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

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

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Responsibility for editorial content is accepted by the publisher.

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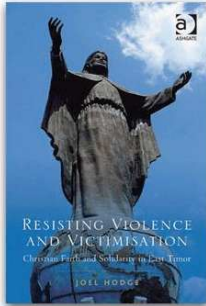
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Keating's Timor and Carr's Papua

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan



On Sunday, I was travelling through the idyllic rural north of Bali, listening on my iPod to [Paul Keating's riveting 2012 Murdoch Lecture](#) in which he spoke about the 'enormous time and attention' he gave as Prime Minister between 1991 and 1996 to the development of a bilateral relationship with Indonesia.

He said, 'I think I grasped, perhaps more than any of my predecessors, the singular importance to Australia and to its security, of the vast archipelago to our immediate north. I understood that the advent of General Soeharto's New Order government had brought peace and stability to our region.'

I warmed to Keating's self adulation until he went on to describe 'the preoccupation of the Australian media with the events in [Balibo](#) two decades earlier' and how he was 'determined to establish a new and durable basis for our relationship with Indonesia other than the one we had which saw everything through the prism of East Timor'. This seemed to me far too simplistic.

Our elected leaders in the 1970s and '80s when visiting Jakarta were right to raise human rights concerns about East Timor. They, like our Indonesian counterparts, were quite capable of walking and chewing gum at the same time. It was not as if it was a choice between human rights concerns and the building of a bilateral relationship.

A bilateral relationship posited on a self-imposed ban on human rights discussion would be a very perverted relationship for a robust democracy like Australia boasting adherence to the rule of law and best international practice in human rights protection.

The Keating over-simplification could be relegated to academic history but for its resurgence in recent remarks by Foreign Minister Bob Carr who earlier this month told the ABC: 'There are Australians ... who take an interest in the notion for more autonomy for Papua but I remind them that you'd be doing a disservice to the Indonesian population of those two provinces if you held out any hope that Australia could influence the cause of events.'

I beg to differ. We could be doing a great service to our Indonesian neighbours if we took seriously our capacity for respectful dialogue about the need for greater autonomy in the provinces of Papua.

Think back to the 1991 Santa Cruz Massacre in Dili. While Keating was commencing his strategy of downplaying human rights violations in East Timor, journalist Max Stahl was able to smuggle out film of the massacre which shocked

the world. Many Australians for the first time asked how this could be happening on our doorstep, and how we could permit it to go unchecked.

Joel Hodge in *Resisting Violence and Victimisation: Christian Faith and Solidarity in East Timor* identifies this as 'a major turning point for the international community ... Showing the innocence of the victims at the hands of the violent Indonesian state was central in the appeal of the East Timorese to the conscience of the international community — an appeal which eventually overcame 'the logic of force'.'

I first visited East Timor a year after the Dili massacre at the invitation of Bishop Carlos Belo. At that time it was almost impossible for foreigners to gain access. At the end of my visit, Bishop Belo invited me to a party with significant Timorese leaders. He and ex-governor Mario Carrascalao cornered me and asked what I would say about the situation in East Timor upon my return to Australia.

They said I must speak, but under no circumstances should I speak about the possibility of independence. They thought independence very unlikely, and were concerned that talk of independence would only exacerbate the discontent of young Timorese who then risked further adverse attention by the Indonesian military.

They told me I should speak about the need for three things: a decreased military presence, greater cultural autonomy, and enhanced protection of human rights.

On my return to Australia I stuck to this script. Some Australians, especially church people supportive of the Timorese cause, were critical. They pointed out that I had the opportunity to see first-hand the situation in East Timor and that I needed to acknowledge the moral case of the Timorese for independence.

My response was that if the cause for independence was frustrated, it was not my blood nor any other Australian blood that would be spilt, but rather that of the Timorese. I saw myself as having no option but to follow the wise counsel of respected Timorese leaders.

I remain of the view that East Timor would not have become independent but for the Indonesian financial crisis, the enigma of President Habibie and the Indonesian misinterpretation of John Howard's referendum suggestion. There is no failsafe prediction of the political future. Prudent advocacy demands that we be attentive to the voice of those whose future it is, those who will suffer the consequences.

It'd be churlish to question Keating's reflections unless there was risk of the mistake being repeated. I do think more autonomy, reduced military presence and greater human rights protections are achievable for Papuans; and that, despite Carr's comments, principles can be espoused respectfully in any healthy bilateral relationship.

Dismissing suggestions that Australia might play a role in urging greater autonomy for the Papuans, Carr said: 'Indonesians have been very sensitive to human rights implications of law and order activity in the Papua provinces. I ask those idealistic Australians who might entertain some other arrangement, what would be the cost in terms of our friendship with Indonesia and of our budget of a different arrangement. It's inconceivable.'

While I do think Papuan independence is inconceivable, greater autonomy is not, and it ought not be. President Yudhoyono said early this year that he was willing to have dialogue with Papuans to solve the longest unresolved conflict in our region. Australia should put its weight behind any dialogue initiative. Now is the time for such a stand because Yudhoyono will leave office in two years. His successor might not be open to the same path.

Interfaith pioneer's search for the sacred

VIDEO

Peter Kirkwood

[Stephanie Dowrick](#) is one of Australia's most influential spiritual teachers. She has carved out a unique and independent niche in the realm of religion in this country.

She is a prolific, best-selling author, a qualified psychotherapist, and much in demand as a speaker. She leads spiritual tours and retreats, and is a pioneer among the handful of interfaith ministers in Australia.

As well as an interview about her latest book, *Seeking the Sacred: Transforming Our View of Ourselves and One Another*, the video also contains excerpts of her speaking at an event held recently at Paddington Uniting Church in Sydney's east where she was in conversation with Uniting Church minister and theologian, Doug Purnell.

Dowrick was born in New Zealand. When she was eight, her mother died. This was a pivotal event in her life, and is one of the things she reflects on in this interview.

As a young adult she lived in Europe and England. She founded, and was first managing director of, London publishing house The Women's Press. In 1983 she moved to Australia, and has been based in Sydney ever since.

After two years study, in 2005 she graduated from the New Seminary for interfaith ministry in New York, and was ordained in that city's Episcopalian Cathedral of St John the Divine. Since 2006, on the third Sunday of every month, she has led interfaith services at Pitt Street Uniting Church in the heart of Sydney.

In 2000 she founded the [Universal Heart Network](#). In her words, 'it is made up of people who care about the values that strengthen and connect us'. It provides a means for them to keep in contact online, and Dowrick sends members a monthly inspirational email.

As an extension of this network, this year, with writer Walter Mason, she started the [Universal Heart Book Club](#), an online forum with blogs, discussion and reviews of 'books that matter for readers who care'.

From 2001 till 2010 she wrote a weekly column called 'Inner Life' in the *Fairfax Good Weekend Magazine*.

In 2008 Dowrick completed her doctorate at the University of Western Sydney on the visionary poet, Rainer Maria Rilke, considered to be one of the greatest modern writers in the German language. She is currently an adjunct fellow in that university's Writing and Society Research Group.

Her other books include *Intimacy and Solitude*, *Forgiveness and Other Acts of*

Love, Creative Journal Writing, Choosing Happiness: Life and Soul Essentials, In the Company of Rilke, and Everyday Kindness.

Family Christmas torture and triumph

TELEVISION

Tim Kroenert

***A Moody Christmas* (M). TV series director: Trent O'Donnell. Starring: Ian Meadows, Patrick Brammall, Danny Adcock, Tina Bursill, Guy Edmonds, Jane Harber, Rachel Gordon, Phil Lloyd, David Field, Mandy McElhinney. Six 30-minute episodes**

If you, like me, are someone who is accustomed to Christmas Day as a 'family occasion', you may be equally aware of the fraught nature of that innocent description.

My siblings and I are adults with partners whose families, rightly, must be considered in Christmas planning. This can lead to tension on all sides as family traditions are tested, transformed, or trashed to be replaced with new traditions. There have been tears and shouting matches over the years as we've all committed or compromised, adjusted, accommodated, or simply absconded.

The heightened emotion of the occasion and the often highly politicised nature of the planning and execution of Christmas gatherings can amplify the causes of both pleasure and anguish in the life of a family. It is no coincidence then that so many films and television series use family Christmases as the setting for dramatic or comedic scenarios.

The ABC series *A Moody Christmas* is a prime example of a story told for entertainment that effectively taps both the farce and the drama that is inherent in family Christmases. The six episodes take place at Christmas over six consecutive years, as the working class Moody family reunites for its annual Christmas Day barbecue.

These occasions draw London-based photographer Dan (Meadows) back to his suburban Sydney family home to be with his mum Maree (Bursill) and dad Kevin (Adcock), his deadbeat brother Shaun (Brammall) and assorted other eccentric or obnoxious relatives. The emotional through-line for the series is Dan's troubled romantic entanglement with his execrable cousin Hayden's (Edmonds) fashion designer girlfriend Cora (Harber).

The time-lapse structure is very effective. It helps to hammer home a point about the bittersweet nature of growth and change. At the start of each episode, we find characters' situations or attitudes have altered from the previous episode, and must guess (or learn) what has happened since last Christmas to produce that change.

During episode one Dan's sister Bridget (Gordon) announces she is pregnant; yet when we meet her again next Christmas she and husband Roger (Lloyd) appear still to be childless. The various implications of this materialise over the

course of subsequent episodes. Similarly, because of the year-long time jumps, Maree's tussle with breast cancer is seen only in snapshots, and as a result, somewhat startlingly, is played mostly for humour.

The series is topical in its attention to social issues. In episode one a drunk uncle (Field) makes snide remarks about 'boat people', and later uses this to embarrass Dan. In another episode Dan offends a homeless woman (McElhinney), then invites her to join them for lunch to make up for it; her presence provokes varying degrees of prejudice from family members. The episode finds surprising ways to assert the homeless character's dignity.

But the series is at its best with its heartfelt portrayal of often tense family dynamics. This is seen most obviously in Shaun, a man-child who still manages to be big brother to the ostensibly more grown-up Dan. His antagonistic relationship with his father, who wants him to join the family business, is too persistent not to be based in mutual affection. A near family tragedy in episode three exposes the extent of Shaun's soft side.

The series' portrayal of family conflict and unity hits home for me. Christmas 2012 will for my family be a time of contrasts. This year, among my immediate family members alone, there has been a separation, the sale of a beloved home, the purchase of another house that brims with promise for the future, and, most recently, the birth of a child, my brother's son and my parents' first grandchild, who by Christmas will be a little over a month old.

The causes for joy will be suitably celebrated, while hopefully the sources of grief will prove also to be sources of growth in the long run. Certainly once Christmas Day comes around we will strive to simply be grateful for the time that we have together. Who knows what next Christmas will bring?

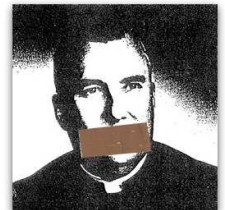
The final episode of A Moody Christmas will air at 8.30pm next Wednesday 5 December on ABC1. [Watch previous episodes now on ABC iview](#)

Confessional debate is a Royal Commission red herring

RELIGION

Chris McGillion

The clamour is growing to enable the forthcoming Royal Commission into child sex abuse to require Catholic priests to break the seal of confession if doing so is deemed necessary to investigate abusers and/or the issue of institutional cover ups. The Federal Attorney-General, Nicola Roxon, has expressed support for such a power, saying that child abuse is 'a crime' that 'should be reported' under any circumstances.



Prime Minister Julia Gillard also supports the move. 'Adults have got a duty of care towards children,' she has said, 'and it's not good enough for people to engage in sins of omission and not act when a child is at risk.'

The former auxiliary bishop of Sydney, Geoffrey Robinson, a vocal critic of the way the Church has handled clerical sex abuse cases, [said he'd break the seal](#) for the 'greater good' and report a confessor to the police if he believed there was an ongoing risk of further offences. At least one Melbourne priest has said he'd do the same.

Before this debate goes much further, it would be wise for everyone to consider what is at stake. Roxon has said that the more important issue is the failure to report to police known cases of abuse and 'open secrets' that came to the attention of priests and Church authorities by means other than the confessional. Similarly, Bishop Robinson has conceded the obvious: 'Offenders in this field, in paedophilia, do not go to confession and confess.'

How much, then, of a practical nature is likely to be gained by trying to force open the seal of confession? More importantly, how much of a religious nature is likely to be damaged? Child abuse is a crime, but so is murder, so is theft. If the seal should not apply to the first, why should it logically apply to the rest?

Sins of omission can be committed, but sins are something other than criminal acts, although they may entail them. Sin is a religious concept — something a believer commits when they deliberately act against the will of God — and as such something that the religious instrument of the confessional is specifically meant to address.

Rushing head-strong into these religious dimensions risks broadening the Royal Commission into a full-blown challenge to the status of the Church (and religious faith) in secular society.

As the practice of private confessions emerged in the fifth century, the seal of confession developed as a way of encouraging people to confess their sins by promising strict confidentiality.

That promise has now been so well established that the Church's Code of Canon Law makes clear that the 'sacramental seal is inviolable; therefore it is absolutely forbidden for a confessor to betray in any way a penitent in words or in any manner and for any reason' and that a priest 'is prohibited completely from using knowledge acquired from confession to the detriment of the penitent even when any danger of revelation is excluded'.

When Cardinal George Pell referred several times to the 'inviolable' nature of the seal, he was not being obstructionist — as many have suggested — but merely repeating the Church's well established position on the issue which he, being a bishop, is required to do.

The Catechism of the Church elaborates on the prohibition to reveal information obtained in the confessional.

Given the delicacy and greatness of this ministry [of hearing confessions and dispensing absolution] and the respect due to persons, the Church declares that every priest who hears confession is bound under very severe penalties to keep absolute secrecy regarding the sins that his penitents have confessed to him. He can make no use of knowledge that confession gives him about penitents' lives.

This secret, which admits of no exceptions, is called the 'sacramental seal', because what the penitent has made known to the priest remains 'sealed' by the sacrament.

Elsewhere, the Catechism repeats that 'it is a crime for a confessor in any way to betray a penitent by word or in any other manner or for any reason'.

What is generally known as confession, the Church knows as the sacrament of Penance (or Reconciliation). It is one of seven sacraments — the others being Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Marriage, Holy Order and the Anointing of the Sick. The Church regards a sacrament as the visible sign of God's invisible presence, a sign through which it communicates the saving grace of God.

Sacraments are also held to be signs of the unity of the Church. They represent, in other words, a fundamental component of what it means to be Catholic and to practice a life of faith. It is thus inconceivable that Catholic authorities, from the Pope down, would countenance the state interfering in the sacramental life of the Church. And any attempt to do so would quickly turn into an issue of freedom of religion.

If the Royal Commission were to go down that path it could quickly find it had bitten off much more than it can chew. And the true focus of the inquiry — on child abuse — would be only one of the casualties likely to result.

East Timor's lessons for our abuse Royal Commission

HUMAN RIGHTS

Pat Walsh



The support group for victims of sexual abuse, Broken Rites, has proposed that victims be given the opportunity to tell their stories as part of the proceedings to be undertaken by the upcoming Royal Commission.

According to the Fairfax press on Monday, the group's spokesman, Dr Wayne Chamely, is [advocating](#) that a 'truth commissioner' be appointed specifically for the purpose of listening to victims. The commissioner 'would move around and meet people in their own communities' and carry out this function concurrently with the Commission's other terms of reference.

At the heart of this proposal is a conviction that the Royal Commission must be as victim-friendly as possible if it is to get at the whole truth, contribute to the healing of victims, educate the public about this entrenched issue and its origins, and generate effective recommendations.

Broken Rites is clearly concerned that the Royal Commission may not be able to adequately accommodate victims because some may not feel comfortable testifying in such a setting or will not be heard because the Commission, due to its anticipated huge work load, will have to be selective.

Faced with similar challenges, East Timor's groundbreaking truth commission opted to take a system-wide victim-friendly approach to its work.

The Comissao de Acolhimento, Verdade e Reconciliacao (CAVR) (or Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation) functioned 2001–2005 and was set up to address the huge number of human rights violations committed 1974–1999, particularly during the Indonesian occupation, including widespread sexual violence.

Its core mandate focused on establishing the truth about these violations, facilitating community reconciliation, and reporting on its work, inquiry, findings and recommendations.

Sensitivity to victims informed every aspect of the CAVR's design, structure, operation and reporting. Its enabling legislation required the commission 'to assist in restoring the dignity of victims' and it employed a number of strategies to achieve this.

Some were procedural, such as consulting victims about the commission's terms of reference and the selection of commissioners, bringing victims together to share their experiences with other victims, recording and preserving victim testimony, and administering an urgent reparations scheme for the most vulnerable victims.

Others were organisational, such as allocating a victim portfolio to one of CAVR's seven commissioners and establishing a victims unit charged with ensuring that the needs and rights of victims were addressed across the commission's activities.

The centrepiece of this victim-friendly approach was listening to victims. For this to work, significant planning, resources and time were invested in preparing communities and victims, particularly women who'd suffered sexual violence, to participate and share terrifying experiences that would have led to recrimination under the previous regime. CAVR teams spent three months in each sub-district for this purpose.

Victims were invited to give statements about their experiences and to testify at local hearings. and some were invited on a representative basis to speak at national hearings. In response and in addition to their input at community reconciliations, victims provided some 8000 statements and testified freely and openly at 350 local hearings and eight national public hearings.

These hearings, particularly the national hearings held in the capital, broadcast live and attended by high-level Timorese, were expressions of solemn respect and solidarity for victims. In addition to providing evidence, the hearings assisted the healing of victims by honouring their contribution both to East Timor's liberation and, through their stories, to the building of a culture of human rights, non-violence and rule of law in the new nation.

The material gathered has been archived and disseminated in multiple languages in video, print and other formats to help East Timor's booming youth population appreciate the sacrifices made on their behalf and to benefit from the lessons learned from this deeply traumatic period.

Indonesia, home of the principal perpetrators, did not interfere with the process.

The CAVR methodology was not perfect and, in retrospect, could have been even more victim-friendly. Some of its core recommendations, including a call for a reparations program, have not yet been implemented seven years after being tabled in the East Timor parliament, a source of considerable disappointment to aging victims.

Two principal conclusions can be drawn from the East Timor experience for Australia's Royal Commission. First, a victim-friendly process is desirable, achievable and productive. If East Timor after decades of war and devastation could do it, Australia certainly can.

However victims should not take for granted that the high level of public and political support the Royal Commission proposal currently enjoys will translate into implementing its recommendations down the track. CAVR enjoyed similar levels of support at its inception. Sadly, East Timor's experience is that victims need to

organise and mobilise if they are to see their recommendations implemented.

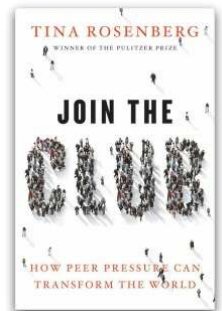
Peer pressure could save the military

COMMUNITY

Evan Ellis

Human beings are pack animals. All the studio apartments in Australia won't change the large part of our brain devoted to functioning as social beings. From an evolutionary point of view, it's served us well. It continues to define us in ways we're probably not aware of.

The American journalist Tina Rosenberg won a Pulitzer for exploring this very dynamic in *Join the Club*. She points to a study from the 1950s that shows just how powerful our desire to belong to the pack is.



Psychologist Solomon Asch invited a group of people — one off the street and the rest secret participants briefed by Asch — into a room. All were given charts with lines and asked questions about the length of the lines. The answer had to be said aloud and the secret participants always went first. The questions were obvious, but after hearing the secret participants give the wrong answer, the lone subject usually joined their opinion.

The takeout: 'In the face of strong public pressure to conform, most people conform.'

Monday's release of a [review into military abuse](#) reminds us how dangerous this lean to conformity can be. The Commonwealth Government's apology and suite of provisions for victims follows law firm DLA Piper's review into sexual and other forms of abuse by the military, announced in April 2011 after the [Skype sex scandal](#). The firm received allegations of abuse from some 847 people, dating back to the 1950s.

The report looks at everything from the 'bastardisation' of new recruits, which 'seems to have been tacitly accepted as a part of ADF life', to the absence of safeguards protecting young people from each other and of adequate reporting and accountability structures.

Damningly, it states 'It is possible male cadets who raped female cadets at ADFA in the late 1990s, and other cadets who witnessed such rape and did not intervene, may now be in middle to senior management positions'.

There appears to be a similar mentality at play here, to that which allowed a French woman to suffer a [tirade](#) of racist and misogynistic abuse on a bus in Melbourne while, in the words of one [Fairfax op-ed](#), the majority of passengers 'were silent and impassive, probably wishing they were elsewhere'.

Where was the dissent, in the face of such clear injustice?

Rosenberg might have one answer. She quotes Arizona State University psychology professor Robert Cialdini about the importance of community norms when facing something new. 'When things are changing, new or in flux, people won't look inside themselves for answers ... they look outside, to legitimately constituted experts and peers. That provides a shortcut way of determining what they should do in a situation.'

In short, if people look around and see others doing or saying nothing, most will do or say nothing themselves.

This is why the Piper report is wise to look at culture. Culture includes those invisible cues that help people know how to behave.

The defence forces are particularly invested in humanity's pack mentality. Victory on the battlefield, the survival of troops and the successful delivery of emergency assistance all come down to teamwork. Everything from basic training onwards is aimed at turning strangers into units ready to die for each other.

The Piper report itself notes: 'It is no accident that modern armies are built on small squads, grouped together into platoons — nor that terrorists almost always organise themselves into cells. Young men in all cultures have a common willingness to work together in small, intensely loyal teams.'

This is Solomon Asch's 1950s experiment amplified. It is not difficult to imagine the challenges involved in stepping outside of this space to make a complaint.

In the face of such incorrigible conformity, it is easy to despair. However the point of *Join the Club* is that if peer pressure is so powerful, why not use it constructively? It draws upon the fields of psychology, sociology, history and neuroscience, to argue that peer pressure can be a force for good.

In mounting her argument Rosenberg offers an interesting reframing of one of the most infamous experiments in all of social psychology. While the Nazi officer Adolf Eichmann was being [tried in Jerusalem](#), Stanley Milligram (a student of Asch) wanted to explore obedience to authority. He invited 40 people into what he told them was an experiment testing the effects of punishment on learning.

Each participant was instructed to administer electric shocks in escalating doses to a subject in the next room when that person answered a question incorrectly. In actuality the 'subject' was in on the experiment, and a tape recorder provided the necessary screams of pain. The results are well-known and disturbing: 26 of 40 participants delivered shocks up to the maximum 450-volt level. Not one demanded the experiment be stopped.

What is less known is that at least 19 variations were considered to test whether people would respond differently under different conditions. Variations included the participant's gender, or proximity to the 'victim'.

The most defiance came from variation 17, whereby two secret participants

joined a real subject in administering shocks. During the experiment the two conspirators would stop and complain that they'd had enough. Thirty-six of the 40 participants in this variation stopped before delivering the maximum volt.

Rosenberg deduces, 'The peer group's creation of a social norm of human kindness was the most effective way to encourage defiance to an immoral order.'

Peer pressure, so long derided as the domain of drug abuse and risky sexual practices, may be the very thing that can save us from ourselves.

Parable of the inhospitable hospital

POLITICS

Andrew Hamilton



Once upon a time in Erehwon, a prosperous but isolated town, there was a small hospital. The town council, which was responsible for the funding and management of the hospital, refused to fund its expansion. Two factions vied with one another to control the Council, with an election due the following year.

The roads surrounding Erehwon, which was visited by many tourists, were narrow and dangerous. There were many accidents, and ambulances constantly came to the hospital bringing the injured. People from outlying settlements without their own hospital also came there. As a result local patients who had booked appointments at the hospital were often obliged to wait to see the doctor because he was attending more urgent cases.

Among the townspeople there was considerable irritation at this inconvenience. This was noted by focus groups conducted by both factions seeking to control the Council. They put the blame on those who had come without appointments, and flayed one another for pandering to them.

The ruling faction cast around for a solution that would solve the problem without damaging Erehwon's chances of winning the coveted Ethically Tidy Town Award. They came up with the idea of a No Advantage policy. All around the town they placed posters emblazoned with the No Advantage logo and headed: A Fair Go for All.

Under this policy, no one who arrived at the hospital without an appointment would receive any advantage from having come unannounced. Emergency patients would henceforth be called Intruders or Malingerers.

To ensure that no advantage flowed to them, they would be escorted from the hospital premises and ranged along the footpath under the open sky. The elderly, babies and those suffering from unusually serious accident would be permitted to sit on the nature strip.

After the hospital medical staff had seen all those with appointments, they would tend to as many of the Malingerers as could be seen in office hours. This would ensure the latter enjoyed no advantage.

To the ruling faction the policy promised to be fair and effective, though their opponents criticised it as too mild. So it was implemented. The whole town was satisfied that the queue along the footpath and the pathetic scenes on the nature strip would be a firm signal to potential Malingerers that they would have no advantage.

But, alas, cars crashed, families came down with botulism, children broke legs

playing, visiting bikies were glassed by locals, grey nomads were bitten by spiders, and the number of people brought without appointment to the hospital increased. They overwhelmed security, and soon the queues stretched down to the main street. The cries of children and the stench of open wounds wafted even to the Town Hall windows.

Clearly the No Advantage Policy needed to be strengthened. The council took counsel and refined it. The hospital was declared a war zone, and martial law imposed within its grounds. The queues were routed out of town.

In order to reduce the queue and discourage further arrivals, a junior nurse was sent each morning to walk briskly along the queue and to call out those who did not look very, very sick. After this triage, those selected were driven some kilometers out of town and left on the other side of the shire boundary.

But still the Intruders continued to arrive: on crutches and stretchers, with drips, catheters and prostheses, escorted and alone. The council saw with alarm, and their opponents with grim satisfaction, that the policy was not working. It had again to be strengthened.

Intruders waiting in the queue henceforth received no food. And, because some regular patients missed appointments and had to be seen the next day, the Malingerers could only be seen several days after they came to the hospital. This ensured they would receive no advantage over any patient who had made an appointment.

Sadly even the best of healthcare policies could not control the breaking of bones, the crushing of spleens, the poisonings, blockings, complications in pregnancy, aneurisms and other events that are part of the human lot. People kept coming without appointment and the queue kept growing.

In desperation the majority faction invited their opponents to a joint meeting in order to discuss how the policy could be made more effective.

The faction members had come to the view that the policy did not define *advantage* broadly enough. Many of the Malingerers had a considerable advantage over some patients with appointments in that their general health was not as impaired. This advantage needed to be removed. So they argued that the policy should be extended to mandate slicing the flesh, breaking the bones, infecting the blood and weakening the heart of Malingerers.

Their opponents, however, believed that this did not go far enough. It was unconscionable that these people should enjoy the advantage of being parasites on the body politic of Erewhon. In order to pay for the space they were occupying, they should be set to work on the railway spur being laid to the local quarry.

One councillor, a local painter, proposed a more radical solution. The core advantage conferred on the Malingerers was the gift of being alive. If this advantage were removed from them, discreetly and humanely, there would be no

queues, and soon no problem.

Most councillors dismissed this proposal as Unerewhonian. But some looked thoughtful.

In the following months before the council election, burned babies and victims of accidents, strokes, appendicitis, domestic violence and heart attacks continued to arrive at the hospital without appointment.

And more councillors began to look thoughtful.

Four Chinese poems

POETRY

Translator: Ouyang Yu

On a certain afternoon

On a certain afternoon

I, on a sudden, actually smelt something

Like a rat

From the fifth collection of poetry

By a poet

I had been passionately in love with

On a certain afternoon

A mass poetry magazine, just bought

Was ripped to pieces by me

And a newspaper, known to all, that had just arrived

Was carried by me to the toilet

On a certain afternoon

I chewed eight bad-quality candies

And wrote an oral poem

That was more poetry

Than the poems written on an exercise book several years ago

On a certain afternoon

A lead bullet, as rumour would have it

Was shot

Excitedly from an air gun

That hit the swaying plumpness

Of the hips of a woman in front of me

On a certain afternoon

I saw myself walking on a street

And being crowded about for a while

Still, I did not know what I was going to do

So I came home in dejection
On a certain afternoon
There were no programs on TV
And when you listened carefully
To a dry speech end itself
You quite enjoyed yourself
As if you were listening to a report about an air crash
On a certain afternoon
You went to sleep
But found you couldn't
Staring, as you were, at the top of the bed
And, later, in a dream, you clenched your teeth
Your ears ringing
Feeling as if the heaven were turning
As you fell on a deserted ridge
Reminding yourself that
This was the consequence of writing
And that you had to go and buy some medications again
On a certain afternoon
A very ordinary one
Yang Xie

I saw

Today I saw
A rich man
I knew not what his brains and intestines
Were like
All I knew was
He had a potbelly and his face, oily shiny
Right, there was something important
I, on a sudden, was able to tell

Which hand was his left
And which, his right
Today I saw
A woman
A ghastly paper
Behind her heavily made-up mask
Something that might break
At the merest touch
And her breasts, highly bundled up
One taller than the other
And her peach-red laced brief
Put on the wrong way in a hurry
Showed through underneath her near-transparent skirt
Today I saw
An old man
Older than my dad
I saw him
One hand holding an old bag
And the other, pressed on his upper abdomen
He looked pale
His head covered in sweat|
And the corner of his mouth

It kept quivering

Yang Xie

Song of failure

The body, via love
leaves the life right before the eye while love
is making a comeback to the world via body
The sky is so blue
it does not allow people to be too greedy

— meanwhile the clouds pile up
like the flesh that grows in the body
Crossing over and standing there
is easy enough. What is not easy is to divide the body up: appearing, as you
wish
simultaneously in two places

Hu Xian

Quiet

So quiet
a lake, rippleless, even the sound of the spring having disappeared. When I
looked
where I came from
I could only see the fallen leaves, the Acorus calamus, the reeds, the purple
locust
trees, the Devil-faced Tung ...
the mountain still in the lake, more like the cast iron than itself on the bank
the firmament, filled with the golden sun, was congealing underground
after the shadow of birds was gone, the white clouds were so light I seemed to
be
guarding another distance and a hometown
near me, a tiny bee, buzzing, its wings fluttering, the air
shivery, with dense ripples

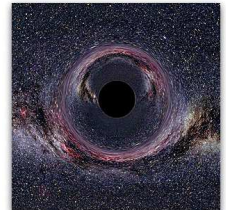
Hu Xian

Dysfunctional Church stares into the abuse abyss

RELIGION

Michael Kelly

Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* begins: 'It was the best of times. It was the worst of times.' If we take St Paul seriously, the worst of times can be the best of times for Christians. In his biblical account of faith, he sees adversity, trial, rejection and hardship as the nodal points for growth. 'We have no other boast but the Cross.'



This time in the Church in Australia is tragic. The intervention by Cardinal Pell in mid-November highlighted an all too familiar pattern of defensiveness that generated plenty of heat, lots of 'I told you so' observations from his critics and no advance in understanding that this is a time of unmatched shame for the Church.

Fortunately, other voices among the bishops — and not just [retired ones](#) — have weighed in with appropriate contrition and compassion.

While countless Catholics, me among them, feel nothing but shame and sorrow at both the abuse of victims and its insensitive and selfish handling by authorities in dioceses and religious congregations, it is far from clear how best an ordinary Catholic could and should respond to this spectacle of culpability.

Many I have talked to in recent weeks are dismayed, questioning why they should ever again bother to identify as Catholics. Kristina Keneally [posed](#) the dilemma that faces informed Catholics seeking to raise children in the faith. Many employed by the Church find it hard to imagine the next step to take.

May I make three suggestions.

First, from adolescence I have been guided by the advice of an old Jesuit who responded to my description of the pettiness, fear and cowardliness of some members of the Jesuit community I was in at the time. 'You're a strange sort of Christian if you are overwhelmed by the scandalous deeds of others,' he told me.

That brought me up short. He wasn't denying the dilapidated humanity, absence of faith and hope, and outright lovelessness in what I had told him. He just fronted me with the brutal reality everyone has to face at such a time. In a succinct way he was asking me: After such knowledge, what forgiveness?

That leads to the second response I would propose. The only reason Christians can look on human depravity and not succumb before it is that their faith is in a crucified Lord. Without it, we would be well advised to agree that nihilism is the only adequate way of thinking about and responding to our own and others' evil.

From the first page of the Old Testament, God is proclaimed as one who makes

something out of nothing. And the black hole that is the horror of sex abuse is a 'nothing', an abyss of darkness into which we stare, undermining any confidence we might have had in anyone's good intentions.

The evidence of depravity in the Church should only surprise the naïve. But whether we are naïve, jaundiced or just bewildered, each of us has to reckon with our experience, absorb the pain and pray in our powerlessness for the transforming power of God to do what we can't do ourselves.

But there's something else that needs to happen beyond our personal search for meaning in this mess. Catholics are part of something social — the community of faith. Admirable and desired as a personal change of heart may be, it remains incomplete unless it extends to how ordinary Catholics live where we live — in the Church.

You don't have to be a business consultant to know that the Church internationally and locally leads a confused life with an incoherent sense of identity and purpose, poorly led and frequently mismanaged. Rome is regularly told by the rank and file across the Western world that it is out of touch with the membership, and local bishops are seen and often behave as branch managers of a poorly administered, centralised multinational corporation.

Just look at the most outstanding instance of 'disconnect' in Church governance in the last year — the sacking of Bill Morris as bishop of Toowoomba. Morris was sacked on evidence that amounted, in the Opinion of a retired Queensland Supreme Court Judge, to 'hearsay and gossip'. The Australian bishops promised to engage robustly with the relevant Vatican officials about the matter, but found that the officials weren't open to discussion.

Such parlour games are seen for what they are, and show that incoherence, mismanagement and incompetence are right through the organisation. There won't be healing of the community of faith until there is systemic change that fixes the culture in which mismanagement thrives and transparency is lacking.

It is about time for the Australian Church's own Truth and Reconciliation Commission. As sure as the sun rises in the east, it will bring as much of 'the Cross' as the Royal Commission will. But then, as St Paul told us, that is the way we grow in faith.

Unclenching the despotic fist in Burma

HUMAN RIGHTS

Duncan MacLaren



For the Burmese, the most unpopular part of Barack Obama's recent speech to the University of Yangon was his [reference](#) to the Rohingya who, as he so eloquently stated, 'hold within them the same dignity as you and I do'. Bengali-speaking and Muslim, they are descended from seventh century Arab traders who settled in what is now Arakan (or Rakhine) State but are regarded as 'interlopers' from Bangladesh by the majority of Burmese.

Under the U Nu government in the 1950s, they had Burmese citizenship until General Ne Win, the man credited with plunging Burma into poverty, introduced the 1983 Citizenship Act of Burma which recognised 135 'national races' but not the Rohingya who remain stateless to this day.

Statelessness means they are robbed of all the rights we have as citizens. They even have to ask permission of the local authorities to get married (after payment of the usual bribe) and are allowed only two children per marriage. Unauthorised marriages can result in ten years' imprisonment, and having more than two children means they are unregistered and denied healthcare and education and are often subject to forced labour.

The current conflict between the Rohingya and their Buddhist Arakanese neighbours was sparked by the alleged rape of a Buddhist girl by a Muslim. Since then, at least 200 people have been killed and 115,000 driven from their homes, the vast majority of them Rohingyas. The deep-seated cause of the furore is access to scarce land.

Even a politician of the moral stature of Aung San Suu Kyi could only timidly say that both communities had suffered and both had breached human rights laws. One commentator compared this to saying that whites as well as blacks violated human rights in apartheid South Africa.

The deeply ingrained hatred of the Rohingyas in Burma generally has resulted in NGOs such as Médecins sans Frontières being denied access to the injured and to their not being treated in hospitals.

Prior to the Obama speech, President Thein Sein of Burma had indicated to the UN he would address the Rohingya situation and look at everything from 'resettlement of displaced populations to granting of citizenship'. It is likely that offers of citizenship will only be made, if at all, to 'third generation Rohingya' — which excludes hundreds of thousands of people who either could not prove that status or had migrated from Bangladesh later.

Obama's speech, while admitting that 'every nation struggles to define

citizenship', still maintained that the American experience was based on universal principles about 'the right of people to live without the threat that their families may be harmed or their homes burned simply because of who they are or where they come from'.

On current form, there is little hope that the Rohingya will benefit from Obama's visit, designed to show America's friendship, if, in Obama's words, the fist of despotic regimes is unclenched. That applies not just to Burma itself but the region where the Rohingyas' boats of desperation are regularly turned back into the sea.

The recent ASEAN meeting in Cambodia resulted in the ten member states adopting an 'ASEAN Human Rights Declaration' which has been widely criticised for allowing that rights can be restricted if they endanger public security, public morals or public order, and that rights must be weighed against public duty. In other words, you can have your rights so long as you agree with the regime of the day.

It will be interesting to see in 2014, when Burma (or Myanmar, to give it the generals' name) chairs ASEAN, has treated its most despised minority.

I would have urged the Australian Government, with its renewed Asian enthusiasm, to intervene on the Rohingyas' behalf but, given the recent inhumane ideas from both Government and Opposition about the treatment of asylum seekers, it has lost all right to the moral legitimacy required to speak up for the oppressed.

Rejection of women bishops is not terminal

RELIGION

Andrew McGowan

There have been two remarkable, historic events in recent weeks in the Anglican Communion's struggle with the question of women's ordination as bishops.

Last Saturday the Rev. Ellinah Wamukoya was ordained as bishop of Swaziland in southern Africa.

On the continent where most Anglicans now live, women have taken a major step towards full participation in ecclesial leadership. Although African Church leaders have played on the conservative side of serious intra-Anglican arguments in recent years, women's ordination has rarely been central to these. In this case, African Christianity is paying little regard to theological battlelines drawn by westerners.

On the other hand, most eyes in Australia and around the English-speaking world have been on another story, of the Church of England's General Synod [stumbling at the threshold of a change](#) supported by all its leading bishops, and by overwhelming majorities of its clergy and lay members.

This damaging but temporary impasse may ultimately prove to be the less significant story. The growing list of Anglican provinces that have left their staid mother Church standing flat-footed on women's ministry is a clear reminder of what missiologists have been saying for decades, that the European hegemony of the Church is over.

The Church of England faces what the whole western Church faces — a still-emerging secularist dominance of culture and society, within which the Church will be a distinct minority. This was the real, if veiled, subject of the fruitless argument in England last week, and won't go away even when a different result is eventually obtained.

The Church of England's particular gift and burden is its historic comprehensiveness, which has often left it trying to accommodate parts whose diversity challenges the attempt of the whole to manifest a clear identity, let alone to take bold action. These latest events reflect that difficulty.

This was not a decision to reject women as bishops, but a failure to make a decision at all. And the vote was not even about whether to ordain women as bishops, but on how to construct a parallel universe for dissenters, who could opt out of accepting the ministry of women if their parishes determined this was unacceptable to them.

More than anything, it was the rules governing the Synod's decision-making that caused the measure's failure: only six lay votes among more than 200 would



have had to change to achieve the requisite two thirds majority.

While the movement to have women bishops has seemed a juggernaut, supported both by the outgoing Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams and his more evangelical successor Justin Welby, it is by no means certain that a repeated vote on the same proposal would be very different in five years.

The General Synod is composed of bishops, priests and lay persons. Perhaps surprisingly, the further one travels away from the clerical hierarchy in this structure, the more likely one is to encounter conservatism. This is partly because the processes whereby lay members are elected allow more representation from larger conservative evangelical parishes, where the most significant opposition to women's leadership now lies.

As time goes on, the voices and arguments from that minority might actually become louder.

These failed proposals were generous to conservatives. Some of the solutions to the impasse may however be less conciliatory to the dissenters, taking different routes that would bypass the Synod structure and its daunting voting hurdles. These might involve accepting that the almost impossible theological sprawl of the Church of England has its limits, and that fundamentalist forms of evangelicalism in particular are testing them.

To describe the failed vote as suicidal is an overstatement. These events may lose the Church members in the short term, but the possibility of ecclesial death stems from wider issues, and the slide towards secular indifference to the Church is not likely to have been halted merely by the advent of women bishops.

In England as in Australia, there are liberals and conservatives of various traditions who offer glib solutions to the wider malaise of the Church, claiming that the unfolding disaster stems either from failure to change or from excessive change; an issue like this then becomes a locus for dispute between these inadequate alternatives.

Both pay scant attention to history, or even theology — the first reminds us that the Church has struggled for survival before, the second that its heroes have ultimately been measured by faith, not success.

It is the faith of women like Wamukoyah and her sisters in episcopal ministry, not prognostications about the success or failure of a Church with or without them, that continues to commend their ministry and leadership.

'No advantage' policy more harmful than leaky boats

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

The Federal Government is using its imagination and casting around for further ways to be cruel to asylum seekers living in the community on bridging visas. Fairfax [reported](#) on Friday that the Immigration Department has invited church groups to suggest measures that would make the lives of asylum seekers more difficult, as part of its 'no advantage' policy.

The policy is the most politically palatable of the measures recommended by the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers when it handed down its [report](#) in August. It promotes disincentives that will cause asylum seekers to decide against taking 'irregular maritime voyages', by ensuring that they gain 'no benefit by choosing not to seek protection through established mechanisms'.

Last week, Immigration Minister Chris Bowen [announced](#) conditions under which asylum seekers will be released into the community. These include a living allowance that is less than the dole and a ban on working for five years, even after they have been granted asylum.

The Sisters of St Joseph are one of the religious groups working with asylum seekers in the community. Their leader Sr Anne Derwin [says](#) life is already difficult for asylum seekers living in the community.

'No work rights, extremely limited available housing, language and cultural difficulties and an allowance of \$219.20 a week without any concessions, means that quality of life is almost impossible without generous community support. Now the bridging visas with the constant threat of offshore transfer will exacerbate the distress already being felt by these most vulnerable people who seek only safety and a fair go.'

As part of getting its 'no advantage' deterrence message to potential asylum seekers in their countries of origin, the Government would have to be encouraging international media coverage of the extent of the cruelty. One wonders whether that includes when an asylum seeker commits suicide, which is the logical consequence of this policy for some people.

The fact is that if you treat people harshly, you will diminish them as human beings, and they will cease to value their own lives. Already they are prohibited from working. They will have difficulty sustaining relationships and it is unlikely they will feel that they can make a positive contribution to society, perhaps ever. This undermines the justification for the initial harsh treatment.

One of the stated reason for the 'no advantage' policy is that dangerous maritime voyages put the asylum seekers' lives at risk, but surely no more than the 'no advantage' policy itself.

The sinister side of African Aid

POLITICS

Ellena Savage

A few years ago, my brother and I took a trip through western Sumatra. It was my first time in a developing country, and the island we spent most of our time had been devastated by an earthquake a few years before.

Like many places that have been traumatised by disaster, corruption and poverty, it was ripe with contradictions: happy, clever kids, wild chooks, a joyful church scene, but also the desperate hustle for paid work in a cash economy, and for the basics like sanitation and protection against disease.

On one ride through the rice paddies, we drove past a farmhouse where barefoot children spilled out of the doorway and onto the yard. As they called out 'Mister! Mister!' and I waved at them, I had a flashback of an image I had seen as a very young child.

When I was in primary school, a person from an aid agency came to our assembly to let us know that children like us overseas were dying, but that we could help them if we wanted to.

I took home some literature, presumably designed to collect donations from people who actually had the money, the parents. But the picture on the pamphlet disturbed me: a small child, about my own age, sitting on the stoop of a simple wooden house with a dirt floor, beside an infant.

The kids weren't injured or obviously starving, but they looked upset, and their sad story was printed next to them. I felt devastated: I cried at how hopeless their lives were, and how useless I was at saving them.

This was the point: to make Australian kids aware of their economic privilege and of the existence of aid programs. But I wonder if the influence of such material was more sinister, if it made us believe in the weakness of others and in our relative strength and moral purpose.

In Sumatra, it could have been these same kids: the simple house, the parents out working, the material indications of poverty. Yet they were jubilant children, playing and posturing like kids do. Although some people in Sumatra benefit from various kinds of aid, they do not spend their lives staring gloomily down the lens of western sympathy. They have lives, too.

A new online campaign, which is ruthless against the moral vanity of aid culture, directly addresses these issues of representation. [Radi-Aid is an African aid drive](#) to save Norway from its bitter plight. 'People don't ignore starving people, so why should we ignore cold people? Frostbite kills people too', says the introducer. Pop singers join in an anthem to encourage the donation of heaters to needy Norwegians.

The campaign, which is such seamless satire that it takes a few moments to realise what is going on, is aimed at challenging patronising representations of people in developing economies. Its website says, 'If we say Africa, what do you think about? Hunger, poverty, crime or AIDS? No wonder, because in fundraising campaigns and media that's mainly what you hear about.'

It brings to mind a well-known article from a 2005 edition of *Granta*, '[How to Write about Africa](#)', by Binyavanga Wainaina. He writes, 'Never have a picture of a well-adjusted African on the cover of your book, or in it, unless that African has won the Nobel Prize. An AK-47, prominent ribs, naked breasts: use these. If you must include an African, make sure you get one in Masai or Zulu or Dogon dress.'

Two-dimensional characterisations of 'Africa' — which is so homogenously represented it seems as though it could be a country, and not the second largest and second most-populous continent made up of 54 sovereign states — make us ask how useful aid can be if it humiliates people in the long run. These representations are grounded in old colonial power relationships.

China, which is becoming increasingly dependent on African resources, has a mandate of giving [fuller, more positive representations](#) of African populations. Sure, it does so in pursuit of mutually beneficial business relationships. But at least this contributes to humane — rather than exploitative — business dealings.

It is also worth considering that while mainstream aid culture depends on an idea of passive suffering, our consumption habits necessitate poverty. The global distribution of labour means that someone else's material poverty benefits our material wealth.

Caught somewhere here is the need for human suffering to be documented, and for the stories of those in need to be heard. Last year, tens of thousands of people died in the East African famine. Its aftermath will cause some people to suffer permanently for their losses. It is grossly unfair that the world's aid efforts couldn't prevent a climate disaster from becoming a human disaster.

So how do we try to understand these stories without characterising them as victim narratives? Only with humour and respect, and when we can laugh at one another's prejudices. We all have them.

On breaking the seal of confession

RELIGION

Geoffrey Robinson



Last week, in an interview on ABC radio, I made [a statement about the seal of confession and sexual abuse](#) . I have been challenged on that statement, have thought further about it, and wish to make a new statement. The matter is closely allied to the question of the [treatment centre run by the Church](#) , and I'd like to start there.

It was a treatment centre, so the clinicians asked only questions directly related to treatment. This did not include seeking admissions of specific offences and, in particular, it did not involve asking the name and address of any victim. To ask such questions would send the client running away from the treatment. The clinicians therefore did not have knowledge of specific crimes.

More importantly, if one single person had been reported to the police, the entire treatment program would have closed down permanently the same day, for no offender would ever again come near it. In gaining information on one single client that may or may not have been useful in securing a conviction, the price to be paid would have been that no offenders into the future would receive any treatment.

If you ask me whether I can give a guarantee that a particular offender will never offend again after treatment, then no, I cannot give it. But if you ask me whether the number of new offences will be significantly, even dramatically less if 100 offenders receive serious treatment, then yes, I can give that guarantee.

This is a question that society must face. Do we wish to adopt only a single solution of punishment for all cases of sexual abuse? Or do we wish to include treatment as another option? If we can have both, so much the better, but on many occasions that is not possible. Sometimes we have to choose between punishment and prevention.

I believe the treatment centre did a great deal of good. Money spent there was not money spent on offenders rather than on victims, as many have alleged. It was money spent in the attempt to prevent future offences.

Concerning the confessional, the first point to make is that paedophile priests simply do not go to confession. Partly this is because of the distorted thinking that is commonly part of their offence, that they have convinced themselves that what they are doing is not wrong. Partly, it is due to a fear that any priest they approach would not give them an easy absolution, but instead be very demanding indeed in terms of a 'purpose of amendment'.

If any ever did go to confession, they'd make sure it was in circumstances

where they would not be recognised.

The priest hearing the confession would probably not know of the identity of the offender or of the victim, and so would have no specific crime to report. Furthermore, if a single priest broke the seal of confession and reported the matter to the police, that would be the last time any paedophile priest confessed to anything anywhere.

If such a priest came to me, I would be aware that I was dealing with the rare case of a paedophile priest who still had something left of his conscience, and I would try to use that opportunity.

I would remind him of the essential requirement of a 'purpose of amendment' or firm intention not to sin again, and that the very high rate of reoffending in this field was notorious. I would tell him that by means of mere words he was not able to give me any satisfactory guarantee that he would never offend again.

I would say that both he and I could have any confidence in his promise only if he took serious and concrete practical steps to ensure that he would not offend again.

If I thought the atmosphere would allow it, I might mention the police as a means of facing his responsibilities and putting the past behind him, but I'd be aware that this might send him running from the confessional. If that path were not open, I'd discuss other practical possibilities. I'd suggest he enrol for treatment and bring me back proof that he had done so. If we then talked about absolution, we'd both have more confidence that it was real.

If he were not willing to take these practical steps, I would tell him that I really could not believe in his purpose of amendment and so could not in conscience before God and the community give him absolution.

My actions here would once again depend on the community recognising treatment as being better than nothing and allowing for its possibility.

The seal of the confessional is a very high value. If one priest started breaking it, we would enter a subjective world in which different priests used different criteria and in which no one would ever confess, not just to sexual abuse, but to anything at all that anyone might consider a crime. We would then lose the opportunity for change and healing that the confessional can provide.

In 52 years as a priest I have never had to face a conflict situation over the seal of the confessional and sexual abuse, and I don't believe I ever shall. Having said that, I know that life is full of the most extraordinary events and I pray sincerely that I never face a situation where I was convinced that an innocent minor would be abused unless I broke the seal. I believe I would find it impossibly difficult to live with that abuse on my conscience.

Talking to children about the Royal Commission

RELIGION

Kristina Keneally

'By their fruits you shall know them,' says Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount. He is talking about the religious leaders of his time, and reminding people that actions speak louder than words, especially when it comes to discerning holiness and devotion to God.



As a Catholic, I can't help reflecting on and being challenged by this in light of recent events.

My soul has been wrenched reading the stories of abuse of children, many of them incredibly vulnerable, at the hands of Catholic priests and brothers. It's utter horror to contemplate such crimes.

Stories of sexual abuse in the Church have circulated for years, and in America and Ireland the systematic horror has been exposed. Perhaps it was naive, but those of us in Australia — Catholic and non-Catholic alike — weren't forced to face the potential scale and magnitude of the problem here.

But the voices of victims can't be ignored any longer, and they rightfully demand compassion and justice.

Just as horrifying is the likelihood that the Royal Commission into the institutional response to sexual abuse of children will confirm that the Australian Catholic Church is guilty of perpetrating child abuse by hiding criminals from the law. Rather than acting to protect children, the institutional Church may well be found to have simply moved sexual predators round the country to new locations where they could find new victims.

If that is what the Royal Commission brings out, it will be an incredible challenge for many Australian Catholics to continue to follow their faith within an organisation that would appear to have so grossly violated some of the most basic teachings of the Gospel.

Jesus said, 'Let the little children come unto me.' Jesus loved children; he welcomed children. He elevated children as holy and special. Individual members of the Catholic clergy and the institutional Catholic Church appear to have done the polar opposite.

The sexual abuse of children in the Catholic Church represents so much sinfulness that it seems to drive home Jesus' point: by their fruits you shall know them. Australian Catholics are going to face very difficult questions as this Royal Commission conducts its work: What do we really know of our Church? How can we grow in our faith within an organisation whose fruits may well be found to be rotten?

As a mother of children being raised in the Catholic faith, who go to Catholic schools, who are old enough to watch the news and understand, I don't know how to explain to them why a Royal Commission is being called.

As a Catholic, I am not helped by the response of the Church's leadership to the Royal Commission. I'd liked to have told my children that the Catholic Church is acting with compassion and understanding for the victims of abuse and a determination to protect children into the future. Rather, I was left trying to explain why Cardinal Pell sounded defensive and seemed to be projecting blame onto the media for reporting stories of abuse.

It's a challenge to raise children in a religious faith. It's a challenge to hold on to a religious faith as an adult, especially at times like these, when the very institution that has nurtured faith may well be found to have so broken its own faith with Jesus, with its followers and with the community at large.

My Catholic faith has nurtured me; it has given me every great value I have; it has guided me through the best and the worst periods of my life; it has brought me closer to God and delivered moments of real grace.

I object in conscience to the Church's teachings on women, homosexuality and contraception. But I have always endorsed every word of the Apostles' Creed, have always believed Jesus is the Son of God, and that his grace is available to me through the sacraments of the Catholic faith.

These past two weeks have tested my faith in the Church like nothing else. It's possible the findings of the Royal Commission will create a crisis of faith for many Australian Catholics. By their fruits you shall know them: can a church be so sinful yet also full of enough grace to still mediate Jesus' love to its followers?

Church needs to go back to the revolutionary '60s

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton



The 1960s have become a mythical period for both society at large and the Catholic Church in particular. Two myths have currency. One sees the period as a golden age of freedom from unreasonable restraints, openness to new ideas and a crossing of restrictive boundaries. The other sees them as an age of license, of abandonment of a moral code, and of loss of cohesive identity.

A book by Vinnies chief John Falzon led me to ponder these myths. In its style, *The Language of the Unheard* is a throwback to the 1960s. It is written in a variety of voices, from analytical to poetic to anecdotal. It is catholic in the range of writers whom it cites, ranging from popes to Latin American activists, to theorists like Fanon and Marx, and especially little known people who have been marginalised.

Most tellingly, its tone is passionate, combining anger and outrage at the way in which people in Australia are maltreated by the state and excluded by the categories of public opinion. It views society from the perspective of those excluded from its benefits. It insists the remedy for this discrimination must be found in their concerted action. It calls for a quite concrete solidarity with the poor that will empower them to organise to receive justice.

This was the stuff of Catholic activist reflection in the 1960s: the affective tone, the search for wisdom in many places, the belief in direct action by those who are marginalised. It seems surprisingly novel today.

Catholic reflection on matters of justice and poverty plays many of the same notes, but in a different key. Its style is more coolly reflective, offering a bird's eye view of the world of which the poor are part. The solidarity that is key to Catholic social thought is grounded in shared human dignity. It binds the wealthiest citizens to the most impoverished and commits the community to ensure the poorest have an honoured place at the table.

The tone of much Catholic reflection is analytic or exhortatory. Although describing starkly the ills of society, in order to redress them it appeals to people's better nature. In Pope Benedict's thought the petrol that drives the engine of social change for the better is not anger but love. The argument is made from reflection on Christian faith, and other sources of wisdom are often seen as rivals rather than as partners in changing the world.

This perspective is in continuity with the long Catholic tradition, but also bears marks of a conscious reaction against some strands of Catholic reflection current in the 1960s. In contrast to the emphasis on local communities and shared struggle, this reflection is located within the Catholic tradition of authoritative

teaching.

It perhaps represents a reaction against the use of Marxist categories and language in analysing the world, and it recognises that anger is not always a reliable counsellor, with its capacity to mask selfish agendas as altruism.

The rich panorama of Falzon's book draws attention to the importance of some of the 1960s heritage. Affective solidarity is central within any commitment to social justice. Solidarity can never simply be a guiding principle in society. It must also be expressed in concrete relationships between people that move them to concerted action.

Although as critics of the 1960s insist, affective solidarity can degenerate into ineffectual sentiment, any form of solidarity must be measured by the actual relationships we form with those different from us, and by the ways in which we enable their voices to be heard and encourage their solidarity with one another.

The reflection on liberation that has come out of the Latin American Church movements still has much to contribute to Catholic reflection today.

It is also important to recognise the value of righteous anger, while acknowledging its ambiguity. It is right to be angered by the way we marginalise people in society and treat them subsequently. The emphasis on love in Christian faith can mask a fear of anger and conflict, and even be manipulative when used to discourage change.

The scriptures represent God's love and anger as complementary, not as contradictory, and anger and its management have an important part in any commitment to social justice..

Finally, affective rhetoric has an important place in church language about justice and society. Reasoned argument, denunciation and homiletic have their place. But language that moves people is direct and demotic, full of delicate and brutal images of which the scriptures are full, a torrent of words gurgling with many voices.

Taking revenge on idiot America

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***God Bless America* (MA). Director: Bobcat Goldthwait. Starring: Joel Murray, Tara Lynne Barr. 105 minutes**

During the first episode of the great American drama series *Breaking Bad*, chemistry teacher Walter White puts a gun in his mouth and pulls the trigger. Recently diagnosed with lung cancer, Walt had turned to manufacturing methamphetamine as a way to provide for his family after his death. When this scheme seemingly unravels, in desperation, he tries to kill himself. But at that fatal moment, the weapon fails. He survives, but is not the same.

God Bless America, too, features a disaffected middle-aged, middle-class man for whom the diagnosis of a terminal illness is the catalyst for abandoning civilised existence for a life of crime. Like Walt, Frank (Murray) enters into a perspective where the old rules of society seem insignificant. But whereas Walt's suicide attempt crystallises a reordering of his moral priorities, Frank's moral compass remains steady, if decidedly skewed.

He has become increasingly horrified by the vacuous and exploitative nature of American media. In particular, he is appalled by the extent to which it seems to feed, and be fed by, cruelty and selfishness in public behaviour and conversation. After a series of personal setbacks, including losing his job, suffering a romantic rejection of a most humiliating nature, and being diagnosed with a brain tumor, Frank snaps — and goes on a killing spree.

The final straw comes with the realisation that his teenage daughter, who lives with his ex-wife, is displaying spoilt behaviour that mirrors the over-the-top brattishness of a popular reality-TV figure. As a result, Frank's targets are centrally media figures whom he blames for the ill behaviour of his fellow citizens; although, problematically, his murderous agenda expands to include anyone that he decides 'deserves to die'.

In *God Bless America*, comedian-cum-iconoclastic filmmaker Goldthwait has created a brutal, didactic satire. His satirising of the media is particularly subversive and hilarious. As Frank channel-surfs one night we see a Hispanic teen ridiculed by the judges of an *American Idol* style talent show — the youth subsequently attempts suicide; a participant on a reality program titled *Tuff Girls* extracting an in-use tampon and hurling it at a rival; and a news anchor spouting hate-filled propoganda so extreme that it might make Fox News think twice.

Goldthwait pulls few punches with a film that is sharp and funny but exceedingly violent. His antihero Frank has a violent streak even before this endless stream of television trash drives him off the rails. He fantasises about murdering idiotic co-workers, and even the wailing infant child of an obnoxious

neighbour (he does not act on this, although Goldthwait does provide us with a gruesome dream sequence that is played for black humour).

There is a kind of snobbery, as well as a strange nobility, to Frank's quest. In contrast with the figure of Walter White, whose world view becomes increasingly corrupted, Frank's values — skewed as they may be — hold steady. His choice of victims remains consistent with his manifesto, on which he expatiates frequently, and compellingly. One suspects that during these monologues Frank provides a direct mouthpiece for the director.

The greatest test to Frank's moral fortitude comes in the form of Roxy (Barr), an insecure teen who becomes his unlikely sidekick. Roxy, equally disillusioned with humankind but also in desperate need of personal validation, gently leaves ajar windows of opportunity for their partnership to take on a sexual dimension. Frank, to his credit, is so determined not to become 'part of the problem' with America that he firmly closes those windows.

Their friendship lends sweetness to a film that might otherwise be rendered unpalatable by the gratuitous violence and tendency towards preachiness. As it stands *God Bless America* labours its point (it could profitably have lost 20 minutes from its running time) but provides a stunning riposte to passivity in media consumption.

Why the old woman couldn't cross the road

FICTION

Mary Manning

SHORT FICTION: 'TRAFFIC ISLAND'

Flora waits on the plantation in the centre of the road. She has managed to cross four lanes of traffic and is waiting to cross the other four. She is on an island in a sea of traffic and can go neither forward to her home nor back to the shops.

When Flora first settled in this suburb with Luigi she was young and fit and could race across the road to the shops and back, dodging the traffic, laughing at the fun of it all. Luigi has been gone a long time now, she is 75 years old and the road is eight lanes wide. Where she once danced her shopping jeep across the lanes of traffic when a gap appeared she now moves tentatively. And these days the gaps are fewer and shorter. The unbroken stream of speeding trucks, buses and cars is enough to make anyone feel unsure.

Earlier today she crossed the road to show Mr J. J. Bullfinch, chartered accountant and tax agent, a letter she received from the pension people. It said she appeared to have worked more than ten hours in some fortnightly periods during the last financial year and must therefore repay \$10,000.

No matter how many times she counted the zeros, there were still four. In her whole life she had never owned as much as \$1000 at any one time. The idea of 10,000 was beyond her. And the letter contained lies; she had not worked for money since she finished her job at the market 20 years ago. She showed the letter to her neighbour who agreed that something must be done, and that Mr J. J. Bullfinch would know how to deal with this matter.

Flora had read the words Chartered Accountant and Tax Agent on Mr J. J. Bullfinch's window many times but had never imagined going inside the door. She had never even peered through the bits of window around the big white letters. She knew accountants did things with money but she found the other words mysterious.

She would treat this trip as an adventure. While she was out she would buy a red capsicum, two onions, and a small loaf of bread. And a box of the mango and guava juice intended for children's lunch boxes. She had seen this advertised on television during breaks in *Herd*, a documentary about how animals once lived in the wild. She decided she would treat herself and buy it to try.

The shops and Mr J. J. Bullfinch's office were more or less opposite the side street from where Flora lived. Only five minutes away if she scuttled across between the traffic.

There was a safer way. But, it involved walking for 15 minutes in either direction, crossing at traffic lights and walking back to the shops. Then the process

had to be reversed to get home again. Younger people seemed to treat this as fun, as good exercise. Pairs of young women wearing singlets and peaked caps strode energetically, backs straight, arms swinging. Others took far less than 15 minutes to speed along the path on their roller blades pushing laughing babies in strollers.

Flora too had used this route, but over the years she had grown tired and heavy, until she felt like an old elephant trudging along the path. She became so weary she considered lying on the path under the trees until someone rescued her. But she kept going and when she reached the lights she waited for the green 'walk' sign that changed to a flashing red sign just as she made it to the little island in middle of the road.

On each side of her, cars with revving engines were lined up like a huge herd of bison pawing the ground, impatient to take off across the vast plains of North America, making the very ground rumble. She had to wait a long time for another green light to tell her she could complete the journey. Then, rested from the wait, she strode across the remaining lanes pushing her jeep in front of her. She felt like an explorer from another time in history but the excitement had worn off by the time she made it home.

Not wanting to face that long, hard journey again she went back to crossing the road at the end of her street. She always chose a quieter time like early in the afternoon before the mothers picked up their children from school and drove them to swimming, ballet or tennis, and tradies were heading home from work.

The mornings were much worse, there were even more trucks and utes on the road. She read the signs on their vehicles advertising products and services such as gardening and dog grooming. Other trucks were full of food, soft drinks and handy pre-cooked meals that the young mothers could just pop in the microwave when they arrived home with their children. She thought about how people used to do their own gardening and dog grooming and most of their own cooking. In those days, there wasn't all this busy-ness.

Today she had left home soon after her lunch, allowing plenty of time to get across the road and back before the peak hour traffic started up. She timed it well and managed to make it to the other side.

Gathering up her courage she knocked on Mr J. J. Bullfinch's door and he opened it. Now she recognised him — the round smiling man she sometimes saw in the delicatessen buying his lunch and chatting with the shopkeeper about cheeses or cold meats. 'Come in, come in,' he said. He read the letter she held out. 'Yes, we must do something about this.' He pointed to a chair, 'I am expecting a client but you sit here and read a magazine until I have a window of opportunity to squeeze you in.'

She thought this sounded very uncomfortable but she sat and waited.

When he was free he asked her some questions and said, 'Leave it in my hands.'

They have made a mistake. I will be delighted to take care of it for you.’ She felt very lighthearted as she did her shopping, adding some treats, sliced hot salami and a piece of good cheese to celebrate.

When she reached the road she saw streams of traffic in both directions, endless lines of cars, trucks and buses, colours flashing by to a roar of sound, a ferocious stampede of traffic.

She waited, hoping for a gap to appear. Suddenly one did. The two lanes nearest her were miraculously empty for quite a distance. The large vehicle belting down the third lane would soon pass, and there appeared to be nothing in the fourth lane. She breathed deeply and bending over her jeep shoved it ahead of her like an armoured vehicle of war.

She moved across the two empty lanes as fast as she could, almost too fast. The driver of the tour bus in the third lane sounded his horn and swerved his vehicle into the fourth lane to avoid her. Horrified faces gaped from its windows.

She shrugged her shoulders as if to say how else am I to cross the road to get to my own home? When she pulled her jeep onto the central plantation she felt like crying at the thought of tackling the four lanes of traffic coming from the other direction.

What was she to do? Mr J. J. Bullfinch would surely rescue her if he knew of her plight. He would stride out into the traffic and it would stop when he raised his right hand. But why should she imagine he would come? He hardly knew her. She was alone, sitting on the grass shaking from the shock of being nearly hit by a bus.

She sat for a long time until she felt hungry. The sky was beginning to darken. It was close to tea time. She rummaged in her jeep and took out the bread and — ah! — the salami; thank goodness.

Luigi came into her thoughts. She remembered sitting with him by a river somewhere. Just the two of them eating a picnic under a huge gum tree. Was he really so young and beautiful? But that was so long ago and he had been dead a long time. He could not help her cross this road.

The juice was not as nice as she’d expected so she drank only half. She tore off a hunk of bread and ate it with salami.

Enormous trucks passed with a rush of wind. She pulled out the green garbage bags lining her jeep, tore them apart and used twigs to attach the plastic to the tree’s lower branches. Now she had a curtain to shelter her from people’s eyes, and a bathroom of sorts.

She was glad of the dark as the thin stream of her urine flowed towards the road.

Might her neighbour realise she had not come home? Did Flora tell anyone she

was visiting Mr J. J. Bullfinch? She wrapped her scarf around her ears to keep out the traffic noise and, exhausted by her day, fell asleep propped against the rough bark of the tree trunk.

The traffic sounded quieter when she woke in the morning. Of course, it was early. She would pack her jeep and be home in a few minutes for a hot bath and a nice rest in her bed.

When she unwrapped the scarf from her ears and looked at the road she saw and heard the traffic, four lanes belting along in each direction. The gaps between vehicles were becoming smaller by the minute. It was much worse than at the best of times on normal days. She could not cross or even go back the way she had come. She could do nothing but wait. A newspaper rolled up in plastic landed nearby and she read it over her breakfast, more bread, more salami and the remainder of the juice.

The day went on. A child threw her a bag of Minties. She dodged a tartan travel rug and a plastic bottle of water that a woman tossed to her. The traffic flowed, roared and passed. A bag of Easter buns landed at her feet. She had food and drink, her rug, an umbrella, a waterproof groundsheet and a tiger-striped cushion. She could wait.

The traffic buzzes, rumbles and roars past without a break. She waits and waits for it to stop.

A Jew and a Palestinian walk into a cafe

POLITICS

Lyn Bender

On a Sunday in Acland Street, St Kilda — the Melbourne Jewish cake and bagel hub — I had coffee with two friends: one an Egyptian, the other a Palestinian. We discussed the current situation in Gaza. My Palestinian friend expressed her anguish and worry about her family there. 'Imagine how terrified the children must be.' We drank our coffee and shared our powerlessness and sorrow at the turmoil in the Gaza strip.



What is missing in most discussions of the rights and wrongs of the ongoing Israel and Palestine situation? Certainly not statistics. There are plenty of those confirmed or disputed, about the number of Hamas rockets launched, Israeli air strikes, troops massing, deaths and injuries..

Social media has also entered the fray with the Israeli Defence Force [tweeting its assassination of Hamas leader Ahmed Jabri](#) complete with a YouTube visual in real time. This is drama at its best or worst. We can all have a front row seat in the theatre of war now.

But as I pour over the tweets coming out of Gaza I feel despair. Where is the world outrage and recognition that ordinary people on both sides are being used as pawns in a political chess game?

Mark Regev, Israeli spokesman, has declared that [Hamas 'started it and we will finish it'](#) . This is kindergarten thinking and a primitive, ineffectual means of conflict resolution.

We are muted in our responses to the escalation of aggression in Gaza, but should confront the truth. For all its declarations of acting in self-defence, the Israeli government holds the position of power. Furthermore as was demonstrated four years ago by the Israeli offensive into Gaza, nothing is gained by violence. Peace is not secured, civilians are not protected, and no-one feels safer.

But overwhelmingly [Palestinian citizens pay the unacceptably atrocious price](#) for Israeli posturing. In the 2008 invasion of Gaza by Israel, it is reported that 13 Israeli soldiers died, while 1200 Palestinians were killed and 5000 were injured. Many were women and children.

Ironically as Israel stands accused of violating human rights in its occupation of Gaza, the world is largely silent. Killing by Hamas is equally reprehensible, but Hamas killing has been denounced by most western countries.

In the wake of the Second World War, Jewish people rightly complained that the world [had been virtually silent](#) : silent when they were vilified, divested of rights and had their property seized; silent when they were driven into ghettos; silent

when European Jewry were deported to Poland.

The world was silent when Jewish people suffered incursions and massacres and the 'final solution' in death camps. A vast number of my own family were murdered during this time of silent consent.

Now the boot is on the other foot.

We must not remain silent regarding the abuses and killing being inflicted on a whole people.

The Israel Defense Forces sent [text messages to Gaza](#) mobile phones: 'The next phase is on the way'. I find this chilling. Is this the worst kind of Chutzpah? Or is this terror?

Identification with the aggressor is a human defense mechanism used to gain power over trauma.

Described by psychoanalyst (and daughter of Sigmund) Anna Freud, as well as the American child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim, it occurs when victims who feel helpless take on the aggressive characteristics of their oppressors. It is a survival mechanism transmitted across generations.

This mechanism is developing in Gaza as well, and producing Hamas. Victim-becoming-aggressor goes a long way towards accounting for how violence begets violence.

There are voices condemning Israel's ongoing violence in Gaza. [Jews for a Just Peace Australia](#) is allied to a worldwide movement. Professor Naomi Chomsky has released a strong statement on the conflict and Israel's action: '[It is not a war, it is murder.](#)'

But most opinion pieces uphold that [this is a war in defense of Israel](#) . Like a favored child, Israel remains almost beyond criticism.

On a beautiful Melbourne day we pored over the photos on Facebook of the view from the house of my Palestinian friend's cousin. Smoke and fire has become her worldview. 'Most Australians have not known war and don't understand,' Samiah exclaimed. 'And that's a good thing,' our Egyptian friend responded, smiling sadly.

The latest death toll is reported as Palestinian: 100; Israeli: 3.

Conscientious Catholics come around to contraception law

POLITICS

Fatima Measham



Last week the United Nations declared that access to contraception is a universal human right. It brings into sharp relief the long-running debate in the Philippines over family planning.

According to UN Population Fund executive director Dr Babatunde Osotimehin, 'Not only does the ability for a couple to choose when and how many children to have help lift nations out of poverty, but it is also one of the most effective means of empowering women. Women who use contraception are generally healthier, better educated, more empowered in their households and communities and more economically productive.'

Yet for decades, Philippine Catholic Church officials have been vocal in their resistance to any state policy that includes artificial contraception. It was not until Benigno Aquino III was elected in 2010 that proponents found a presidential ally. Aquino has so far resisted calls to drop his legislative agenda on reproductive health and 'responsible parenthood' despite threats of a tax boycott and excommunication.

Artificial contraception is taboo in the predominantly Catholic Philippines. The Church holds that it is intrinsically evil as it is non-procreative, a teaching that many Filipino Catholics take to heart. The policy and politics around it is thus personal, and so discourse has been emotive and divisive.

The doctrine is not infallible, though its defenders speak as if it is. Their language has been uncommonly fervent.

Churchgoers have been warned from the pulpit about expulsion should they support legislation. When floods shut down the capital in August, some public figures concluded that 'heaven must be crying' because the bill had progressed to the amendment stage. When 160 faculty members at the Jesuit-run Ateneo de Manila University produced a statement supporting the bill, a bishop declared they ought to be investigated for heresy and sacked if found guilty. (There are now 192 signatories.)

The fervour is hollow because it does not address identified social problems such as high rates of poverty and teenage pregnancy, as well as inconsistent access to sexual health information, products and services.

As a Manila-based friend pointed out to me, the Church's opposition is not about policy, including whether the legislation would effectively meet its stated goals, but doctrine.

In fact, the rhetorical focus on fertility control has been at the expense of other provisions in the bill such as maternal and child health care, age-appropriate sex

health education, programs for indigent women and persons with disability, as well as protections for female employees.

Moreover, despite the support of Islamic clerics and Protestant churches for the bill, its critics are yet to reckon with a pluralistic society under (at least nominally) a secular government that is bound to enforce the common good. That is, one that benefits all members including the non-Catholic minority.

In any case, many conscientious Catholics are themselves arriving at the conclusion that they can support the bill without having to renounce their faith. That indeed they can support it in good faith. This is the spirit in which the president of Ateneo de Manila University received the sentiments of academic staff, despite official reticence over aspects of the bill that are 'ambiguous or inimical from a legal, moral or religious perspective'.

Fr Jose Ramon Villarin SJ, in his response to the professors' position paper, noted their 'social compassion and intellectual efforts' and urged them to 'continue their discernment for the common good'.

His statement was received as a balm to a phenomenally heated debate, as it acknowledged that despite their differences, both sides are sensitive to the inherent tensions between ideals and lived realities.

'Catholic tradition has always taught that reason and faith are not enemies but allies in the service of God's truth,' says Fr Villarin. 'From this tradition, we can draw strength and compassion in our often tortuous journey as persons in community toward the greater glory of God and the service of God's people'.

It is the sort of language that may yet reconcile those locked in such a polarised debate. It should be emulated as a way of engaging in conflict, one that assumes the integrity of opponents and focuses on shared problems.

City rush hour adventures

POETRY

Peter Bakowski

Frog in ornamental pond, Fitzroy Gardens, East Melbourne

Sticky-tongued,
I leap and swallow,
kick-swim down
to the cooling depths.
The afternoon suggests digestion.
Above me
a child's shadow throws bread scraps
until called away by a disallowing voice.
The hulls of ducks bunch
then become orderly fleets.
There's always a straggler.
Disturbed days too.
Surface hiss of cigarette butt,
splash and roll of beer can,
trespass of a Labrador —
green reeds bent or broken,
water shuddering.
Night is best.
My croaking
joins the slippery choir
of fellow frogs,
semi-submerged baritones.
We pause to look up at
our silver patrons, the stars,
sad that their applause
wont reach us

for light years.

This is where I belong —
learning the water, alert
to all manner of winged food,
when hailstones or a boy's sharp stick
stab through the green skin of lily pads.

To be a frog
or not to be a frog?
Now, that's an interesting question.
I'll give you my answer
the next time someone
who hasn't got cooking pot eyes
bends down to kiss me.

The scalpel is and isn't a wand

Here are the patients, their
Orifices and organs
Secreting, bleeding, failing, slowly, quickly,
Probed, slit, suctioned, stitched, sent to
Intensive care, in faith, in hope, perhaps beyond medicine's ambitious reach.
The waiting for X-rays, the doctor's verdict as you rub at a spot on your
trousers.

All the flowers, get well cards, visitors whose smiles and jokes sometimes falter.
Leaving is best. You feel the sun warm the body that is yours again for a while.

City workers during morning rush hour, Collins Street, Melbourne, 2012

Perhaps not fully awake you exit Parliament Station, alight from trams.
Expected you are — to join the ballet of the brisk.
Rebel by sitting on a park bench. Such a luxury may incite a
Scowl on a passing face. Reading the
Obituaries in The Age may distract, you'll learn how many times a certain
Nuclear scientist was married. This knowledge of a more troubled life may

Allow you to take a break from painting the town grey.
Look up at the bird-borrowed sky. It's not raining rats and tarantulas.
What a gift is hunger. Because of it your ancestors left their caves,
Explored plains, valleys, rivers, seas. Their
Adventures became stories, paintings, songs.
There's the story of each person, on the trains, trams, street corners.
How vulnerable you are, how strong you are. I want to reveal your
Essence via the camera of this poem, as you swarm and
Rush in the business district, glance again at wristwatches.

The Church should accept its humiliation

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

Last week we received a fine article on the child sexual abuse Royal Commission from a writer who had worked for a Catholic Church agency that deals with children.

He told of how he'd been at a consultation that included presentations from the Church and from advocates representing victims of church-related sexual abuse. Afterwards he accidentally struck up what he called a 'warm and constructive friendship' with a victims' rights advocate that led to some significant cooperation.

A few hours after sending the article, the writer wrote again to withdraw it. I was disappointed, but pleased that he subsequently gave me permission to quote from his email, in which he explained his decision:

*I've been trying to figure my discomfort...
and it is something like this:
that any words we write at this time run the risk
of justifying ourselves as church people,
instead of undertaking our real task
which is to sit in silence and shame and confusion....
and repent*

I believe that our writer made the correct call. It is, as he suggests, time to let the dignity of victims shine, and for the Church to set *its* dignity aside, without question, and accept the humiliation that has come its way. In other words, the Church needs to take its own advice about imitating the humility of Christ. It often preaches this using the [text](#) from St Paul's letter to the Philippians:

'In humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave.'

The consensus is that Cardinal Pell [failed](#) in that regard during his media conference on church sexual abuse last Tuesday, particularly with assertions such as this: 'We object to it being exaggerated, we object to being described as the ...only cab on the rank... .'

I also failed last Monday when I [argued](#) in *Eureka Street* that the mistakes the



BBC made in its mistaken identification of a former government official as a pedophile should cause us to apply 'a degree of skepticism' to all investigative reporting, including that of church sexual abuse.

Any hope that the Church has of being a credible witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ depends upon its ability to accept its current humiliation and give glory instead to the sexual abuse victims whom it has humiliated.

Going backwards after Abbott's 'urban Aboriginal' gaffe

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Myrna Tonkinson



It is a sobering irony to hear Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda claim that 'if you have a drop of Aboriginal blood, you're Aboriginal'. As a person of African ancestry and a descendant of the slave population in the 'new world', I found this comment a little troubling.

This and other comments on Aboriginality last week hark back to an earlier and ugly period of classification based on ideas about race, culture and identity. Gooda's remarks are part of a new battle of words about Aboriginality, with a number of prominent persons voicing notions of what constitutes 'authenticity'.

Tony Abbott started this latest debate by making some ill-conceived remarks about Ken Wyatt, a member of the Liberal Party, the only Aboriginal person currently serving in the Australian Parliament, and the first to be elected to the House of Representatives.

Abbott described Wyatt as 'not a man of culture' and compounded his error by describing NT government minister Alison Anderson as 'an authentic representative of the ancient cultures of central Australia' and 'a highly traditional Australian Aboriginal, who is nevertheless charismatic and inspirational in modern Australia'.

He welcomed the prospect of Anderson running for Federal Parliament and appeared to contrast her with Wyatt, 'an urban Aboriginal' (there has been no comment on the rather patronising tone in his praise of Anderson).

It is fair to assume that Abbott would not wish to offend one of his own MPs, who won a seat formerly held by Labor, but his words demonstrate lingering prejudice and ignorance about identity.

An implication of these remarks is that Aboriginality can be authentic only when certain criteria, readily discerned by observers like Abbott, are met. This suggests the invocation of stereotypes like *remote*, *dark-skinned*, *non-EFL*, 'traditional' etc. While Mr Abbott's remarks are retrograde, they are not all that surprising as he seems to have a penchant for clumsy mis-speaking. Some responses to his remarks, however, are also discomfiting.

Gooda is reported to have said 'Aboriginality is not defined by the colour of your skin, or whether you live in a remote or urban community', which is an incontrovertible observation and where he should probably have left it. Reference to blood, however, conjures up the absurd measurements that were used to classify and separate Aboriginal people in the past, including providing justification

for removing children from their parents.

The 'one drop of blood' notion was often invoked in the USA where, regardless of colour, any known 'Negro' ancestry could be used to exclude people from full citizenship and ruin a person's life if it were disclosed when the person had been 'passing' as 'white'. There were parallels in Australia, but less consistency. White 'blood' often seen as having redemptive qualities and as a justification for separation from 'full bloods'.

Colour classification as a shorthand way of identifying cultural difference is inevitably flawed and inaccurate. So is the lumping of people under labels that are presumed to convey reliable information about them. These tendencies seem contradictory but both are used for a variety of political ends.

In dignified and measured words, Wyatt rejected Abbott's characterisation, stating that 'It is unfortunate that we have got this whole debate going around authentic Aboriginals because all Aboriginal people, no matter where they live, are authentic ... All of us are proud of our heritage.'

Demonstrating the diversity and complexity within the category 'Aboriginal', Wyatt's nephew, Ben Wyatt, a Labor politician in the Western Australian legislature, made a more robust response in defence of his uncle, and offered demographic and cultural instruction:

Tony Abbott ... seems to have absolutely no understanding about Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal history. To suggest that Ken is not a sufficient Aboriginal for Tony Abbott because he's not a man of culture, I think not only Ken will find offensive but every Western Australian should find offensive ... Particularly those Aboriginal people, the vast majority of Aboriginal people, who do live in our nation's cities and towns.

In her forthcoming Boyer lectures, Professor Marcia Langton will address 'the emergence of an Aboriginal middle class in Australia in the last two to three decades' that has 'gone largely unnoticed'. This development is not new and will doubtless strengthen. Class, and other differences, including multiple ethnic affiliations, will continue and multiply and have a variety of consequences.

I recall debates in the 1970s and '80s about whether black Americans' inequality was more about class or race; there were similar discussions about gender vs class, and indeed about the intersection of gender, race and class. People's sense of identity is multi-faceted.

Identity and interests will differ among Aboriginal people as they do in other groups, and there will be increasing awareness among the wider Australian population that there is no homogenous, monolithic Aboriginal community, nor is there a single measure, biological or cultural, of Aboriginality.

