation from Indonesia.

Already fortified in response to the September 2001 attacks in New York, the Australian Embassy tightened security and the UN forbade its staff to visit Bali.

At the time my daughter was enjoying the unique experience of life in an Islamic boarding school near Banyuwangi in East Java across the strait from Bali. She recalls watching television coverage of the bombing with the Muslim head of the school, his family and teachers. They grieved with her in utter disbelief at the loss of innocent Australian lives and condemned the killings as murder and a distortion of Islam.

When as worried parents my wife and I visited to check on her, we were treated like family by the pesantren. Like the outpouring of grief recently seen in Melbourne in response to the murder of Jill Meagher, the bombing brought us together in human solidarity.

Many other examples of Australian-Indonesian solidarity since the bombing can be pointed to, including today's visit to the bomb site by PM Gillard and President SBY.

The recently concluded [Ubud Writers and Readers Festival](#) held in Bali, which I attended, is another good example. Now in its ninth year, the festival is the brain-child of a dynamic and creative Australian, Janet De Neefe, who started it in response to the Bali bombing.

Oddly its program did not feature the tenth anniversary, but the festival was an outstanding example of international cooperation of obvious benefit to Ubud and Indonesia. It brought many published writers and their fans to Ubud, in the process showcasing the best side of Bali and a number of Indonesian writers to the world.

Many died as a result of the 12 October bombing, including suicide bombers and their handlers. It is not easy to pray for the repose of their souls. At the very least, may their victims rest in peace and the people of Bali be allowed to live in peace and determine their own future, free from further violence.

Historical precedents for Jones' Shamegate

BY THE WAY

Brian Matthews

The name Charles Hughes Cousens is not one that has been canvassed at any time during the lamentable and often tawdry apology for debate and discussion that has characterised the more frenzied responses to the Alan Jones affair, but perhaps it should have been.

And so should have 'Section 80.1 of the Australian Criminal Code Act 1995 [which] makes it an offence to cause the death of, or harm to, the Sovereign, the heir apparent, the Governor-General or the Prime Minister'. And, while we're at it, add in, even more remarkably, a statute 'made at Westminster in the Parliament holden in the Feast of Saint Hilary in 1351, the Twenty-fifth Year of the Reign of King Edward the Third'.

As described by Ivan Chapman in *The Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Cousens, a graduate of the Royal Military College Sandhurst, was commissioned 'on 31 January 1924 and posted to the 2nd Battalion, Sherwood Foresters, in India'. The Foresters, however, lived too high for Cousens and unable 'to afford [their] expensive lifestyle ... he resigned his commission on 29 June 1927 and worked his way to Sydney'.

Various jobs followed, including some time on the wharves, a stint boxing preliminary rounds at a suburban stadium, and newspaper advertising, but he found his niche at last at a radio station — 2GB — and so his story becomes tenuously intertwined with that of Jones, who joined 2GB some 70 years later.

The quality of Cousens' voice, writes Chapman, and 'pleasing personality soon made him a popular announcer ... While uncommitted to any political viewpoint, he delivered a number of anti-communist broadcasts.'

As a Captain in the AIF in the Second World War, he was commended for his leadership but was captured during the fall of Singapore and ended up in the soon-to-be-notorious Changi Prisoner of War camp.

The Japanese, however, having discovered his radio experience, first tried to force him to do propaganda broadcasts then transported him to Japan where he wrote scripts, instructed Japanese radio announcers and worked with the infamous Tokyo Rose.

All this was done, as he always firmly insisted, under threat of torture. In any case the broadcasts were basically ephemeral and full of deliberate errors but also, on occasion, contained subtle information for Allied use.

Cousens was arrested when he returned to Sydney after the war and charged under the 1351 Statute with treason — a capital offence. Newspapers called it the 'Treason Trial' and, among many assorted slanders, the *Canberra Times* labelled

him 'Australia's Lord Haw Haw'.

Flaws in the evidence led to the charge being dropped. The option of a court martial was then keenly proposed by some sections of the military but abandoned because it 'would have the appearance of persecution and would thus be politically inexpedient'. In the end, military authorities stripped Cousens of his commission, a last ditch humiliation so patently vindictive that it ennobled rather than diminished him.

Cousens' plight while a prisoner of the Japanese was strikingly similar to that of British author P. G. Wodehouse — the creator of [Jeeves and Bertie Wooster](#) among others.

As George Orwell puts it in his 1945 essay 'In Defence of P. G. Wodehouse': 'When the Germans made their rapid advance through Belgium in the early summer of 1940, they captured, among other things, Mr P. G. Wodehouse, who had been living throughout the early part of the war in his villa at Le Touquet, and seems not to have realised until the last moment that he was in any danger.'

Placed initially under house arrest, Wodehouse was moved to Berlin when the Germans — like the Japanese dealing with Cousens half a world away — realised that his literary talents, like Cousens' broadcasting experience, could be turned to useful propaganda.

'On 25 June 1941,' Orwell writes, 'the news came that Wodehouse ... was living at the Adlon Hotel in Berlin. On the following day the public was astonished to learn that he had agreed to do some broadcasts of a 'non-political' nature over the German radio.'

In a brilliant analysis of Wodehouse, his mentality and the imaginative world of his comic novels, Orwell demonstrates conclusively 'that the events of 1941 do not convict Wodehouse of anything worse than stupidity', that 'his moral outlook remained that of a public-school boy' and that, in considering his actions, one must allow for 'Wodehouse's complete lack ... of political awareness'.

Nevertheless, the dogs were loose. Journalist William 'Cassandra' Connor, the leading 'shock jock' of his day, accused Wodehouse of 'selling his country', of being a 'Quisling', and of 'worshipping the Führer'. A traitor, in short, who should be executed. A belated rapprochement 30 years later did not attract Wodehouse home and he died aged 93 in New York.

Cousens' ordeal as the target of a treason-baying press and its parallel in Wodehouse's victimisation by the vulpine Cassandra, lie in the distant but pointed background to Jones' assault on Prime Minister Julia Gillard. His odious reference to the death of her father, obliquely reprised by Tony Abbott in Parliament, was only the most infamous and reviled of his several slurs.

Enrolling Gillard in the Cousens-Wodehouse line, though no doubt unconsciously, Jones has made the Cassandra-like claim that Gillard's behaviour in

imposing the carbon price 'borders on the treasonous' and, apparently impatient with the modern wishy-washy attitude to treason, agreed with one of his callers advocating a return to the more stringent methods of the past: 'Yeah, that's it. Bring back the guillotine!'

Whatever Gillard's 'crimes', 'treason' is surely too strong a word to describe them. On the other hand, consider again Section 80.1 of the Australian Criminal Code Act 1995 which makes it 'an offence to cause ... harm to ... the Prime Minister' — in light of this, it seems Jones might be, as the detectives say, a person of interest.

An Anglican view of Vatican II

RELIGION

Charles Sherlock

In 1963 when I was at Sydney University I travelled daily on the Hunters Hill ferry, on which I first met a Roman Catholic, Michelle. She invited me to a home meeting where a priest was introducing the 'Ecumenical Council' meeting in Rome. I was impressed that the priest was happy to respond to questions, and keen for these young adults to explore their faith. It was my introduction to Vatican II, which was to play a significant part in my life.

My only previous contact with Catholics was avoiding the local Catholic school when walking home, for fear of having stones thrown at me, in my state primary school uniform — sadly, some state schoolers did likewise to Catholic students. I remember it as a parable of pre-Vatican II Catholic-Protestant relationships in Australia.

By 1966 Australian Anglicans were exploring liturgical revision. I have vivid memories of four stimulating lectures given by (later Archbishop) Donald Robison on this to the Sydney University Anglican Society.

Yet it was years before I realised the debt owed to the scholars behind Vatican II: the Anglican world of Cranmer, Restoration, Wesley, the Anglo-catholic revival and fights over ritualism dominated the revision agenda. I studied Latin at uni — which later proved to be a great investment — but Roman Catholicism was a parallel universe.

The late 1960s saw me in Canberra, living in a public servant's hostel. A good number of Catholic residents went to Mass early on Sundays so as to have the day free. My pattern was to attend 8am Holy Communion at St John's, return for breakfast, then head back to help with Sunday School.

I will never forget coming back to one incredibly noisy Sunday morning breakfast at which most Mass attendees were very angry — 'I never realised it was about God' sums up the general viewpoint. This was the first time these young blokes had experienced the Mass in English. A fortnight later only three were going — Legion of Mary members, whom I got to know as fellow believers.

Having a keen interest in liturgical revision, as a theological student I soon found Dom Gregory Dix, and then the documents of Vatican II, a revelation. I was especially impressed with the 'application' work of Anneliese Reinhardt and Greg Manley, whose *The Art of Praying Liturgy* became a text for my students.

I see three particular fruits of the Second Vatican Council as significant for Anglicans, and other non-Roman Christian traditions.

First was putting the liturgy into the vernacular: the Mass was no longer a mystery, but something all could understand. ICET's *Prayers we have in Common*

emerged in 1970, and many saw that we were closer theologically than previously realised. One unhappy consequence was growing misunderstanding of 'hospitality': few non-RCs would want to receive communion at a Latin Mass (and only a small proportion of Catholics then did so regularly).

Common language, and reception becoming normal across most Christian traditions, saw hospitality become a possibility — and a barrier.

A second gift is the Three-Year Lectionary, which Australian Anglicans welcomed in *An Australian Prayer Book* (1977). Vatican II drew Protestants back to reading the Bible shaped by the Gospel. Knowing that congregations across the nation are reading the same scriptures has led to huge shifts in ecumenical openness.

And thirdly, Vatican II opened up ecumenical (and inter-faith) relationships, in particular the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC), which I am privileged to be part of (this is where the Latin comes in handy!). Its Agreed Statements have encouraged Anglicans and RCs to be open to one another at local level.

For myself, I have deeply appreciated two features of the theological work of my Catholic colleagues on the Commission: the utter priority of grace, and their fresh reading of the scriptures.

What then are my hopes? Above all, that both the Holy See and the Anglican Communion would act on the work ARCIC has done — thus far, a very slow process. If we could do so, the divisions between our Communion would soon disappear.

More particularly, I look for a radical reappraisal of the Curia, whose dominance in our global marketplace culture is now a theological issue. But this also demands greater Anglican willingness better to balance the universal and local dimensions of Christian identity.

Further, I look to see the office of the Bishop of Rome reformed in such a way that all who own the name of Christ can receive this personal embodiment of our unity as 'Mr Christian' — and for Rome to be open to this global ministry being filled by a 'Mrs Christian'.

Defining Vatican II's rules of engagement

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton



Catholic discussion of Vatican II is about more than a Council. It is also about the legitimacy of different ways of being Catholic. The question most recently debated — whether the Council represented a change in Catholic teaching and life from what had gone before — invites a judgment on change subsequent to the Council.

The question about teaching is complex. But Vatican II certainly did mark a break with the past in one significant respect: namely, in the way in which the documents it generated addressed their audience.

In contrast to previous Councils which were generally called in times of crises to offer authoritative resolution of disputes about faith, Vatican II did not set out to define faith through clear statements of unacceptable positions or to legislate in the face of abuses.

Its address was less magisterial than pastoral in the sense that the account it gave of faith and its tone was encouraging. It was designed to attract the Catholic audience and to model ways of reflecting on faith and living it.

Changes in forms of address are not insignificant. They shape subsequent reflection about faith by encouraging distinctive emphases and metaphors and imagining the relationships between speakers and hearers in distinctive ways. The generally pastoral and conversational rhetoric of Vatican II encouraged participants to reflect on their inherited tradition, and to listen to and take one another seriously.

It was designed not to end discussion but to begin and to deepen it. But it presupposed that both parties were knowledgeable and grounded in faith.

Vatican II primarily addressed Catholics. But its change of address inevitably also affected relationships with the broader society. The Vatican Council itself modelled this conversation in its document, [*Gaudium et Spes \(The Church in the Modern World\)*](#). This broke new ground. And it became the focus of controversy about the Council.

The then Fr Jozef Ratzinger shared his reservations about the document very early. He criticised it for seeking an imagined common ground for conversation instead of speaking boldly out of Christian faith. He believed this approach unlikely to persuade non-Christians.

He also found its presentation of current social issues to be superficial and ungrounded, reaching into areas where the Church had no competence. His own

understanding of how conversation with the secular world should be conducted can be seen in his Encyclicals which work out of deep theological reflection to comment on such issues as the economic order and the role of government.

Benedict's form of address is consistent with that of Vatican II, but not uniquely so. He is right to insist that Catholic conversation about faith won't go far unless it is based in commitment and familiarity with the tradition. In conversation we must reach out from whom we are and what we know, and not simply accept our conversation partners' perspective.

He is also right to criticise the identification of the spirit or philosophy of Vatican II with the unqualified endorsement of principles of non-discrimination, of individual choice, or of a consequentialist ethic.

But these qualifications do not rule out the address adumbrated in *Gaudium et Spes* where Catholics engage with others on public issues and seek a shared language. This presupposes in Catholics a deep understanding of their tradition and a commitment to follow Jesus. Like other participants in the conversation they will commend their proposals less by argument than by the match between what they advocate and the generosity of their lives.

Conversation of this kind also implies that its participants will be open to learn from others and will be led to question their own presuppositions.

Participants in the debates about Vatican II can be grouped according to their attitudes to the forms of address it employed. There are those who distrust the pastoral and open address of Vatican II even within the Church, regarding it as corrosive of Catholic truth and authority.

Others regard it as legitimate within the Church provided that it is anchored to a firm commitment to the Church and acceptance of authoritative teaching. This seems to be Pope Benedict's position.

Others, including myself, wish to adapt this address for the broader society, again on the basis of a commitment to Christ within the church. And finally some believe Catholic conversation within and outside the Catholic Church should not be constrained by commitments to church life and discipline.

If four football teams ran out on to the field on Grand Final day, one might expect confusion until the rules of engagement were clarified. We should not be surprised by the debate about the legacy of Vatican II.

Mysticism and the Beatles

MUSIC

Philip Harvey

'There's a Place' is one of my favourite Beatles songs. The B-side to 'Twist and Shout' never makes any top-100 lists. But the sounds are unearthly to me. John Lennon's strident harmonica and the transcendent duo lines work in contrast to the moodiness of the words. The emotion still hits me 50 years later.

The song draws on the early '60s idea of a secret place where we can go for solace, but while the Drifters are found 'Up on the Roof' and Brian Wilson goes 'In my Room', John affirms that he is never alone in his own mind. This is not only a breach of the concept, and a revelation about John's centredness as an individual, it is a surprise because the words aren't being crooned softly but literally screamed out. The Beatles were different.

There is a theory that our musical directions begin to be formed by what we listened to at age 16. The dream was 'over' when I turned 16, but to this day I still ponder why so many people are Beatles tragics.

Not only are most of the tunes instantly recognisable and the lyrics easy to pick up but I can rehearse all the most arcane history about this band. Is Brian Epstein 'Mister Moonlight'? Did Paul McCartney die in a car accident to be replaced by someone who played the bass guitar in exactly the same way? Can Ringo Starr sing? Is George Harrison the *je ne sais quoi* that kept it all together? Why am I still interested in this crazy stuff?

The Beatles reinvented rock and roll music. They took the American '50s form and completely transformed it. Other musicians in the '60s did similar things, but not with the same versatility, variety, playfulness and sheer creative musicianship. That they did all of this while living through unprecedented popular adoration, unimaginable fame, is proof of their individual level-headedness and of the good taste of the listening public at that time.

And they were English, bringing an entire tradition of pub singing, music hall, vaudeville, and sentimentality unknown to pluralistic America. When they crossed the Atlantic in 1964, the Beatles unwittingly turned rock music into the main international popular form, an inheritance we still live with today, especially in the Anglosphere.

We live in world of 24-hour global entertainment. 1962 was different. There was the book and cinema, radio and television, but popular culture was still largely a local concern. Mass production of records and paraphernalia coupled with the sudden expansion of media across national borders were new realities that the Beatles were able to exploit with resounding success.

Millions of people could relate to 'There's a Place' all at the same time. 'All You

'Need is Love' was the first live global television link (1967). It's no wonder that attention on the four members of the band was intense. The Fab Four became the gurus of 'Instant Karma', whether in your own mind or shared in the now across the known world. Today satellite is something we take for granted, a fact of life.

And what of these four people in my head? As well as their music, I pay attention to their religion.

From first to last their main message is Love, something they had been taught from an early age not only by family but by the close Liverpool society in which they grew up. It has never seemed just an accident of circumstance that Lennon and McCartney first met at a church fete. The broad message of Christianity is at the very front of the lyric concerns of the Beatles, even if Christianity itself is almost never acknowledged.

Love in its different expressions, of course. Eros is there continuously, both positive and negative, but Agape informs many of the songs. Familial love, and need for love of family, plays a part in the composition of several songs. McCartney's 'Let It Be', for example, could be a Marian hymn until we learn it is written for his mother. While actual love of God is the motivating cause, if not directly named, in 'Because' and 'Across the Universe'.

The Beatles are not bigger than Jesus and trying to make an apologetic for what Lennon meant has taxed many fans. We know he regretted his notorious statement soon after making it, and it stands today more as a sign of how out of proportion the phenomenon of the Beatles had become. More instructive, I think, is Lennon's reply later in his short life when asked what he felt about Christianity: 'I'm into whatever is happening'.

The other Beatle we associate closely with religion is Harrison; he is even called 'the mystical Beatle'. Visits to India inspired Harrison with a lifelong love of Indian music and devotion to Krishna.

As with their music, so with their religion, the Beatles did not so much reject their influences as test them, seeking alternatives and building on what they knew. Whether in art or belief, they were never interested in experimentation for its own sake but in how to make something new out of something old.

In all of this they played out in their popular art the divergent and changing expectations of Western society at a time when old ways were being openly questioned and hedonism was becoming a good in itself.

Rise of the Kurds in Syria

POLITICS

Kerry Murphy

Former US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld famously referred to 'known unknowns' and 'unknown unknowns' in politics. As the situation in Iraq evolved into several civil wars between various groups, the US and its allies found themselves in the latter territory of 'unknown unknowns'. However, the situation in Iraq was less complex than what is going on in Syria. An interesting development has been the effect of the conflict on the Kurds in Syria.



Historically the Kurds faced repression from the Syrian regime. Kurds were denied Syrian citizenship in 1962 but this was changed in 2011 and they can now obtain Syrian citizenship. It is estimated that about 9 per cent of the population, around 2 million people, are Kurdish in Syria. Kurds were prevented from using their own language and Kurdish protests and celebration of their new year (Newroz) were suppressed by the Syrian military.

The regime held the Kurds under control with large number of troops being stationed in the Kurdish area. Kurds are mainly in the north western area adjoining Iraq. However the current conflict has created opportunities for them.

The intensity of the conflict in Syria meant that the regime has moved the military from the Kurdish areas to the fighting in Damascus and Aleppo. A consequence has been the Kurds are left to run their own area in a way similar to the Kurds in northern Iraq in 1992 after the no-fly zone was created.

Initially the Kurds in Iraq fought among themselves, but eventually a united Kurdish front was presented. That resulted in the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), established after 2003 and now well entrenched. Kurdish is the main language in the KRG area of Iraq. The president of Iraq is a Kurd, and the new Iraqi passports have Kurdish, Arabic and English script. In the Kurdish parts of Syria, the Kurds are only just starting to set up control.

The growth of Kurdish autonomy has long been a desire of the Kurds, who are spread through Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. It is estimated there are around 20 million who identify as Kurdish and this would make the Kurds the largest nationality without an independent homeland.

Iraq repressed the Kurds brutally under Saddam, and the gas attacks on Halabja by Saddam's regime were the first use of gas to defeat an uprising since the British did so in Iraq in the 1920s. With the establishment of the KRG, Kurds set up their own regional government and effectively were independent.

In Iran, the Kurds were suppressed by the regime and many fled Iran as

refugees. The same happened in Syria. In Turkey, a long running war between the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) and the Turkish government left many dead and although the PKK leader Occalan is in prison, the PKK is still active. In fact, the PKK was known to have bases in the Kurdish areas of Syria as well as parts of Iraq.

Now, the Syrian regime is encouraging the PKK's opposition to the Turkish government as retaliation for the Turkish government's support of the Syrian opposition.

This is potentially a dangerous scenario where the Syrian regime is encouraging Kurdish separatists in Turkey, risking Turkish reprisals as happened in Iraq a few years ago when the Turkish military bombed suspected PKK bases in northern Iraq. Already there have been exchanges of fire across the border.

If it becomes more intense, the trigger for NATO intervention occurs because a NATO member, Turkey, will be defending itself against aggression and call on the other NATO powers to support it. This was the reason used for NATO involvement in Afghanistan, the attacks on one NATO member (the US) leading to NATO intervention.

NATO in Syria would not be favourably viewed by Russia, which already sees NATO encroaching on traditional areas of Russia's sphere of interest in eastern Europe and in Georgia. Syria is a long term Russian ally and Russia is unlikely to dump such a loyal ally especially to NATO.

Russia has a naval base in Syria. While Russia is unlikely to use military power against a member of NATO, Turkey, the mere prospect may be enough to prevent the conflict spreading from Syria to Turkey. But the situation in Lebanon is not so secure.

While the conflict continues in other parts of Syria, the Kurds are establishing their own armed security in their areas. Previously the Syrian regime would have suppressed this ruthlessly, but the Assad regime has more pressing concerns in Aleppo and Damascus from the various rebel groups. It is ironic that a group that potentially benefits from the Arab Spring are not Arabs, but Kurds.

An old joke goes, is someone tells you they understand Middle East politics, then it has not been explained to them properly. The unknown unknowns are still considerable as the Syrian conflict continues to become more complex and even more brutal.

The archbishop's last day

NON-FICTION

Brian Doyle

The archbishop awakes at 6am on his 75th birthday. He makes a cup of coffee and dresses for his daily walk. He used to run ten kilometres every morning through the city, wearing his sweatpants and a sweatshirt from one of the Catholic high schools in the city, but mostly now he walks, although here and there, if the sun is out, and he feels limber, he runs. Some people know him and wave and a couple of people bow and say Your Excellency but most of the people he sees just see an old man running, which is not something you see much.

By 8am he has showered and had a second cup of coffee and prayed quietly for a while in his room. By 9am he is at the chancery. At noon he says Mass in the chapel in the chancery. Usually there are maybe 20 people at the noon Mass in the chancery but today there are 60 or 70. Ten or 20 of the people at Mass cross their arms over their chests when they come up for Communion and he blesses them and they say amen and several say thank you and one says happy birthday.

After Mass he skips lunch and goes back to his office.

You know we have to get the letter into the mail today, he says to his secretary.
Yes, Archbishop.

She has worked with him for 14 years, since the very first day he walked cheerfully into the office and soon discovered the horrors boiling under the placid surface of the archdiocese, and she admires him more than any other man she ever met, she thinks, not because of his position but because of the way he handled the rapes and lies and bankruptcy hearings, he never shirked a moment, he never was anything but flat-out honest and blunt about sin and responsibility, and even in the darkest hours he managed some thorny flinty tough cheerfulness and humour that more than once, truth be told, pulled her out of a dark place; if he could keep a smile on his face through all that, then so could she, damn it; a remark she had once made to him in an unguarded moment, which provoked his famous roaring laugh.

He has a laugh like a country, enormous and welcoming and infectious; you can hear him all the way down in the mail room, and supposedly you can hear him in the street outside, even though it is a busy street, always choked with traffic.

In his office he reaches for his dictaphone and dictates the letter. The letter is two paragraphs long. He doesn't hesitate over the language; he knows what he is supposed to say, what he is not averse to saying, but which he does not want to actually finally irredeemably say; but he says it, beginning with *Your Holiness* and ending with *Yours in Christ's love and mercy*.

He was melancholy that whole day, says his secretary later.

He turns the dictaphone off and pops out the cassette and walks out his open door and hands the cassette to his secretary. He doesn't say anything and she doesn't say anything either and he goes back in his office.

At 2pm the archbishop comes out of his office and says to his secretary you need to do the letter, remember. The mail comes early and it needs to go out today.

Yes Archbishop, she says, but I put it off and put it off, she says later. I put it off as long as I could. But that was a Wednesday, and the mail does come early on Wednesday, so I finally did it. I printed it out on letterhead and gave it to him. We have a system. He likes to see letters the way they'll look for the recipient. Sometimes he makes little changes and I print out a second copy. I don't mind. We have a system. In this case he did make a couple of small edits. He signed the second copy and I put it in the envelope and walked it down to the mail room. The letter goes to the papal nuncio in Washington, D.C., and then into his diplomatic pouch for delivery to His Holiness. I don't know who opens the diplomatic pouch at the Vatican, no. Perhaps His Holiness' secretary.

The archbishop also celebrates Mass in the Cathedral at 5pm, and this second Mass is packed.

A lot of people who can't get to Mass in the morning or at noon catch the evening Mass at the Cathedral anyway, partly because it's smack downtown and a lot of people can get to it on their way home, but it is also crowded this day because, I think, because it is the archbishop's birthday, and a lot of people have stopped by to convey their regards. I think a lot of people know it was the day he had to write his letter, also, because I hear a lot of people say thank you to him after Mass, so many people that he is almost late for a dinner he has to attend.

He's so friendly and unassuming that this happens to him all the time, where he's almost late for things because everyone wants to talk to him and shake hands and ask for blessings, and he never rushes anyone but he's never late for anything either. We don't know how he does it. I think it comes from him being a parish priest so long. He knows how to be completely accessible and friendly but not get bogged down.

He almost gets bogged down on his birthday, though. I bet a hundred people say *thank you for what you have done for us and bless you for your honesty and thank you for saving the children and thank you for your service and bless you for your humor*. One man says to him *thank you for being a beacon of light in such darkness*, it is so pithy and what so many of us think about the archbishop.

But he does finally make it to his car and to the dinner, with about a minute to spare, I think. I don't know how he does it, but he's never late. If he says he will be there, he'll be there. That's why so many of us admire him so much, I think. You can trust that man.

Hating Alan Jones

MEDIA

Catherine Marshall

Who are we going to hate now? This was the question [asked by columnist Catherine Deveny](#) in *The Age* after the 2007 election, when Kevin Rudd replaced John Howard as Australia's prime minister. Deveny effusively endorsed Rudd (how could she have known that this shiny-new leader would himself become the focus of a nasty coup just a few years later?) but Howard's electoral loss had left a void that needed to be filled.

'If only Tony Abbott became Liberal leader. I can't really hate Malcolm Turnbull yet, I just like laughing at him in the same way I would laugh at a dog with a bucket on its head,' she lamented.

And one could almost detect the wistfulness in her voice as she reflected on the exit from public life of such a potent hate-object as Howard: 'I have to admit thinking last week that if [he] lost ... I would drive up to Bennelong with a bunch of garlic and a stake to finish him off. But now he's been decimated I don't feel like that. I actually feel a bit sorry for him.'

Five years later, there is no shortage of people to hate, and no dearth of haters either: their numbers have been swelled by robust and easily accessible social media platforms, one of the most significant technological developments in the fomenting of public opinion and social revolution.

And so Alan Jones, who made offensive comments about Prime Minister Julia Gillard and her father, is receiving his just desserts: columnists and commentators on internet forums are vilifying him with much the same brutality as he has seen fit to dish out to people during his many years as Sydney's most influential shock jock; [petitioners have effected astounding change](#), effectively forcing retailers to remove their adverts from Jones' show or face consumer boycotts of their products.

There is a convivial atmosphere of unity and people power in cyberspace, on the airwaves and TV screens. But there's something strange going on here, for the voices shouting down Jones are almost certainly not those of his listeners; the people most offended by his actions, it seems, are those who have never tuned in to his show. They are trying to influence a platform with which they are not engaged, and which has no impact on their lives.

And it's more than just moral rectitude that appears to be motivating this protesting vanguard: if that were the case they would have been on to Jones — and countless other opinionated public figures — long ago.

While there is no doubt that Jones provokes fury and deliberately stirs trouble, this debacle is steeped unashamedly in politics, with the outcry reinforced by

various Labor politicians and dripping with as much contempt for Abbott and his party as Jones' diatribes do for the left.

The brouhaha has also pitted journalists from the right and left against one another, with no opportunity for snide reposts against rival publications left unexploited. For the impartial observer, it's like watching children engaged in an immature playground fight.

The fact that detractors have honed in so zealously on this particular tasteless comment, and forced retailers to stop advertising on a right-wing commentator's show, is disquieting.

Firstly, it seems antithetical to the democratic process that a group of people is able to so willfully cut off the oxygen from someone whose political views don't coincide with their own. It is one thing to boycott offensive programs, but quite another to strong-arm third parties into boycotting them as well. People power transforms into vigilantism when responsibility for one person's bad behaviour is transferred to all of his associates.

Secondly, it delivers a punishment that is disproportionate to the offence, and for which a precedent has now been set: when next Deveny or the equally provocative Andrew Bolt or Marieke Hardy publish vulgar comments about politicians, we will expect the masses to revolt in a similar way.

This would be unwise, of course, for democracy demands the careful balancing of liberties against responsibilities, and when examined dispassionately it should be quite obvious that Jones broke only the law of common decency when making his now infamous comment about Gillard's father.

Thirdly, it gives members of the public permission to bully the bully back — and to exonerate themselves by claiming that he is simply getting what he deserves.

[Peter FitzSimons writes in *The Sydney Morning Herald*](#) that this is merely an example of 'decent Australia saying enough is enough'. Australians have taken to the internet to voice their opinions of Jones, and things are looking ugly; there's nothing decent about descending to the offender's juvenile level. Better to condemn Jones' actions without resorting to the very vilification that one is decrying.

Finally, this incident has resulted in the monopolising of the headlines by a person who doesn't need publicity and a story that is really a non-story: someone says something mean about the prime minister and her constituency is outraged.

Nasty comments have been endured by most of us, and are dished out with alarming regularity and viciousness by politicians themselves. Gillard will recover from this, and so will Jones. And then who will we hate?

Only rationality will destroy Alan Jones' joint

MEDIA

Michael Mullins



Management of Sydney radio station 2GB [announced](#) on Sunday that it was removing advertising from the Alan Jones breakfast program for an indefinite period, at a cost to the station of \$80,000 per day.

The action was unprecedented. It followed social media [pressure](#) on advertisers to boycott the program after Jones violated the unwritten code of common decency in remarks he made about the prime minister's late father at a university student function.

Jones' apology was unconvincing, and many people remain appalled. It is a testament to the relatively new phenomenon of social media that it is able to empower ordinary people to bring Jones and 2GB management to heel when government broadcasting regulation cannot.

It is perhaps an example of the 'people power' that is more usually thought of in the context of overthrowing unpopular political regimes such as occurred in the Arab Spring.

However we need to remember that what has happened in the aftermath of the Arab Spring has shown us that people power can create more problems than it solves. The people are manipulated by other powerful groups, or their action may precipitate a power vacuum. As a result, many who supported the revolution may wish for a return to the dictatorship they loathed.

People power can also become mob rule, which is a long way from its democratic aspirations. Mob rule is tyranny of the majority and the rule of passion over reason. The rights of small people with less audible voices are not taken into consideration in the way they are with properly functioning laws and regulations.

That is why it is better to work within the regulatory system. People power is a last resort that is justified only if the regulatory authority is unable to fix the problem.

In the case of broadcaster Kyle Sandilands, the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) has demonstrated its impotence, despite the restrictions it placed on 2DAY-FM's licence. There is no indication that Sandilands has reformed, in the sense of becoming contrite. Nor is it likely that the ACMA can change Jones.

With regard to advertisers on Jones' program, the social media organisers have outsmarted 2GB's Macquarie Radio Network management. But it is unlikely that the collective rage against Jones' behaviour will be sustained, respectable, and ultimately effective, unless the passion is accompanied by reasoned argument. If not, it could even vindicate Jones and 2GB management's claims of 'cyber

bullying’.

It is encouraging that there are signs of reason in the Facebook groups spearheading the campaign. ‘Sack Alan Jones’ organisers Nic Lochner and Vinay Orekondy [responded](#) in a cool headed manner to 2GB management’s decision to cancel advertising on the program: ‘This campaign has constantly called for civility and decency in public debate — it will continue to do so — and we have gone to great strides to ensure that discourse is conducted appropriately.’

Similarly, the ‘call to arms’ of the group [Destroy the Joint](#) is ‘Keep Calm and Destroy the Joint’.

Calm is not exactly reasoned argument, but it helps to create the necessary disposition. It is important that such groups do not simply destroy the careers of rogue broadcasters, but also work to improve the regulatory system that allows them to flourish.

Another media pressure group, Friends of the ABC, appeals to a different constituency but has always maintained a good balance between activism and contributing to the shaping of public policy through activities such as the preparation of submissions to inquiries. GetUp! covers a range of issues, and is similarly involved in providing policy input.

Forcing 2GB to cancel the advertising was a spectacular victory but the social media groups should not expect more capitulation from station management or Jones, especially if their action is not accompanied by developed rationale. Moreover it may look as if Jones is being bullied, as he claims, and the public could feel sorry for him.

Dead father's voice comes home

POETRY

Peter Gebhardt

Finding a voice – An actor's song

(i.m. Stuart Graham Pearce, killed as a test pilot on 6 August 1976)

For his son Guy upon hearing his father's voice 36 years later.

Suddenly the navigator, bound to his chair,

Produces the promotion,

A testament to the Nomad aeroplane.

1972.

Dad: I think it's a very good Short Take Off and Landing aircraft. On our performance work that we've done so far, all the indications are that the aircraft is performing as good as, and in some areas better than the original estimates were. For example, on our short take off and landings we're achieving something like 20 per cent better than the estimates.

Interviewee: What does it handle like in the air?

Dad: I think you could call it a pilot's aeroplane; it's got very light responsive controls, you get a very good view from the aircraft, there's plenty of power available in the engines when you require it.

Interviewer — What were your worst conditions you flew under?

Dad: (smiles) Oh, I think coming up to Canberra were probably the worst. We came through some pretty atrocious thunderstorm weather where the turbulence was fairly severe and we had plenty of rain and hail, but ah, we managed to come out the other end quite unscathed.

It really is, I think, a delightful aircraft to fly even in those conditions.

When now the nomadic voice

rises from the dust,

makes beams,

comes home,

then we know that the spirits

do not wander for ever

homeless.

And I hear that voice,

part of my past,
gone, but not forgotten,
part of my changing,
 treble to tenor
 to saxophone,
part of my growing,
part of my cadence and pitch,
part of my singing,
the music of my soul
Pilotless in the flight-path
I made a place, a cockpit,
 to call my own,
I built horizons,
 from desert to city,
 from bush to suburb,
 from Melbourne to New York,
 from Geelong to Los Angeles,
 from reflections to mirrors,
 from memories to mementoes
I built my own horizons,
I gave to the earth,
 planting after planting,
 hoping and hoping
seeds would take.
We know they did
 as we cheered and clapped,
but,
 best for you to go on hoping
for that gives the flowers
 their colour,

their scent,
 their sunlight,
all for us to relish.
‘It is tiring being someone else.’
Indeed,
Empathy is exhausting,
but,
 for now there is completeness.
and love has come home to roost.
‘He’s a model,’
 says the lady in the bookshop.
‘The more he tastes success,
The more humble he becomes.’
You have your voice
all right
and for that, in that,
we all rejoice.
Give praise for the ways
of your days
you have given
by your own choice.
The soliloquy of the soul
 is the hardest to make,
but make it we must.
and the flesh will sweat
 sweet in the doing,
follicle fantasies
 daily uprisings.

Voice

(i.m. Jimmy Little)

We all pray for a voice
a voice that is our own
so even the gods can know us
one by one
a voice that speaks and sings
a voice that can listen and be quiet
a voice that joins other voices
the skies are all ears
hear all the songs, the poems, the prayers
the songs that hang in the clouds
and fall season after season
rain on the red earth desert flowering
spring seedtime summer blossoms
autumn fruits winter rest
a favoured wind, a gentle spirit
he travels through it all
the chorus listens in wonder and love
in joy and in reverence
that the earth can give up such ripeness
through the red gums and waters of Barmah
throats are filling with sounds
seeded years and years and years ago.
We will hear him again and again
the gentle spirit has bequeathed his voice

Back-peddalling on Vatican II

GUEST EDITORIAL

Michael Kelly

As my recently deceased spiritual guide, [Peter Steele](#), would never tire of saying: 'There are only two conditions in the spiritual life — you're either growing or you're dying.'

What makes for spiritual growth? In my childhood and adolescence, it was all about going to Sunday Mass, confessing your sins once a month at least, going to Mass through the week or even attending Sunday benediction, an active interest in cultivating a devotional life fostered by the many movements that still thrived till the 1960s. These were the emblems of a thriving Catholic faith.

Mass attendance was four times what it is today, members of pious societies filling the pews at their designated Masses. Clerics in collars and soutanes and, when called on, bishops and 'experts' in particular devotions, fed the faithful with the treasures of these traditions of piety. There was always an 'authority' who could explain the mysteries and put anxious minds and hearts at rest. Authority was a big factor in Church and society.

Also, the religion of Catholics was of a piece with the self-perception that had carried generations of them through hard times on the margins of Australian economic, social and cultural life. Most Catholics only had their status as 'sons and daughters of the one true faith' to comfort them.

Enter Vatican II and the change to the ground rules of Catholicism: the Church isn't the hierarchy, the priests and religious, but the people of God; the point of being a Catholic isn't best exemplified by the ordained or vowed members of the community, but by the calling of all the baptised.

The treacle of devotional piety melted under the renewed discovery of the New Testament as the fountainhead of faith. A perceived obsession with sin and death was named as sick. Bad theology had combined with human limitation to create a Church whose stunted culture needed the vacuum cleaner.

But the drive for reform and its associated energies and activities were only half implemented. Over the last 30 years, the momentum that had driven a fresh wind through the Church for 20 years was reined in. The focus turned to shoring up 'the firm wall of religion' against threatening forces unleashed by a world that had grown tired of religion in general and the Catholic Church in particular.

Some, such as the present Pope Benedict XVI, agree with the leading 20th Century theologian Karl Rahner, who in the 1960s predicted a minority status for Christianity in Europe.

But whereas for Rahner, Christians of the future will be either mystics or nothing, for Benedict, the future lies with the Old Testament concept of the

'faithful remnant', a distinctly marked, garbed and confessing group tied together in their adherence to doctrine, sacramental practice and a structure of authority in the Church. The Pope's plan seems to be an intellectualised version of the ghetto that Vatican II sought to break down.

The ghetto mentality does not diminish the things that Vatican II suggested were the way forward for the Church — among them, a robust engagement with the wider world on its terms, an embrace of the multi-denominational and multi-faith world we live in, a recognition that faith and its celebration needs to relate more obviously to our lives, a recognition that we had got some things wrong over the centuries such as clerical power and our approach to ideas we found uncongenial, and an acknowledgement that we don't have all the answers.

And Vatican II was an implicit recognition that the bonds of fear at a personal level — which seemed to authorise capricious exercises of authority, a culture of unworthiness and the celebration of a pattern of conformity that masked human needs and shrivelled the personalities of many in authority in the Church's institutions — were no way to nurture a free embrace of faith.

But Rahner's way forward is a narrow gate and a straight path. It is an interior path that engages a believer with his and her Creator as the point of departure for faith. And when you look at the deployment of the Church's resources to sustain that journey, you can see how ill equipped we are to meet its requirements.

Public displays and events, immense investments in education, training, the intellectual life and the corporal works of mercy — health, aged care and social welfare: these are the strong points of Australian Catholicism.

Will they meet the challenge that a new age in the Church's life needs, one that nourishes the capacities for believers to grow deeper in their lives of faith and walk the mystic road?

Free speech beyond the pale

MEDIA

Justin Glyn

The French magazine *Charlie Hebdo's* printing of insulting cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, the controversy surrounding Alan Jones' comments about the death of Julia Gillard's father at a Liberal Party function and the online airing of a film trailer insulting Islam have once again fired up the perennial debate about the limits of free speech.



All over the Western media, columnists are dusting off their Voltaire for his oft-attributed quote about disagreeing with what you say but defending to the death your right to say it.

Protestations about free speech, however, should be taken with a grain or two of salt. Even in America and other countries where the right to free speech is constitutionally protected, it is not absolute. As we were reminded just last week, child pornography is universally reviled and prosecuted.

Laws protecting reputation (think of the tort of defamation), and privacy, are standard, even in the most liberal of democracies, and the treatment meted out to Bradley Manning (criticised by the UN rapporteur on torture) is stark proof that even the US' famed First Amendment has its limits. [As Glen Greenwald notes](#), internet postings praising attacks on Western forces or even highlighting issues with America's human rights record have led to terrorism charges being pressed against the posters.

Bearing all this in mind, it may be worthwhile examining exactly why it is that free speech has historically been seen as important. Traditionally, the key purposes of this right have been to protect the right to free exercise of religion, the right to free exchange of ideas and the ability to air public grievances (e.g. see Articles 9 and 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights and the First Amendment to the US Constitution). While Australia has no entrenched mechanism for the protection of human rights, there have historically been attempts to protect this right using the Constitution's protection of freedom of commerce (s.92).

As a protector of public discourse and freedom of religion, the right to free speech is plainly fundamental to a democracy. In this context, a great deal of speech should be tolerated, even if it may cause offence to some. A thick skin is, to a certain extent, the price of living in an open democracy.

This does not mean that any amount of offence is acceptable. Traditionally, where human rights are under discussion, the differing interests or rights protected are weighed against each other and against the potential harm caused by upholding each of the relevant rights being considered. There must therefore

surely be a legitimate question as to what protection speech enjoys when its sole or primary purpose is to hurt or insult rather than to debate ideas, exercise religious freedom or air grievances.

It is for this reason that democracies frequently legislate against such phenomena as hate speech. Drawing the line is notoriously difficult: racial vilification laws and religious hate speech, to name but two, have been the subject of fierce debate of late.

Where comments — such as Alan Jones' attack on Julia Gillard or the French cartoons — are particularly designed to offend, there must be some question as to what legitimate purpose they serve.

Jones has argued that it is the backlash against his comments which is at fault — claiming that it is his own freedom of expression which is under attack. [He is reported as saying that](#) 'The hatred towards me, I've long learnt, stems from the views I express.'

Charlie Hebdo's editor has taken a different tack, [claiming a broader societal good behind its actions](#), arguing in an interview with *Deutsche Welle* that its motivation is to 'fight every religion as soon as it leaves the private sphere and starts to influence politics and the public'.

Yet, as we have seen, the key point of the right to freedom of speech has historically been to protect the right to free and open discussions and the airing of grievances — whether these relate to religion or anything else. If a commentator or cartoonist has the right to insult others then the flipside is surely that his targets (and those who hear him) have an equal right and opportunity to make their hurt and outrage known — and to put an alternative view, if they see fit. This after all must be part of the robust debate.

In this context, it is worth noting that France (in which *Charlie Hebdo* has its home) has laws which significantly restrict religious expression — banning the prominent wearing of any religious symbols as well as clothing (such as Islamic headscarves) associated with the practice of religion. This seems inconsistent with the Enlightenment ideals of freedom of speech as guarantor of freedom of religion.

Against this background, claims that it is those who have been insulted who do not understand the value of freedom of speech reek of both hypocrisy and irony.

Freedom of speech is an extremely important value. For this very reason, it is worth reflecting why it is there and whether or not our attempts to invoke it say more about the intolerance of others or our own double standards.

