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Pop up shop of poetic pollie horrors

CREATIVE

Brian Matthews



When I was in Year 10, I was punished for some trivial misdemeanour the precise nature of which I have long since forgotten, by having to write out Byron's poem 'The Ocean' twenty times.

*Roll on, thou deep and dark blue ocean, roll! Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain
Man marks the earth with ruin; his control/ Stops with the shore …*

I'm not bothering to check those lines as I type them but I bet they're right, because if there's one lonely virtue to be had from copying a poem twenty times it is that it becomes cauterised into some part of your brain and neither age nor vicissitude nor shock nor carelessness nor a concerted act of will can ever obscure or compromise it.

Byron's salute to the briny, brought back to me yet again while walking this morning on the beach, is of course not the only rhyme stuck irremovably in the labyrinths of my subconscious. Far from it. We all have these abruptly resurfacing images, tunes, memories and references. Mine happen often to be poems or quotations or brief lines that pop up unannounced and unsummoned because I have spent a great deal of my working and casual life involved in some way or another with the written word.

For example, Treasurer Joe Hockey's musings on the difference between the poor, who don't drive very far - 'O scathful harme, condition of povertie' (Chaucer) - and the rich, who are 'lifters', had me invaded mentally by Yeats's 'Meditations in Time of Civil War': 'Surely among a rich man's flowering lawns/Amid the rustle of his planted hills/Life overflows without ambitious pains.' Without pain and *with* cigars and feet up on desks and smirks of self-congratulation. Surely!

Every now and then, however, these otherwise random intrusions into one's mental and imaginative world take on a kind of unwanted or certainly unorganised coherence; a theme emerges despite your efforts to concentrate on something quite different.

So, suddenly, towards the end of last year, I found myself recalling fragments of that scene (Act 4, scene iii) in *Macbeth* where Macduff and Malcolm (!) bemoan Scotland's

descent into disorder. Their 'poor country … weeps, it bleeds; and each new day a gash/Is added to her wounds'. Their long discussion is about leadership and, among Macbeth's other shortcomings, his dangerous unpredictability. Yet to make a move, to oppose and attempt to overthrow him, is a fearful proposition fraught with imponderable ramifications and possibilities.

And so, vaguely pestered by these hauntings, I arrived along with the rest of the nation, at Australia Day. Our head of State, the Governor-General, abandoned his country's special day to mourn in Saudi Arabia - a place of public beheadings, ritual stonings and discrimination against women. For his part, the Prime Minister produced his own *coup de théatre*, which, for just a moment, transported me to yet another world of the imagination familiar because of its unhinged refusal to accept the realities and mundanities of everyday life.

'In a village of La Mancha [lived a gentleman] … age bordering on fifty … of a hardy habit, spare, gaunt-featured, a very early riser and a great sportsman … [one day] he hit upon the strangest notion that ever madman in this world hit upon, and that was that he fancied it was right and requisite, as well for the support of his own honour as for the service of his country, that he should make a Knight …'

Well, that's all I could remember until I looked it up, but you'll readily see how such an image should have assembled itself in even less fevered brains than mine when, on the morning of Australia Day, our Prime Minister metaphorically strapped on his 'doublet of fine cloth and velvet breeches and shoes to match for holidays' and, like Don Quixote of La Mancha with his demented commitment to chivalric romance, transported us back to another age, long past, and created a new Knight for our land.

It was a grand moment, awkwardly dwarfing other honours bestowed that same day. Like the hero of La Mancha, our new Knight will be required - in common with all his dubbed colleagues - to engage in 'righteous warfare' because on the horizon the huge, looming silhouettes of the windmill army await only a sharp zephyr to set their sails flailing. As he charges the stolid monsters - against the advice of his loyal, bemused acolyte, Sancho Panza, and in honour of his equally uncomprehending beloved, Dulcinea - Don Quixote proclaims, using language eerily predictive of Prime Minister Abbott's three hundred years later, 'It is God's good service to sweep so evil a breed from off the face of the earth.'

So - we have the Knight of the Ready Gaffe. And now step forward: Sancho Pyne, or Sancho Hockey, or Sancho Brandis or Sancho Morrison. And Dulcinea Bishop. Then again, perhaps we should chuck the lot of them, heavy armour and all, into 'the unplumbed, salt, estranging sea' (Matthew Arnold).



Brian Matthews is honorary professor of English at Flinders University and an award winning columnist and biographer.

The PM's taste for old blood

AUSTRALIA

John Warhurst



Governments in trouble often reshuffle their ministry to introduce renewal and new blood. Sometimes they fall short and Tony Abbott's reshuffle to begin 2015 is a case in point with one exception.

Sussan Ley, the new Health minister, is trying to cope with the shemozzle that she inherited from the Prime Minister and her predecessor, Peter Dutton. She cancelled the immediate implementation of the cut to the Medicare rebate and promised more consultation, while sticking to the general company line on reining in health costs. Her performance has been nothing marvellous so far but her style is fresh and engaging; just what this federal government lacks. It boasts a stack of experienced but boring ministers.

Ley, the member for Farrer, based in Albury, and formerly an air-traffic controller, farmer and public servant, may turn out to be one of the bright spots for the government this year. She is genuine new blood at the higher level and might even bring about some renewal in the government, at least in image.

This distinction between reshuffle, renewal and new blood is important. Ley occupies her new position because of the Cabinet reshuffle in December, which also elevated Josh Frydenberg to Assistant Treasurer, replacing Arthur Sinodinos, tainted by political scandal at ICAC. Ley was Assistant Education Minister. The music stopped at Health for her because Scott Morrison moved to Social Services to replace Kevin Andrews who moved to Defence to replace David Johnston who was dropped from the ministry altogether. Dutton moved to Immigration.

It was not a serious effort at renewal. Abbott shuffled the existing deck of cards but didn't introduce many new ones at the senior level. Even at the junior level there wasn't much movement. Senator Simon Birmingham replaced Ley as the Assistant Education Minister. Brett Mason was dropped as a Parliamentary Secretary, apparently because of internal Queensland Liberal National Party politics rather than ability, leaving poor

Johnston as the single casualty because of alleged poor performance. Clearly it was not a ministerial performance review or a serious effort to inject new blood into the Cabinet and the ministry.

This reshuffle moved some senior ministers from the portfolios they had spent fifteen months administering and getting to know. Most of them had also been shadow ministers in these portfolios while in Opposition. Andrews, for instance, had spent years getting to know the sector and thinking through what his approach to Social Services was going to be and now, after less than half a term in office, he is no longer minister.

Shuffling the ministerial deck can sometimes produce improved government performance. The new ministers may just click in their new portfolios. The whole exercise may produce new energy in the Cabinet. It may lead the way to changes in policy under the guise of the new minister putting their own stamp on the portfolio.

But this assumes that the central control of government policy allows room for flexibility by individual ministers. There has been little sign of this so far.

The limited renewal of the Cabinet and ministry embodied in the December reshuffle is characteristic of Abbott's approach. He entered government promising that his government would be a continuation of the John Howard era. Therefore he stuck with those who had served as Howard ministers. He elevated little new blood when he came to government and he has compounded this error by his very cautious mid-term reshuffle.

One aspect of his first Cabinet was the almost complete absence of women with only Foreign Minister Julie Bishop among the 20 Cabinet ministers. Bishop has been one of the better performers, perhaps the best. Ley may also turn out to be more successful than the old hands.

Gender is part of the Cabinet's problem but it is not the only one. The whole Cabinet needs to be fresher and more engaging. Abbott will probably need a second Cabinet reshuffle by the end of the year.

In the meantime the Prime Minister needs to look to the future rather than the past; his preoccupation with knighthoods and his unilateral award of one to the Duke of Edinburgh is evidence of his attraction to old rather than new blood. Whatever the composition of the Cabinet he must bring them into his confidence and learn from them if their collective performance is to improve.

John Warhurst is an Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the Australian National University and a Canberra Times columnist.

Grieving pilgrim's wild days in the wilderness

REVIEWS

Tim Kroenert

Wild (MA). Director: Jean-Marc Vallée. Starring: Reese Witherspoon, Laura Dern, Thomas Sadoski. 115 minutes

Last year, the Australian film *Tracks* recreated Robyn Davidson's 1978 trek, 2700km overland from Alice Springs to the Indian Ocean. Cinematographically sublime - rendering vast, claustrophobic space, and grey-green scrub against yellow sand and white-hot sun - what the film possessed in mysticism it lacked in basic human insight. Its Robyn was an enigma, her motivation all but inscrutable.

Wild shares *Tracks*' evocation of awesome wilderness - in this case, the rugged, mountainous wilds of California and Oregon - but is rooted in its hero's humanity. It is based on Cheryl Strayed's account of her solo 1600-plus km trek along America's Pacific Crest Trail, and makes of her endeavour a kind of expurgatory quest; a march to the transcendent inner spaces beyond guilt and desolation.

Cheryl (as portrayed here by Witherspoon) is haunted by her past - by her own sins, and by tragedies that have befallen her. These come to us in fragments; as Cheryl walks, she hums, and the music she hears in her head leads her in and out of the past. Cleverly, director Vallée bends the film's soundtrack to Cheryl's march-and-hum, helping to frame and intensify these often painful memories.

Her mother (Dern) and her ex-husband, Paul (Sadoski) feature regularly in these memories. The true significance of these two figures is revealed only gradually. Certainly, Cheryl has done wrong, and is trying to atone. But why is Paul, whom she has treated so poorly, so supportive when she speaks to him on the phone? And why are her memories of her mother so steeped in almost mawkish nostalgia?

The trek is, of course, pointedly, a metaphor for Cheryl's life. Each hardship she overcomes brings her a step closer to facing down the fierce regrets that gnash at her heels. This is a timeless storytelling device that might seem trite, if not for Nick Hornby's poignant, funny screenplay, Vallée's elegant direction, and the vast wellspring of quietly turbulent emotion Witherspoon brings to the role.

Cheryl seems out of her depth almost from the get-go; she battles with a ludicrously overstuffed backpack, brings the wrong kind of fuel for her portable stove, and struggles to erect a simple dome tent. We are invited to laugh at these misadventures, but we also root for her. Like all of us, she is on a journey from naivety to experience. She seems visibly to grow with each new lesson learnt.

She benefits greatly from the kindness of strangers. After a shaky start to her trek, she is forced to put herself at the mercy of a farmer whom she comes across on a deserted back road. Finding her at her most vulnerable, he treats her with the utmost generosity. In fact with one frightening exception, Cheryl finds the majority of the people she meets

on and around the trail in to be similarly generous.

It is a decidedly upbeat view of humanity, and it is this, perhaps more than anything, that helps lead Cheryl out of the wilderness and to a place of contentment with herself, her world, and the other flawed human beings who inhabit it.

Tim Kroenert is assistant editor of Eureka Street.

The view from outside glass house Australia

AUSTRALIA

Andrew Hamilton

Complaints about hypocrisy are rarely edifying. They are usually made to draw attention away from the harm we are doing by pointing to the bad things our critics are doing. But Pierre Martinus' charge made in Saturday's *Jakarta Post*, that 'Canberra is merely trying to save their own &'subject bodies&' from the firing squad, while slowly disposing of &'abject bodies&' it does not want through inhumane detention camps or returning them to foreign regimes that will probably finish the job for them', is not so easily dismissed.

He rightly deplores the brutality both of Indonesian and Australian treatment of drug traffickers and asylum seekers respectively. Both are based on the logic of deterrence - of potential drug traffickers and of people who seek protection from persecution. Pragmatically, it must be admitted that deterrence works. Manus Island is its showpiece. The camp on Manus, with its isolated and claustrophobic location, long delay in processing applications, and best option of an uncertain residence in PNG, is a gold-standard deterrent. No one would cheerfully choose to end up there.

Deterrence, like execution, is a transaction between human beings. So it is important for us as Australians to look beyond the language of policy with its antiseptic formulations of push and pull factors, unlawful boat arrivals, transferees, migration zones and security of borders, to reflect on how the deterrent value of Manus Island and of execution is played out in human lives. Only when we have weighed this will we be in a position to applaud the effectiveness and wisdom of our policy or deplore its inhumanity.

Manus Island is an effective deterrent because people who seek protection from persecution can imagine from personal experience what life on Manus Island may be like. They have lived in fear, are familiar with prisons and licensed callousness, know what it is like for all relationships and projects to be put on hold. Because they seek freedom, hospitality and the opportunity to begin a new and productive life in a generous society, they can imagine the despair of being rejected by that society and being transferred to a prison without trial, with no access to law and no guarantee of any future anywhere. Manus Island will surely make them think again.

But few of us can imagine the effects that the passing of time in detention has on the spirit. As Patrick McGorry famously said, detention centres are factories for producing mental illness. When people, often already traumatised by the past experiences of persecution and flight, have infinite, idle time to feel guilt because they can do nothing to help their families, to feel dread that they may be returned to danger, and to feel frustration that they must live in total dependence and passivity, they naturally feel prey to depression and rage. In an environment like Manus Island that they perceive as hostile, this distress is exacerbated.

Of course what potential asylum seekers do not see and cannot easily imagine will not be an effective deterrent. But mental illness often finds public expression in destructive activity. In enclosed and isolated situations it leads to self-harm and to aggressive behaviour. These increase the anxiety of officers responsible for keeping people locked up in an orderly way, and are often met by further restrictions on their liberty. This can escalate to organised protests and to their forced suppression.

Where there is no access to independent information, Government spokespersons minimise the incidents, blame them on the people who seek protection and on their

supporters in Australia, and reiterate their determination that no one from Manus Island will settle in Australia. Accounts given by the people themselves of what has happened to them necessarily lack context, and are discounted as self-serving and hysterical.

In Australia these incidents and the response to them pass without much notice. But they constitute an effective deterrent. People who might seek protection from Australia will notice the lack of serious attention given to death, injury and arbitrary imprisonment, the implacability of the Government and the impotence of its critics.

Most recently the sending of people involved in the protest to a PNG jail without trial underlines the powerlessness and imputed worthlessness of the people imprisoned and their lack of recourse to law. It also focuses the minds of others who may seek protection in Australia on the fate that may await them in PNG if they are found to be refugees. Together with pushing back the boats, in Manus Island Australia has devised a very effective deterrent.

These are the human considerations that must be taken into account when we judge whether or not to applaud or condemn the policy of which Manus Island is the emblem. Deterrence, the keystone of the policy, rests on using the suffering of innocent people there to deter others. Supporters of the policy will argue that such a cost is acceptable. I disagree - human beings should never be subject to such a calculus.

But those who agree that the cost to asylum seekers is acceptable will find it hard to argue that the lives of two young, reformed Australians are an unacceptable price for deterring others from trading in drugs.

Andrew Hamilton is consulting editor of Eureka Street.

Tony's Australia Day barbecue stopper

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas



Fiona Katauskas' work has also appeared in ABC's *The Drum*, *New Matilda*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, *The Australian*, *The Financial Review* and Scribe's Best Australian political cartoon anthologies.

Luther's flawed hardware decisions

CREATIVE

Brian Doyle



I think we are in agreement at this juncture that Martin Luther was absolutely correct and right philosophically when he nailed his Ninety-Five Theses on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences to a chapel door in Wittenberg.

The Catholic Church of his time was rife with greed and corruption and scandal and lies and theft and devious financial plots, as it still is, and probably always has been; such is the fate of entities run and staffed by human beings, from countries to corporations to city councils to colleges, although perhaps that will not always be their fate, if we ever manage to evolve away from snatching and hoarding, which is possible, if not probable. But I maintain that Luther was utterly wrong and incorrect in his choice of tools.

Why would you smash a nail into the lovely wooden door of All Saints Church? Could he not have used tape, or gum, or sap from the nearby towering and beloved village oak? Did he feel the slightest regret at punching a monstrous hole in a door that some poor workman had laboured over for weeks?

Imagine how you would feel if a Catholic monk (we forget that Luther was an Augustinian priest) showed up at your front door, the one you had specially made by your brother the master carpenter, who found some unbelievably beautiful black walnut, and planed it and carved it for months, and even installed it properly for you, because that is the kind of

gracious and excellent guy he is, and then some portly monk storms up, and hammers a nail into your door?

Would you feel all warm and grateful about this? You would not. You would shriek and rage, and stomp and storm, and roar and bluster, and set all three of the dogs on the guy, and chortle evilly as he sprinted away down the street, the dogs shredding his cassock, and then you would think seriously for a moment of stuffing some birch gum into that hole, and carefully painting over the hole with shoe polish or peanut butter, to match the russet colour of the door, but then you would realise that your wife will eventually notice that, and sigh that sigh she sighs when you misuse the peanut butter, so you man up about the whole thing, and call your brother, and then you call the local religious authority, and file a blistering complaint for damages, and enclose a very nasty note to the priest's personnel file.

Again let me say that the paper that Luther nailed to the door was a very fine paper indeed; again and again the man makes the most perfect and admirable sense, and calls the Church he loved, and indeed had joined in a professional capacity, to task for vast and stunning lies and corruption; no reasonable soul could argue with his general propositions that the pope is not actually God, and ought not to be acquisitive financially, and money donated on earth does not actually expurgate the sins of those who have died.

Nor can any reasonable soul argue with the tidal shift that Luther's tart note then caused in the long history of Christianity; while we may rue the splits and carvings, we must admire the impulse toward honesty and piety that drove those shearings-away, even as we daydream about some sort of Great Détente, in which the myriad Christian traditions come back together under one flag or another, even, perhaps, as a tremendous tribe of defence and reverence for the faith Christ Himself practiced, which is to say eternally besieged Judaism.

No, no - we can have nothing but great respect and even a sort of awe for Martin Luther the author - a brave man, taking on the fabulously wealthy powers of his day. But we ought to be aghast and appalled at the man with a terrible nail in his hand. He might have borrowed some glutinous material from a snail; he might easily have tapped an evergreen for a drop of its lifeblood; he might have snatched a cinnamon bun from a child, and used a dab of that awful gleaming sticky muck to affix the Theses.

But no: a whopping nail, and a whole day's work for some poor guy who probably was all set to slip up into the mountains for a day to hunt ibex. In a just and fair world, Luther himself should have had to go back the next day and fix that hole, and not with peanut butter, either. Perhaps he did; he was, by all accounts, a decent sort, and it may well be that an hour after he posted his revolutionary document, he slapped himself on the forehead and went back to plug the hole. Let us hope so; in fact, let us pray that this was the way it was, on a cold November day, many years ago.

Brian Doyle is the author most recently of A Book of Uncommon Prayer (Ave Maria Press). His books are distributed by Garratt Publishing in Australia.

Obama misfires on Russian 'threat'

AUSTRALIA

Tony Kevin



In his otherwise excellent State of the Union address last week, President Obama drew rare bipartisan applause when he said:

'We're upholding the principle that bigger nations can't bully the small - by opposing Russian aggression, supporting Ukraine's democracy, and reassuring our NATO allies. Last year, as we were doing the hard work of imposing sanctions along with our allies, some suggested that Mr Putin's aggression was a masterful display of strategy and strength. Well, today, it is America that stands strong and united with our allies, while Russia is isolated, with its economy in tatters.'

Obama was misadvised to speak so boastfully and contemptuously of Mr Putin and Russia.

The Cold War ended 25 years ago in 1991, yet the desire in certain quarters to weaken Russia has never gone away. I still feel that to write anything in defence of Putin's Russia is aiding and abetting the enemy. But this is nonsense. Russia now poses no ideological or strategic threat to the West. It is just another country, albeit a very large and nuclear-armed one, trying to make its own way in an unfriendly world.

To its west and south-west, Russia faces unrelenting hostility and suspicion from the governments of Poland and of former Soviet member republics Georgia, Ukraine, and the Baltic states. By contrast, relations with Finland, Byelorussia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Central Asian post-Soviet states, Mongolia and China are quite normal.

The shaky Ukrainian successor state has lost Russian-populated Crimea to Russia, for good reasons and almost certainly irretrievably. A largish part of the Russian-speaking formerly rich industrial eastern Ukraine, the famous Donbass region, is controlled by rebel forces demanding human rights and autonomy within a looser federal Ukraine, or political separation from Ukraine and integration into Russia.

Russia's role in the conflict has ranged from cross-border humanitarian aid, through reported tacit approval of entry of trained Russian ex-military volunteers, up to alleged covert large-scale military advice, troops and munitions support. This increasingly bitter and bloody fratricidal war defies political settlement so far. This civil war, marked by ongoing human rights abuses, is an open wound largely ignored by the West. US-supported President Poroshenko in Kiev blows hot or cold in negotiations, according to whether his forces seem behind or ahead at the time. This could continue, as with the long porous border, war materiel and fighters could keep filtering in from Russia as needed to keep the rebels viable.

Russia is united behind Putin on this war, and feels it has right on its side. In his Christmas homily, Russia's most senior Orthodox churchman Patriarch Kirill noted that 2015 is the 1000th anniversary of the death of the holy man Prince Vladimir - the baptiser of Rus - who linked Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and all countries of historical Rus. He said: 'No temporary trials, no hardships, no external forces can sever these centuries-long spiritual and cultural ties between heirs to the Kiev baptistery.'

Obama should have reflected on these words before putting the boot into Russia. They evoke Tsarist's Russia's determined pan-Slav diplomacy and 19th century military pressure in the Balkans, resisted by Turkey and supportive Western powers trying to maintain the status quo of a corrupt and cruel Turkish Empire, suppressing by force southern Slav aspirations to sovereignty.

Ordinary Russians now feel the same kind of rage as they see television footage of Kiev's army shelling helpless civilians in cities like Donetsk - with NATO support - as Kiev attempts to retake the rebel-controlled Eastern Ukraine region. Kiev is shelling its own claimed citizens.

Since last February's Maidan rising in Kiev - which ousted pro-Russian President Yanukovich - Ukraine joins the ranks of nations with vehemently anti-Russian governments. Many Russians see this as a US-backed coup d'etat, with Kiev seeking to join NATO and to impose a harsh 19th century style centralist Ukrainian nationalism on this linguistically divided, politically weak Soviet successor state. In this, Kiev has had considerable support, overt and covert, from NATO members US and Poland. German and French efforts towards a more balanced diplomacy have been swamped by Washington, London and the East Europeans.

Moreover I believe evidence will emerge that points to the United States egging on Saudi Arabia to drive down oil prices by flooding the world market is a powerful lever of economic warfare against Russia. This is because the US and Canada now have enough exploitable Arctic oil shale for Europe to survive without Russian oil or gas. Russian export revenues have fallen sharply, and the rouble has lost much of its value. Russia is being forced back towards autarky and a lower living standard. Russians will cope with this, but they will not forget Obama's rash words.

Thoughtful political and opinion leaders are resisting the US-NATO's demonising and bullying Russia. These include Angela Merkel, Francois Hollande, former Soviet President Gorbachev, former Czech President Vaclav Klaus, Henry Kissinger, scholar John Mearsheimer, as well as commentators such as Tom Switzer in Australia.

Yet the Anglosphere's media and political rhetoric continue to clamour to demonise and insult Putin and his nation. Normandy-format (Ukraine, Russia, Germany, France) quadripartite peace talks are now in the balance, possibly boycotted by Kiev. Lithuania recently released a pamphlet recently advising its citizens what to do if Russia invades. Poland, in a calculated insult, Poland did not invite Putin to commemorations of the 70th anniversary of the liberation by Soviet forces of Auschwitz (Oswiecim, Poland).

And so the demonisation of Russia continues, strongly kicked along by Obama. I don't know where it will end. I will continue to argue that Russia should be treated with civility and respect as a normal country - and former indispensable World War II ally - and that Kiev's irresponsible provocations - supported by goodness knows which elements in NATO - not be further encouraged.



Tony Kevin is a former Australian Ambassador to Poland.

Australia out of step with Pope's climate action mission

ENVIRONMENT

Thea Ormerod



It is no coincidence that Pope Francis chose to visit the Philippines before he releases his encyclical on the environment, and that he made a point of visiting Tacloban in particular.

The people of the Philippines are 'at the doorstep of all major threat of climate change', as they describe it. Tacloban City in particular is, of course, ground zero for super typhoon Haiyan (pictured), an iconic victim of the worst that global warming can do to vulnerable populations.

The visit became the occasion on which the Catholic Bishops' Conference and civil society organisations in the Philippines handed the Pope a letter about the urgent need for climate action.

There's a palpable authenticity about their cries for justice. When Bishops and civil society in the Philippines call for 'the transformation of energy systems away from fossil fuels', it is all the more powerful because they know personally the 'catastrophic misery' caused by Haiyan.

No doubt Pope Francis is predisposed to listening to their perspective. We know he is committed to listening to Catholic Bishops' Conferences, and he is particularly interested in voices from the Global South.

It is most interesting that the Filipino Bishops call for, among other things, 'an end to investments in fossil fuel and ecologically-destructive projects'. This is the first time a national Catholic Bishops' Conference has come out fully behind the message that 'if it's wrong to wreck the planet, then it's wrong to profit from that wreckage', as US environmentalist Bill McKibben famously put it.

In a move that may further unsettle mining companies beset by rapidly-falling coal prices, the Bishops and civil society quote from a recent study published in the journal *Nature*. The study showed that '82 per cent of coal should be classified as un-burnable reserves', even if carbon capture and storage is widely deployed.

That large proportions of the world's coal, oil and gas are 'un-burnable' was first identified by the Carbon Tracker Initiative. CTI calculated the 'carbon budget' humanity now has left before going over the internationally agreed guardrail of 2°C warming. The amount is so limited, that the vast majority of it has to stay in the ground.

The Catholic Bishops and civil society in the Philippines go so far as to say, 'Investing in fossil fuel companies and in eco-destructive projects is synonymous with supporting the destruction of our future.' Their message resonates strongly with that of the global 'Divest the Vatican' campaign.

Considering the other measures they advocate as a kind of yardstick for how countries should be responding to climate change, Australia is doing poorly. In fact, we are near the bottom of the global Climate Change Performance Index. There is nothing 'fair and equitable' about Australia's weak emissions reduction target, and as a nation we are moving *away* from policies which would reduce our dependence on fossil fuels.

At the UN climate talks in Lima, Australian negotiators so regularly blocked consensus that they won us the 'colossal fossil' award for 2014 from environmental observers. Only under enormous pressure, did Australia agree to contribute a mere \$200 million to the UN Green Climate Fund for adaptation and mitigation in developing countries - a reallocation of Overseas Aid.

But I'm speaking here of the current Australian Government. We, the Australian people, are another matter. In spite of fewer incentives from governments, Australians spent \$2.3 billion last year on rooftop solar systems.

We have a vibrant divestment movement, which has inspired thousands of individuals and dozens of organisations to move their investments out of carbon-intensive industries, starting with extractive industries. These include the Anglican Dioceses of Perth, Canberra-Goulburn and Melbourne and the Uniting Church in Western Australia. Earlier this month, the Quakers in Australia decided to move their investments out of the 'big four' banks for the same reasons.

So far, there have been limited steps taken in this direction within the Catholic Church, most of which are not made public. In the USA, just the one Catholic university - Dayton - has openly moved its investments. Now that the Bishops of the Philippines have stated that it's wrong to hold investments in fossil fuels, perhaps Catholic Bishops' Conferences elsewhere will be moved to act.

My sense is that the chances of this theme being present in the coming encyclical have dramatically improved. The fossil fuel industry should beware if 1.2 billion Catholics are prompted to respond to this particular call!

Thea Ormerod is President of Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARCC), which has the Pope's Philippines letter posted on its website.

Typhoon Haiyan image from Wikimedia Commons.

The boys' pranged up moment of shared and shed untruths

CREATIVE

Kevin Gillam

the colour of healing

it's a thick silence,
unrehearsed and accidental,
with the house suddenly empty.
rare, in a home like this -
grand piano, two 'cellos, violin, guitar -
three musicians and a dog,
Bach Chaconnes, Chopin Preludes and
high pitched whines joining 'cello duets

has me thinking though,
about the repositories of silence
because it's been here and waiting,
in the 45 degrees of stairwell, the angle
providing harbour, a balloon of silence
the colour of healing

the tides

you would say that it was tidal,
all to do with the tides.
yes, you would say that
and I would look away, look West

we're doing things in halves today,
you would say that,
a day in halves,
only was there ever a day that was whole?

have you finished writing about tomorrow?
you said that.
no I said, haven't finished with the yesterdays

I'm driving now, driving and thinking,
away, and thriving.
I could say that, could say that

the boys

the boys, circled, in jeans, shirts
untucked, beers and banter,

loosening, back slapping, real
estate prices, golf tales, the

boys, who's round? unbuttoning,
stubbies and schooners, un-

finishing, Wednesday after-
nooning, the boys, in this

pranged up moment of shared
and shed untruths and

bruises, the boys, beering,
untangling, cruising, jaunty

and blooming, the boys, in the
ambered half light, the boys

the road

the road scars right, across the
palm of land, tumbling, dwindling,
a groove, a history, a way in,
worn and healed slick

the road, oil on linen, bitumen
on peat, with all its gradations
of shadow, bruise to smear to brush

the road, cloud above scuffed and
tugged by wind, rain sifting down,
the 'haar' they call it here,
cold breath of wet

the road, its dip and sway, blur
of scrub, the urge, glimpse of roof,
swerve, the early dark, the entrance



*Kevin Gillam is a Western Australian writer with three books of poetry published.
Beer drinking image by Shutterstock.*

Return to higher education elitism

EDUCATION

Bill Uren



Federal treasurer Joe Hockey has reaffirmed the Government's intention to reintroduce into Parliament in the forthcoming February session its [Higher Education and Research Reform Amendment Bill](#).

This Bill was narrowly defeated in the Senate in November 2014, but the Government obviously expects that over the intervening three months it has been able to convince a couple of the cross-benchers of the acceptability and inevitability of its reforms.

There have been suggestions that the Government might have been persuaded to amend some of the more radical elements of its proposed reforms, but the responsible Minister, Christopher Pyne, has been adamant that such negotiations will not be entered into.

This is not surprising. He only needs a couple of cross-bench votes for the Bill to pass the Senate, and he has the almost unanimous support of the Vice-Chancellors of Australia's thirty eight universities. Nonetheless, on Wednesday there were some *indications* that the Government might be willing to amend some of the provisions of the Bill to make doubly sure of Senate approval.

One can sympathise with the Vice-Chancellors. Over many years Government financial support for higher education has been eroded in real terms, and uncapped student numbers (for which, let it be said, the Vice-Chancellors themselves agitated) have put further strains on already very tight operational budgets.

Faced with a cut of 20 per cent in Government funding, one can understand why the Vice-Chancellors, with one notable exception, capitulated to the Government's demands, especially since the stick was also accompanied by the carrot of deregulation of undergraduate student fees. This also was a development for which the Vice-Chancellors had agitated, indeed even more enthusiastically and over a more prolonged period than they had for the uncapping of student numbers.

Further, they could claim that there was a certain logic in deregulating undergraduate student fees. International student fees and most domestic graduate fees were deregulated - it was inevitable that sooner or later undergraduate fees should follow the same path. Why not sooner, especially since, with a 20 per cent cut in Government funding, they could wash their hands, Pilate fashion, of responsibility for this added financial imposition on students?

And finally, of course, access to this unregulated source of revenue would not only remedy operational budgets. It would also enable the universities - especially the G8 major universities - to maintain their quite remarkable international rankings, even though their rankings are based on research performance and only indirectly, at best, on student welfare, the constituency from whom this additional revenue is to be derived.

But accepting a 20 per cent cut in funding without a whimper, being accomplice to at least a 25 per cent increase in student fee-debt, and, in most cases embracing at least a 30 per cent increase in the cost of degrees in the various disciplines - how could the Vice-Chancellors swallow these pills? It is important to appreciate just how radical a funding cut the Government legislation proposes.

Just imagine if there was a 20 per cent cut in Government funding for primary or secondary education, for health, for welfare or tourism. What an outcry they would be! And remember, higher education is our third most significant export industry even in financial terms, let alone in cultural impact, especially in the Asian context.

The Minister, Christopher Pyne, has sought to justify the reforms by suggesting that higher education is elitist in character. Why should the rank and file taxpayer, he asks, pay for 60 per cent of the costs of students attending university? This, of course, is a highly contentious argument. It relies on four questionable presuppositions. It ignores in the first instance the whole nature of taxation where we all are taxed for benefits in which only some of us participate. Secondly, it ignores the intergenerational nature of support for education.

One generation through taxes pays for the education of the next generation, which in its turn pays for education of the following generation. Thirdly, it ignores the fact that university graduates not only subsequently extinguish their tertiary fee-debt but also, particularly if, as the Minister suggests, they become members of wealthy professions, they pay substantial taxes over their professional careers. And finally it ignores the social benefits of higher education. Where would we be without our doctors, engineers, social workers, lawyers, nurses and architects, to say nothing of our artists, poets and educators?

As I have suggested above, Australian universities perform remarkably well in the international rankings, and that even though they are competing with small elite universities like Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard or Princeton, often with very substantial philanthropic endowments.

It is to maintain these rankings that the Vice-Chancellors are willing to embrace fee deregulation, the most radical change since the Dawkins reforms of the late 1980s. But, if we are performing so well, why are we embarking on such a radical reform, in effect further privatising higher education?

Why not? No Government funding cut, a modest increase in student fee-debt, and some sacrifice in the international rankings? But not fee-deregulation. Otherwise, at least for the major metropolitan universities we will be returning to the financial elitism that characterised the early history of the Australian tertiary education system which over sixty years Commonwealth scholarships and the Whitlam and Dawkins reforms endeavoured to mitigate.

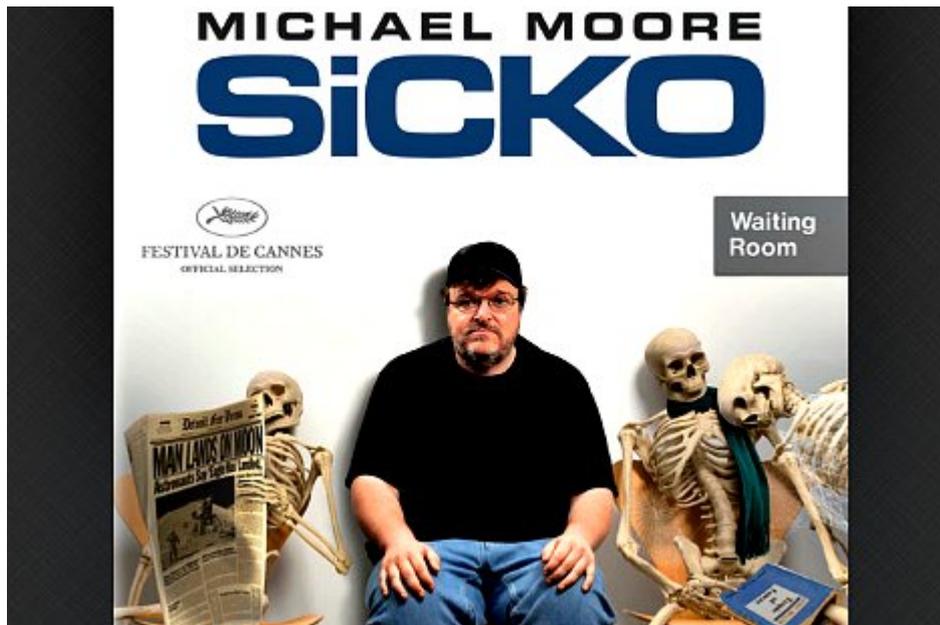
Fr Bill Uren SJ AO is Rector of Newman College at the University of Melbourne.

<!--Follow him on Twitter.-->

US health care a sick joke that's coming to Australia

CREATIVE

Ellena Savage



Everyone knows that the health care system in the United States is an hilarious joke at the expense of poor people. The terrifying inequities that play out in surgeries across the country has been documented in the films *Sicko* (2007), *Escape Fire* (2012), and all over the internet (search 'health care horror stories' on any American masthead's site). Nothing new.

The constant pressure the Australian Federal Government has been pitting against our own universal health care, though, seems new and raises some disturbing questions. Why would any fair minded political leader want to emulate a brutalising system? It seems like class warfare dolled up as fiscal responsibility.

Anyone who was born (or naturalised) in Australia after 1984 has enjoyed universal health care their whole (Australian) life. Universal health care is, philosophically, a fair concession to the shocking materiality of life: I didn't ask to be born, specifically not in a body that requires a decent amount of upkeep to carry on.

And while it's not perfect in Australia, universal health care offers the promise that while some people's bodies require more medical care than others, this is not the basis for discrimination nor an unequal distribution of fiscal responsibility. While there are strategies for pursuing 'wellness' - you know, drink four litres of water a day, half a glass of wine, eat red meat, no, don't eat red meat - no one should be rewarded for the fact that their mother was able to properly nourish them during infancy, or that no-one has decided to run them over just yet.

A population's health is largely in the hands of the state and culture, and universal health care is a material extension of this truth. Good health benefits us all, and thus is everyone's responsibility.

In trying to understand why anyone who is not simply a monster would wish to erode the basic dignity of health, it's important to remove maliciousness from the equation. The outcome of privatised healthcare is, of course, brutal. But to believe that a person who

has found a way to intellectually compartmentalise *literal* human suffering completely lacks compassion would infer that they are evil. Evil is intrinsic, evil has no human remedy. Evil can't be reasoned with. Which means that a person is not responsible for the evil they commit.

But what could reasonably motivate a person who, in attaining the life and health required to make political arguments in the first place and is therefore a beneficiary of adequate health care, to believe that other people are not entitled to their health?

It is not really the budget deficit, is it? The one that all economists say is negligible. The one that also allows for the military's acquisition 58 new F-35 Joint Strike Fighters at a cost of \$12 billion. The emphasis on a budget 'crisis', and naming low-income earners as those who are responsible and will have to bear the brunt of it, is an example of inane populism. Certain ideologues regard this as reasonable, part of a system that requires the poor to be dependent the labour provided them by the very wealthy.

Without universal health care - in America - the main way of accessing basic health care is by having a 'good' job. So if you're not independently wealthy, your employer, rather than the state or the collective, is effectively your barrier to health. Do we really trust the market so much as to place in its hands the bodies of workers? And how free can any person be if they are indentured to their job?

There is a vested interest in dismantling the protections on health care for poor people. It effectively pushes them into forms of work that benefit capitalists. And this type of labour, and what it requires of people psychically - working full-time, for a lifetime, for another person's wealth - is to derive their ideas about their selves and their autonomy *through* work, and not in spite of it.

The orthodoxy of the market says that it's not enough to be alive and contributing to whatever your community is; you have to pay for the privilege. In rent, in acquiring objects, health care, in unwittingly contributing to the demise of the environment. So if we're going to live until we are 150 - as Joe Hockey reckons - we'd better figure out if this is indeed the model of being alive we should aspire to.

Ellena Savage is the editor of The Lifted Brow, commissioning editor at Spook Magazine, and a graduate student in creative writing.

Doomed actor's devastating ego trip

REVIEWS

Tim Kroenert

Birdman (MA). Director: Alejandro Gonz lez I ntilde; acute;rritu. Starring: Michael Keaton, Emma Stone, Edward Norton, Zach Galifianakis. 119 minutes

A quarter of a century ago, an actor pulled on tights and a cape and helped to prove that superhero films could be treated as a serious proposition.

More than a decade would pass before the juggernaut really set in, with Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* films paving the way for Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy and the formidable Marvel Cinematic Universe. But it's likely the present boom of strong, character-driven superhero films could never have happened without Tim Burton's brooding *Batman*, starring Michael Keaton in the title role.

Keaton would miss the juggernaut though. He would play Batman just one more time, in 1992's underrated *Batman Returns*, before walking away from the role forever.

All of which, of course, is central to the profound, disturbing joke that is Alejandro Gonz lez I ntilde; acute;rritu's *Birdman*. Keaton plays Riggan Thomson, a washed-up former superhero actor trying to transcend the memory of his most famous character, Birdman, by mounting a comeback on Broadway - an adaptation of a Raymond Carver short story that he has written, and is directing and starring in.

Keaton has, rightly, scoffed at suggestions that the portrayal is biographical. (Keaton is hardly washed-up, having worked continuously and respectably for decades.) But the resonance is potent, and lends emotional and comical punch to the performance. Riggan's deep resentment towards *Iron Man*'s Robert Downey Jr, for example, has the sly hilarity of an in-joke shared between the actor and the audience.

Birdman is a technical marvel, presented as if it is one continuous tracking shot. Space and time contract and expand, as the camera appears to move fluidly from location to location and even through time. This is not merely stylistic bluster. The result is a work that is fundamentally cinematic yet at the same time appears to be itself a theatrical production, mounted on the stage of Riggan's ego.

And his ego is immense. The action takes place backstage during the days leading up to the premier, and onstage during a series of previews. Riggan is out of his depth, prone to humiliating blunders, including one that results in a near-naked dash through the crowds of Times Square. But his resolve to affirm his greatness in the eyes of a media and public that has dismissed him is nearly maniacal.

His delusions of grandeur manifest, too, in his apparent belief that he actually possesses superpowers - of flight, of telekinesis. These are presented on-screen as physical fact, in the manner of magical realism, although there are strong hints that they are merely

extensions of Riggan's delusion - and thus part of Iñ´rritu's gleeful, vicious, heartbreaking deconstruction of ego and fame.

The film's excellence extends to its supporting cast. Complicated characters drift in and out of Riggan's path, variously supporting and antagonising him in the midst of his delusion. Norton is hilariously unhinged as brilliant but volatile method actor Mike, whose ego eclipses even Riggan's. Galifianakis gives an uncharacteristically restrained performance as Riggan's quietly concerned lawyer and friend.

Hollywood golden girl Stone, meanwhile, trades ravishing for ravaged to portray Riggan's recovering drug-addict daughter Sam, who is unafraid to speak truth to her father - the man rather than the actor, who is slowly unravelling and doesn't even realise it. Riggan's relationship with Sam is one of several that demand mending as he mounts a comeback that seems doomed before it begins.

Tim Kroenert is assistant editor of Eureka Street.

Am I Charlie?

AUSTRALIA

Andrew Hamilton



The Martin Place killings and the Paris murders had one thing in common. They both generated hashtags. [#Illridewithyou](#) and [#JesuisCharlie](#) (or [#IamCharlie](#)) focused popular response to the atrocities. Their simplicity allowed people to express instantly their solidarity with victims and their rejection of violence. But they also raised complex questions.

[#Illridewithyou](#) responded to the fear that in the aftermath of the Martin Place siege Muslim Australians would suffer vilification. The hashtag rejected divisiveness in the community and asserted solidarity with its potential targets. But some critics believed that it made a premature and ungrounded judgment of widespread xenophobia in the Australian community, and was even likely to create the response that it feared. Others claimed it obscured the connection they made between Islamic beliefs and the violence. At its simplest level [#JesuisCharlie](#) expressed outrage at the killing of the journalists and solidarity with those who died. But it too could be seen to say something more. It could imply identification with Charlie as the fearless publisher of cartoons that mocked religions. And in the Australian context it could imply identification with the campaign to repeal laws designed to protect people from vilification on the ground of race. So the hashtag invited people not simply to take a stand but to name the ground on which they stood.

To identify with Charlie as the victim of violence and to express outrage that people should be killed and maimed because of what they think, say and express is simply right. It is proper to stand with the victims and not with the perpetrators of violence.

[#JesuisCharlie](#) places people in solidarity with those killed in Martin Place, the journalists killed in the Charlie Hebdo offices, and the Jewish hostages killed in the Paris kosher supermarket.

In this sense the hashtag asserts that each human being is precious and may not be treated as things or as means to an end. People must be respected because they are human, and not simply because they are of the right nationality and religion, or because they are morally admirable.

To identify with Charlie as the publisher and maker of cartoons that mock religious belief is more ambiguous. It is generous and right if it says that no cartoon, however deplorable we may find it, can strip a person of their human dignity and their right to respect for it. That conviction surely inspired the Muslim leader to display the commemorative edition of Charlie Hebdo while condemning the killings. It affirmed the

obligation to respect the human dignity even of those who mock what is most precious to us.

But #JesuisCharlie could also be seen to entail approving the publication of cartoons that mock people's deeply held beliefs that form a central part of their communal identity. I would hesitate to do this. Respect for human dignity entails the right to life. But it also implies ensuring the conditions that are central for their flourishing as human beings. These include their ability to maintain unmolested the beliefs and rituals that are central layers of their identity. These things are subject to reasoned criticism, of course. But they should not be subject to mockery or abuse. That disrespects the human dignity of those targeted.

So if #JesuisCharlie identifies us with those whose human dignity is assaulted by violence, it should also encourage us to stand in solidarity with those whose dignity is assailed in other ways. It links us imaginatively to those in the Muslim community who may be abused by being made scapegoats for the crimes of others. It also links us with those whose deep sense of themselves is shaken by cartoons that mock beliefs and practices that are central to their dignity. At this point #JesuisCharlie flows into #Illridewithyou.

#JesuisCharlie is also invoked to support taking a stand against laws limiting freedom of expression. That claim is plausible. Certainly the publishers of *Charlie Hebdo* would have opposed such laws. And even those who accept my argument that it is morally unjustifiable to mock others for their race or religion, may differ about whether this judgment should be enshrined in law.

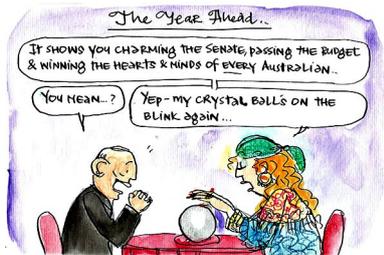
But if our solidarity gathered around #JesuisCharlie is based in respect for human dignity, it would more naturally lead us to stand in solidarity with the victims of the irresponsible use of freedom - the powerless members of minority religious and racial groups who are mocked and belittled by powerful people in powerful publications. Ultimately #JesuisCharlie and #Illridewithyou are commendable gestures of solidarity. Their logic invites us to identify with all those whose human dignity is infringed upon.

Andrew Hamilton is consulting editor of Eureka Street..

Misfortune teller

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas



Fiona Katauskas' work has also appeared in ABC's *The Drum*, *New Matilda*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, *The Australian*, *The Financial Review* and Scribe's Best Australian political cartoon anthologies.

Fundamentalism in the land of Jesus

RELIGION

Lawrence Cross



For well over a decade, compassionate Christians have watched in horror as a string of Middle Eastern countries have collapsed into chaos and violence. What has been less noticed is that the chaos is being used to destroy the heart of Christianity in those lands where it had flourished for 1500 years.

What is being cut down is the trunk upon which the Churches in the West still rest. That it has gone largely unremarked says much about the lack of understanding of the religion's history. Such amnesia poses a deep peril not just to the heritage of Christianity, but to capturing its true spirit.

Let us start with the land of Jesus, and in Jerusalem. Israel is now demanding to be recognised as a Jewish state; the corollary is that they have an interest in getting Christians out. There are regular attacks on Christian institutions. Christian properties in East Jerusalem are slowly being seized. Nuns and clergy are routinely abused in an effort to encourage them to leave. Being spat upon in the street is not a rare occurrence. On the Palestinian side, the Islamic influence has been intensifying for decades, in part because Christian Palestinians have found it easier to leave. This has an equally marginalising effect. To be a Christian in the Holy Land is to be doubly an outsider, a resident alien in your own country. The same situation is vivid in crucial towns like Bethlehem and Nazareth. Many Christians have left.

The destruction of traditional Christian ranks is occurring across the Levant. The numbers of Iraqi Christians has been brutally reduced: down to about 250,000-400,000 from 1.2-1.5 million. ISIS represents a mortal threat to those who remain. In Syria, Christians are in extreme danger. The Christian communities of Syria constitute almost a tenth of the Syrian population. They have been systematically targeted. Churches have been desecrated; priests, monks, and nuns have been kidnapped and murdered. Again, the religious ethnic cleansing is intense and effective, pushed as much by Shia and Sunni, Assad's Alawite Islamists as by the jihadists of all colours.

So why has there been so little concern about this destruction of the Christian heritage? It should be remembered that three of the five founding Sees of the Early Church, three of the ancient Christian Patriarchates, are situated in the region: Jerusalem, Antioch and Alexandria. Only Rome and Constantinople are outside the region, but even so, the situation of Constantinople is always tense and its Christian numbers have also fallen. These traditional Christian regions are under attack from various types of religious fundamentalism, which has led to a widespread blindness to what is happening. Fundamentalism is a religious wolf in sheep's clothing. It represents a denial of the mystery of the relationship between God and the world.

It resorts to simplistic interpretations of how God acts in the world that cannot be true, and in the process it reduces revelation to fairy stories. It is scandalised to discover that revelation, like Joseph's coat, is multi-coloured. The fundamentalist is horrified that revelation has been a developmental process throughout history. God has been revealing himself in shadows and images in many non-Christian cultures, but to the fundamentalist these things are rejected as pagan and foreign. Not one of 'us'.

Fundamentalists typically focus on the outward forms of religion - who is following the rules and practices, who belongs to which 'tribe', who shows allegiance to the religious leader - while descending into deeply irreligious behaviour. Witness the savagery of Muslim fundamentalists who, it is often pointed out, act against many of the basic religious instincts of human beings and flout some of the teachings about respect for human life in the Koran.

The fundamentalism of the American Bible Belt is deeply culpable. Their celebration of the Jews' return to Israel, in the belief that this is predicted by the Book of Revelation and heralds the Second Coming and the so-called 'Rapture', demonstrates a heartless lack of sympathy for Christians in the Holy Land.

The dangers of fundamentalism are seen in egregious examples like the Westboro Baptist Church's campaigns against gays, which presents a God of hate, not a God who is love. The end of this road is a sick delight when human beings slaughter each other, a perversion that is truly Satanic.

The Zionist fundamentalists in Israel wish to impose a religious apartheid on what has been the heart of Christianity since its inception. Whereas Christianity acknowledges a deep connection between itself and Judaism, Zionists only have eyes for their own interests, rejecting the universalism of their own faith.

Political fundamentalism, which is routinely based on ideological perversions of religious ideas, is evident in the demonisation of nations as 'evil': Iran, Syria, Iraq, Libya, North Korea. It can also be seen operating within totalitarian nations. As G.K. Chesterton observed, 'bad government, like good government, is a spiritual thing. Even the tyrant does not live by force alone; but mostly by fairy tales'.

Fundamentalism leads to dishonesty and cowardice. It creates the perfect audience for the disinformation and propaganda that have become the norm in public media, which is why so few are noticing the slaughter of some of the world's oldest Christian groups and the destruction of the Christian heritage. Far better to see the world as made up of good and bad people (naturally placing oneself amongst the 'good', the self-declared righteous) than taking responsibility for one's own evil or indifferent acts. It represents a massive failure of conscience by both individuals and states, occurring at the very heart of the Christian life.

The Western ear needs to hear the cries of Christians from the East; at the very least they are deserving of empathy. It needs to hear the famous question put to of Cain, 'Where is your brother?' and to consider Cain's response, 'Am I my brother's Keeper?' (Gen 4:9). God's command to the hate-filled fundamentalist, whether they are Muslims, Jews or Christians, remains 'Love thy neighbour as thyself,' (Mk 12:31) and reminds them that 'When you did this to the least of my brethren, you did it to me.' (Matt 25:40) The main imperative, however, is military. It is stating the obvious to say that a deadly

game of geo-strategic militarism is plaguing the region. America and Islamic militants have let loose the dogs of war and the masters cannot control them, except to wreak havoc. It is murky and brutal, and there are many shades of evil. The simple portrayal of right and wrong presented on Western media is deeply deceptive: as ever, truth is the first casualty of war. As one Iraqi priest pertinently asked: 'Who is funding ISIS, which has heavy weaponry costing billions?'

But what is not in question is who are among the victims in this deadly regional game. Christians from the most ancient Churches of all.



Archpriest Dr Lawrence Cross OAM is the pastor of Holy Trinity St Nicholas Russian Catholic Church in East St Kilda and leader of the Russian Byzantine Catholic Mission in Australia. He is an alumnus of the University of Sydney, of St John's College, Oxford and the Melbourne College of Divinity.

Israel flag image by Shutterstock.

<!--Follow him on Twitter.-->

Reaching out to Muslim youth

EUREKA STREET TV

Peter Kirkwood

With the recent Charlie Hebdo massacre in Paris and the siege in Sydney's Lindt Café fresh in the collective consciousness, a preoccupation in Western countries at the moment is how to prevent the radicalisation of Muslim youth.

The man featured here is at the forefront of efforts in Australia to educate young Muslims in an enlightened version of their faith, and help them become good productive citizens. Imam Afroz Ali is an influential leader and teacher in the Australian Muslim community, and has devoted much of his working life to establishing and running Muslim educational institutes specifically aimed at youth and young adults.

In this interview he speaks candidly about his reaction to the recent tragedies in France and Australia, and the ongoing atrocities of ISIS, how to reach out to Muslim youth and to non-Muslims reacting in fear to these crises, and what sustains him in this demanding work.

Afroz Ali is of Indian Fijian extraction, and migrated to Australia from Fiji with his family in 1980. He studied architecture at university and, after completing his degree, early in his career as an architect, had a spiritual crisis. This caused him to look more deeply into his religion and change direction to his present vocation as educator.

He acknowledges his father as a major influence in realising the importance of enlightened education, and enlightened teachers. As he says of his father, 'This powerful relationship with a man who was both friend and father inspired a deep understanding of the power of role models and leaders to nurture excellence in an individual.'

He undertook religious studies in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Yemen and Mauritania, and became a devotee of well-known American progressive Muslim leader, Sheik Hamza Yusuf Hanson, spending time at the Sheik's centre near San Francisco.

In Australia he realised there were few Muslim organisations that offered traditional Islamic learning at a deeper level, or that actively sought contact and dialogue with the broader Australian community.

To realise these goals, early in 2001 Afroz Ali founded the Al-Ghazzali Centre for Islamic Sciences and Human Development in Lakemba in south-western Sydney, the heartland of Sydney's Muslim community.

He named the centre after well-known Sufi and theologian, Abu Hamid Al-Ghazzali who lived in the eleventh and early twelfth century and wrote hundreds of works on theology, mysticism and Islamic jurisprudence.

Recently he joined with a number of other like-minded Muslim scholars around the world and founded Seekers Hub, a global educational institute, and the Al-Ghazzali Centre has been incorporated in this broader institution. He is the first Managing Director of [Seekers Hub](#) that has centres in Sydney and Toronto, with plans to open more soon in London and New York.

Part 1 (10'15")

Part 2 (6'43")

Peter Kirkwood is a freelance writer and video consultant with a master's degree from the Sydney College of Divinity.

Francis moving Church from pale green to deep green

RELIGION

Paul Collins

There is one area where the last three popes have been right on the ball: the issue of care for the environment. John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis have been far ahead of most politicians on this issue.

It's widely expected that Pope Francis will issue an encyclical on the environment and climate change early this year in time to influence the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris in late 2015. He is already being hailed in the *The Guardian*, Bloomberg and Fairfax Media as 'rattling' and 'upsetting' Catholic climate change sceptics and politicians.

But Francis faces an enormous challenge to move beyond his predecessors and confront two core issues that have emerged in environmental theology. Because they failed to confront these issues, John Paul II and Benedict remained rather 'pale green' in their approach, under-estimating the magnitude and urgency of the environmental problems we face.

As a number of us writing in this area have pointed out for years now Christianity's basic problem (and yes, this is not just a Catholic problem) is its ingrained anthropocentrism. To be anthropocentric is to be entirely focused on humankind and its needs and aspirations to the exclusion of all other species and priorities. It is the unconscious assumption that the earth exists for us and that its total meaning is derived from us. Thomas Berry says that anthropocentrism is rooted in 'our failure to think of ourselves as a species, interconnected with and biologically interdependent on the rest of reality.' He says that we have become besotted with 'the pathos of the human' and take ourselves and our needs as the focus, norm, and final arbiter of all that exists.

Given that the cosmos has been here for about 14 billion years, earth for 4.6 billion years and life on earth for 3.8 billion years, if we are the sole meaning and purpose of the whole process then, as I said in the TV documentary *God's Earth*, 'God has been waiting an awfully long time for us to make sense of it all.' As Irish priest-ecologist Sean McDonagh says, 'God would not be waiting for *homo sapiens* to arrive about 200,000 years ago to give meaning to creation.' In other words there is an emerging consensus among Catholics writing about the environment that the pale green, anthropocentric approach has had its day.

But there is another challenge lurking for Pope Francis' new encyclical: the question of population. Very few Catholics have been game enough to tackle this issue and it's difficult to discuss in polite society. Mention it and you are accused of being 'anti-human', an 'extreme Green', 'racist', 'anti-immigrant', or wanting to dictate to developing countries how they should behave.

It's hard not to sound misanthropic when discussing population. It offends political correctness on both the right and the left. For the right it suggests that you favour abortion, contraception, fertility control and sterilisation especially in developing countries, and you want to limit the rights of couples to decide the number of children they wish to have. For left-wingers discussion of population smacks of neo-colonialism and paternalism; you are accused of dictating population size to developing countries and of distracting attention from the priority of social justice.

There is also enormous vested interest in maintaining high rates of growth and immigration, especially in Western countries which have reached zero population growth, or have decreasing populations. Behind the attempt to stifle discussion are the business

and economic elites who want to maintain the number of consumers for their goods and services without regard for the pressure this puts on local environments. In market-oriented thinking new immigrants add to the pool of consumers, rather than putting strain on fragile environments.

Sure, only a naive optimist thinks that Pope Francis is going to tackle both these issues. But he does have to find a more balanced theological perspective for Christianity's exclusive focus on the human. Two Christian virtues might come into play here are humility and prudence.

Firstly humility: we have got to see ourselves and our needs within the perspective of the natural world on which we depend for our existence. Also our context is a cosmic history which has us born yesterday. The planet doesn't just exist for us; it has a *raison d'être* that far transcends us. The meaning of our existence is derived from the cosmos, not the other way around.

As such we are under enormous pressure to constrain our use of resources. This is where prudence comes in. Thomas Aquinas says that prudence demands that we act cautiously and make sure that all our actions are in accord with the natural law, the primary purpose of which, surely, is to protect nature.

Sean McDonagh makes another suggestion: that Francis calls a synod on creation. McDonagh's right; at least it would get Catholics thinking about this issue.



Paul Collins' last book on religion and ecology was Judgment Day. The struggle for life on earth (2011).

The musty sweetness of the Styx ghost

CREATIVE

Chris Armstrong



Styx River bora ground

I descend steeply with knees grinding
down a spur of accrued footsteps towards the Styx,
walking beyond woe and lamentation, past fire
rivered through the trees, leaving charcoal spaces
where distant glimpses of the valley are placed
in my mouth. Five wild cattle. White cedar. Cockatoo.
There is forgetfulness to wade through;
life binding oaths lost to place and care
amongst the topographical blur of lines
sliding the river nearer. History is no comfort
beyond the ridges and deep where I drink greedily,
lose my voice for nine desperate years
because the only word left in the world is river-
speaking it does not give patience enough
to smooth granite or greywacke
in the long run of debris from the big fresh
that rummaged gullies for words and truths
and found the language of ghosts.
Be suspicious of a river murmuring
like the drowned when crossing as the living
because preceding you were those who dipped,

who danced, yet remained vulnerable, who left nothing but a circle of grass amongst the trees.

Ghosts

My footsteps rustle fallen leaves
the sound repeats on rock
earth bank and rosewood
as I brush past a prickly tree fern.
It feels like I am being tracked,
by a ghost, to the left, over my shoulder,
its footsteps, its shirt against the foliage.
Could be my ghost, testing this place,
seeing if it is a nice spot to haunt
when the time comes, testing
its skill outside my body.

There is another ghost and it is smell.
When you get home from a bushwalk
the forest has infiltrated your clothing, skin,
backpack, there is a musty sweetness
when I open the cupboard door, a week later,
it wafts out and I wait a while
to unpick your scent of nature
from the fabric of my self.

Like the echoes we hear at home in the evening
sitting quietly in the warm lounge room.
You are reading the day's paper,
I've got my notebook open, it's dark outside.
The television is off, all the windows are closed.
Everything is pleasantly hushed and then
you look up and say, what was that?
I say what was what? You say,
did you say something? I say no.
You look confused but I didn't speak.
I wonder if you heard the ghost
of a different moment between us.

It is the way semi-arid rivers run
without being seen. They run in the night
or they run while your back is turned,
when you've gone to town
to pick up the week's supplies
or you wake, or return, or drive, or backtrack
and the river-bed has shifted,
rocks and silt have moved,
and the crossing is now impassable
until council comes out with the grader.

Chris Armstrong's poetry has been published on Cordite and in regional anthologies, and her first novel Blue was shortlisted for the 2005 Vogel Literary Award for an unpublished manuscript. These above poems form part of a collection created as a result of an ASA Emerging Writers Mentorship awarded to her in January 2014. She also writes a wilderness walking blog.

Tasmania Styx image: Michael Mullins.

Accommodating Indonesia's capital punishment barbarism

AUSTRALIA

Michael Mullins



Bali Nine drug runners Myuran Sukumaran and Andrew Chan are on track to be executed by firing squad during the first half of this year. A letter rejecting Sukumaran's presidential clemency bid was hand-delivered to Bali's Kerobokan prison by an Indonesian government official earlier this month. A similar outcome is expected for Chan before a date is set for the pair to be executed together.

Prime Minister Tony Abbott stressed that Australia would make 'the strongest possible representations' on behalf of Sukumaran. 'Australia opposes the death penalty. We oppose the death penalty for Australians at home and abroad'.

Abbott deserves praise for his focus on our abhorrence of the death penalty, and his avoidance of the argument that they are model prisoners who have turned their lives around, even though the evident truth of that provides a solid basis to urge the granting of presidential appeals for clemency. Such appeals make the decision to take or spare human life an act of political will, and going down this track is an uncomfortable compromise for those who believe that the death penalty is wrong *per se*. As a value, human life becomes relative to President Widodo's otherwise commendable political will to combat drug addiction. It is no longer absolute.

It should be stressed that any acceptance of the death penalty as an option, is incompatible with upholding human life as an absolute value. The image of Indonesia as a mature and civilised nation is diminished, and the actions of an Indonesian state firing squad are different to those of Islamic State executioners only by degree. They signal an Indonesia turning back to a barbaric past evidenced in atrocities in East Timor (with Australian Government acquiescence), and the disregard for human life that accompanied Sukarno's demise as depicted in the 2012 film *The Act of Killing*, again without opposition from Australia.

Where Abbott does not do himself any credit is in his qualification that Australia's 'strongest possible representations' on Sukumaran's behalf will be subject to the need to avoid jeopardising Australia's relationship with Indonesia. Not only does it suggest that Australia can accommodate Indonesian state barbarism (as it did under Whitlam). It is also an unequivocal declaration that opposing the death penalty is less important than the effort to stop asylum seeker boats from reaching Australian waters. We can recall the Abbott Government's insistence in its early days in office that the boats must be stopped even if it upsets Indonesia. Indonesia was duly upset, but relations bounced back, as they always do. There is no reason to fear our long term good relations with Indonesia could not withstand strong and unqualified opposition to the death penalty. Further, we need to put the Australian Government's accommodation of Indonesia in the context of its support for America's effort to disable Islamic State and its barbarous practices. Human life as an absolute is a core value we are seeking to uphold on behalf of many innocent populations in the Middle East. If we act on our belief that killing human beings is not OK in these distant lands, why can't we take a more decisive stand against the taking of human life on our doorstep?



Michael Mullins is editor of Eureka Street.

Thanks to mercycampaign.org for Myuran Sukumaran and Andrew Chan image.

<!--Follow him on Twitter.-->

We are all bigots

INTERNATIONAL

Justin Glyn



Let there be no doubt about it: the recent murder of staff at the Parisian satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* was appalling. No publication, however obscene or offensive, justifies killing in response.

Unfortunately, this crime (and, for all the talk of terror, that is what it is) has led to the usual broader Manichean media narrative of 'us' (the civilised world that believes in free speech) against 'them' (the murderous, terrorist hordes who do not).

According to large sections of the electronic and print media, 'we' are all Charlie now. While it is absolutely right that we stand with the victims and their families in grief and outrage at these terrible acts, predictably we have been told that we should, as a corollary, also defend people's rights to say what they like, no matter how hurtful it may be.

I have previously made the point that this will not wash - a more sophisticated analysis of the values which free speech is designed to protect is required, as well as an analysis of any double standards at play. France itself protects its citizens' right to insult Islam (and Christianity) but denies the right to wear the *hijab* in public. Within days of the *Charlie Hebdo* killings, France arrested a man for making a Facebook post satirising the response and British and American prosecutors' routine use of 'terrorism' as an excuse for outlawing views - as opposed to direct incitements to violence - which they find offensive.

There is a difference between speech which enlightens and that which obscures. 'Speaking truth to power' and allowing fearless investigation of facts which others would rather keep hidden is a major purpose of free speech and the essence of good journalism. Where, however, the dominant purpose of the speech is to offend or incite - and especially where the targeted group is already in a minority with limited means of objecting or putting a case in response, it seems in a different category. One need only go to the Jewish Museums in Sydney or Melbourne to see examples of

how terrifyingly effective speech or images can be in demonising the 'other' and persuading people to view them as sub-human, with results which do not need repeating. I grew up in *apartheid* South Africa where such propaganda was a staple. Were the 'Total Onslaught' propaganda tracts of the PW Botha era or *Jud Süss*, Hitler's notorious anti-Semitic film, really as worthy of protection as the publication of the Watergate tapes or Pentagon Papers? In the modern era, at least, the right to free speech has historically been closely connected to (and even a means of enforcing) the right not to be discriminated against. (Think about the civil rights movement in the US, for example.) To clarify, I am not demanding additional legal regulation of hate speech, especially where there are already statutes (such as the *Crimes Act* prohibitions on incitement, s18C of the *Racial Discrimination Act* or the law of defamation) which cover the ground. I am already uneasy with the string of curbs which anti-terror law in this country has brought on free speech. Nevertheless, I do think that public consideration of free speech and its moral and legal limits should be more nuanced than a sound-bite or hashtag. There are no easy answers here: what is required is an ethically nuanced discussion which recognises both a right to an open society without taboo topics but also the vulnerability and marginalisation of some groups and people within society. People cannot be assumed to have thin skins. Nevertheless, to pretend that money and power do not influence speech and, in some cases, openly buy a louder voice for some which allows them to drown out others is to blatantly ignore reality. (One only has to look at the concentration of media ownership in Australia for an example.) Context matters to this debate. Where Muslim women are being assaulted in public for wearing traditional dress and rhetoric explicitly linking Islam and terror appears in even mainstream media outlets, does abusive comment such as hateful cartoons or the racist rants on public transport periodically uploaded to YouTube count more as an exercise in free speech or as one in marginalisation or discrimination? Should we deliberately use free speech as an excuse to hurt people because we theoretically can? The problem becomes particularly acute in societies where the demonisation of the other has gone beyond mere words. Shi'a leaders in Iraq, for instance, have just prohibited sectarian hate speech in a context where Sunni-Shi'a tensions are open and violent. In the final analysis, therefore, it may be that more legislation will be required in order to protect the fabric of society. That would, however, mark a failure for compassion and real freedom. I would hope that we do not reach that point and that a responsible, rather than a knee-jerk, sloganeering but ultimately damaging, approach to free speech carries the day.

Justin Glyn SJ is a Jesuit presently studying for the priesthood. He has previously practised law in South Africa and New Zealand and has a PhD in administrative and international law.