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Interfaith guru's 9/11 moment

VIDEO

Peter Kirkwood

Many of the interviews on *Eureka Street TV* have featured the views and insights of interfaith activists. Usually they've commented on the theology or politics of interreligious dialogue. This burgeoning activity is one of the few bright spots, a sign of hope in our troubled era marked by conflict between different religious groups.

This week we offer quite a different angle on interfaith collaboration, a focus on the spiritual dimension. The video features an interview with [Ros Bradley](#) who is editor of a book of prayers from all the major traditions, and excerpts from the launch of the book which took place recently in Sydney.

This includes a moving segment from Gail O'Brien, wife of highly regarded Sydney-based surgeon and cancer specialist Chris O'Brien who died from a brain tumour in 2009, as she explains his contribution to the collection.

The book is called *A World of Prayer*, and it's published by the prestigious American company, Orbis Books. As the blurb on its inside cover explains, 'Nearly a hundred prominent men and women from every religious tradition and region of the world share a favourite prayer and offer their own reflections on its meaning.'

The very dogged Bradley spent three years persuading and cajoling just about every major religious figure around the globe to contribute to the book. It includes such spiritual luminaries as the Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Nelson Mandela, Hans Kung, John Shelby Spong and Rowan Williams.

Ros Bradley was born and raised in the UK, and her parents were agnostic and very secular. Though there's a strong Jewish heritage on one side of the family, they didn't attend any synagogue or church, and while growing up she didn't receive any religious instruction.

Despite this, as a young adult she was drawn to religion, and in her late 20s she was baptised and confirmed as an Anglican. Shortly after she spent two years working as a volunteer teacher in Papua New Guinea. This experience in an exotic culture awakened in her an abiding interest in different cultures and belief systems.

She has lived in Australia for 25 years, and was received into the Catholic Church in Sydney in 2002. She has worked in public relations and marketing for several charities including the Fred Hollows Foundation, and in world development with the Methodist Church.

Bradley is a founding member of a Sydney-based interfaith initiative called [Companions in Dialogue](#) which promotes fellowship and understanding among its

members and holds regular public forums on a range of topics.

In recent years she has become a committed member of the [World Community for Christian Meditation](#) , attending one of its groups that meets weekly at a Catholic Church in Sydney's lower north shore.

She is also a member of the council of [Eremos](#) , an organisation which explores and promotes spirituality in Australia, and of her local St Vincent de Paul chapter in Sydney.

A World of Prayer is her second compilation of prayers from different religions. The first was published in 2008 and is called *Mosaic: Favourite Prayers and Reflections from Inspiring Australians*.

International Criminal Court's African bias

POLITICS

Binoy Kampmark



On Tuesday, the International Criminal Court formally sentenced Congolese warlord Thomas Lubanga Dyilo for his use of children in the Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC) militia. He had deployed them in lethal operations in the eastern Ituri region in 2002–03. He was given sentences pertaining to conscripting, enlisting and using child soldiers (children here being under 15 within the meaning of the statute).

It is the first sentence ever handed down by the ICC.

The sentencing finalises a phase begun on 14 March, when Trial Chamber I, as it is termed, issued its judgment in the ICC's first case — *The Prosecutor vs Thomas Lubanga Dyilo*, [finding](#) the defendant guilty for violating Articles 8(2)(e)(vii) (conscripting children) and 25(3)(a) (enlisting children) of the court's governing statute. The judgment was 624 pages and dealt with instances where 129 victims (34 female and 95 male) were involved.

The record of the International Criminal Court is astonishingly short for a body that has existed for ten years. The logistical difficulties of its operation are many — for one, where to place those it convicts, seeing as it has no prison cells. Agreements exist with seven countries as to where convicts might be jailed — Denmark, Serbia, Mali, Australia, Finland, Britain and Belgium.

The movement in international law and the domestic legislation of many countries has been towards the 'best interests of the child'. War is in the best interests of no one, and children are seen to be a special case in that regard. 'The vulnerability of children means they need to be afforded particular protection,' claimed presiding judge Adrian Fulford, who issued a separate opinion from the majority in the case.

Nor was the judge thrilled by the performance of former chief prosecutor Luis Moreno Acampo, who failed to bring charges of sexual violence into the proceedings. An entire and brutal dimension of soldier violence involving children was thereby avoided.

The evidence adduced at the trial was also problematic. The Chamber felt there were strong reasons to believe that those working for the prosecution had exerted improper influence on the testimonies of alleged former child soldier witnesses. Such testimony, it was argued, might be unreliable.

This was made more acute by the reliance placed by the Chamber on video and documentary evidence, given the paucity of reliable witness testimony. One video proved, at least in the minds of the judges, particularly damning — showing

Lubanga's visit on 12 February 2003 to a training camp at Rwampara. Among the troops Lubanga was visiting were children under the age of 15.

The Lubanga case, while a landmark decision — in fact, the only decision — handed down by the ICC shows the enormous difficulties in bringing such cases before international criminal courts.

When the verdict was announced, the predictable [reaction](#) among many in the Congo was that the ICC was a 'political institution'. That is the view of such individuals as Pele Kaswara, a UPC representative who makes the relevant point that, 'You'll never see an American pass before the ICC. All of the accused there are Africans.'

This is easy to understand, given the ICC's move to characterise the conflict as purely internal, and consisting of ethnic rivalries. In truth, the conflict in eastern Congo between 2000 and 2003 involved such toxic factors as gold and the presence of the Ugandan army. Viciousness and victimhood enlisted all sides.

While it would be too much to say the judges had to fudge the issue of linking Lubanga to the enlistment and conscription of children, it is fair to say that liberties were taken in accepting the evidence of that link.

This is made clear by the [standard](#) put forth by the majority of the judges: 'The Chamber needs to be satisfied the accused knew that the children were under the age of 15 years and, additionally, that he was aware that he was providing an essential contribution to the implementation of the common plan [of conscripting children].'

In the end, the various objective and subjective elements linking the accused with both the conflict at hand and the use of child soldiers were satisfied. But satisfied judges don't make a satisfied populace subject to an international institution regarded by many states as a political front.

The United States is a classic illustration of that problem, its juridically minded officials happy to front and develop international law, while its political figures trump it with refusals of participation. International law, for that reason, never grows at speed, but limps along to an uncertain destination.

Justifying garden-variety torture

MEDIA

Max Atkinson

'The use of torture is anathema to a civilised society. We decry the Spanish Inquisition yet tacitly accept or ignore the use of torture, both physical and psychological, in many of our closest trading partners. Do the panellists follow the rule that the ends justify the means?' Trevor Robey, Q&A audience member

Greg Sheridan's work as a journalist is impressive; a veteran of 30 years in the field, he has written five books, hundreds of articles, and regularly comments on television and radio. He is also a man of culture; in the first few minutes of [an episode of Q&A](#) this year he revealed he 'loves' Jane Austen, is reading George Eliot, and likes to cite Henry James on the importance of love.

He also allows, with vague qualifications, the use of torture.

None of this would matter very much if he were not also, at least in the judgment of Newscorp, Australia's 'most influential foreign affairs analyst'.

Like other intellectuals in politics he must accommodate his views to his (Catholic) religious convictions. He'd be aware that Pope Benedict xv1, in December 2005, condemned torture in the war against terrorism and that eminent legal scholars, including natural law philosopher John Finnis, believe the right to be free from torture in the Universal Declaration of Rights is *categorical* — it is not qualified by limitations which apply to other rights to meet the 'just requirements of morality, public order, and the general welfare in a democratic society'.

One might imagine he is also conversant with the Russian classics and Dostoyevsky's famous question, posed by Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov*, on the nature of evil:

Imagine that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end, giving them peace and rest at last, but that it was essential and inevitable to torture to death only one tiny creature — that baby beating its breast with its fist, for instance — and to found that edifice on its unavenged tears, would you consent to be the architect on those conditions? Tell me, and tell the truth?

With the possible exception of Kant, no philosophical theory has put a more forceful case against torture; certainly none has put a more eloquent argument against the 'serpentine wanderings of the happiness theory', and the idea that the end justifies the means.

Perhaps so, but what has this to do with the fact that Australia's most influential foreign affairs writer refuses to exclude the use of torture? He is entitled to his opinion no less than Kant, Finnis and Dostoevsky. The answer is that it may explain a deep ambivalence in this support, which leads Sheridan to begin his

reply to a question from the Q&A audience (as quoted above) about the merits of torture with a hedged denunciation:

Well, no, I'm against torture under any circumstances ... But I tell you this: I do think you ... confront a much more disturbing, difficult, interesting moral dilemma when you construct a case where torture does work and might save many innocent lives.

Now I don't think that justifies out and out torture but I don't think it's absolutely black and white. I don't think you're obliged to give the Taliban that you capture on the battlefield a slice of apple pie and a cup of tea and a warm environment. I think you are allowed to be pretty robust in your questioning.

Host Tony Jones tried robust questioning: 'Can I just ask, what is the limitation you put on this because we know that American Republicans at very senior levels talk about enhanced interrogation techniques?'

Sheridan: Well I think, you know, there have got to be rules and the CIA, as I understand it, asked for proper legal guidance all the time and found it very difficult to get legal guidance.

Jones: But they ended up doing a lot of water boarding, for example. So just to sort of test you here, do you think water boarding is legitimate?

Sheridan: Well ... there are other authors with similar knowledge who argue that enhanced interrogation techniques did provide lifesaving information. Now, it seems to me if the ...

Jones persists: So just to get back to my question, would you condone water boarding?

Sheridan: Well, I'm getting, in my crab like way, to an answer, Tony. If the technique doesn't leave any lasting physical damage whatsoever or any lasting psychological damage then I think you have to examine whether, in an extreme case, it might be allowed. But I wouldn't have a blanket policy saying, yes, you can water board, but I wouldn't absolutely rule out things which are pretty stressful in the interrogation.

Jones: Isn't this exactly why policemen used to use rubber hoses and hit people with telephone books so it didn't leave a mark?

Sheridan: Yeah, but I just don't think you can just blanket whitewash everything and say you can't do anything that's stressful to a prisoner under any circumstances, no matter what because that's not the reality of any battlefield.

In the end he did answer: in 'extreme' cases 'you must examine whether it

might be allowed'. So in special cases the government will have a duty to consider torture, a formula which is broad and fuzzy enough to justify the official abuses by US authorities at both Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo.

Having got this far by enhanced interrogation we need to pause, because any serious discussion of the morality of torture must distinguish two kinds of justification.

The first is for philosophers searching for the perfect moral theory. Its concern is with cases so exotic and so catastrophic they have nothing to do with the ordinary affairs of mankind, such as the nuclear bomb ticking away in a New York basement, with incontrovertible proof the suspect put it there.

This is not a moral argument but a rhetorical device to justify excesses in US foreign policy.

By contrast, a real-life justification must justify a wide range of common garden cases, beginning with the torture of innocent people and suspects in the hope of finding information which might be useful to national security interests. This is the formulation required if we wish to justify the abuse and enhanced interrogation of Guantanamo detainees, mostly soldiers who fought to defend the Taliban regime against a US-led invasion.

What 'enhanced' means is detailed in a November 2008 report by the US Senate Committee on Armed Services; it means the use of methods

... based, in part, on Chinese Communist techniques used during the Korean war to elicit false confessions, including stripping ... of their clothing, placing them in stress positions, putting hoods over their heads, disrupting their sleep, treating them like animals, subjecting them to loud music and flashing lights, and exposing them to extreme temperatures. It can also include face and body slaps and until recently, for some who attended the Navy's SERE school, it included waterboarding.

Former CIA torturer Glenn Carle, a fellow panelist on the same show as Sheridan, explained why:

Fundamentally they are designed to ... psychologically dislocate the detainee ... you make the person half crazy ... you have sound at an almost deafening level nonstop and the sounds are designed to create stress ... you hear silence and the silence is deafening and frightening because there's been nonstop sound and then you don't let someone sleep for 17 hours and you let them sleep for eight minutes and you tell them it was eight hours and you completely mess them up and it's very quick.

US military intelligence added a further refinement after Guantanamo director Major General Geoffrey Miller visited Abu Ghraib in the summer of 2003. The new methods were designed to inflict a profound sense of religious shame, using forced masturbation, naked human pyramids and faked menstrual blood. This alternated

with the use of vicious attack dogs to intimidate prisoners during interrogation.

We now know from the authoritative *Denbeaux Study* on Guantanamo by US Law Professor Mark Denbeaux of Seton Hall Law School, based on US Government files obtained under freedom of information laws, that ordinary Afghan citizens were detained as terrorists if found to be wearing olive drab clothing or a Casio watch.

We know that 92 per cent had never fought for al Qaeda and that only 5 per cent were captured by US troops — the rest having been purchased from Pakistani and Northern Alliance forces for amounts up to US\$5000. Given the Alliance had just lost a savage civil war against the Taliban, and the high local value of US currency, its motives and claims were always dubious.

So much so that after nine years, of the more than 770 detainees in Guantanamo, only a handful were tried and convicted; over 700 were quietly repatriated without charge — but also without apology and without compensation, most after years of imprisonment and ‘harsh techniques’ of interrogation.

This is what the abuse of rights and torture means in real-life cases (as opposed to fascinating puzzles for philosophers); it helps explain Sheridan’s equivocation when asked to clarify what he had in mind. This admirer of George Eliot and Edmund James could not say what kind of torture he would use or when he would use it. It is the same evasiveness — to the point of dissembling — displayed by John Yoo, co-author of the infamous ‘torture memos’, before an outraged US House Judiciary Committee in June 2008.

If we now ask what this has to do with the general debate on torture, the answer is obvious. If the Guantanamo cases are, in Sheridan’s words, ‘extreme’, it means there are no meaningful constraints on the use of torture as a tool of foreign policy; but if they exceed the scope of legitimate torture he has a clear duty to say so.

But if he speaks his mind he will lose the access to US power he commanded as an influential supporter of US policies during the Iraq War when, in April 2004, he enjoyed a private interview with Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy Secretary of Defence, who he saw as ‘chief intellectual architect of the Iraq invasion and high priest of the neo-conservatives’.

This is important to any writer on US defence policies and to the proprietor of a national broadsheet which strongly supports them — if he is not welcome in Washington he will quickly be replaced as Australia’s most influential foreign affairs analyst.

All moral and political argument relies on the difference between exceptions and inconsistencies. When someone puts a controversial claim that torture may be used in certain cases, they have a responsibility to do so with articulate consistency. When Tony Jones — within the limits of the show’s format — sought

this, Sheridan did not know what to say. It was clear he could not reconcile his special cases with his claim that torture is wrong, and the more he tried to do so the less articulate he became.

The incoherence goes deeper; justification presupposes a personal commitment, and commitment to a moral position is as much an affair of the heart as the mind. We test our judgments against our moral intuition and confirm this intuition by reason. We often rely, as elsewhere in the social sciences, on a method some philosophers have described as a process of 'reflective equilibrium', seen in the idea that we learn about ourselves by studying others, and about others by studying ourselves.

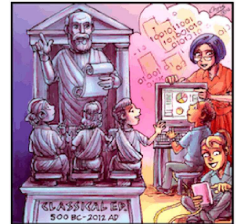
Is it unreasonable to conclude that this experienced journalist could not, as a decent and civilised human being, bring himself to do what the US had been doing for years, but was simply unwilling to criticise it in public?

Battle for the 21st century classroom

EDUCATION

Dean Ashenden

The classroom — one teacher, one group of students, usually of the same age, one rectangular space, door closed — is the great survivor of schooling. It is now as it has been for two or three centuries the main arena of the encounter between teacher and taught, and the taken-for-granted stem cell of schooling as it metastasised from cottage to global enterprise.



The pre-eminent chronicler of the classroom, United States historian Larry Cuban, has depicted the history of the classroom as a contest between 'teacher-centred' and 'student-centred' [pedagogies](#). In the foundational form of the classroom, rows of desks faced the front where, on a raised platform, standing before a blackboard, a single adult talked, told, and controlled dozens of students who sat up straight and listened, recited, copied and remembered their way through one 30-minute 'lesson' after another.

But this form has long been under assault from 'progressivism' and its disruptive ideas about how to organise space, students, time and activities to produce 'active' and 'creative' learning driven by 'student needs and interests'.

The contest between the old and the new, Cuban argues, has been settled decisively in favour of the established order. As a stroll down any school corridor will reveal, 'student-centred' teaching and learning have steadily gained ground, particularly in the earlier years of schooling, but even there it has been absorbed into a 'hybridised' but clearly teacher-dominated classroom order.

There is little evidence to suggest that things have played out differently in Australia. Here as in the United States a crazy-brave rebellion in the 1970s in support of the 'open classroom' and its team-taught, flexibly-grouped, activity-based learning was effortlessly defeated. A former colleague conducted a national evaluation of the open classroom, and could tell some very funny stories about the ingenuity with which teachers used pot plants, book-cases, office partitions, stacks of cartons, *anything* to turn open classrooms back into closed ones.

Twenty years later another incursion came from a different direction but suffered the same fate. In the early 1990s the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning (NPQTL) set out to encourage different ways of organising the work of students and teachers, but soon disappeared without trace. The classroom is a jealous god.

But does it have another century or two left in it? The classroom is facing a combination of pressures which might force it to cede more ground, perhaps even lose its place as the dominant life form, in at least some areas of schooling.

First and most familiar is the pressure of what and how teachers want students to learn. Teachers have been the apostles of progressivism, often against the opposition of parents and editorialists. Now more than ever they want students to 'take responsibility for their own learning', to 'learn how to learn'. Teachers know that as early as Year 3, a single class will include some students who are five learning years ahead of others. They want to organise learning that stretches all of them, the fastest, the slowest, and the in-between.

For many years teachers believed that they could do it if only they weren't trying to cope with so many kids. On my first day of teaching in February 1964 I faced 40 students, a special dispensation because I was first year out. The old hands had 50-odd. Teacher militancy in the 1960s led to tumbling class sizes in the 1970s and 1980s, and for a time it seemed to work. As classrooms became less crowded so did they become less formal and more varied in their organisation of furniture, student groups, time and activity.

But change in both quantity and quality has been arrested by two realities. First, even 20 students constitute a crowd. Chaos always threatens, and only one person stands between order and chaos. That is why the social order of the classroom has not been fundamentally changed. A gathering body of evidence suggests that it will stay that way unless and until the student group shrinks to as few as eight, perhaps ten at a pinch. Halving class sizes was expensive. Halving them again is prohibitive. The central reform strategy of half a century has reached its terminus without delivering the kind of learning and teaching that teachers want. But that hasn't stopped them wanting it.

A third pressure on practice comes from the theory of reform. At the risk of suggesting neatness and sequence where it is often hard to find either, 'reform' in the 1950s and 1960s meant more — more teachers, more classrooms, more schools. Then it meant changing 'the system', through devolution, regionalisation, and restructuring hierarchies of control. As teacher scepticism about these changes deepened into cynicism, the attention of reformers shifted from the system to the school. 'School improvement' and then 'school effectiveness' were all the go.

The last of these grew up as an effort to understand how so much time, money and effort could be spent with so little apparent improvement in student learning. The trail led, at last, to the classroom door. As researchers peered inside the most obvious thing was the difference between teachers. A very effective teacher, they calculated, makes three or four times as much difference as a very effective school. The question now on the agenda is whether the grail will be found in somehow producing more and more highly effective teachers, or in changing a workplace that functions well only in the hands of a maestro.

Until recently the question might have been hypothetical. The demise of the open classroom and then the NPQTL demonstrated that even if the classroom didn't let teachers teach as they felt they should, there was no alternative. The

fourth pressure on the classroom is that an alternative may be just around the corner. I refer, of course, to emerging information and communications technologies.

Schools have been fiddling with computers for decades, but computers have so far gone the way of numberless other innovations, absorbed by and pushed to the margins of the dominant order. In other words, they haven't delivered. But, they will — or perhaps I should say, they will be able to.

There already exists a good deal of software that helps students learn at their own pace in a thoroughly engaging and productive way. But the big gains will come from the management of learning rather than, or as well as, its conduct. 'Expert systems' combined with the 'soft' technology of standards- or outcomes-based curriculum will be able to assess or record assessments of where each student is up to in each area of learning, figure out the best next step, summon up ways and means of taking it, and monitor progress toward a clearly-defined and amply-illustrated objective.

Expert systems will open up the private world of the classroom and make possible a different allocation of the labour of learning. Students, both individually and in varying combinations, will be able to take over from teachers some management of the teaching and learning process, as will other adults including parents, support staff, and trainee and intern teachers. Teachers will spend more of their time in expert diagnosis, prescription, planning and supervision.

At this early stage it seems likely that emerging technologies will also free up resources needed to construct a different division of labour. There are already entirely 'virtual' secondary schools in the US as well as schools that 'blend' virtual and real-world schooling, each with cost structures very different from those of the [classroom-based school](#). The productivity problem of schooling may find a solution long-familiar elsewhere.

Perhaps all this can be done within the familiar circumstance of the class, the teacher, and the classroom, but technology-rich learning and learning management may be better served in spaces that look and feel more like a workshop or studio than a chapel or a factory. In any foreseeable or desirable future there will be a place for the class and its teacher, but it will be shared with many other combinations of students and adults, time and space, brains and machines.

Where and when these fundamentally different forms will emerge is hard to predict. The class and the classroom are heavily defended, by the physical shape of schools, by how students and teachers are used to behaving and interacting with each other, and by a cat's cradle of regulations and industrial agreements. It is possible that what exists will cause what could be to arrive last in those schools where the need is greatest.

Divorce, sexuality and the cult of self-improvement

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***In Treatment* (M). Starring: Gabrielle Byrne, Irrfan Khan, Debra Winger, Dane DeHann, Diane Wiest, Amy Ryan**

Discussing her 2011 film [Sleeping Beauty](#), Australian filmmaker Julia Leigh coined the term 'tender witness', an appealing euphemism to describe the cinematic voyeur, who pours over characters' private moments without menace or malice. It is such an attitude that audiences are asked to bring to the excellent American series *In Treatment* — the third series of which is underway on the Foxtel channel Showcase.

The HBO drama epitomises the fine writing and performances that have become hallmarks of that network's impressive slate of productions of the past decade, from *The Sopranos* to *The Wire* to *Game of Thrones*. It offers an in-depth consideration of the nature, the strengths and pitfalls of the discipline of psychoanalysis, exacted within the various sombre-toned offices of therapist Dr Paul Weston (Byrne).

Each half-hour episode provides a snatch of a therapy session between Paul and one of his patients, played out in real-time through reams of utterly captivating dialogue. The therapist's office is a place where frankness is not only welcome but imperative, and self-examination is a veritable artform. The revelations made are therefore at times shocking, at times funny, at others deeply moving, but always illuminating.

The characters recur and their stories are cumulative, so that (in the current series) we spend each Monday with Sunil (Khan), a displaced Indian widower; Tuesday with Frances (Winger), a well-known, middle-aged actress whose sister is dying of breast cancer, to which she too may be genetically predisposed; and Wednesday with Jesse (Dane DeHaan), a gay teen with a self-destructive streak. Their stories and selves unfold week by week.

According to *In Treatment* tradition, Friday's episode is reserved for Paul's session with his own therapist (Wiest in seasons one and two; Ryan in season three). It is here that we learn the extent to which the intently compassionate persona he presents during the sessions he conducts with his own patients is a skillfully executed front. His own emotional traumas, self-delusions and egotism are as deeply dug-in as those of his patients.

Part of the brilliance of the series — a feat of both writing and performance — is how each patient's individual story, while following its own narrative arc towards a satisfactory resolution, also provides a kind of subtext to Paul's overarching narrative. This was most pointedly seen in series one, when Paul guided a couple through the final ugly stages of a marriage breakdown, even as his own marriage

was disintegrating around his ears.

In the current series, Frances' terror of contracting cancer resonates with Paul's private fear that he is in the early stages of a degenerative illness. Sunil's feelings of helplessness as he adjusts to life in a new country reflects Paul's fears of aging and infirmity. Jesse represents a possible future-glimpse of Paul's own, increasingly alien teenage son.

It is a career-defining role for Byrne, who embodies Paul down to every well-rehearsed gesture and mannerism. To his therapist each week, Paul gradually, grudgingly exposes his fears and prejudices; and these truths tick beneath the stoic surface of his 'game face' during his sessions the following week. Ultimately this only serves to augment the humanity that inhabits every crease of his careworn face.

The audience may ponder whether the doctor or the patient is the more deeply disturbed. But as 'tender witnesses' we are invited to sympathise with both sides of the therapist's couch. So much humanity broils among the sometimes heated, sometimes intimate exchanges of dialogue that we cannot help but identify with all who speak it. Even as *In Treatment* gently satirises the cult of self-improvement, it promotes empathy for the other.

Little Adonis and the fruit box

NON-FICTION

Helena Kadmos



When my father was born his parents thanked God for the gift of a son. They named him Adonis, but for the first few years he was called *Adonaki*, *Little Adonis*.

Even his older sister knew that he was special. Her play revolved around amusing him and keeping him from harm. I have a photograph of him and my Aunty Milly. Wearing a white dress and ribbons in her hair, she sits on a simple wooden chair. My father is accorded his status in relation to her. Even though he is still a toddler and his nappy fills his playsuit, he is standing on a chair next to hers, so that he is much higher.

His hair is long and wild curls spring around his face. But, leaning precariously against the back of the chair, he looks worried. Was he afraid he'd fall? I still see that anxious look on his face sometimes, the way his eyes lift upwards, creasing his forehead in the centre. And I wonder about the things that concern him.

I carry mental snapshots of a few stories from my father's childhood that I've heard often. He's comfortable with the notion of himself as a small boy, always described as cheeky and resourceful, but often in trouble for one boyish prank or another.

But the stories peter out by the time he is a teenager, and I've only a vague, out-of-focus sense of who he was from then until he became a husband and father. There is a long period of time he skirts around. And I know, without being told, that there are secrets. I have contented myself with drawing conclusions about my father from what I've seen and heard myself.

Of his childhood, the stories he has given me have colour and sound like scenes from films, and when I place them side by side, they form a narrative that, I think, builds towards the inevitable silence around his youth and early adulthood. Like one brick upon another, they create a wall that may have kept my father out, or that he may have disappeared behind. Either way, I have barely seen the other side.

Out of this narrative, three things stand out. Three stories represent my father's early life, and they are beautiful and awful. But they are all I have. They feature, respectively, The Rocks, the jam sandwiches, and the fruit box.

The Rocks

My father was born in Sydney when the community of Greek immigrants was still small, just a hint of the movement that would swell that city and others around Australia decades later during the '50s and '60s. My grandparents lived in

the part of the city that hugs one side of Circular Quay known as The Rocks, its name inspired by the local sandstone that its original buildings were made from.

There was only a fledgling Orthodox congregation at the time, so my father was not baptised until he was two years old, and even then it was a Russian priest who performed the ceremony, sprinkling holy water over his head and presenting him to the gathering of friends and relatives at the church.

Afterwards, his parents would have led everyone back to their small home behind their fish and chip shop. They may have feasted on lamb cooked with rosemary, chunks of bread and wine. My father grew up knowing it was a very special day.

My father talks fondly of The Rocks. He learnt to walk in the streets at the foot of the Bridge under construction, and one of his earliest memories is of holding his father's hand and walking across it after it was opened, and the tremendous thrill at the scale of everything around him.

Crumbling arches covered steep stairways between the terraces, many which survived refurbishment programs following an outbreak of bubonic plague in 1900. My father and his cousins chased each other under these arches, where they were accustomed to the sight of people slouched in doorways, or asleep in the laneways.

With great delight my father tells me he would sit on the stone walls overlooking the harbour and watch the ships come in. As their great forms edged slowly past the docks he allowed himself to imagine the places they had come from and where they would take him to one day.

But these were the Depression years. His parents struggled with business in their shop. They were also concerned about increasing violence in their neighbourhood, and with three growing children, they made the difficult decision to move away from their small network of friends and relatives to a more prosperous suburb on the north shore. My father was five years old.

The jam sandwiches

My grandparents took a lease on a shop in the main street and settled their young family into the small two bedroom flat upstairs. Their new home didn't look like The Rocks. Beyond the main street people lived in separate single storey houses, not terraces. Tall leafy trees lined the roadside. No one slept in the streets.

Without his cousins around, my father spent his days in the back yard with Milly and their baby brother Stelios, playing among the extensive flower garden that became his father's source of pleasure and pride. He missed hearing his parents chatter in rapid Greek as they served food. Instead, they became quieter, conducting business with nods, or a simple *yes* or *thank you*.

When he was the right age to start school, my father was anxious. He couldn't imagine being away from his parents. On his first day his Mama walked him to the schoolyard. He carried his lunch in a brown paper bag. It contained two jam sandwiches. Mama told him his teacher would tell him when it was the right time to eat them.

He understood that his teacher would be a very great and educated person, like the priest, who must be obeyed and respected at all times. When his teacher met him at the door of the classroom she was not what he'd expected. She had grey hair, and she looked old, much older than Mama. But she smiled kindly and my father felt glad that she was there.

Mama kissed him on the cheek and told him that she loved him, *S'agapo Adonaki*. And then she turned and walked outside the school yard and away from him.

That morning my father began to learn to read and write. His head hurt with trying to remember all the letters and numbers, and the day felt very long. Nevertheless, when a bell started to clang he was surprised. Was school finished? Had he missed hearing when he was supposed to eat his lunch?

The teacher told them to pack up their writing materials and my father was very glad that the day had come to an end. He followed the other children into the playground and continued out the gates and down the street. He was so hungry he ate his sandwiches on the way home.

When he reached the shop he hurried inside to play with his brother, but stopped short when he saw the frown on Mama's face. *What are you doing here?* And then she saw the crumpled paper bag in his hands. *It is only playtime!* She untied her apron, took his hand, and walked him back to school, just in time to join the other children filing back into the classroom. There hadn't been time to make any more sandwiches.

When lunchtime came he was hungry again. But that day he learned just how long the school day really was.

The fruit box

My father's parents told him he would grow to like school, but that didn't happen. He missed his cousins who he'd played with so easily. At school the children often excluded him. They told him he was different.

He knew this was true, because his skin was tanned like an almond kernel, not pale, pink and freckly like the other children. His hair was dark and long and curly, not ginger, or brown and flat. And when his mother came to collect him at the end of the day, some children laughed behind their hands when she greeted him in Greek. When that happened he was torn between wanting to shout at the children, and running away from Mama.

At the end of the first year he left the warm grandmotherly care of his first teacher. In subsequent years he learned that not all teachers treated every one of their pupils with kindness. Although my father showed academic promise from the very beginning, the social isolation and lack of encouragement began to impact on him. Slowly his delight in achieving became tempered with the desire to avoid attention.

This dynamic can best be illustrated by the story of the fruit box.

When he was about nine years old, his teacher was a stern and unpredictable man for whom teaching seemed to be less a vocation than a last resort. My father says everyone knew the man had been gassed during the war, and that he suffered ongoing respiratory problems that forced him to take a week or two off work every so often.

When he was in the classroom he made no effort to hide his resentment about his position, or his attitudes to Germans and, by extension, all 'foreigners'.

From the start my father felt his teacher did not like him. He describes bitterly how his teacher would draw attention to him in class, calling him *Greasy Greek* and *Dago*. I can see my father as he may have been, sinking lower into his chair, keeping his head down, wishing to disappear.

And then one day there was the incident with the box.

My father was working out sums off the blackboard. He liked maths and he was concentrating hard. The door opened and the teacher from the year six classroom came in and approached my father's teacher.

As the two adults talked they looked across to my father, which made him nervous. Then he was called to the front of the room, and told to go with the teacher to her classroom. He didn't ask why. He thought he must have done something wrong, and felt afraid of what was to happen.

When he entered the room the students, sitting in long rows, turned to look at him. Some whispered to each other. One pointed a finger. The teacher told him to go to the front of the class where a wooden fruit box had been placed up-side-down at the base of the blackboard. She nodded at the crate and when he didn't move, she told him to step onto it and face the class. He hesitated for a moment then did as he was told.

His legs trembled, and when he saw the teacher pick up the long wooden ruler from her desk he closed his eyes and waited for the sting as it whacked against his bare thighs. But it didn't come. He heard her speaking and opened his eyes and saw that she was pointing the ruler at him. She touched the corner of it to his hair, his forehead and very close to his eyes, where it melted into a blur.

She was drawing attention again, and he didn't like that. He didn't want to be seen too clearly. But she wasn't calling him names; she was speaking the way

teachers do when they are telling their students something important, like history or geography.

She told the children to notice how my father's hair clenched into tight, shiny curls, how his skin was dark and muddy, how his forehead was higher and shinier than normal, and how his nose bulged in the centre. She told him to turn around and then she touched the ruler against the backs of his legs. He felt the tip of the wood on his ear lobes as she commented that his ears stuck out too much.

The whole time she didn't address my father personally or use his name. He heard murmuring, some giggles, and his face burned.

Finally the teacher told him to face the front again and she dropped the ruler to her side and waved her hand up and down the side of his body as though he was a statue. *So you can see children, the features of a European.*

She told my father she didn't need him anymore. He slipped back into his own classroom, trying not to disturb his teacher, wanting to avoid further attention. The sums he'd been working on beforehand were still on his desk, but when he looked at the board the list had been rubbed away.

He didn't speak to anyone for the rest of the day, and that he never told his parents what had happened.

When I picture him standing in that classroom on the fruit box, my photograph of him as a toddler, standing on a chair with his worried frown, seems both portentous and cruel.

The Rocks, the sandwiches and the fruit box. A sequence that is precious because I have it from my father. And it points to the silent years that we do not speak about, but which I know involved leaving school early, scattered and inconsistent attempts to earn a living, some failures and many disappointments. But there is also a trip on an ocean liner, as the boy Adonaki dreamed of. And time spent overseas.

My father takes real human form for me after I am born, in the living, breathing, warm body that I have grown up knowing. And there are many stories now that are his and mine, my mother's, my brothers' and my sisters'.

And there is my father sitting opposite me now, on a chair at the kitchen table. His hair is still curly if it gets long enough, but it is soft and silvery. He listens as I read this story to him and wants to set some things straight.

I must specify that the sandwiches were plum, always plum jam, cut in rough, uneven chunks, unlike the neat triangles other children pulled out of their lunch bags — he laughs fondly as he remembers his mother cutting into the loaf pressed against her chest. And that the ocean liners really were marvellous, coming in and going out, so large and taking so many people to places very far away. And that he remembers all their names.

Trading fears for tears in complex asylum seeker debate

POLITICS

Fatima Measham

When the Australian senate [failed to pass](#) the Oakeshott bill before the parliamentary winter break, many observers were quick to lambast the Greens for opposing it.

During those emotionally charged few days, a law enabling federal government to transfer asylum seekers to third countries somehow took hold in the public imagination as the best way to keep people from drowning. The rejection of the bill was thus seen as a failure of politics or even a moral failure.

But in exposing the difficulty of crafting a morally coherent and legal response to seaborne asylum seekers, the debate probably served the issue better than the assorted catchphrases peddled by federal leaders on both sides. We may finally be grappling with the nuances of a situation that has always been complex and broad.

This is evidenced by the astonishing tear-shedding in both parliamentary houses over people drowning near our northwest coast (as if no boat had previously capsized there). It was a peculiar but important reversal in a decade that has seen asylum seekers demonised and psychologically brutalised by our policymakers.

The reversal is so palpable as to be nearly comical: asylum seekers, it turns out, are human beings to whom we have obligations. It illustrates how poorly the question of asylum has been discussed since 2001.

It was sentimental behaviour, of course, but some spark of leadership may be detected. Elected officials finally signalled to the public that such deaths are not negligible — that we must reckon with the desperation that puts people into boats. We can only hope parliamentarians will be able to hold on to their belated compassion when sitting resumes next month.

We can also hope they will return with cooler heads to consider how partnerships may be cultivated in the region to address asylum seeker movements separately from people smuggling.

The recent debate should have alerted them to this distinction. There is no sense in discussing offshore processing without a multilateral framework in place that disentangles the right to asylum from people smuggling. By now our legislators should already be educated on the nature of this right: it is not negotiable, deferrable, or conditional on the circumstances in which it is claimed.

Asylum, not deterrence, should always have been the starting point for discussion about boat arrivals. This is why the problem-solution approach ultimately fails: the wrong problems keep being identified. If anything good is to come out of the debate over the Oakeshott bill, it would be the shedding of an

insular mindset that fixates on border control, people smuggling, and deaths at sea as problems requiring domestic legislation.

The real question — and the deeper problem to which all these issues may be traced — is how to respond to hundreds of thousands of people in our region needing long-term solutions to their displacement.

It is a complex challenge that must be treated as such. A Lowy Institute analysis in 2010 pointed to [a comprehensive approach](#), including 'capacity-building in origin and transit states; engagement with international efforts to address root causes in primary origin countries ... and building partnerships including through consultation with civil society within the state and cooperation with other states in the region'.

The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, a civil society organisation in Australia with considerable grassroots experience and expertise, has made a [submission](#) to the expert panel convened by Prime Minister Gillard in the wake of the Oakeshott bill.

The submission includes emergency measures such as the immediate resettlement of a combined 5000 assessed and approved refugees in Indonesia and Malaysia, and increasing our refugee intake to 25,000, with a significant portion to be taken from within the region.

It also sets out long term measures: pursuing a regional refugee protection framework underpinned by the Refugee Convention; supporting reforms in countries in the region including granting legal status to refugees and asylum seekers, affording right of stay, work permission, and protection against arrest, detention and deportation; establishing a formal multi-party parliamentary committee to begin 'the process of de-politicisation of the issue'; increasing funding to the UNHCR and regional neighbours to build capacity for human rights protection; and formally instituting community processing as an alternative to detention centres.

These are patently challenging pursuits because they introduce variables beyond our control, such as the pace and cost of reforms in the region. But there have always been variables beyond our control, including but not limited to the dire conditions that compel people to leave their homeland in the first place.

It is time for Australia to lead on this issue instead of working from behind through ad hoc bilateral agreements like the Malaysia solution. It is also time to let go of the idea that we can somehow turn the tide of humanity. In a world where [humanitarian space is shrinking](#), we cannot long deny our part when 15.4 million refugees need to be resettled, when violent conflicts continue to simmer.

It is complicated business and approaching it as such will test our national maturity. When parliament resumes — aptly, the spring sitting — we will see who is ready to grow and who will remain stunted.

The epiphanies of our lives

POETRY

B. N. Oakman

Baby, I Don't Care

The title is Robert Mitchum's famous line from the 1947 film noir, Out of the Past, directed by Jacques Tourneur, and also starring Jane Greer and Kirk Douglas.

never thought I'd say it couldn't sound like Mitchum
tolling every syllable like his death knell
before he kisses Jane Greer on the beach at Acapulco
Are you sure? she asks adding extra bait to the hook
Baby I don't care he says and as soon as he kisses her
all the traffic lights on his road to hell turn green
who can blame him? remember her entrance
strolling at sunset into *La Mar Azul* (hot chilli cold tequila)
the flies stop buzzing a guitar starts to throb
the kind of girl a guy would die for 'die from' more likely
three corpses from four bullets is handy shooting
takes two for Kirk Douglas a durable performer even then
you'd turn a few heads in *La Mar Azul* flesh aglow
from stolen Aztec sun but we're in a real-life drama
and you're the girl with the dead-end part the stiff
in a tragedy by Stupidity the Three Stooges hamming
as your doctors but you fluff your exit lines
mess-up your death scene three times over
so when I kiss you (it won't be in Acapulco) I'm stalled at a detour
on the road to hell facing red grateful I'm going nowhere
while Mitchum charges flat-chat to the inferno
you're asleep now no empty bed yet damns my breaking day
and for the rest when I hear them trilling
about property prices blathering about positive thinking
getting lubricious over big cars and bigger careers spending

their waking hours with the All Ordinaries then believe me

Baby (if you'll wear the diminutive) I don't care

Look At My Eyes

Look at my eyes.

I'm dead behind these eyes.

Archie Rice, eponymous character in John Osborne's play, *The Entertainer*, (1957).

I know how Archie feels
after the fire's gone out
easy to grab at pain killers
a few swigs of self-deceit
no trouble doing drugs
helpful doctors will oblige
or try DIY
no one will notice
you'll still be moving and nodding
not a bother to anyone
after all you're only dead inside
somebody taught me
pain is more lively than torpor
but there's a price
you'll be a bloody nuisance
a pest in a popularity quest
now look at my eyes
see anything burning
flickering
maybe smouldering
or is there a blaze
the flames dancing in the ruins

Epiphany

Save two, my classmates in Poetry are young enough to be my children. My trade,

'economist', seems a subset of 'leper' to them.

I want you to list the epiphanies in your lives, says the lecturer. We'll build poems

around them. Then he smashes my sole advantage and tells them what an epiphany is.

I ponder, but cannot manage to think of one.

Does he really believe people have several?

My extra years are like binoculars peered through from the wrong end, shrinking past significance to present inconsequence.

Meanwhile Youth is attacking notebooks, scribbling with furious intent. I'm becoming desperate. I'm starting to sweat.

Maybe I don't view life the right way, certainly not the way my classmates do.

Then at last I recall a distant day. To be precise, a distant night.

Divorced. Three children. Closing 40. Senior lecturer in economics.

Mortgaged to infinity. New woman ten years younger. In the dead hours

between two indistinguishable days I dreamt of myself when old: grim

rented room, plain-label tomato soup simmering on a single gas ring,

a cockroach named Harold my dearest companion, The Financial Review

dangling from a loop of string ready for base duties in a communal toilet.

My dream didn't seem worthy of Doctor Freud's attention, but I figured

less explication and more application of the dismal science might make

my dismal prospects a little less dire.

It's hardly an inspiring epiphany. It's not going to satisfy youthful

optimists captivated by predictions, plans, revelations - all bearing fruit

in the future - rather like investments, if you think about it.

I won't divulge my modest insight here. *Typical bloody economist*, they'll say,

immolating in flames of righteousness. Concrete capitalist. Neo-liberal stooge.

He even dreams about economics!

So I tell the class I saw my circumstances as if for the first time after reading

Auden's injunction to aspiring poets: *First secure an income*, the master is alleged to have said.

Who's Auden? mutters someone. *Probably his accountant*, sniggers another. Giggles ripple around the classroom.

Shit! says the lecturer.

He's a man around 40, a published poet with a PhD, divorced, with a new and younger partner, young kids, a mortgaged man - and he knows a lot. Suddenly, as if for the first time, I realise I like him.

History curriculum perpetuates East Timor myths

HUMAN RIGHTS

Susan Connelly

This month the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority completes its consultation on the draft senior secondary Australian [Curriculum](#) for English, Mathematics, Science and History.

Although I applaud the inclusion of two mentions of East Timor in the Draft of the Australian Senior Secondary [Modern History Curriculum](#), I believe that the history of the relationship between Australia and Timor-Leste is not sufficiently represented.

Any teacher wanting to teach East Timor in the Curriculum unit 'Movements for Rights and Recognition in the 20th Century' would find investigation points which rightly outline the global forces affecting the many countries and issues suggested for study. But in the case of East Timor, omitting any specific mention of Australia's role could easily lead to false impressions.

Many people's opinions are shaped by notions championed by various political forces and media, and therefore some actually believe that regarding East Timor, Australia has been unremittingly courageous, generous and exemplary. That Australian soldiers went into Portuguese Timor in 1941 'to protect the Timorese', for example, and that Australia 'saved' East Timor in 1999. A study of the history would allow students to have these perceptions challenged by examination of the facts.

If Australia's relationship with East Timor was given prominence, students would be able to fulfil the other aims of the curriculum i.e. how to inquire, how to use sources and how to defend well-researched positions, all by using a line of inquiry which has relevance to the place of Australia in the modern world and in this region in particular.

In 'Unit 4 'The Modern World Since 1945' East Timor again appears as one among others in a study of 'Movements of People', which refers to conflict and persecution in 1975 and 1999. Without specific reference to Australia's role, however, the tendency to portray Australia as the champion may not only remain unchallenged, but may be strengthened.

It is true that students can transfer historical skills learned with respect to one set of material to other content. But transference of skills could be as adequately served if the Australia/Timor relationship was included as a choice, for example, in Unit 4 of the 'Engagement with Asia' section. Students could learn their skills in relation to Timor's history and so be equipped to understand Vietnam, or indeed, cultural and sporting ties with Asia, topics for which the present Draft Curriculum provides.



If students are to engage in valid participation in contemporary debates, they require an understanding both of history and of its relevance to the present. Without this there is the danger that current political realities will cloud historical inquiry, and that Australian students will pass through schools with little knowledge of a history which has peculiar relevance to how Australians see ourselves, to demonstrated facts, and to the current effects of those facts.

Timorese poverty, among the most dire in the world, is the result of recent regional history in which Australia played a pivotal role.

Many issues concern Australia and East Timor, for example [unresolved justice issues](#), the building of Timorese systems and structures, ongoing Australian roles in Timor-Leste, the increasing presence of China there, the questions of maritime boundaries and the resources of the Timor Sea. Unless students are given the impetus to study the modern history that makes these questions relevant, they will remain likely to repeat the stereotypical thinking which affects those with a veneer of historical understanding. That can sometimes be heard from westerners in the eating houses of Dili.

To introduce a meatier engagement with the region, in the 'Engagement with Asia' section the relationship between Australia and East Timor could be presented as a free standing element in these terms: the significance of Australia's policies concerning East Timor, including the effects of the Australian presence in World War II, the Balibã³ Five, the invasion and occupation by Indonesia, Timorese independence, and the resources of the Timor Sea.

Students would find here a wealth of content from which to draw conclusions and develop the skills of historical inquiry. The inclusion of the relationship between our two nations in the Curriculum would both educate the young and encourage Australian educators to grapple with this unique chapter of modern history.

The Draft Senior Secondary Curriculum [available](#) for anyone to read and comment until 20 July 2012.

Politics in the pulpit

GUEST EDITORIAL

Aloysious Mowe



'I don't think politics should be brought into the pulpit,' said the gentleman who waited for me at the church door after all the other mass-goers at Sunday's 8:30 am Mass had departed. 'You upset my wife: she wanted to walk out during your homily.'

It was the start of International Refugee Week, and I had taken the opportunity to preach about asylum seekers in Australia. The gospel according to Mark was propitious: the Kingdom of God is like the tiniest of seeds sown in the ground, growing slowly and invisibly, but eventually producing the greatest of trees, a place of shelter and welcome.

Every member of that Sunday congregation was a seed; every word they uttered in support of asylum seekers was a seed; every gesture of welcome they showed to asylum seekers was a seed.

If I had read out at Mass the [pastoral letter](#) about marriage issued by the Archdiocese of Sydney on Refugee Sunday, would anyone in the congregation have protested about politics being brought into the pulpit?

The letter was an unambiguous statement of the belief of the bishops regarding the nature of marriage and the current discourse about rights: a broadside fired against attempts to legislate for gay marriage. Some might have disagreed with the letter's exegetical strategies, or its presentation of natural law. No reasonable person, however, would have questioned the right, nay, the duty, of the bishops to enter into the same-sex marriage debate or to engage in the public square with issues raised by proposed parliamentary legislation.

We hear the voice of the Church on issues of sexuality and reproduction all the time, but we strain to hear the Church speak out on behalf of refugees and asylum seekers. Recently Malcolm Fraser [berated](#) Tony Abbott for the Coalition's recently announced asylum seeker policies, which he said were based on 'falsehoods, misinformation, and a blatant playing of politics with the lives of vulnerable people.'

Mr Fraser went on to describe Abbott's policies as 'the closest thing to evil you can get.' It was perhaps my desire to hear an authoritative voice in the Church speak out boldly on behalf of asylum seekers that I detected the tone and cadences of a prophet in Mr Fraser's article.

What particularly provokes Mr Fraser's ire is the lack of integrity in the presentation of information, with the result that this deliberate misinformation fuels unfounded fear. Richard Towle, the regional representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, has also recently lamented the way

misleading language is being deployed to undermine sympathy and support for asylum seekers: 'Queue jumping...|is probably the most toxic and poisonous expression one could find to undermine the institution of asylum — because it (falsely) presupposes that there are two ways that you can claim asylum.'

Where are the voices in the Australian Church that will boldly and authoritatively speak the truth about asylum seekers? Where are the pastoral letters berating the many untruths told by politicians about asylum seekers and the institution of asylum?

Australia's ad hoc refugee rescue costs many lives

POLITICS

Tony Kevin

When distress calls come in from asylum-seeker boats, Australia's current policy is to rescue by choice — in other words, on a case by case basis.



Some of these calls are from areas quite close to the Indonesian shoreline. Some are closer to Christmas Island.

To its credit, Australia's border protection system usually rescues asylum seekers who have made distress calls from the Indonesian search and rescue zone. This zone includes all the international waters surrounding and north of Christmas Island.

The responsible Australian authorities include the Border Protection Command (BPC), under Home Affairs Minister Jason Clare, and the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA), under Transport Minister Anthony Albanese.

Occasionally, they fail to respond correctly to such distress calls. On these occasions they pass them to the Indonesian search and rescue authority BASARNAS and wait to see what happens. They do this knowing that BASARNAS has neither the maritime rescue capacity, nor the policy inclination, to rescue refugee boats reporting distress in international waters while trying to reach Australia.

When BPC/AMSA and BASARNAS play chicken with people's lives in this way, boats sink and people die. We now know that this happened both with the *Barokah*, which foundered near Java in December 2011 with the drowning of up to 200 asylum seekers. It also occurred with the boat that capsized last month, on 21 June. In this case, Australia had known of distress calls for two days but had simply informed BASARNAS and then watched and waited.

Australia took charge of that rescue only after the boat was seen to have capsized on 21 June. An estimated 90 people drowned. These people could have been saved if Australia had mounted its own rescue in response to the distress messages phoned in on 19 and 20 June. We also know there had been a comparable incident in October 2009 (detailed in my new book [Reluctant Rescuers](#)).

When such tragedies occur, embarrassed Australian ministers and officials are economical with the facts. They try to blur public understanding of the legal status of the waters in question, obscuring questions of which government was most responsible for the loss of lives.

The public is often told — inaccurately — that such tragedies are happening 'in Indonesian waters'. Indonesian waters actually extend only 19 kilometres from the

Indonesian coast. And, anywhere at sea, response to distress calls is properly the responsibility of the nearest country or ships with capacity to rescue.

The fact that Australian authorities have not always responded to distress calls promptly and correctly should concern us all, regardless of our views on asylum-seeker processing policy. Australia's rescue-at-sea protocols and practices should have nothing to do with policy debates in Australia about asylum-seeker processing choices. Maritime rescue authorities should simply get on with their job of saving lives in peril at sea.

Focusing in more detail on the December 2011 *Barokah* foundering, we note that the new Minister for Home Affairs Jason Clare then announced that a boat had capsized the day before, 40 nautical miles off the coast of Java. The search and rescue effort was being coordinated by Indonesia. AMSA was now working with Indonesian authorities. The minister said:

The information about this boat and the information about it capsizing off the coast of Java was provided by Indonesian authorities to Australian authorities.

Yet on 5 July 2012, the Minister disclosed:

We received calls from a vessel in distress last year in December that was very close to the Indonesian shoreline. You might remember that vessel in December just off the coast of Indonesia where two hundred people drowned.

There was worse to come, as Natalie O'Brien [reported](#) in yesterday's Fairfax Sunday papers, on Australia's refusal to co-ordinate the search and rescue for the *Barokah* despite pleas for help from Indonesia.

Documents obtained by Fairfax under freedom of information reveal that AMSA told BASARNAS that it was up to them to lead the rescue effort into this major maritime tragedy, which resulted in the biggest loss of life (up to 200) since the SIEV X in 2001 in which 353 people drowned.

A spokeswoman for AMSA said the decision about the *Barokah* was made because the boat was inside the Indonesian search and rescue zone. She said the agency offered support for planning and drift modelling. The boat broke up in high seas about 40 nautical miles south of Prigi Beach in Java. Most of the fewer than 50 survivors were rescued by a passing fishing boat.

The documents, obtained from the Department of Customs and Border Protection, also reveal that Customs officials provided a different account of the story to Senate estimates briefings in February. Customs did not reveal AMSA's refusal to coordinate the rescue, instead saying that Indonesia's search and rescue agency BASARNAS had 'initially declined an offer from AMSA to assist with the search and rescue effort'.

O'Brien also reported further official responses to her questions about *Barokah*:

A spokeswoman for the maritime authority denied there had been any direction

from government about its response to distressed asylum seeker boats, maintaining its policy is consistent and in accordance with the relevant conventions and international practices. 'The operational circumstances may vary from incident to incident and it is these operational factors that shape the actual response,' a spokeswoman said.

Meanwhile a spokesman for the Federal Minister for Transport, Anthony Albanese, said that where an incident occurs in another country's search and rescue region, AMSA would normally act to provide assistance, rather than lead the response itself. 'The requirement for coordination of effort becomes more compelling with incidents close to the Indonesian coast than it is further offshore towards Christmas Island' he said.

These are disturbingly clear official admissions that Australian decisions on how to respond to distress calls from asylum-seeker boats are taken *ad hoc*. Australia either chooses to rescue, or not: rescue by choice. Fortunately, most of the time our border protection system chooses to rescue.

With regard to the 21 June incident — in which 110 asylum seekers were rescued and 90 drowned — Marg Hutton documents what occurred in a well-researched lead article at sievx.com titled 'Australia's Shameful Response to a Boat in Distress'. [Michael Bachelard](#) of *The Age* also deals with this.

The [subsequent](#) 27 June incident in which 123 asylum seekers were rescued and one to four were reported missing, had a happier outcome. Significantly the Australian authorities acted promptly and correctly in this second incident.

A further incident on 4 July in which 164 asylum seekers were reported to have been transferred to safety aboard Australian Navy ships just hours after a distress call, due to Navy concerns about the seaworthiness of their boat, is now subject to questions about whether the distress call had been genuine. Asylum-seekers on this boat were accused of using the Navy 'like the NRMA'.

The Minister responded, properly, that Australian authorities had to treat every distress call as genuine and fully investigate it. I note also that, in this case, a decision was made by the responsible Navy commanders on the spot to rescue the people who had sent the distress call.

That should surely be the end of the matter.

50 years since Australia's 'most poisonous debate'

EDUCATION

John Warhurst

FIFTY YEARS SINCE THE 'GOULBURN STRIKE': CATHOLICS AND EDUCATION POLITICS



An address to the Australian Catholic Historical Society

Sydney, July 8 2012 An experienced non-Catholic observer very close to political events, Labor speechwriter and historian Graham Freudenberg, has observed in 1977 that 'the oldest, deepest, most poisonous debate in Australia has been about government aid to church schools'. Furthermore, thirty-five years ago he offered the

damning opinion that: 'The century old failure of the Catholic Church in Australia to achieve her principal social aim is remarkable testimony to the political incompetence of the bishops'.

The first aim of this paper is to put the Goulburn strike of July 1962 in context of the state aid debates. Secondly, I want to trace the story of Catholics and education politics over the fifty years since then. Finally, I want to reflect on how far the state aid debate has come and to ask where state aid for Catholic schools sits now.

I rely not on fresh historical research about the strike, but on some of the major secondary sources, especially *The Catholic Campaign for State Aid* by Michael Hogan, and my own broader perspectives on the Catholic lobby and Catholics in politics.

This is not just a narrow story about education policy and funding, but a broader account of the Catholic community and its various interactions with politics. This involves the structure and organization of the church, including the teaching congregations, the changing place of the church and its schools in society, Catholics, voting and political party politics, and contributions by other interested participants in politics and education debates.

A number of themes emerge, most of which can only be discussed briefly. These include the situation of the times, the education funding arguments advanced by Catholics, the strategies and tactics of pressure group advocacy and, perhaps most importantly, the pattern of government funding of Catholic schools.

The ecclesiastical and political context was tantalizingly poised. In 1962 Robert Menzies was in his thirteenth year as prime minister of a Coalition government, after his narrow victory at the 1961 federal elections. He was supported by the largely Catholic Democratic Labor Party which had formed seven years previously after the Labor Split of 1955. The DLP, keeping Menzies in office, was vocal in support of state aid. The Leader of the Labor Opposition was a Catholic, Arthur Calwell. Three of the four federal Labor leaders were Catholics. The other was the

new Deputy Leader Gough Whitlam.

At the state level the Labor party was dominant in NSW, the most Labor of all states and had been in office since 1941. It was a very Catholic branch of the party. RJ Heffron had been the Premier since 1959, succeeding Joe Cahill, but he was to lose office to the Liberal Bob Askin in 1965.

John 23rd was Pope and the second Vatican Council took place from 1962-1965. A large section of the Australian Catholic community was at war with Labor over communism. The politics of the permissive society, in which Catholics played a large part, did not hit Australia till later in the 1960s. Five years earlier Rome had declared that the Catholic Social Studies Movement was not Catholic Action and the Movement lost the formal support of the Church and became the National Civic Council. The Archbishop of Sydney was Norman Gilroy and his auxiliary was James Carroll. Goulburn was part of the Canberra-Goulburn Archdiocese, headed by Archbishop Eris O'Brien.

The Goulburn 'Strike'

Catholic education in the 1960s was in crisis as growing enrolments caused by population growth outran financial resources and school capacity. Very large classes and poor facilities were the norm. There were even rumblings of the church restructuring its commitment to education in some way, perhaps even dispensing with one or more levels of Catholic education. Yet the schools received little or no government funding and progress in attaining state funding was moving at a glacial pace. What support there was came indirectly from state governments in the form of bursaries and assistance with teacher training.

Some of the opposition was philosophical but some was personal. Sectarianism in society (that is anti-Catholicism and in return anti-Protestantism) was rampant and consequently the governments and political parties were extremely cautious about tackling this issue. They regarded state aid as electoral suicide because it would generate more opposition than support. Catholics were a big minority but a minority nonetheless. Catholics within the main political parties, including premiers and prime ministers, had proved impotent on the issue over many years. Most Catholics supported the Labor Party but the 1950s Labor Split, weak though it was in NSW, had produced the Democratic Labor Party and begun the long road for Catholics away from Labor. Catholic lay militancy was in the air, though the bishops were locked into traditional forms of advocacy.

On Friday July 13 1962, Bishop John Cullinane, the Auxiliary Bishop of Canberra-Goulburn, authorized the closing of the six Goulburn Catholic schools for six weeks until the end of term, and instructed the 2,000 students to present themselves to the nearby government schools for enrolment, which they did on Monday July 16. The tipping point had been state government insistence over several years on improvements to a toilet block at a local Catholic primary school. Amid great excitement and furore 640 Catholic students were enrolled with

considerable professionalism and good will but there was no room for the remainder. Some Catholic students from boarding schools marched en masse to their new schools under firm instructions of good behavior from their teachers. They were well-received, some of the government school teachers being themselves Catholic parents. It was the week of the Leaving Certificate 'trials' and some students were held back by the nuns.

Shortly afterwards, on July 22, the point made, most of the students returned to their schools, though some 10% stayed in the public system. The event itself, which attracted great media publicity, some of it extremely hostile, did not in itself solve anything. Nor was it 'masochistic' as academic Robert Parker described it years later. But it appears to have stimulated developments and progress was swift. There was no turning back.

Academic studies have been confident of the event's importance. Sydneysider Michael Hogan describes it 'the most spectacular demonstration of Catholic frustration in the history of state aid' and 'a watershed in state aid politics'. Henry Albinski, an American visitor, saw it as a 'sensational episode' and 'an unprecedented manifestation of Catholic lay action'.

Looking back now from a Catholic perspective Geoff Joy, former director of the CEO in Canberra-Goulburn, describes it as 'an explosion and a watershed in the state aid debate that advanced the movement to direct government grants both Commonwealth and State to non-government schools'. Sister Kerrie Cusack, now congregational leader of the Sisters of St Joseph Goulburn, who was one of the students who transferred to Goulburn High at the time, now recalls the strike as 'both bold and attention-seeking' and 'an effective, non-violent protest'. 'Behind it all', she says, 'was Catholic faith seeking justice'.

Several general themes can be drawn from the story of what happened in Goulburn in 1962.

The strike, as the name suggests, drew on the direct action tactics of union-style industrial confrontation rather than the usual quiet diplomacy and behind the scenes negotiations practiced by the bishops. The mood was militant and the action was public. Critics objected to such a 'menacing' approach to pressure group politics.

Lay Catholics, especially men it seems in this instance, played a considerable role, though the hierarchy was formally in charge. The decision to strike was taken by a public meeting of 700 Catholics after a preparatory meeting of 40 Catholic men called by Cullinane, the parish priest. This lay action was symptomatic of growing action among Catholic parents and friends organizations in several states.

Informal Catholic interaction with the political system was largely with the Labor Party because of the traditional ties, though that was in the process of changing, initially through the influence of the DLP. Catholics were rare in the Coalition parties and those that were involved complained of anti-Catholic prejudice.

Goulburn was a very Irish-Catholic town (36%) and this was a push by the whole integrated Catholic community, not just an education sector led by religious congregations and school principals. The state aid issue was a unifying factor within the Catholic community, though not all Catholics went to church schools, and a sense of injustice was pervasive.

The strategy adopted was emotional and symbolic. Enrolment in government schools was not seen as a long-term solution but a short-term tactic to draw attention to the issue of just and proper funding of Catholic schools.

The Opposition to funding of Catholic schools was resting on its laurels and was not as highly organized as it was to become once such funding became a reality. That was to lead to the political organization known as the Defence of Government Schools campaign right up to the High Court, where the case was finally lost.

This was a NSW state issue as there was no commonwealth funding, though state aid was soon to attract such federal government interest that state politics faded from the limelight.

Immediate Consequences, 1962-1975

The Catholic hierarchy returned to the negotiating table. The Cardinal, advised by Bishop James Carroll, approached the Premier. The NSW Labor government did not want to be seen to be stampeded by the strike. Later in the year it was returned to office at the 1962 state election. During 1963 it came into conflict with Labor's federal executive, which supported indirect but not direct state aid.

In general Labor tied itself in knots. State aid threw it into crisis. Albinski described it as self-immolation. Since 1957, post-Split, official party policy had been opposed to direct state aid. Many state parliamentarians wanted to take the lead and respond to Catholic community pressure but they were repeatedly humiliated by the federal party organization, led by Joe Chamberlain, the federal secretary, who refused to budge.

There was just as much internal conflict and opposition to State aid within the Coalition parties as there was within Labor but their parliamentary leaders had more freedom to move. Liberal leader Robert Askin tried to take initiatives but was cautious and was initially rebuffed by his own party. Unlike the Country Party the NSW Liberals did not take a state aid policy to the 1962 state election. That came later.

The 'simple Presbyterian' PM Robert Menzies took the political initiative in superb fashion at the 1963 federal election by offering federally-funded science blocks to all schools. Both sides of politics recognize that he outmaneuvered Labor, to use Gerard Henderson's term. Sean Scalmer writes that Menzies 'exploited the demonization of Labor's internal structures, wooed Catholic voters with generous State Aid, and profited from the economic recovery'.

Until late 1963, according to Albinski, 'successive Menzies Governments did and

promised little indeed for private schools', though small indirect steps had been taken by the federal government in the ACT since 1956. At the election there was a large swing against Labor and the swing was biggest in NSW. Labor lost 10 seats, seven in NSW.

This may have been NSW's 'DLP-type moment' at which Catholics moved to the Coalition. In 1994 John Howard recollected to Gerard Henderson that Menzies' 'great genius was to unlock' the Catholic vote. According to Howard, 'what really happened is that we got Menzies' Catholics in 1963 for the first time in a really big way'.

The federal Labor Party, under Calwell, initially still refused to budge on direct financial assistance to church schools. Nevertheless, at the 1963 election Labor did offer a generous indirect aid package, including a big Commonwealth scholarships program available to all students, public or private.

But the humanist agnostic Whitlam, who replaced Calwell in 1967, introduced needs based funding after coming to office in 1972. Whitlam fought the so-called faceless men that ran his party and had a furious dispute with his Federal Executive. His general view was that 'only the impotent are pure', so he sought a compromise. This solved Labor's internal problems and offered a coherent approach to funding. The Catholic bishops as a whole did not accept the needs based approach, however, and looked like lining up against Whitlam, but Archbishop Carroll intervened with a last minute statement that both political parties had an acceptable approach to funding Catholic schools. It defused the issue and a majority of Catholic voters backed Whitlam.

Whitlam changed the politics of education funding forever though he did not end the state aid debate. Dean Ashenden calls it an education revolution in which money from the federal government 'gushed into the Catholic schools and flowed to the state systems'.

Since the bishops wanted to lock in public funding as a right not a privilege, Whitlam agreed that the second, tiny component of the non-government sector, the high-fee independents, should get some money too. Suddenly the ancient taboo on 'state aid' to church schools, dating back to the egalitarian and sectarian settlement of the 1880s, seemed obsolete. Everyone was in the money. Class sizes tumbled, teacher salaries rose, new schools were built.

Longer Term Developments, 1975-2012

Labor:

There have been two long periods of Labor federal government, 1983-1996 and since 2007. Labor governments and oppositions, including Bob Hawke and his Education minister Susan Ryan (1983), Opposition Leader Mark Latham (2004) and Kevin Rudd and his Education shadow minister Jenny Macklin (2007) have wrestled with how to fund elite schools under a needs-based formula. Regular

conflicts took place between Catholics and Labor over its interpretation of needs funding and the church's precautionary support for largely Protestant elite schools. Catholics maintained solidarity and the principals of small Catholic parochial schools publicly stood by their GPS Catholic brothers and sisters. For example, in November 1983, 5,000 people protested in the Sydney Town Hall against the Hawke government's plans to cut out recurrent funding to 41 elite Protestant schools, though there were no Catholic schools on the list.

Coalition:

The Howard era, including Education Ministers David Kemp and Brendan Nelson, played a significant role. Kemp introduced the SES system in 2001 as a formula for allocating Commonwealth funding, but Catholics did not join and continued to be funded separately. At Howard's insistence Nelson bought Catholic involvement in 2004 for \$300 million through the idea of 'funding maintained schools', that is, no one loses, (60% of all Catholic schools), which remains an element of public debate today..

The Church:

The church built considerable professionalism in the NCEC, created in the 1980s, and was well-served by its boards and staff. It installed powerful and politically-attuned NCEC Chairs, including the former head of the NSW Premier's Department, Gerry Gleeson from 1990-1996, and Western Australian Catholic leader Dr Peter Tannock from 1996-2001. It bolstered its political credentials by appointing leading retired political figures, including former NSW Liberal Premier John Fahey and former SA Labor Education Minister Greg Crafter. It gained a reputation for expertise and experience, and chairs such as Monsignor Tom Doyle, 2001-2008, developed a formidable reputation.

The ACBC accorded the education portfolio a high priority and chairs of the bishops committee have included Cardinal George Pell and Bishop Greg O'Kelly.

2004: Catholic Power

There were two illustrations during 2004 of how Catholics 'do' education politics. Both are examples of Catholic power, implicit or explicit.

Howard desperately wanted Catholics in the SES scheme to make it comprehensive and authoritative. He also recognized that when he came to office in 1996 for the very first time a majority of Catholics had voted for the Coalition. He sent his Catholic Minister for Education Brendan Nelson to seal the deal. Catholics agreed for a price to come inside the tent.

Latham tried to limit federal funding to a hundred or so largely Protestant elite schools by cuts and freezes. George Pell, Denis Hart and the two Anglican Archbishops of Sydney and Melbourne, in an example of inter-church solidarity, objected to this so-called hit-list. Labor subsequently retreated by changing its policy for the next election.

Catholics and Education Politics Today

The Catholic community is very different now; that includes its political profile. It has maintained its numerical size (2011 Census) and strength as a political lobby nevertheless.

The church is also very different in composition, that includes its declining religious workforce, particularly relevant to education, and its more national organization, including the ACBC and NCEC.

The education sector as a whole has become much more expensive for the community to fund and faces many new issues, including technology, science, English as a second language, and disabilities, etc.

The Catholic education sector is now very different too, including the CEOs and the NCEC. Catholic funding for all but 60 schools is distributed by block grants through CEOs, which are then distributed according to needs. Other private schools are funded individually and their lobbies look enviously at the relative cohesion of the Catholic lobby. The NCEC reported that in 2011 71% of all funding for Catholic schools came from governments (on average 53% from the Commonwealth and 18% from state governments).

There is bipartisan support for federal funding of Catholic education, despite some new opposition from some sectors of the Greens, especially in NSW.

Catholic education funding is extensive and by that criteria the last 50 years have been successful. Of all the sectors in the church the education lobby has been most successful. Freudenberg's negative judgement of the 1970s would have to be revised.

Funding has increased at both state and federal level but the federal funding has become the focus of debate about the funding of private schools.

The arguments for funding by 'right' (1962) have been adapted to 'capacity to pay'. Public funding is no longer a right but follows the school's own capacity to contribute. This is spelled on in the NCEC's 'Funding Principles for Catholic Schools' (December 2009) and in the NCEC Gonski submission in 2011.

The distribution of funds from all levels of government must be needs-based to take into account the general educational needs of students as well as the particular needs of children disadvantaged educationally by social, economic, geographic, cultural and physical factors. Needs-based distribution also should include consideration of the recurrent resources available to a school from private income.

Education lobbying is largely administrative and bureaucratic. It is rarely militant, especially at the federal level. Where Catholic militancy occurs it is generally in other sectors, such as life and death issues, including abortion and euthanasia. Education advocacy is led by church bureaucrats and bishops rather

than by lay Catholics. This takes place within a modern style of politics and policy-making which is common to many sectors.

The denominational composition of the political parties has changed dramatically. The entry of Catholics into the upper reaches of the federal Liberal Party has been remarkable. Tony Abbott, Leader of the Opposition, and Christopher Pyne, Shadow Minister for Education, illustrate this shift. They both attended Jesuit schools at which Bishop Greg O'Kelly, Chair of the Bishops Commission for Catholic Education has been the Headmaster.

The Catholic education lobby remains divided along three or four different lines (elite schools versus parochial; congregational schools versus CEO systemic schools; state and diocesan differences). Catholics are caught uneasily between a binary framing of the issue as a public-private one rather than a public-private-Catholic one. In this context the alliance with the Independent private sector is crucial.

The Goulburn peoples' strike in 1962 is a world away from Canberra politics and advocacy in 2012. Hogan hypothesized that perhaps the state aid campaign, including Goulburn, was 'the last hurrah for 'Catholic' politics'. That's not quite right but it is an interesting proposition because Catholics are losing their distinctiveness and risk being submerged into broader Christian lobbying.

There is no such thing now as the Catholic community of old nor, if there ever really was, the Catholic vote. Catholic identity is increasingly blurred and the Catholic 'brand' has been damaged, though it still has some purchase.

Half of all Catholic students are in government schools. In the late 1960s Catholic schools educated close to 70% of Catholics. Catholic schools have become increasingly middle-class, with the working class disproportionately in government schools and many of the upper middle class attending elite private schools. Increasingly Catholic schools attract non-Catholic students (28% of all students in Catholic schools).

Bishops negotiate with governments on a professional non-partisan basis through their intermediaries, state CEOs and the NCEC. The political reputations of bishops and Catholic education bureaucrats vary. Some would now be seen as favouring the Coalition, while others would be seen as inclined towards Labor.

Those involved in the Goulburn strike, if they were alive today, would recognize that they were part of the success story that is Catholic education. Not only are Catholic schools much better funded, despite having the lowest average level of resources of the three big sectors (NCEC), but like the whole education sector they probably provide better education. Dean Ashenden, for one, concludes: 'Australian schools are a lot better than they were during the overcrowding and funding crises of the 1950s and 1960s ...|'.

In 1962 educational aspirations were at the heart of an aspirational church that

still saw itself as a bit of an outsider. The Catholic community wanted to make its mark in the wider Australian community through professional advancement and education was central to this vision. In 2012 the Catholic community has achieved that goal and is definitely mainstream.

Government funding of Catholic schools is seen as just part of the furniture of Australian politics. The danger, if there is one, is the complacency that may follow if a belief spreads among Catholics that the flow of government money is endless and that the tap will never be turned off.

Furthermore, as Catholic education is at the heart of the church's relationship with the federal government it raises the question whether it weighs on the minds of the hierarchy in its other dealings with government. After his recent retirement, for instance, Archbishop Hickey of Perth, for instance, was quoted as saying that he regretted that his worries about possible financial repercussions for the Church played a part in his not being more active in the public square. There is no such thing as a free lunch.

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The struggle to resist linguistic empires

NON-FICTION

Ellena Savage

On Wednesday, I arrived home at the airport, drowsy and bitter after 27 hours in transit. I reached past someone to pull my suitcase from the carousel. 'Scuse me, sorry.' 'No worries,' he said. 'Cheers,' I replied.

The exchange of words made me feel instantly at home. I'd been living in Papua New Guinea and Japan for almost six months, and in that time had only met one other Australian.

With my own accent all around me, and no lousy foreigners ruining it by commenting on how it sounds like British only weirder, I felt the warmth of belonging. For better or worse, my home is in Australia, my identity Australian.

When I arrived home that evening, I read Aidan Wilson's [essay](#) at The Drum, 'Letting languages disappear is a crime against humanity,' in which he argues that speaking and being educated in one's native language, regardless of how small the language is, is a human right.

I had just spent six months living and travelling with a linguist who is working on documenting and studying endangered languages, so I found the article clear and true, and an important contribution.

The [Ethnologue](#) is the most referenced catalogue of world languages. It states that 389 — or nearly 6 per cent — of the world's languages have at least one million speakers and account for 94% of the world's population. By contrast, it says, the remaining 94% of languages are spoken by only 6 per cent of the world's people.

But I foolishly went on to read the comments on Wilson's article. Comment after comment shouted that if a language could not keep up — or rather, *if the language was not English* — it should die, die, die, as though it were a simple matter of natural selection. I wondered if any of the commentators had come from a linguistic background that had vanished.

It's true that languages acquire prestige when they are politically and economically dominant. English is the language *du jour*. And there's no reason why it shouldn't be acquired as a useful second, or third or fourth language by speakers of other languages. But to suggest 'natural selection' is to assume that there is something innately better about the English language.

Language itself is arbitrary. It is spread, forcefully, by the dominant politics of colonialism and neoliberal trade. Although languages have changed and disappeared throughout the conquests of history, at no other time in human history have languages disappeared at the current rate.

The question, I have realised, is never really about languages whose speakers are dwindling. Their preservation would have zero impact on any of the commentators signing their death warrant. It is about the legitimacy — or the perceived illegitimacy — of indigenusness.

The desire to celebrate the death of indigenous cultures is based on the assumption that there is nothing valuable about them, that they should assimilate or die. I spent a lot of time thinking about this while travelling. I was living in Bougainville and also Okinawa, both hotspots of indigenous activism. The real question that kept emerging was, if indigenous cultures are so insignificant in the first place, why is so much effort taken to decimate them?

The answer, I believe, lies in the acquisition and use of resources. In Bougainville, indigenous autonomy and the recognition of traditional land rights — which are totally, legally, operative — were suppressed in order to run a multi-billion dollar copper mine without paying royalties.

In Okinawa, Japan refuses to recognise the Ryukyus as colonised territory, while describing their language as a *dialect*, in order to house 74 per cent of their US military presence there. This causes a myriad of social and economic problems for locals who have no recourse.

In Australia, settlers used the resource of land to live on and trade. The existence of Aborigines here reminds us that our dominance in this country, as recent Australians, is due to their displacement and decimation, and that our subsequent trading of land as *property* has no ethical weight over traditional land tenancy. This fact alone is terrifying. If there is nothing innately better about the structure of our society, it too could be wiped off the planet.

There are scientific reasons why linguistic diversity is important. Linguistics and cognitive sciences study how the brain processes language and thought; such sciences try to determine what language is, and what combination of influences affects its structures: intelligence, environmental factors, innate factors. The more languages available to study, the better the science will be. As well, 75 per cent of plant-based pharmaceutical drugs we use were discovered through practitioners of bush medicine, whose medical knowledge had been passed on in languages which are now dying, along with such traditional knowledge.

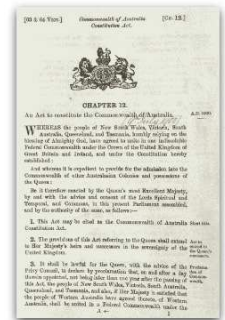
But that's not why we should care about language death. If we are able to simply step off a plane and hear a speaker of our language and sigh in relief, finally feeling that we are home, perhaps it is difficult to imagine not having such an essential pleasure. The despair of Indigenous people around the world is that their right to belong, to have an identity, which, for many, is located in language, is constantly under threat. And their efforts to preserve such culture are belittled.

Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in Australia's Constitution

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan

Since 1967, the Australian Constitution has made no reference to Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. Prior to 1967, people 'of the aboriginal race' were exempt from the Commonwealth Parliament's power to make laws with respect to the people of any race 'for whom it is deemed necessary to make special laws'. Most Australians agree that it is time for the Constitution to make positive reference to Indigenous Australians thereby affirming their status as equal citizens free from all vestiges of racial discrimination and recognising their status as Indigenous Australians.



This can only be done by a super majority of the Australian population at referendum with a majority of voters in four of the six states voting in favour. This will only happen if any proposal is supported and strongly backed by the major political parties. We are now a sufficiently mature polity to know that will not happen unless any proposal has first met the approval of a broad range of respected Indigenous leaders. That's why the *Report of the Expert Panel*, chaired by Pat Dodson and Mark Leibler, including key Aboriginal leaders and academics and members of the major political parties, published in January 2012 is a useful starting point. But it is not the final word.

The Panel is right to have recommended that any referendum proposals be first discussed with all political parties, the independent members of the Commonwealth Parliament, and also 'State and Territory governments and oppositions', and that any referendum proceed only 'when it is likely to be supported by all major political parties, and a majority of State governments'. The atmosphere in our national parliament is so toxic at the moment that I cannot see these conditions being met in time for the next federal election.

Uncontroversially, the Panel has recommended that the outdated and now racist section 25 of the Constitution be repealed. Gone are the days when the Commonwealth would contemplate people of a particular race being excluded from the franchise for the House of Representatives. That much is easy.

The Expert Panel has presented the government with a number of measures going beyond the simple 1988 suggestion that section 25 be repealed and section 51(26) be replaced with a power to make laws with respect to Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. The Panel has suggested some splendid words of acknowledgement:

Recognising that the continent and its islands now known as Australia were

first occupied by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;

Acknowledging *the continuing relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with their traditional lands and waters;*

Respecting *the continuing cultures, languages and heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.*

The Panel has proposed that these words form the preamble for a new section 51A. I wonder whether they would not be better placed in the preamble of the revised Constitution which, on our becoming a republic, will replace the *Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act (UK)* which contains a now outdated preamble.

Another of the Panel's suggestions is the inclusion of a one line prohibition of racial discrimination: 'The Commonwealth, a State or a Territory shall not discriminate on the grounds of race, colour or ethnic or national origin', followed by a double pronged special measures exemption for laws or measures having 'the purpose of overcoming disadvantage, ameliorating the effects of past discrimination, or protecting the cultures, languages or heritage of any group'.

Understandably many other members of the community will look to lawyers, not to answer whether racial discrimination is a good or bad thing nor to work out what special measures should be permitted, but rather to determine whether the insertion of such a clause in a Constitution which does not have a comprehensive bill of rights is workable and desirable, and to assess how such a stark constitutional provision would sit with the complex plethora of existing laws prohibiting such discrimination.

The general non-discrimination clause proposed is a variant on the equality right proposed by the 1988 Constitutional Commission which tentatively put forward a comprehensive constitutional bill of rights. That Commission included legal luminaries Maurice Byers, Leslie Zines and Enid Campbell, and political legends Gough Whitlam and Rupert Hamer. They first proposed a modest improvement and expansion of the few rights presently articulated in our Constitution and then the addition of a new Chapter VIA of our Constitution entitled 'Rights and Freedoms'.

They treated these two matters separately 'not because the rights and freedoms presently protected by the Constitution are necessarily more important than rights and freedoms which are not so protected, but rather because we estimate that proposals to alter the Constitution to strengthen and extend existing guarantees are less likely to be misunderstood than proposals to incorporate in the Constitution guarantees of an entirely new kind.' In the end, not even the former won acceptance at the referendum; and of course, no major political party was interested in proposing the latter.

These luminaries were very upfront in acknowledging 'that adoption of the

proposed new Chapter on Rights and Freedoms would produce a radical change in the effective allocation of power as between Parliaments and the Courts. It would, for practical purposes, give to the courts the last word in deciding a wide range of issues which are sometimes very difficult and which many people regard as issues which cannot always be satisfactorily resolved by methods of adjudication.'

The Australian 1988 Constitutional Commission did propose an equality right similar to that proposed by the Expert Panel. But it was part of a general chapter on rights and freedoms which included a clause which provided: 'The Rights and Freedoms guaranteed by this Chapter may be subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.'

It also included a clause: 'The rights and freedoms guaranteed by this Chapter do not abrogate or restrict any other right or freedom that a person may have.' You can't just insert one constitutional right in the Constitution without words of limitation for balancing all other rights. And when you are trying to build on the jurisprudence of a 37 year old, 60 page *Racial Discrimination Act*, you can't just write a one line blank cheque for the judiciary. I think this suggestion from the Expert Panel will need to be abandoned if we are to get to the next base for Indigenous recognition in the Constitution.

When considering section 51(26), the Expert Panel has recommended a provision stipulating that the Commonwealth Parliament have power to make laws 'with respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples'. Aware that such a law making power theoretically could be exercised in a manner adverse to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the Panel has suggested a special preamble for the newly proposed section 51A 'acknowledging the need to secure the advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples'. I am one of those contemporary Australians who flinches a little at the word 'advancement'. It is a very 1970s word. The government will be wanting to 'advance' Aborigines from where to what?

Of more concern to me as a lawyer is the prospect that such a broad preambular statement might be an invitation to disaffected citizens to litigate policy questions in the High Court. For example, groups opposed to the 'Stronger Futures' legislation passed by Parliament last month might turn to the High Court expecting a ruling on whether the legislation is classifiable as being for the 'advancement' of Indigenous Australians. What criteria could a court possibly develop to answer such a question? Those worried that the Commonwealth Parliament might use any 'race power' to act against the interests of Aborigines might want to consider whether the legislative power should relate to objects rather than people. For example, the Commonwealth Parliament could be given the power to make laws 'with respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land rights, heritage protection, languages and cultures.

The Expert Panel has given us some great talking points. But there is a lot more

work to be done before we settle on a constitutional formula for decent and workable constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians.

At 8 pm on Monday 9 July 2012, Frank will join Professor Mick Dodson, Professor Megan Davis and Ms Alison Page on ABC Radio National's [Big Ideas](#) to discuss the topic ...œWhere to from here? How do we recognise Indigenous Australians in the Constitution?...

Crisis of trust in the Vatican

THEOLOGY

Andrew Hamilton



If all publicity is good publicity, the Catholic Church has certainly prospered over recent years.

Clerical abuse and its handling, the new translation of the Roman Missal, the Bishop Bill Morris affair, the reining in of Caritas, the censure in the United States of the group representing religious sisters and of the work of two women theologians, the silencing of prominent Irish priests and the cleaning out of the Irish College in Rome, the public disquiet expressed by clergy in Austria and Ireland, the sacking of the head of the Vatican Bank, the steady leaking of confidential Roman documents, and the conflict between the Obama Administration and the USA Bishops over health care are just some of the recurrent stories.

Most of these stories have raised questions about how central authority is exercised. For many critics the answers are self-evident. Just as the actions of Orcs and other forces of Mordor reflect what Mordor is, so arrogance and misbehaviour are what you expect from the Catholic Church. They are as much a fact of life there as others would find them in News Limited, the Greens, the Unions or any other organisations they may want to identify as part of the Evil Empire.

If you want to address the way people in any organisation behave, however, you must first understand why they act as they do.

In the case of the Catholic Church the account it gives of its foundations is of critical importance. In this account faith is passed on by Christ through the Apostles to the early Christians. The Apostles live on in later generations through the bishops. The place of Peter who was charged with strengthening his brethren in their faith, is subsequently held held by his successors, the Bishops of Rome.

The weight of this account and of two thousand years of history explains why the Bishops and Popes feel such an enormous sense of personal responsibility for handing down faithfully the faith they have received. They will always respond cautiously to alternative understandings of faith or morality and demand that their continuity with the faith of the early church be demonstrated.

But the handing on of faith is not like the reading of the will that distributes family possessions: that is entirely top down. Faith is at heart a relationship to God. In all Catholics of any generation, including Bishops, it needs to come alive and its implications to be seen and weighed. This involves a shared process of wondering, learning and reflecting. The sharing of faith engenders the mutual

trust that provides the space for Bishops and Popes to teach authoritatively. Where mutual trust is eroded, teaching is met with reserve and comes to be seen as imposed.

This is the background against which the listing of papal news items should be seen. In addition, however, these events reflect a reading by the Vatican of the contemporary Catholic Church. The Vatican judges that secularism and relativism are a serious threat to the integrity of faith and have infected the ways in which many Catholic individuals and groups see the substance of faith and the governance of the Catholic Church. The mistrust that follows from this judgment expresses itself in the desire to create from above a strong and authentic Catholic identity without exploring the local conditions in which this must be forged.

The combination of responsibility and mistrust lie underlies what critics see as lack of due process in decisions that are detrimental to Catholic individuals and groups. These include Bishop Morris, the United States Sisters, the Irish priests, the Caritas council, English language liturgical commissions, and perhaps the head of the Vatican Bank. Because they see these people as untrustworthy in their grasp of faith and of Catholic life, those responsible for the faith of the Church judge it reasonable that they themselves should act as investigators, prosecutors and judges in their regard.

All this is understandable. The problem is that mistrust is contagious. In any group it corrodes governance and ultimately renders sterile the projects that the group initiates. The corrosive force of mistrust can be limited when processes are kept secret. But in a world where what is spoken in secret will be shouted from the housetops, mistrust is revealed and met with reciprocal mistrust. Its corrosive power on governance itself can be seen in Vatileaks. To the extent that mistrust characterises relationships between Catholics the more difficult it will become to commend the Gospel.

It is common to speak of a crisis of faith in the Catholic Church. The crisis is not only that people do not believe, but also that they are not believed.

Pictured: Vatican spokesperson Fr Federico Lombardi at a media conference.

Fatherhood philosophy gets infertility treatment

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Not Suitable for Children (MA 15+)*. Director: Peter Templeman.
Starring Ryan Kwanten, Bojana Novakovic, Ryan Corr. 97 minutes**

Meaning and purpose can come from the most unexpected sources. They can also arrive unbidden and unsought.

Life's Big Questions are not at the fore of 20-something party planner Jonah's (Kwanten) mind. The nearest thing he has to existential dilemmas consist of how to bribe a grumpy neighbour to let him siphon off his electricity to power a house party, or how to squeeze extra bucks out of his pissed and paid-up patrons.

Then: crisis. During what is for Jonah simply another senseless sexual encounter, he finds a lump on his testicle. It's only small, the size of a pea, but its significance for Jonah is as big as the whale that devoured his biblical namesake. Specialists inform Jonah the cancer is treatable, but the treatment will render him infertile.

This is the beginning of a bona fide existential crisis for Jonah. He's always envisioned he'll be a dad, although not until he reaches that nebulous future known as 'some day'. Now his fertility has an expiry date. Due to a rare abnormality, his sperm is not freezable. His only shot at biological fatherhood is to get a girl pregnant, soon.

Not Suitable For Children, albeit a comedy, navigates its topic with less puerility and more grace and substance than you might expect. The title is ambiguous, referring to the at times darkly humorous, and even sordid, content, but also to Jonah's lack of not just physical but also, initially, emotional and psychological capacity for parenthood.

At first there is a glib desperation to his quest. He humiliates himself and an endless stream of ex-girlfriends by reconnecting with them and ambushing them with requests that they become the mother of his child ...| like, now. To their credit none of these young women takes the request lightly.

Eventually his friend Stevie (Snook) agrees to help him along his way, introducing him first to her lesbian colleague and her partner, who are aspiring to parenthood, and then to another, single 30-something co-worker who has given up on love but is desperate for a child. These encounters only highlight how ready Jonah isn't.

But this whole experience represents a belated coming-of-age for the boyish Jonah. As the deadline approaches he grows wiser and comes to appreciate that parenthood is not to be entered into easily, however desperate the circumstances. The cynical and staunchly anti-kids Stevie, too, is changed by her proximity to the

changes in him.

Jonah and Stevie, then, come to consider another solution. *Not Suitable For Children* finds surprising, amusing and at times downright moving paths to the ultimately predictable resolution of Jonah's dilemma.

Blasting Tony Windsor out of New England

POLITICS

John Warhurst

The Nationals have made their first big play for the next federal election. The Torbay Affair is either a masterstroke or a revealing insight into their problems and weaknesses as a regional and rural political party.

Richard Torbay, former Speaker of the NSW Parliament and the Independent member for the NSW state seat of Northern Tablelands for 13 years, has been offered pre-selection by the local Nationals to stand against the Independent federal member for New England, Tony Windsor. He has the support of federal leader Warren Truss.



Torbay is a capable, experienced person. That is not at issue. In fact he was apparently once seen as capable enough by some Labor powerbrokers to replace Nathan Rees as NSW Premier.

At one level the move can be seen as ensuring that the so-called renegade Windsor is consigned to oblivion. The Coalition would be immensely satisfied because Windsor chose to support Labor after the 2010 election. Torbay is very popular and Northern Tablelands, based on the university city of Armidale, overlaps New England. The Nationals have done their local polling, according to Senator Barnaby Joyce, and are more confident that Torbay will beat Windsor than any other possible Nationals candidate, including Joyce himself.

Windsor may fear his erstwhile Independent ally Torbay, but would still be gratified that the Nationals are pulling out all stops to unseat him. Despite the Coalition's current popularity and its relentless campaign against Windsor they think he still has to be winkled out of his seat by a celebrity opponent.

The Nationals couldn't produce a likely candidate from within its own ranks, a sign of its organisational and philosophical weakness.

So desperate were the Nationals to attract Torbay to defeat Windsor that the new recruit was able to insist on his own special conditions. He retains the freedom to speak out for his local electorate as he has done as an Independent. The Nationals are still not trusted to do so. Torbay knows this and has campaigned against the Nationals for more than a decade on just this basis. The Nationals at federal and state level are perceived by many country voters as mere junior coalition partners, submerged in and taken for granted by city-based Coalition governments and their pro-market ideologies.

He also implicitly accepts that Windsor's role in the minority government has directed profitable attention to the electorate. Torbay says that ...œIt's very

important to me that this area does not become very important in this hung parliament and then is forgotten after, or even punished....

Remarkably Truss claims that he has even has no problem with Torbay crossing the floor. Earlier Torbay remarked that his arrangement with Truss would allow him not only to speak out on matters of local concern but, when necessary, vote against party policy. This deal is fraught with dangers for the Nationals unless it is mere verbiage.

The broader context is the Nationals' troubles in maintaining the loyalty of the bush, which preceded the rise of Pauline Hanson and One Nation in the 1990s. The performance of another rural Independent Bob Katter's Australian Party at the recent Queensland state elections is a current indication.

The Nationals have an opportunity to consolidate at the 2013 federal elections. They will pick up seats if the Coalition wins easily, including the coastal NSW seat of Lyne where they have preselected a local doctor to defeat the other rural Independent Rob Oakeshott. But overall they lack the organisational discipline and coherence to rebuild from the ground up.

Joyce, raised on the local family farm and educated at the University of New England, has been openly interested in Nationals pre-selection for New England but has missed out. Not only are the Nationals a divided party but Joyce, its Senate leader and putative parliamentary leader if only he can get himself into the House of Representatives, cannot be especially popular among his own party members.

The Nationals' logic is flawed. Long-term Independents like Torbay rarely settle into a party. It risks stirring up their existing internal instability. They have betrayed their inner doubts and revealed their utter determination to stamp out Windsor and his Independent ilk come what may.

East Germany's angel of peace

POLITICS

Donna Mulhearn



In her tweed skirt and sensible shoes, sixtysomething church elder Sigrid doesn't look like a revolutionary.

She carries neither iPhone nor gun, but revolutionary she is. She has been at the heart of a movement that toppled an oppressive regime, thawed the Cold War and brought down the Berlin Wall, opening East Germany to unification and democracy.

This softly-spoken woman was part of changing German, and world, history.

Sigrid was there where it all began — Leipzig's Nikolaikirche (St Nicholas Church, pictured above) deep in East Germany, every Monday night for peace prayers, discussions and peaceful demonstrations in the years leading up to the fall of the Berlin wall.

'It started with about 15 people,' Sigrid explains as she pours me a coffee in a simple back room of the church. 'We used to go once a year for a peace retreat, but then we decided to do it every week.'

'Then more and more people came. Not just Christians — anyone was welcome and they came to discuss the situation, to air their grievances, to discuss disarmament, environmental issues, human rights and freedoms.'

'By the end there were thousands - we could not fit in the church so we poured out into the square, and people came from all over East Germany.'

The story of Nikolaikirche is the untold, under-rated, almost unbelievable story of the fall of the Berlin Wall. A story of courage, nonviolence, people power, and many say 'a miracle.'

Inevitably the movement attracted the ire of East Germany's brutal security forces which surrounded the church with roadblocks and security checks. There were arrests and temporary detentions every week as well as threats, brute force and bashings. The highways leading into Leipzig on a Monday were closed.

Yet the peace prayers, meetings and demonstrations continued, growing larger and stronger, with the church slogan 'Nikolaikirche — Open to all' becoming a daily reality under the watch of the prophetic

'Angel of Peace' (pictured below) was painted hundreds of years earlier above the altar. Young people wore an image depicting 'swords into ploughshares' on their shirts, drawing on the prophetic Old Testament imagery. It became the symbol for the movement, spreading to Berlin and other churches in East Germany which supported, and provided havens, for the nonviolent resistance.

When I asked Sigrid what access the movement had to training or resources to

maintain nonviolent commitment and discipline, she smiles and shakes her head from side to side: 'We had none, just the teaching from the gospel, we just followed it.' She explains the simple, yet profound strategy that proved the decisive factor.



'We held a candle in one hand, and with the other we held the hand of the person next to us — this way no one could throw a stone at the police. This is how we kept the peace.'

It left East Germany's hardline riot police baffled.

At one point Sigrid, a board member of the church at the time, was called to the Mayor's office and urged to stop the weekly meetings. She told the mayor they would continue.

Another time the Stasi, East Germany's notorious security agency, sent 1000 agents to one of the gatherings. They sat through the prayers and reflection, listened to the radical message of the gospel and, it's claimed, many were profoundly affected as they heard the Sermon the Mount being read and discussed for the first time.

Then on October 9, 1989, more than 2000 people leaving the church were welcomed by an estimated 70,000 waiting outside with candles in their hands chanting 'We are the people'. It was at this point, Sigrid explains, a miracle of peace and nonviolence occurred.

'Troops and the police were drawn in, became engaged in conversations, then withdrew. Nobody triumphed over the other, nobody lost face.'

The next week, 120,000 people showed up, the following week, the number more than doubled to 320,000.

This consistent, peaceful, respectful, nonviolent pressure, led to the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9 and the East German ideological dictatorship collapsed.

'We planned everything. We were prepared for everything. But not for candles and prayers,' said Horst Sindermann a former East German Central Committee member years later.

The Monday night prayers for peace continue at Nikolaikirche. Leipzig's down-and-outs come for a coffee and chat — it is still a church 'open for all.' Programs for the unemployed and migrants are staffed by volunteers such as Sigrid who follow a simple teaching, a teaching that, when practised by the people together, is known to lead to revolution.

The political performer

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas



The dubious removal of Paraguay's former bishop president

POLITICS

Rodrigo Acuna

The recent questionable removal of Paraguay's left-wing president Fernando Lugo probably broke some type of world record.

With just two hours for Lugo's lawyers to prepare his defence, the former Catholic clergyman, once known as 'Bishop of the Poor', was ousted in a 39-4 vote by the Senate within twenty-four hours of his original impeachment.



Denouncing his removal from the presidency, in which he still had a year left to serve, Lugo [summarised](#) the event as a 'parliamentary coup d'État'. He has a point.

The developments which led to the impeachment revolve around the deaths of 17 people, including six police officers, on 15 June. That day, authorities were attempting to evict a group of families who had engaged in a land seizure in the Department of *Canindeyá*. This was not the first time such an incident occurred, but it was the bloodiest.

When Lugo's centre-left Patriotic Alliance for Change (APC) won the 2008

presidential elections, expectations by Paraguayans were high as 50 per cent lived below the poverty line — 35 per cent in abject poverty.

During the electoral campaign, the student of liberation theology claimed his administration would reduce poverty and redistribute land. [According to](#) Eric Stadius from the Council on Hemispheric Affairs in Washington, roughly two per cent of the Paraguayans control three-quarters of all property.

Once in office, the Lugo administration did attempt to carry out a mild land reform program. It also sought to increase taxes on soybean, as the South American country has recently [become](#) its fourth largest exporter in the world.

Despite the president's plans, the opposition Colorado Party, through the legislature, constantly [blocked](#) his progressive reforms.

In response, Lugo repeatedly sought to work with the opposition. He engaged in one political compromise after another to the point where sectors of his own constituency became seriously disgruntled. Eventually, some of Paraguay's landless peasants decided to act independently, as they did in *Canindey*.

Releasing a [communiqué](#) on that event, Paraguay's National Committee for the Recovery of Ill-Gotten Lands placed the incident into a broader perspective:

The slaughter in the department of *Canindey* was the result of a historic class conflict in Paraguayan society, the product of the support of the three branches of state, of a system of accumulation and hoarding of land in the hands of a few...| The violence will continue if we do not initiate, once and for all, the return of lands belonging to the Paraguayan people that today are in the hands of persons not subject to land reform.

The individuals blocking the redistribution of farm lands, which the committee was referring to, are Paraguay's land owning elite. Often, they are top ranking members or associates of the Colorado Party who ruled Paraguay for 61 years since 1947. Most of this governance took place during the brutal US-backed dictatorship of General Alfredo Stroessner from 1954-1989.

But even by Latin America's right-wing thuggish standards, Gen. Stroessner earned an exclusive place in the pantheon of Washington's stooges during the Cold War. Ruthlessly persecuting the native Guaraní people, over 1 million Paraguayans [fled](#) the dictatorship. Upon his death at age 93 in 2006, an [article](#) in the *Washington Post* by Adam Bernstein discussed Stroessner's rule:

'El Excelentísimo', as he sometimes trumpeted himself, was elected every five years with near-universal approval that he took for a clear mandate. However, voting fraud was rife, and he tended to receive overwhelming support from dead constituents.

With a network of informants and the backing of the military, he tortured dissidents, both real and perceived.

Commenting on the huge levels of corruption during the dictatorship, Bernstein added:

Payoffs were essential to all commerce, with much of the swag going to top military officers. Paraguay became a sanctuary for smugglers in arms, drugs and everyday goods such as whiskey and car parts.

In a noxious twist on Latin hospitality, Gen. Stroessner provided refuge for French-born international heroin dealer Auguste Ricord; strongmen such as Argentina's Juan Perón and Nicaragua's Anastasio Somoza Debayle (later assassinated in Paraguay); and war criminals, including Josef Mengele, the Nazi doctor known as the 'Angel of Death' who performed genetic experiments on children.

'In spite of my wishes' Stroessner once said, 'the party insisted that I be a candidate.'

In 1989, the *caudillo* was overthrown by one of his high ranking henchmen, Gen. Andres Rodríguez, in a battle that cost the lives of roughly 500 soldiers. But the Colorado Party's grip on the presidency did not end there. Its previous monopoly on power allowed it to rule the country until 2008 when it lost the elections to Fernando Lugo. Once this leftist led Paraguay, the Colorado Party all of a sudden decided human rights were important.

When Lugo admitted to fathering a child during his time as a bishop, the opposition quickly used it against him.

By late 2009, the president denied rumours that a possible military coup would take place against his government. But just to be on the safe side, he [dismissed](#) the country's top military commanders. After the incident at *Canindeyá*, Lugo sacked the interior minister and police chief, but this was not enough to placate his political enemies.

Commenting on recent developments, Stadius said: 'the political process in Paraguay is broken, and this essentially amounts to a political coup that threatens the country's democratic legitimacy.' Reaction throughout the region has been swift with the majority of South American countries recalling their ambassadors in non-recognition of the new government headed by Federico Franco.

Leftist leaders like Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, and Ecuador's Rafael Correa, are all too aware that, like the 2009 [coup](#) in Honduras against Manuel Zelaya, they have lost another important ally.

But according to the Associated Press, even Chile's right-wing Piñera administration [said](#) Lugo's dismissal, 'did not comply with the minimum standards of due process' while Colombia's conservative President Juan Manuel Santos noted that, 'legal procedures shouldn't be used to abuse.'

The German ambassador Claude Robert Ellner though, according to Associated

Press, had a different response, stating that his government: 'will continue as normal with all cooperation agreements with Paraguay. We see the process of change happening within the laws and the constitution, because no parliament makes a coup d'État.'

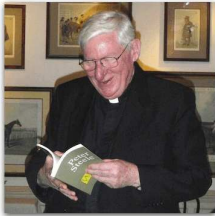
Likewise, the US State Department recommended 'all Paraguayans to act peacefully, with calm and responsibility, in the spirit of Paraguay's democratic principles.'

As is evident from the country's history, those principles are in abundance.

Peter Steele's seven types of ingenuity

EULOGY

Philip Harvey



Even in his own lifetime John Donne was criticised for writing *TMI* poetry: too much information, Reverend Dean.

That his contemporary in London William Shakespeare was doing exactly the same thing in helter-skelter speeches did not elicit similar complaints. Shakespeare had to get his people inside the heads of the audience, so hours of normal connective thought and feeling were compressed into sixty seconds of words.

Miraculously, it works. Donne made poems in which every line can be a new simile, an outrageous inversion, a nerve-racking pun.

His poems are an anthology of knowledge where, somewhere, an argument or an emotion waits to be revealed. The reader has to have determination. This ingenuity of the anthology is also a characteristic of the poetry of Peter Steele.

The American poet Marianne Moore had the felicitous knack of finding the just-so quote. She also had the audacity, borne of a democratic spirit, of not privileging one source over another, so a distinguished declaration of Henry James could find itself beside the home-grown idea of a baseball hero she'd heard on the radio that morning.

The polished and the popular found company in the same poem. Literary distinctions do not count when you need the *bon mot*, something we find over again in Steele's writing and teaching. This ingenuity with the appropriate, which we dare to call wisdom, capsizes snobbery and chortles with common sense.

More than once I have observed him walking from the Medley Building of the University of Melbourne to Newman College reading a book, not looking up. I will alert the reader to the many corners on that course.

With anyone else, such behaviour would be thought attention seeking or eccentric. But I wish to picture the emblem of the book leading the human through the everyday world.

No bookish adjective gets close to the way learning with Steele was a means to creative ends. The poetry at its best bounds forth as one inspired and energised by these providers of language. Barracking, banter, backchat, blessing and occasional battle come fresh to us as Steele engages with the big past in an ingenuity of belief statements.

A Midsummer Night's Dream says the poet 'gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name'. In the same magical outpouring Shakespeare talks of how 'imagination bodies forth the forms of things unknown.' Solo quips, haiku sprees,

Skeltonic skittering, the thin slalom of chopped prose, postmodern agglutinations — none of these were Steele's metier.

When he bodies forth it really is a body, broad verse structures, expanding stanzas, weighty divertimenti, well-nourished conclusions. Lately we kept coming face-to-face with solid sonnets. We find this increasingly (how else would we find it?) as his work matures, this ingenuity with prepossessing sentences and dilating dialectic. Neither rambling as Les Murray nor wanton as Walt Whitman, closer to the gorgeous ecstasies of Christopher Smart, but eminently more intelligible.

Peter Steele loved quoting George Herbert and most frequently 'I like our language, as our men and coast.' In this one line we have an affirmation of English, humanness, and local place that in total we call home. Herbert's undemonstrative tone tells us he will never find reason to retract the statement, either. One or all of this tried and true triad are present as a point of departure or return in Steele's poetry, and can be described as an ingenuity of self-awareness.

I remember sitting in a Steele seminar once when he pointed agitatedly through a south window of the same Medley Building towards the City of Melbourne, exclaiming, 'If you try to believe everything that is said out there, you will go mad.'

This is helpful in reconciling what seems like a contradiction in his work, between the desire to say everything 'out there' using a panoply of thought and every known word in the language, up against his desire to get at the essence. 'The knowledge' — what's not to prize in that?' he says in a late poem, but the ingenuity of his order is to acknowledge the extensive view while fixing on the short view.

Which is another way of saying he is going after pearls. Peter Steele would have revisited Herbert's poem 'The Pearl' many times, splendid in its austere summary of worldly ways. The poem turns on our understanding of the saying at Matthew 13, 45 where a merchant sells everything he has to buy 'one pearl of great price'.

While Steele flourished poetically in the second half of his life, seeming to be on a permanent roll into new found lands, it is observable in the late work how he returns to where he began, talking through the Christian inheritance. Steele spent plenty of time in churches, but also in common rooms and galleries and libraries, hence in the poetry the manifold ingenuity of his devotion.

To exhilarate their minds

POETRY

Peter Steele

Rehearsal

Upright again, fritters of mint in my fingers,
I'm given pause in the kitchen patch
by the car's whine, the loud harrumph of lorries
that round the stand on Two-Tree Hill
and hustle past the boneyard.
I've taken leave of the Cliffs of Moher, the unsmiling
campus guard at Georgetown, the fall
of Richelieu's scarlet enclosed by the London gloom:
I've watched my last candle gutter
for dear ones, back in Paris,
sung, as with Francis, the spill of an Umbrian morning,
each breath a gift, each glance a blessing:
have said farewell to Bhutan of the high passes
and the ragged hillmen, to the Basque dancers
praising their limping fellow,

to the square of Blood in Beijing, to the virid islands
that speckle the Pacific acres,
to moseying sheep in Judaeen scrub, to leopard
and bison, a zoo for quartering, and
to the airy stone of Chartres,
But here's the mint still on my hands. A wreath,
so Pliny thought was 'good for students,
to exhilarate their minds.' Late in the course,
I'll settle for a sprig or two —
the savour gracious, the leaves brimmingly green —

as if never to say die.

This poem was selected by Andrew Hamilton. It was first published in Peter Steele's collection [The Gossip and the Wine](#) (John Leonard Press 2011). Fr Brendan Byrne referred to its significance at the end of his [homily](#) at Peter Steele's funeral at Newman College Chapel on 2 July 2012:

Many have remarked on the equanimity with which Peter accepted his terminal illness and the medical procedures it increasingly required. The poem *Rehearsal* is, I believe, his *Nunc Dimittis*. He addressed it publicly on several occasions in recent months, including what was to be in fact his last class of all, given to our Jesuit students at Jesuit Theological College early in May. Several times, in the course, of that event, granted his physical condition, I tried to bring the session to close but, try my best, he kept on explaining, drawing out responses—the teacher to the end.



The poem is ... a reverie while preparing (Peter the cook in action to the last!) the ingredients of a meal. He runs through all those places in a life of travel to which he must now say 'Farewell'.

Electricity price hike won't give us clean energy

POLITICS

Brian Toohey



The Gillard government is confident that voters will soon forget the carbon tax that started on Sunday. But many people will be hit with a double whammy when they see their electricity bills.

Although little attention is paid to this factor, the tax will come on top of continuing steep rises in the cost of distributing electricity over the poles and wires that connect generators to the customers.

The government is giving low-income earners generous compensation for the impact of the tax, which Treasury estimates will lead to a 0.7 percent increase in the consumer price index compared to over 4.0 percent when the GST was introduced in 2000.

Although rising electricity bills are the main source of political friction surrounding the carbon tax, the compensation is not designed to cover the impact of the rise in distribution costs.

Nevertheless, the government's 1.7 percent increase in the Age Pension should cover the combined cost. However, the compensation for low-income earners who are not on a pension won't stretch that far in many cases.

The Australian Energy Regulator (AER) approves increases in distribution prices five years into the future, with variations from state to state. But the AER is not the villain in the piece. Its chair David Reeves has spoken out against the regulatory rules that lead to unnecessarily high prices. So has the chair of the Australian Competition and Consumer Council Rod Sims.

What is bizarre is that the Resources and Energy Minister Martin Ferguson could have done a lot more to modify the rules that the AER has to implement at the behest of a separate commission. Legislative change would need the cooperation of the states.

But they have a motive to back changes as they cop much of the blame for AER price rises that their own regulators are obliged to pass on. While the NSW and Queensland government can benefit from owning the distributors in their states, federal Labor governments could have hammered them politically for blocking measures to reduce price rises. In any event, the Gillard government has not fixed the problem before the carbon tax piles on top of the sharp regulatory rises.

The NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) recently announced that it will increase electricity prices by average 18 percent. The main factors are a 8.4 percent rise in distribution costs and 8.9 percent for the carbon tax.

In contrast, IPART said generating costs would fall by 0.8 percent (excluding the carbon tax). Based on AER figures, the Energy Users Association of Australia calculates that distributors' revenues— a good proxy for price rises — will increase nationally by an average 7 percent a year in real terms between 2011 and 2015. This is roughly double the rate of the last 10 years, yet it is hard enough to justify the earlier increases.

Reeves says the AER has to follow rules that encourage 'over-investment'. In effect, it has to give the distributors a generous profit margin on whatever new capital spending they plan to make. Most other businesses could only dream about making a guaranteed profit on whatever they spend. With distribution, the government's former climate change adviser Ross Garnaut says it leads to 'gold plating'.

Several observers note that over \$10 billion has been spent to cope with a surge in demand that is confined to four or five extremely hot days a year. Options to restrain demand include paying companies with back up generators not to use the grid during these days.

The Gillard government has compounded its political problem of rising electricity prices by starting with a carbon tax of \$23 a tonne when the international price is under \$10. The smarter route would have been to start with a \$3 a tonne tax, rising by \$3 a year for 10 years.

That would only increase the CPI by a barely noticeable 0.1 percent a year. The starting price is irrelevant for investors in clean new technology. They need to know where prices are going after their investment becomes operational. But the \$23 starting price is likely to fall to the \$15 floor price that the government will establish when it moves to an emissions trading market in 2015 linked to overseas prices.

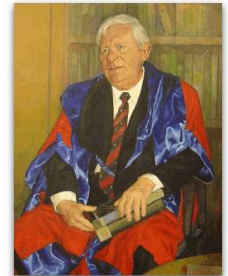
That will make life a little easier for low income earners. However, because the \$23 price would not be high enough to make 'dirty' coal-fired generators uncompetitive, the drop to \$15 will ensure that Labor's trading scheme can't achieve its promise of a '[clean energy future](#)' for Australia.

Peter Steele's path to something better

EULOGY

Michael Kelly

Peter Steele SJ, 22/08/1939 – 27/06/2012 'Things can only get better', was Peter's characteristically self-deprecating response to the list of publications, qualifications, accolades and many achievements rehearsed as he rose to receive an Honorary Doctorate from the Australian Catholic University last year.



His half chuckle, and by then somewhat hoarse and high-pitched, response summed him up — at least for himself and those who knew him.

A man of grand and gracious gesture, it was always *for others*.

For himself, the manner was ordinary and the presence bordering on the shy. even if the prose could be prolix.

Those verbal explosions came from an abundant inner life that was complex, at times moody, yet always affirmative. But such effusions came after long consideration and what he used to call 'brooding'.

This is captured in his portrait at Newman College (pictured). There he is in an ill-fitting doctoral gown, almost unaware of wearing it as it slides off his shoulders.

On his lap are books on which his hands rest loosely. The look on his face is part bewilderment, part surprise, completely vulnerable and not a little sad. He seems to be saying, 'Mate, has it come to this?'

Peter's adult life, his professional career and the character of his vocation are all indelibly marked with Melbourne University. Proud to say he was a boy from the bush, he crossed the Nullarbor in 1957 to see what it might be like on the other side. Adventure, travel and discovery were the hallmarks of his life for the next 55 years.

But it was at Melbourne University that he most expansively found out what life was like on the other side, going there in 1962. And there he met his lifelong mentor, though he presided at his funeral in 1988: Vincent Buckley. It was Vin who licensed his muse, fostered his talent and shaped some of the enduring features of his imagination.

Vin's life and work, despite his melancholy, were about 'the honeycomb', the sweeter things, their depth and perseverance at the heart of our living. For a good deal of Vin's middle life, that focus centred on the Incarnation.

Peter shared that passion lifelong, though he added to it. He shared with Vin an unusual sensitivity to how that deeper sweetness could be brutalised. To survive the glare of that sight, Peter took comfort in the relentless commitment to irony,

which was the subject of his doctoral thesis on Jonathan Swift.

However sunny the greeting or warm the embrace of any and everyone he met — and in forty years, I only ever heard him once speak ill of another human being — beneath the exterior there lurked in Peter an acute familiarity with the dark side.

Nicknamed 'Stainless' early in life, the swashbuckling gait and swaggering style masked all that he knew and felt of life's grimier parts. You can measure how present and potent in his life that was by the way he prized paradox. It was the fulcrum of his imagination.

'Fools and knaves' is how Swift viewed our species. But to this sober recognition Peter added what he learnt in his lifelong pattern of prayer taught by the Jesuits' founder, Ignatius Loyola. In the *Spiritual Exercises*, the retreatant is asked to pray to see and discover 'where the divinity hides itself' in the darkest mysteries of Jesus' Passion.

Peter waited and he discovered. And what he found was the complement to what we celebrate at Christmas — Easter.

Peter took to heart all his life what he learnt early from the Romantics and the Existentialists: that from conception we are death bound creatures. Mortality and alienation were subjects of his constant musing, prayer and poetry. And as a death bound creature, he sought every day to find plausibility in affirming that, despite the corruption and self-interest that soil so much human endeavour, he could still find the 'dearest freshness deep down things'.

It is a testament to the value and fruitfulness of his lifelong search that he met his decline in health in recent years with such serenity. It was as if he was saying but not uttering 'See, I told you this is what it builds up to. And I've been preparing for this day with all the surrenders to trust and love that I've made for decades.'

But Peter knew the pain that challenges love and kills trust: disappointment with his brothers; frustration with his own limitations; indulgence of his considerable passions; the Cross of the unstinting love of his many friends, some of whom didn't reciprocate. But no matter what the fare, Peter was always ready to take it because for him, it was the path to something better. Throughout his poetry and preaching, yearning and longing for what might be, how this event or that personality might be made more of, were constants.

For Peter, the end of all our longing is greater yearning still. Now all that waits him is the crowning of that desire.

Stronger futures, stolen futures

GUEST EDITORIAL

John Falzon



Stolen Futures

Blessed are you for whom this law was made.

It will show you right from wrong
and will teach you good discipline

and, from time to time, imprison you

for

you remind us much too much of war and the memory of war

and the logic of plunder,

stolen futures, forced removals, violated land.

(And you too who are not, but who remind us of,

the First Ones; you

with the sound of your scored and scoured stories.)

We passed this law in the night time

of your mourning.

We listened

but you said nothing.

We watched

but you did nothing for yourselves.

*Today we are crying but today and tomorrow, we are ready
to take back the future you stole from us.*

*But not with all the love in our bodies and our skies will we
ever be able to take away the shame from you.*

*That is yours to keep,
you who made this law*

*and who screamed without dignity
every time we tried to tell our stories to you*

*and who tore out your eyes when we tried to show you
what we are determined to create,
strong in the plot and the singing of our People.*

*We will take our future.
Be assured of that.
And you
will keep your shame.*