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Villains of Australian education funding

EDUCATION

Dean Ashenden



The past seven days have seen the Gonski proposals trigger exactly the kind of childish squabbling between political parties, school sectors, and interest groups that they are intended to prevent.

The first stone was cast by the Independent Schools Council when it reported modelling to show that some of its member schools would be worse off under Gonski.

Next came Prime Minister Julia Gillard, addressing the national conference of that same council. She was spooked, apparently: having previously promised that no school would be worse off, she now promised that every independent school would be better off.

Next up to the podium was Leader of the Opposition Tony Abbott. He declared that non-government schools were hard done-by because they got only 21 per cent of government funding but had 34 per cent of students.

Meanwhile the Australian Education Union (AEU) planted 6000 'I give a Gonski' placards — one for each government school — on the lawns in front of Parliament House, and predicted a dire future for the sector under and Abbott government

The week ended with Opposition education shadow, Christopher Pyne, accusing the government of having a Gonski 'schools hit list', and promising to repeal any Gonski legislation in favour of the very system Gonski found to be haphazard, inequitable and counter-productive.

Thus the week ended with even greater uncertainty as to the funding of Australian schools than it began with.

The Opposition insists its policy is straightforward and definite. But does that square with its promised budgetary austerity? And what storms would face a government trying to repeal Gonski, should it be there to be repealed?

The Government, for its part, clearly wants to get Gonski up, but it has to get the states to pay their share. This is no easy matter when the four biggest states are in hostile political hands. Moreover, it faces its own deepening budgetary problems, and is rightly worried that Gonski will be good money after bad.

Gonski is commonsense itself: every school, irrespective of sector, should be funded according to the size of the educational job it is asked to do. All government funding, federal and state, should go through a single national body charged with working out the size of each school's job and apportioning funds accordingly.

The idea is simple, but its implementation is not. Pyne claims, probably correctly, that the government has again delayed announcing its response to Gonski because the calculation of need is proving to be so complicated.

More worrying to the Government is that Gonski promises much but guarantees nothing. Will the money end up in the schools for which it is intended? If it does, will they know what to do with it? And will they be allowed to?

The reflex of many, including the AEU, is to spend yet more money on still smaller classes, evidence as to its negligible effect and very high cost notwithstanding. Gillard wants each school to prepare a performance improvement plan. Whether that is naïve or desperate is hard to tell.

Another entire cluster of difficulties derives from the fact that while Gonski proposes a sector-blind system of funding he leaves intact a system divided into three sectors, each in receipt of different mixes of funding, and requiring some parents to pay while others do not.

These are some of the consequences.

First, Gonski provides a funding floor but is unable to impose a ceiling, leaving many independent schools free to do what they have been doing ever since Karmel provided them with government subsidies back in 1973, spending yet more money to put yet more daylight between themselves and the rest.

Second, the system is inherently competitive, as between systems, schools, and parents. Australia now has the most marketised system in the OECD, and hence the highest concentrations of the educationally-advantaged at one end of the scale and the disadvantaged at the other, with predictable educational consequences.

Third, parents patronising non-government schools are hard done-by, just as Abbott contends, although he fails to chase the point to its logical conclusion. Why should some parents pay heaps when others who can afford to pay nothing at all? More troubling: why should many in low-fee Catholic schools pay fees they can't really afford when their govvie-school neighbours do not?

The old answer is: because parents who put their kids in non-government schools have 'opted out' of the government system, and because different schools play by different rules.

As a secular person of sternly Protestant upbringing, I should disclose that I hanker after the idea of a common and secular schooling. But the irreversible reality is that since the Karmel/Whitlam reforms delivered government subsidies to all, the proportion 'opting out' has risen from 22 per cent to 34 per cent and counting. People don't opt out any more. For better or for worse, they choose.

Moreover, non-government schools, and particularly Catholic systemic schools, increasingly play by rules shared with the government sector and, conversely, many government schools are acquiring the prerogatives of non-government

schools. The great majority of schools are moving within reach of a common regulatory regime.

The root cause of, and therefore the solution to, many social, political and educational problems is not in funding, in who gets how much from whom compared to whomever else. It's the system, stupid!

There is no one villain.

Teacher organisations have been advocates for one sector rather than opponents of the whole structure. Catholic bishops since Whitlam's time have insisted on public subsidies for avowedly 'elite' or 'exclusive' schools in pursuit of a guarantee, the private 'right' to public funding. These 'elite' schools and their clienteles have engaged in vigorous class formation, consolidating dominant groups in their schools, and dividing them further from others.

State and federal governments of both stripes have adopted policies which have supported and entrenched an educationally and socially counter-productive organisation of a major public institution. Parents have done what they think best, often with severe misgivings, in the face of a system not of their making.

The blame could be chased all the way back to the settlement of the 'free, compulsory and secular' settlement of the 1880s and no doubt well beyond that. But the point is: how many more generations has this scheme of things got left to run?

Gonski is a glimpse of what a school system ought to look like, one that protects the choice of secular or religious schooling, single-sex or co-ed, but after that, all parents on the same basis, all schools ditto.

Hard to imagine? No need. Just get on a plane and go to just about any other country in the OECD. Not the UK or the US, I concede. Finland for preference.

The many holy faces of humanity

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Holy Motors* (MA). Director: Leos Carax. Starring: Denis Lavant. 115 minutes**

A man (Lavant) is picked up from a luxurious rural home by a limousine. He asks his driver-secretary how many appointments he has; nine, he is told. Weary before he has begun, the man begins a slow process of transformation in front of a lighted dressing-room mirror mounted in the back of the limo. What follows in this elaborately allegorical film is a portrayal of a most unusual day in which the only constant is transformation.

One moment the man is an elderly beggar woman, so agonisingly stooped that all 'she' sees of the world is 'stones and feet'. Next he is a motion capture artist, clad in a black body-stocking studded with sensors, miming the gestures of sex and combat to be digitally transmuted into anime. The old woman and the stuntman reveal the man's total control over his physical self, though his psychological and spiritual selves remain indistinct.

Next he is a monstrous vagrant, who crawls out of a sewer and terrorises passers-by with hilarious ferocity. He desecrates a fashion shoot in a graveyard (which itself is surely a kind of desecration), brutally assaulting a photographer before absconding with the swooning model. Back in the sewer they are beauty and the beast, as she recognises vulnerability and tenderness beneath his frightening veneer.

It is obvious by now that the man's existence is not what we'd describe as normal; not unique either though, because there are indications that there are others — perhaps many — who are rolling around in limousines and living similar chameleonic lives. At one moment he is a father belittling his teenage daughter to the point of tears; the next, a dangerous mobster; then an old man bonding with his granddaughter on his deathbed.

The face of the film changes, too, with that of its central character. So that now it is D-grade horror, now it is domestic drama, now it is a violent thriller, and now it is a Hollywood musical (Australian pop singer Kylie Minogue appears here, speaking French, as a fellow chameleon with whom the man shares a painful past — unless this, too, is another performance). The film traverses this diverse terrain with great cinematic poise.

The man integrates just as seamlessly with his environments, and others interact with him as if this — *this* — is his true face. Then he returns to the limousine, undergoes a transformation through makeup and costume, studies the file for his next appointment, and begins all over again. The film is endlessly cryptic: during two appointments the man is mortally wounded, but each time he

returns to the limousine unscathed.

So what exactly is going on? Director Carax's screenplay is certainly enigmatic. It does dawn on you that the 'home' the man goes to at night is not the 'home' he was picked up from in the morning. 'Home' then is merely another 'appointment'. This is not a job but the totality of the man's existence. A slightly silly postscript affirms what is already clear: that the man is not and will never be master of his own destiny.

The film has more to offer than fatalism though. Is it an allegory for the plight of the wretched artist, who gives himself totally to, and so is utterly consumed by, his work? Such a reading is valid, and ascribes a certain level of self-indulgence to Carax. But equally, *Holy Motors* is an eloquent discourse on the roles that we all play, and the physical and emotional trauma of remaking ourselves to fit our own and others' expectations in a given situation.

That sounds a tad trite on paper, but in truth *Holy Motors* is fascinating, and packed with humour and terror and innumerable small insights. Each time the man recreates himself he is reborn, and each rebirth brings with it endless possibilities. This in itself is an inherently hopeful conceit, though in *Holy Motors* hope is invariably supplanted by despair. In this it is perhaps best viewed as a cautionary tale.

How not to have a revolution

POLITICS

Justin Whelan

Last year many said Syria was proof that nonviolent struggle could not overthrow a truly ruthless dictator — as if the likes of Mubarak, Marcos and Milosevic were bastions of civility.

Never mind that the latter two ordered their armed forces to fire upon unarmed protestors just like Assad, only to find the generals, thanks to a range of tactics from the revolutionaries, refusing to carry them out. No doubt Mubarak would have tried the same but the Egyptian army had made it clear early on it would refuse to do so.

There were a number of weaknesses in the strategic choices being made by the Syrian democracy movement. The almost exclusive use of street demonstrations was an admirable show of defiance and courage but it made it easier for the regime to arrest and later violently repress the participants.

Unlike Egypt and almost all other successful revolutions, there was a dearth of alternative tactics aimed at mass participation in a dispersed form (which is much harder to crack down on), such as labour strikes and boycotts.

It was as if the Syrians, in trying to capture the momentum of the Arab Spring, looked at Egypt and saw only Tahrir Square, and not the wide range of tactics and many years of struggle that predated those incredible 17 days. If so, they did no worse than the vast majority of the world's media.

Nevertheless, as the nonviolent movement came under sustained violent repression, some people inside Syria decided to take up arms. In doing so, they have unwittingly opened a Pandora's Box.

Violence has its own internal logic and momentum. Although in cases like Syria it is taken up in response to a perceived failure of nonviolent struggle and to widespread violent repression by the regime, violent insurgencies radically increase the rate of civilian and movement actor casualties.

This is because insurgent violence makes it much easier for the regime to increase its repression of even the nonviolent parts of the movement while maintaining legitimacy among its support base and neutrals.

Violent struggles often draw in outside powers, through material assistance, provision of weapons or other supplies, and sometimes through direct military support. Of course, these outside powers bring their own agendas, which rarely align with those of the original pro-democracy movement leaders.

The Syrian conflict now has active participation from the governments of



Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Russia and the United States. Iran and Israel are also posturing, threatening direct military intervention to prevent their enemies gaining the upper hand.

And in the Middle East, 'regional powers' also include al Qaeda, which has a persistent tendency to show up wherever there is violent conflict and throw its own incendiary cocktail into the mix. In the case of Syria, this complicates matters for the likes of the US government, who want to support the insurgents but do not want al Qaeda to benefit from the conflict.

Added to these factors is the significant ethnic and religious polarisation of Syria's population. The Assad regime represents the minority Alawites, who make up almost all of the regime's 'pillars of support' (e.g. the military, judiciary, senior government officials, et al.). Most people in this group believe they have no future without him.

Indeed, some parts of the Free Syrian Army have begun summarily executing important Alawite families seen as backing the regime, further entrenching this polarisation and making it impossible for more moderate leaders to reach out to these pillars of support to assure them they have a role to play in a post-Assad Syria. This dynamic is entirely consistent with violent struggles elsewhere.

Last year, Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan published a ground-breaking study *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic on Nonviolent Struggle*, comparing violent and nonviolent struggles to overthrow authoritarian governments and foreign occupations.

Their comprehensive analysis of 323 campaigns from 1900—2006 found that nonviolent struggle was twice as likely to succeed as violence in achieving movement goals. They also found that successful nonviolent struggles were ten times as likely to lead to reasonably robust democracies as successful violent campaigns, and 50 per cent less likely to fall into civil war over the ensuing ten years.

And they found that the 'strategic advantage' of nonviolent struggle was increasing over time, especially after the end of the Cold War, and is present even against the most powerful and violent regimes.

In looking for the contributors to success, Chenoweth and Stephan found that the greatest single indicator of success was participation rate. Here, nonviolent struggle has a clear advantage: almost everyone can participate in street demonstrations, labour strikes and boycotts, but only a few can and will take up arms.

Furthermore, the addition of a violent 'wing', as the Free Syrian Army started out, has been shown to decrease participation by nonviolent actors. We see this in Syria where street demonstrations and the like have disappeared, with everyone too afraid to step outside. Thus the nonviolent part of the revolution has been

completely sidelined and the likelihood of a democratic outcome becomes ever more remote.

There is some prospect (but no guarantee) that the civil war could end Assad's rule. But both history and the myriad local factors give us no reason to hope that such an outcome would lead to a democratic, or even significantly less authoritarian, regime in Syria.

Hail to the climate geeks

POLITICS

Frank O'Shea



The word geek has changed from a term of derision to one of smiling respect and even a badge of honour. It is employed almost exclusively to describe people with aptitude in technical matters — computers, mathematics, engineering, the physical sciences.

The members of the Climate Commission would no doubt be happy to be called geeks. They've released a [report](#) that put in context Australia's contribution to climate change and worldwide efforts to ease its effects. Their evidence comes from numbers, some of which are not encouraging. For example, Australia is the 15th largest emitter of greenhouse gases; per capita, we make the greatest contribution of any country to climate change.

It seems there is far too little 'geek' representation in the halls of power. In the US, 55 of the 100 senators are lawyers, but the senate does not have even one scientist or engineer; in the UK House of Commons, only one of the 650 members was a scientist in a previous career. The figures for geeks in the Australian parliament are better, but they are small beside those with backgrounds in law, media, economics and business.

Recently, Joe Hockey was heard complaining to parliament about the way the present government has wasted money on research: 'Hang on — there was \$145,000 for a study of sleeping snails, to determine 'factors that aid life extension'! There was \$210,000 to study the early history of the moon. You can imagine Tim staring out longingly from the window at the Lodge at the moon and thinking, "You know what, Julie? We should have a good look at that. Why don't we spend \$210,000 to work out what happened before Neil Armstrong got there?"'

I don't know what the snail study was, and ignoring for a moment how the Hansard writer knew to use that exclamation mark, I would be most surprised if the life extension to which the research refers did not have relevance beyond gastropods, including to older citizens who unlike Hockey may have an interest in the results.

But I do know that the early history of the moon has long been an area of research. Notwithstanding the Shadow Treasurer's mockery, it is important to know whether the moon is a result of a collision or near collision with the earth, whether it started out as a planet inside mercury, or whether there is some other explanation for its origin and composition. It has relevance for tides, for tectonic shifts, for life on this planet.

Apart from all that, it bodes ill for the clever country if the next Federal Treasurer finds amusement in serious scientific research — and remember that

such a study needs to go through rigorous processes of value and importance before it can even begin.

Science is comfortable with being wrong, with a culture that insists you change your mind when evidence shows that your theory will not hold up. Contrast the name-calling and vituperation that follows when circumstances cause a politician to change her mind. It would be nice if there was a change of mind among those who insist that we are the only country acting on climate change and that what we do is inconsequential; they will find evidence in the statement of climate commissioner Tim Flannery who describes both of those assertions as 'lies'.

And science has the uncanny habit of improving our lives in serendipitous ways that surprise even the researchers. Think of the developments that followed the work of the 19th century geek [James Clerk Maxwell](#), work Hocky would probably have raised a laugh at. 'There's Maxwell over in Scotland with his meaningless strings of Divs and Curls and partial derivatives. And some Italian shyster thinks that this gibberish may lead to messages being sent through the air. Perhaps Jimmy should go easy on the Laphroaig!'

Science is poorly served by the kind of media balance that is demanded in less certain areas of study like economics or law or the arts. Bad science has no right to impartiality: if something is wrong, it should be stated as being wrong and that should be the end of the matter. Flat earthers or people who campaign against the triple MMR vaccine or gangs who vandalise CSIRO crops do not deserve the same kind of air time or sympathetic column inches as real scientists.

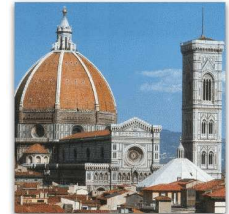
Another report, from the US, shows Arctic ice coverage is at a historically low level and seems to be declining. Anyone living within a short distance of the Australian coast would be well advised to be aware of that fact.

My life as a Florence tour guide

NON-FICTION

Ben Coleridge

I'm coming to the end of my time here in Firenze. I've been working here for the last month as a tour guide in the Duomo of Florence.



As a mental exercise, just imagine the typical tourist's day in the city:

You pull up your socks, buckle up your bum bag and head out early, ready to take the day by the horns. But after a couple of hours you're getting irate — you can't find a toilet and are struggling to locate that 'famous' pizzeria that your friend (who visited Florence 30 years ago) recommended.

And if that isn't bad enough, it turns out that that famous painting of the Last Supper (who painted it again?) isn't in Florence as you thought, it's in Milan, where you were last week. Damn. So why on earth did you bother coming to Florence? I mean, what's here? (anything else from *The Da Vinci Code*?) And what can you get for free?

But all is not quite lost. There's still Michelangelo's David in the Academia — that's 'famous' and always makes for a good Facebook album cover. But after queuing for two hours, you feel rather underwhelmed — David isn't the 20m high statue of a ripped male you had been expecting, and there isn't a secret passageway leading from his gluteus maximus to a torture chamber beneath the Vatican.

So, after a hasty and overpriced pizza, you decide to just seek out the biggest, no nonsense building you can find and go in there — generally, it's that one that you see in the middle of the piazza with the big dome. So, slurping down the rest of that gelato, proudly smearing your face with chocolate and hazelnut, you queue up and enter.

And that's where you meet me, with a smile on my face and a twinkle in my eye.

Now, after this small exercise you might think that my job involves being martyred several times a day.

But actually it's full of wonderful moments — it's been a great chance to think and to learn.

Not long ago I was gardening in an orchard in the hills above the city. We were eating wild plums while we worked in the sun. It would have been quite the Tolstoyan scene, like Levin reaping the hay with his peasants, in search of truth and meaning through manual labour, if it weren't for the regular breaks and the

constant plum eating.

If Levin had worked in the field like I worked in the orchard, the scene would have been described as follows: 'Levin took a swipe at the hay with his scythe, sending a few stalks onto the heap. He paused and reached up for a plum, then munching, watched amiably as his peasants worked on without him.'

In the middle of the day we took a break and went to sit inside the small 11th century chapel on the hillside. It was the first church in Florence to ring its bells in the year 1100 to usher in the 12th century. We were tired, so we lay down on the floor and looked up at the ceiling which was painted dark blue and covered with silver stars.

For a lazy hour, we all tried to offer an interpretation of what the stars meant. For me they spoke of two things. Firstly, chaos — the universe as terrifying dark chaos surrounding the world, Milton's dark cosmos. But perhaps they speak of divine love as well: 'the love that gives this heaven its quietness' (Dante — *Paradiso*).

So chaos, and amidst it love: 'from chaos rises the world of the spirit'. The universe is quiet — and in the *Paradiso* the quietness is the quietness of love. But at the same time, the universe is filled with noise: 'And what I saw, it seemed, was now the laughter of the universe.'

It puts me in mind of D. H. Lawrence's description of the night sky in *The Rainbow* — 'the roaring sky' — which seems to speak of the cosmos alive with noise, but also, strangely, of its immense quietness.

I think it's this quietness that overwhelms Alyosha in the *Brothers Karamazov* — he looks up at the night sky and then he falls down onto the snow prostrate.

Even the simplest images in these churches are powerful — every detail conveys meaning, every detail adds to the cosmic vision the church offers. In Santa Maria Novella and Santa Croce, and even in the humble chapel on the hill, each piece of art seems to be a unified whole, its own limited world, imbued with an iconic presence — and together, each artwork in relationship with others, they form an 'iconographic atlas'.

One night we went to the Duomo to hear a visiting men's choir. They sang beneath the dome and the Cathedral was dark. It was a wonderful moment, the Russian Orthodox choir singing next to the plaque commemorating the Council of Florence. It reminded me of St Sophia Cathedral in Novgorod, the darkness and the voices.

And the icons on the walls and the frescoes in the dome took on a different character in the darkness, only lit by a dim light — Pavel Florensky wrote that, 'by the flat light of day, gold is crude, heavy, useless, but by the tremulous light of a lamp or candle it springs to life and glitters in sparks beyond counting—now here, now there, evoking the sense of other lights, not of this earth, which fill the space

of heaven.'

So the night sky and the icons seem to play a similar role — they evoke the 'space of heaven', the depth and breadth of divine mystery — standing in front of an icon involves chaos, a loss of control, a sort of submission. And the night sky also symbolises a loss of control, the earth sailing through the universe, alone, vulnerable amidst a vast dark cosmos.

Taking tours in the Duomo has been a wonderful experience. Leading the gelato stained crowds about the church definitely has its frustrating moments — people can be amazingly rude or depressingly unimaginative. But most often, they're just curious.

It's a space filled with story, and people love to hear stories — of the Council of Florence and of Constantine XI, the last emperor of Byzantium, and the vision of eternity depicted in the dome, in Vasari's frescoes. I hope what they see then is that everything in the church is part of what Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams described, in his book *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith, and Fiction*, as 'a subtle and resourceful symbolic world'.

And perhaps it all comes together as a reminder to look upwards — again in Williams' words, as 'a reminder of the depth behind all the exchanges of discourse, a depth offering not a simple last word but an assurance of some foundational energy that keeps human narrative open to absolution, whatever occurs'.

In the evenings, a group of us sit on the terrace outside the monastery of Santa Marta, and watch the sun go down behind the Florentine hills. Then the lights come on over the city below, and the olive trees change colour slightly.

Confronting the shadow within

POETRY

Stuart Barnes

o Prozac

I'm very nearly free of
you Completely
Surgeon's hue & Snowy Owl's
precision All
that's left's
to choose my insurrection
Turn, a fearsome lyrist —
Eurydicean smithereens
Or bare my self, a god
— your body
burns like
Semele

Nigredo

*... various terms [...] have found their way
into many a description of the individuation
process: nigredo, for the dark night of the soul,
when an individual confronts the shadow within*

— Hopcke

I don't love you anymore,

I don't think I ever did

— Eurythmics

Dark shadow, I don't love you
anymore (you're deadly, the
sea of Ezekiel; the
flame forever roiling the
bush; the soil, thorny, hardened;

the wind of the beginning),
I don't think I ever did.

Mary's song

after Sexton; and Plath

O my God, such a pain
in the arse!

Thirty years torturing
vacuous youth:

enlacing

black rah-rah

skirts, watered-

down tunes.

Clubbing each night, I'd mimic Grace

Jones, heart

scorching

my ribcage, its sinew.

Like, hey,

I was no more an artist

than Yorkshire's

hideous sooth

-sayer.

Cross my palm

with silver crowns she'd warble.

Bless you

wretched children I'd betray.

What a laugh,

the glory,

the assumption. The scoop

lays in Arcadia ...

My only hope, my lasting

act: I bore
a blond with baby blues.
I wanted to be famous,
I wanted to be a big star.
I went to New York
and my dream came true.

N. B. eighth verse from Madonna Live — The Virgin Tour, Warner Music Video, 1985

Tiger Lily knives Captain Hook

'Pirate he ironed, booze
strewing its darkness, *pirate ...*
arr! as I strode the Hotel's unctuous
deck for the first time since the accident.

Where's my
wooden leg then, huh; my black and white
striped corset; my shoulder-clawing
macaw; have I neglected Halloween?
Later, polystyrene at my table,
he bobbed to the gobbled clock's
tick-tock. *If you was a man Ida*
never, never said nuthin ...

If you
were a man you could nevernever suffer
this hideous black leather patch.'

Holy Saturday

From a pine's still tip this black
disconsolate god unlooses quavers.
Where's the magpie, wattlebird
and mynah? Milky, honeyed caffeine scalds my palate.
Two paddy wagons, two illumined hearses

fill the driveway: on one's tray
slumps an addict, handcuffed, faceless.
Spilling up from concrete sheets: nothing like compassion;
just the blindness of disciples, bald and shirred.

Vatican prefers tanks to talks to achieve unity

RELIGION

Andrew McGowan



When the idea of an Anglican Ordinariate was announced in September 2009 in the apostolic constitution [*Anglicanorum Coetibus*](#), the *Times* of London ran the headline 'Vatican Parks Tanks on Rowan's Lawn'.

It seemed an apt image at the time, for all sorts of reasons: one was the spectacularly undiplomatic character of the act, which was opposed by some in the Vatican and by very senior English Roman Catholics; another was the personal affront to Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, whose progressive leanings have never hidden a genuine admiration for the wider western catholic tradition of which his own Anglicanism is a part.

But the other implication of the image was one of a serious and lasting shift in power, a re-drawing of boundaries or movement of populations. Three years later it is more as though the Pope had, uninvited, sent over a Fiat cinquecento or two to pick up some stranded friends and their bags. As they leave the Lambeth Palace gates there is probably relief on both sides.

The agenda was ostensibly Christian unity; *Anglicanorum Coetibus* cited Vatican II's decree on ecumenism to the effect that 'such division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalises the world, and damages that most holy cause, the preaching the Gospel to every creature'. The tanks were there to unify the Church.

The Personal Ordinariates established this year in the UK, the USA, Canada and Australia have in fact been important mostly to individuals — a few thousand in total world-wide, a mixture of high-Church conservatives who found themselves ill-at-ease in Anglican Churches that now ordained women, and others of similar mind who had already left Anglicanism to form splinter groups driven by the same issue. A structure that provides them with a happier ecclesial home can be welcomed, even by those who differ from them.

However the stated aim of the Ordinariates, to accommodate whole groups of Anglicans who might come together as existing communities or structures with Anglican patrimony in tow, and thus to promote unity, is a failure. In just a few cases — ostensibly including one in Melbourne — congregations have moved en bloc; generally the new parishes of the Ordinariates will be precisely that, new bodies made up of disaffected individual Anglicans from various communities, gathered afresh around re-ordained clergy.

The Anglican parishes from which they came and even the 'Traditional Anglican Communion' itself remain, the structures of disunity as evident as ever, with a few extra cuts and bruises to boot.

As for Anglican patrimony, embodied in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, it remains to be seen how much this really becomes part of the life of the Ordinariates. Anglicans of high-Church leanings had often abandoned that eucharistic liturgy for theological reasons, even before Anglicanism's own version of Vatican II's *aggiornamento*, and were often using more or less the whole Roman Rite.

When *Anglicanorum Coetibus* was issued, one bishop in the Church of England quipped that the likely departures would have to go out and buy copies of the BCP so as to have a patrimony to take with them.

So statistically at least, the impact of the departures on Anglicanism itself is minimal; Anglicans have more serious things to worry about than the outbound trickle of remaining opponents of women's ordination. By implication, Roman Catholics might have even less reason to notice the new arrivals, given the scale involved.

Yet the appearance of a decent handful of new clergy not imported from far afield may be more significant. So far at least the Ordinariates are more about these than about parishes or groups of lay people.

The departing clergy now have some prospect of pursuing their vocations with more support and encouragement than they will recently have felt in an Anglicanism where they were a shrinking minority.

There have been costs to them. One will be somehow reconciling the immediate past of their sacramental ministries in Anglican orders, pursued even while publicly preparing to join and accept re-ordination in a body which still does not recognise that they had ever had any orders or sacraments at all.

This is not quite Newman's profound journey of conscience.

There must also be some curiosity about future clergy; the fact that the Ordinariates can accept married men as candidates for ordination, for instance, could be of wider significance for a Roman Catholicism struggling to identify local vocations in English-speaking countries.

This story has underscored the unpromising future of ecumenism itself. Agencies such as the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity do continue to work with Anglican bodies on bilateral dialogues, and many Anglican and Roman Catholic individuals and communities find their ways to bear common witness.

Yet the fact of the Ordinariates suggest that the real position of the Vatican on Christian unity is about absorption rather than convergence; the tanks, not the talks.

Fitzgerald's proof that politics can make a better world

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

Friday evening's *Eureka Street* Discerning Conversation between former prime minister Kevin Rudd and our own Fr Frank Brennan was billed as being about the 'things that matter'. The event took place at Melbourne University to celebrate *Eureka Street's* 21st birthday.

It was the end of a week during which federal parliament enacted legislation for offshore refugee processing.

In a rare bipartisan moment, politicians acted on their collective reading of the mind of the Australian electorate. According to this, what matters to Australians is keeping our lifestyle to ourselves by locking asylum seekers up for many years. Preservation of a set of comforts was considered to matter more than compassion for people who, in their own countries, lacked basic human securities.

If there was a message from Friday evening's conversation, it was that things don't have to be like that.

In the course of their discernment of the will of the Australian people, politicians can choose between attending to our base instincts or to our aspiration for higher humanity. The high road is the more challenging option that involves short-term pain for the sake of long-term gain for all of us, and the risk of electoral oblivion for politicians.

The Rudd-Brennan conversation began with recollections from their common home state Queensland in which politicians opted for the high road several decades ago to the benefit of the whole population. The turning point was the political acceptance of the findings of the Fitzgerald Inquiry into Police Corruption (1987–89) and the putting in place of a range of checks and balances to ensure greed no longer holds sway over the common good.

Brennan remembered *Eureka Street* was launched 21 years ago by the head of that commission, Tony Fitzgerald, who 'spoke at the opening about the need for the world of ideas and greater transparency in Australian society'.

Rudd responded: 'If you reflect back on what things were like in the late '80s compared to what things are like now, you can see the profound nature of changes that have come about. In that context, Fitzgerald played no small part ... You could have had entrenched racism and entrenched sexism [rather than] deep societal change.'

Apologists for political culture describe politics as the art of the possible, often in an attempt to excuse compromise that is actually veiled greed. Fitzgerald paved the way for a politics that demonstrated decisively that politics is indeed the art of the possible, and that the common good does not need to be compromised and

higher ideals and principles can be embraced and popularly accepted.

It was public anger over the Fitzgerald revelations that caused heavy defeat for the Queensland Nationals in 1989 and brought the ALP to power for the first time since 1957 in what was to prove one of Labor's more powerful — and hopefully seminal — moments.

Eureka Street is proud that we owe a common debt of gratitude with Queenslanders to a man who launched us on a path where a better world for all is the guiding principle.

Assange tests British diplomatic principle

POLITICS

Tony Kevin

Julian Assange now sits securely in a small room inside the Embassy of Ecuador in London. He is safe, as [Cardinal J  zsef Mindszenty](#) was safe for many years inside the US Embassy in Communist-ruled Hungary. This is a benefit of the internationally-agreed Vienna Convention on sovereign immunity of diplomatic premises. The irony is exquisite.



He draws on the rich and frequently resorted to Latin American tradition of using secure diplomatic immunity to protect the lives of one another's dissidents or deposed political leaders.

Such embassy safe havens and agreed safe conducts are not just theoretical concepts in Latin America. They have saved many lives and avoided the savagery and mutual embarrassment of reprisal trials in the oft-repeated cycle of coups and counter-coups.

They provide a face-saving and humane way for all concerned to deal with the consequences of violent and unpredictable political transitions. If any part of the world has reason to cherish the ideal of diplomatic immunity and inviolability by the host government of sovereign embassy premises, it is Latin America.

Assange chose well with Ecuador. Paradoxically, it is small and unimportant enough to be able to stand up to the US in ways that would be more difficult for larger Latin American nations such as Argentina or Brazil. There is a less complex and opaque web of economic interconnections. Commercial sanctions exercised through US corporations would be more easily exposed and denounced.

If clumsy pressures were applied on Ecuador, a wave of Latin American solidarity against Yanqui bullying could be relied on. Ecuador is not in regionally doubtful odour like leftist Venezuela, Cuba or Bolivia. It is a decent little middle-of-the-road country.

The choice now before Britain is stark: to give Assange safe conduct to Ecuador or to let him become another highly visible prisoner of conscience — another Cardinal Mindszenty — in London.

The British government has no option of storming the Embassy or cutting off its electricity or water. As Geoffrey Robertson [argued](#) on ABC Radio on Friday, once it violated the principle of immunity of diplomatic premises, Britain would be at the mercy of such actions against its many thousands of diplomatically protected people and their families in many parts of the world.

Britain has so much more to lose here. It would be grossly irresponsible to violate the Ecuadorian Embassy's diplomatic immunity.

Yet Britain and Sweden will not negotiate any compromise with Assange now. They would lose too much face.

The wisest course for Britain would be to make the best of a bad job: to give Assange safe conduct to Ecuador as soon as possible. The longer he stays in the Embassy, from where he will be free to write, communicate, and broadcast in audio and video, the more harm and embarrassment he can cause to the Anglo-American national security interests he is challenging.

To be confined to the Embassy as a prisoner of conscience would make a wonderful pulpit for Assange. The media drama of television journalists entering a guarded embassy to hear his views would not fade quickly. London is a hub of world media networks which could not resist following the story — as this weekend has proved. Bad luck for Britain, Sweden and by extension the US in an election year for Obama.

Far more sensible, then, to give Assange a safe conduct to Ecuador, under warnings that if he tries to leave Ecuador, including on an Ecuadorian passport, he will face British arrest and extradition to the UK for the crime of violating his bail conditions in going to the Ecuadorian Embassy. Most countries would honour such a request.

Effectively, Assange will have exchanged the small prison of the Ecuadorian Embassy in London for the much larger prison of Ecuador itself. He will find it harder to maintain an international following and a viable Wikileaks system from remote Ecuador. There would not be a large and prestigious foreign correspondents' media corps in Ecuador to broadcast and amplify his views and Wikileaks scoops to the world.

If I were advising the British Government, I would say, give him his safe conduct to Ecuador, and then wait for the dust to settle. As it eventually will.

Meanwhile I would advise Assange, once he reaches Ecuador, to learn good Spanish as quickly as he can, and immerse himself intellectually in Ibero-American history and culture. For the foreseeable future, he will effectively live as a political refugee from the Anglosphere, which will not forgive him for showing the world the truth of its duplicity and the crimes it committed in Iraq.

What he did with Wikileaks was right and admirable. But he must pay for it with exile in Ecuador, possibly for many years. This is the way of the world we live in.

Assange — who reminds me more and more of the many Irish rebels exiled to Australia, if they were lucky enough not to be hanged by Britain — has chosen the best available option. Now, he must look forward.

The trams revolt

BY THE WAY

Brian Matthews

Recently I've resumed my interrupted relationship with Melbourne's trams. We go back a long way, the trams and me. As a schoolboy, clutching my book-heavy Gladstone bag — a preferably battered Gladstone with your initials on it in fading gold being *de rigueur* in those days — I would climb aboard the number 64 and roll through suburb after suburb to school.

Sometimes I would have to sprint to the departing tram and leap on to the running board. You couldn't get locked out because automatic closing doors were still some years in the future.

When other boys jumped on to a moving tram it looked easy, even graceful. When you tried it yourself for the first time, however, the tram's apparently snail-like progress was transmuted into an alarmingly fast take-off, and a kind of G force pinned you to the running board and made the next step — actually climbing up into the tram — a lead-weighted, gravity-defying coup. In this brief skirmish with momentum and various immutable laws of physics, the Gladstone bag was no help at all.

The trams of my youth were green, with a splash here and there of yellow, and had a crew of two — a driver and a conductor. Drivers underwent a rigorous course of training which encompassed not only the rules of the road but other subtleties — like how to miss every green light while appearing not to be dawdling. In the old days, missing the lights involved inexplicable periods of utter motionlessness or a series of teeth-jarring starts and stops. But the advent of the sliding doors radically changed the driver's range of options.

The skilled driver will shut the doors just as someone dives for the entrance, then chivalrously reopen them, then close them and ring the bell — Melbourne tram drivers are very heavy on the bell — then give the tram a balance-testing forward jerk causing older passengers to brace themselves in their seats and strap-hangers to sway and reach like a trapeze artist mistiming a leap, then reopen and shut the doors and — bingo! red light.

It is the lot of trams everywhere to be welcomed, argued about, derided and threatened with extinction and removal. Melbourne trams have been dogged survivors and shapers of destiny.

In 1990, with the Victorian government of John Cain teetering amid serial financial disasters, trams played a bizarrely central role. Tram drivers, protesting against a government plan to introduce a new Met ticket system saving \$24 million a year but costing the jobs of more than a thousand conductors and train station staff, drove their trams, 250 of them, into the Melbourne CBD and parked them there for 33 days.

To my possibly fevered and overly dramatic imagination, and allowing for the fact that I was viewing it from then almost tramless Adelaide, the report of this action made it sound as if the trams themselves had rebelled, so that my version, in an unfinished short story called 'The Last Days of the Cain Government', went like this:

The trams trundled in from the suburban depots — driverless, empty and all lights blazing — one quiet warm night in the weeks following the football finals. Like a uniformed and undirected army, they clanked and rumbled the length of various long and be-railed arteries until, converging on inner city intersections, they deferred to each other with a chilling and ponderous mechanical protocol. Eventually they queued end to end in the heart of the city, choking it solid with an implacable wall of yellow and green.

The trams seemed to squat somehow lower on their shiny rails — and all their lights went out. For more than a month the trams paralysed the city and everyone could see that the Cain Government had entered its last days.

Melbourne's 21st century trams — like their famous European counterparts in, among other places, Prague, Zurich and Berlin — are colourful, comfortable, mostly much loved survivors into a new age. In the world's big cities, trams are svelte and streamlined like a French bullet-train. Still pretty slow but quiet — apart from the bell, which is now electronic, but just as popular with local drivers as the ding-dong of days gone by.

They're so quiet in Melbourne that advertisements at many stops invite travellers to imagine what it would be like to be run down by 30 rhinoceroses — that's what a Melbourne tram weighs. So watch out and listen!

In European trams, each stop is announced in a mellifluous, recorded feminine voice. In Melbourne, a heavily accented voice might deliver 'live' at the end of a journey the unrehearsed information that 'You will be terminated now', or, more memorably, 'The end now is come for everyone', or, a never-to-be-forgotten one-off: 'The system dissolves here'.

If your city has trams, it has a slice of romance and a doggedly persisting history which buses and underground rail systems can't match. Even in their most modern incarnations, trams may be grindingly inflexible and rather cumbrous. Like the mills of God, however, they grind slow, but they grind sure.

Australia takes the low road on asylum seekers

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan

Back from its winter recess, the Australian Parliament has now passed the Migration Legislation Amendment (Regional Processing and Other Measures) Bill 2011 which was first introduced to the Parliament in September last year as a response to the High Court's decision striking down the so-called Malaysia solution.

Ten months ago the stand-off between the Government and the Opposition over this bill related to the choice between Malaysia and Nauru as prospective offshore processing countries.

The Coalition wanted Parliament to insist that any country eligible for designation as an offshore processing country would be a signatory to the Refugees Convention. The Government wanted to retain the liberty of designating Malaysia immediately as an appropriate offshore processing country.

The Houston Expert Panel has [provided](#) the necessary political circuit breaker. The Coalition dropped its insistence that any potential offshore processing country be a signatory to the Convention. The Government dropped its insistence that Malaysia be pursued immediately as an appropriate offshore processing country.

The Government and Coalition remained in agreement that the Parliament should legislate to lock out the High Court from scrutinising the human rights protections offered in any offshore processing country. No major political party wants the High Court scrutinising future offshore processing arrangements in the same way that the High Court was able to strike down the Malaysia deal which the Coalition still describes as 'abominable'.

The panel was in agreement with the High Court that last year's Malaysia deal fell well short on human rights protection.

On Tuesday, Philip Ruddock, the chief architect of the Pacific Solution Mark I congratulated the panel for its competent outlining of the issues and options. He then put this challenge to Government:

What they are saying is that this Government's proposal is for mandatory detention in Nauru and Manus Island indefinitely until a place can be found after others in the queue have been accommodated. If this measure is going to work this government has to make it very, very clear that, for all of their statements that they would walk away from mandatory detention, they are now implementing indefinite mandatory detention offshore.

If people understand that, it may have the impact that the government seeks. But you cannot be unambiguous about the language you use. The message has to be clear not only to the people smugglers but also to their client base.

Thus the need for locking out the High Court. Nauru will only work as a deterrent if the package includes indefinite mandatory detention and protracted waiting before processing and resettlement. The Pacific Solution Mark I depended for its success on John Howard's bluff that refugees from Nauru would never end up in Australia. Mark II will depend on Julia Gillard's bluff, and that of her successors, that refugees in Nauru will have to wait there for many years.

All major political parties now hope they can confine people in Nauru for years on end without any prospect of court supervision and without any need for Parliament to revisit the matter. Scott Morrison, the Shadow Minister for Immigration, told Parliament on Tuesday:

These amendments ensure that, case by case, countries to which offshore arrivals are sent will be approved by this parliament. This means that a very heavy burden of responsibility now falls on this parliament. Previously there were the section 198A protections in the Migration Act. These were introduced by Mr Ruddock when he was Minister for Immigration to ensure that people who were processed offshore had legally binding protections.

If anyone doubts that those protections were legally binding, they need only look at the High Court decision of last year which proved that they were legally binding because the Malaysian people-swap — that abominable arrangement — was ruled out by the High Court on the basis of the insufficient nature of the declaration which made Malaysia, and particularly the people-swap arrangement, available to the government.'

Morrison, Ruddock and most of their parliamentary colleagues on either side of the aisle proceeded to vote to abolish these safeguards.

The Government has accepted the panel's recommendation that 'decisions in relation to how (asylum seekers) in Nauru would be processed would be determined by Australian officials in accordance with international obligations'. If people are to be detained indefinitely as Ruddock says, the Australian officials will need to institute a 'go slow' in processing refugee claims.

Though Parliament has done all it can to exclude the High Court, the Constitution (s.75(v)) which is beyond the reach of politicians (even when they are in panic mode) does provide the High Court with jurisdiction to order Australian officials to perform their legal functions. And if the deliberate 'go slow' by the bureaucrats is aimed at detention stretching into years rather than months, the High Court could well be asked to determine whether the initial detention of people arriving by boat is indeed punitive (as of course it is intended and trumpeted to be).

Under our Constitution, punitive long term detention is the sole preserve of the courts. It's called the rule of law and the separation of powers. If the Australian officials on their years long 'go slow' are not exercising any functions under Commonwealth law, there could well be questions about the legitimacy of the

expenditure by the Commonwealth in the absence of specific statutory allocations for long, slow punitive detention. The High Court opened this door in the recent school chaplains' case.

The deliberately punitive regime will run into further problems once a person is proved to be a refugee. Now that Nauru is a proud signatory of the Refugees Convention, it is bound to provide proven refugees in their territory with a full suite of rights including 'the most favourable treatment accorded to nationals of a foreign country in the same circumstances, as regards the right to engage in wage-earning employment'; 'the same treatment as is accorded to Nauruan nationals with respect to elementary education'; 'the same treatment with respect to public relief and assistance as is accorded to Nauruan nationals'; social security; and 'travel documents for the purpose of travel outside Nauru, unless compelling reasons of national security or public order otherwise require'.

If Ruddock is right, Australian officials will have to start schooling their Nauruan colleagues in breaching the provisions of the Refugees Convention before the ink is dry on Nauru's ratification.

I am one Australian who will not be holding his breath waiting for a revised Malaysia deal which measures up to the human rights protections recommended by the Houston panel. I still can't see our immediate neighbours like Malaysia and Indonesia being much interested in a regional processing agreement for all asylum seekers arriving in the region. The Panel with its savvy international experience felicitously noted: 'Going beyond principle to addressing how greater regional cooperation would work in practice, in the immediate and longer term, is less travelled territory but critically important.'

While waiting to open up that virgin territory, let's hope the bluff works and the boats do stop coming. If people come in any numbers, we are going to find ourselves in a dreadful imbroglio in Nauru for years to come. In five years time, it might not just be the Greens in Parliament who look back and say that it would have been decent for Ruddock and his colleagues in 2012 to retain the minimum human rights protections which he negotiated with Kim Beazley back in 2001.

We have reached a fork in the road between decency and deterrence. As a nation we have taken the low road, inviting the newest signatory to the Refugees Convention to emulate our indecent behaviour.

Refugee on the road to Jericho (a parable)

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton



In the time of the uprising a certain man fled from the Romans who were seeking to kill him and his family. For his brother had taken up arms against them. He went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

And by chance there came down priests, scholars and rulers who came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the inn keeper, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

But the innkeeper thought unto himself, 'Too many fugitives have died along this road. They greatly anger the people and must be prevented.'

It so passed that in that hour a caravan halted at the inn. The innkeeper gave the fugitive into the charge the merchants, paid them 30 pieces of silver, and bade them, 'Take ye this man to a desert fort and bid the guards confine him there, never to see his wife and his children. They are to set him free only when the sun sets on the day when peace doth rule from coast to coast and the lion lies down with the lamb.'

And that night the innkeeper stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank thee, that I am not as this fugitive is, unclean, in rags, and like to die, nor even as that Samaritan is, a feigner of compassion, hypocrite and angel of death. I pay my taxes, I meditate right thoughts, and this day have I pleased the people and saved from death a multitude of fugitives.'

And that same night the fugitive turned his face to the dungeon wall and prayed to die.

After three days the Samaritan returned to the inn. And the inkeeper told him all that he had done. And the Samaritan left the inn and wept bitterly.

Houston report's significance for deaths at sea

POLITICS

Tony Kevin

After the advice (or some of it) offered by the [Houston report](#) becomes law, smaller numbers of people will continue to try to come to Australia in boats. The demographic will shift to young single men and family groups travelling together — people who will be willing to sit patiently in Nauru for some years.



Will some of these people continue to drown? Will Australia's government and border protection system continue to evade responsibility for systemic failures, trying to shift blame onto the easy target of people smugglers?

The Houston report offers a powerful international law template by which to measure the border protection system's adherence to its safety-of-life-at-sea (SOLAS) obligations to asylum seekers in its detection, interception and rescue operations.

The Report's Attachment 3, 'Australia's International Law Obligations With Respect to Refugees and Asylum Seekers' charts the legal framework for the case studies of the operational SOLAS failures I discuss in depth in my book *Reluctant Rescuers*, and the more recent large failures of 21 June (capsize) and 28 June (lost boat).

Houston notes that the areas of international law relevant to Australian policies are the Refugee Convention, human rights law, law of the sea, and principles of state responsibility. Legislation alone is unlikely to be able to guarantee compliance with Australia's international law obligations. Compliance depends on what Australia does by way of legislation, administration and practice. Well said.

The law of the sea sets out a State's obligations relating to the interception of suspected irregular entry vessels, rescue of persons at sea, and safety of life at sea. Specific maritime law obligations arise from the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR Convention), and the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS Convention).

UNCLOS stipulates a duty to render assistance. Every state must require the master of a vessel flying its flag 'to render assistance to any person found at sea in danger of being lost' and 'proceed with all possible speed to the rescue of persons in distress, if informed of their need of assistance' (note this duty applies anywhere at sea).

The SAR Convention says a party has an obligation to use search and rescue units, and other available facilities, to provide assistance to persons in distress at sea in its search and rescue region (SRR). Parties shall ensure that assistance is

provided to any person in distress at sea, regardless of the nationality or status of a person or the circumstances in which the person is found. This obligation is thus not limited to a party's own SRR.

The SOLAS Convention says that on receiving information that persons are in distress at sea, the master of a ship in a position to provide assistance must proceed with all speed to their assistance. This applies regardless of the nationality or status of such persons or the circumstances in which they are found.

Where assistance has been provided to persons in distress in a state's SRR, that state is responsible for ensuring coordination and cooperation occurs between governments so that survivors are delivered to a place of safety.

If a breach of an international obligation (such as a human rights obligation or an obligation to render assistance at sea) occurs, international law prescribes rules which determine when a particular state is responsible for that breach. Key principles of state responsibility include that a state is responsible for any actions of its officials.

One may infer here that if a state deliberately withheld from its search and rescue units information obtained from its intelligence resources regarding a real-time SAR emergency, in which the latter could have assisted had they known of it, that state could be held responsible for resulting deaths at sea.

The conduct of bodies which are not, or persons who are not, state organs may also be attributed to a state if, for example, the state instructs or directs or controls that conduct. In addition, a state may be responsible for wrongful conduct committed by another state, where the first state knowingly aids or assists in that conduct.

These laws are relevant to possible wrongful disruption activities funded by Australia and conducted in Indonesia by Indonesian agencies, an issue that arose in the 2002 Senate CMI inquiry.

Houston finds that the loss of life on dangerous maritime voyages in search of Australia's protection has been increasing, and the likelihood that more people will lose their lives is high. The panel notes the challenge of continuing to uphold Australia's obligations under the SOLAS and SAR Conventions and UNCLOS.

It says that 'Australia takes its SAR obligations under international and domestic law very seriously'. Most of the time this is true, though sadly, not always.

We just learned of a boat that disappeared on 28 June carrying 67 people, now presumed dead. The dysfunctional patterns of official behaviour we have seen in the past were repeated: tardy and reluctant response (six weeks) to family appeals, cruelly insensitive language, the blurring of dates, and finally shameless political exploitation by the responsible Minister. The system does not seem to know how to behave better.

I hope Houston's quiet hints that all is not well in this area, and his meticulous reminder of the international law obligations governing Customs and Border Protection doctrine and operations, might lead to a more compassionate and timely response in future to distress situations of which Australia's intelligence-based border protection system becomes aware by whatever means.

It is time for decent people in government to stop exploiting deaths at sea as deterrents.

Shaking Australia's 'brutal sexual economy'

TELEVISION

Jen Vuk

Puberty Blues is what you get when teenage girls with a grudge show the world what they're made of.

The book, written in 1979 by 19-year-old best friends Kathy Lette and Gabrielle Carey before being made into a film in 1981 (and now coming of age as a Channel 10 [television series](#)), not only made a scene — it kicked sand in the face of the establishment.

Set in Sydney's beachside Sutherland Shire (yes, that [Shire](#)), the plot revolves around the lives of a couple of brash 13-year-old lower middle-class girls, Debbie and Sue, as they explore gender politics against the backdrop of perhaps the most iconic period of recent Australian history.

It's hardly *War and Peace*, but this was the mercurial 1970s, and somehow these self-obsessed teens managed to tap into the unsettling mood. As Lette recalls: 'Gough had just been elected, dragging us out of the beige '50s mentality of Menzies. *Cleo* scandalised the Aussie male population by publishing nude male centerfolds ...'

By the early 1980s, when the book was made into a [film](#), censorship laws dictated the girls' ages be changed to 16 and several of the book's details were absent or rewritten (Lette later complained that 'the film sanitised the plot by omitting central references to miscarriage and abortion').

But what the film did was further champion the novel's fiercely 'proto-feminist' spirit.

As then 13- and 14-year-olds with only a well-thumbed library copy of Judy Blume's *Forever between us* as our guide through the sexual mire, both on the page and the big screen *Puberty Blues* offered my friends and me a rare, yet all-too familiar voice. Our own.

It didn't matter to us that we lived in Melbourne's northern suburbs which were about as far away from the beach as you can get and still be within the city radius. Debbie and Sue not only spoke our language; they were our poets laureate.

Like us they understood what it was to be treated as the lesser sex at high school. In the classroom and on the field (including behind the shelter sheds) the boys ruled. And us girls? We sat precariously between 'frigid' and 'moll' — which were unbearable states of being rather than mere derogatory labels.

As Lette [said](#) recently: 'We girls were little more than a life support system to a pair of breasts. But sadly, at that age, you have no objectivity ... Once I realised that Germaine Greer wasn't just rhyming slang for beer, I wanted to write down

our story to help liberate the other surfie girls ...'

When Debbie finally takes to the surf with a board under her arm, she shakes off more than her school uniform. So what if the subtext was about as subtle as a panel van? By defying her chorus of critics a brave new world opens up to her — and to us, because through her somehow we'd plumbed the depths of our own insecurities, too.

It was also as if we'd been handed our very own pair of prescription glasses. Finally, we could see the tribal chauvinism for, as Lette calls it, 'the brutal sexual economy' it was. And while we may have still been too young to take full advantage of this clear perspective, it piqued in us a burgeoning self-awareness.

I'm glad to say that last night's opening episode was promising. Not only is there a natural chemistry between the spunky duo, Debbie and Sue (played beautifully by Ashleigh Cummings and Brenna Harding respectively), the broader dynamics between families and peers also look set to be well mined.

I'm sure I won't be the only middle-aged woman glued to the screen on Wednesdays for the next few weeks. But I'll not be letting the warm glow of nostalgia influence me too greatly. No, I expect something more profound.

Lette and Carey wrote a book that turned the page on social expectation. Moreover, they set down a blueprint. We were creatures on the cusp of adulthood bubbling with hormones and grappling for meaning. *Puberty Blues* provided much-needed context for our yearning.

The truth about the Vatican's money

RELIGION

Paul Collins



I've lost track of the number of times people have told me about the 'enormous wealth of the Vatican'. Some are confused: they think the Vatican owns all the Church's worldwide real estate, lock, stock and barrel. Others think that all that art could be sold for the poor without adverting to the difficulty of selling Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling or the rooms containing the Stanze of Raphael.

Most just think the Vatican is corrupt and busy laundering vast sums of Mafia money through the 'Vatican Bank'. The papacy hasn't helped itself with its insistence on an absurd level of secrecy and its earlier involvement with criminals like Sindona and Calvi.

Well, now for the first time we actually have some hard facts.

Benedict XVI has been determined to clean up the Holy See's finances. In February 2011 he called in the Council of Europe's experts on anti-money laundering and financing of terrorism, Moneyval. Moneyval and their 241 page July 2012 report (plus annexes) gives us an enormous trove of factual material about the Vatican.

Before dealing with the money, some other interesting facts. As Moneyval says 'although the Holy See (HS) is not a state in itself, it has sovereignty over the Vatican City State (VCS) which is the smallest sovereign state in the world'. It is the HS, not the VCS, which is officially recognised by governments like Australia.

VCS is 44 hectares in area with 595 citizens with 348 of these living outside the VCS. You become a citizen not by birth but by office, that is by appointment to a specific job for the HS/VCS. Citizenship is lost upon the termination of that employment.

With six million visitors annually the VCS needs its own 137-strong police and security force, or Gendarmeria; most are ex-Italian police. Crime rates are very low and mainly involve petty thieving, almost all occurring among the tourists.

Moneyval's main focus was on the HS's two financial institutions: the Institute for Works of Religion (IOR), the 'Vatican Bank', and the Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See (APSA).

The IOR (founded in 1942) essentially operates as a commercial bank whose customer-focus is on deposits 'destined for religious works or charity'. It can also take deposits for other purposes, although its customer-base is restricted almost entirely to religious orders, dioceses, parishes, seminaries, bishops, HS departments, employees and retired employees of the VCS. It has 33,404

accounts and 20,772 customers. There are 47 accounts in Oceania, presumably mainly in Australia. Lay people hold 32 per cent of these accounts and clerics and/or religious 68 per cent. The IOR employs 104 people.

The IOR has 6.3 billion Euros under management. For comparison the Commonwealth Bank has US\$500 billion in assets. IOR carries out most bank functions except it doesn't lend money including consumer and mortgage credit, although it issues credit cards; it doesn't provide financial guarantees and doesn't underwrite insurance. It only has one branch and 13 ATMs, all within the VCS accessible only to clients of IOR.

One of its most important services is customer payments via wire services. This is where most of the money-laundering accusations are focused. IOR investments are mainly in low-risk, short-term, fixed interest securities; it avoids the equity, precious metals and foreign currency markets. Most of its revenues are derived from commissions and service fees. The IOR uses the services of more than 40 banks in Europe, the US, Australia and Japan to facilitate its investments and transfers.

The other financial institution is APSA, the Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See. APSA is an office within the Roman Curia. It administers the property of the HS and manages funds given to the HS by Italy in accordance with the 1929 Lateran Treaty, that is the money (1.75 billion lire) paid to the HS for the Italian seizure of the Papal States. This money has been invested and APSA relies on clerical and lay advisors for expert guidance, most of whom work for free.

APSA has 680.7 million Euros under management, accounts and deposits with many central banks (e.g. Bank of England, the Federal Reserve) and invests in financial markets and real estate in France, UK and Switzerland. Besides managing HS real estate, it funds the papacy and curia's annual budget, subsidised by Peter's Pence and other income. APSA also pays the 2400 HS/VCS employees and the pensions of 1600 retired employees.

Moneyval gave the HS/VCS a reasonable pass mark but added that 'further important issues need addressing' for the HS/VCS to be added to the 'white list' of banking systems considered safe from money laundering and financing of terrorism. But it is a first step in the direction of accountability.

After Greece's party ended

NON-FICTION

Gillian Bouras

Thirty-two years ago I came to my husband's ancestral village for six months' holiday. The holiday got out of hand, as I am still here. A nomad without an ancestral village, I was made a present of one, and now find irony in the fact that I will soon have spent as many years here as I did in Australia.

For the first 16 months I lived with my mother-in-law, the redoubtable Aphrodite, who stood five feet nothing in her stockinged feet, wore daunting head-to-toe black, and could quell me with one basilisk glance.

She saw no necessity to change a way of life that had remained the same for countless generations, so I was the one who had to adjust to a set routine of feast days and fast days, to the demands of the Orthodox church, to the dictates of the seasons and the rural round.

The world of books and writing, so important to me, was closed to Aphrodite, who could just manage to sign her name on her pension cheques; she could not read at all. To her I was irremediably foreign, and I don't think she saw a black or Asiatic person in all her life.

Any life entails a struggle to accommodate change, and changes there have inevitably been, even in this small, slow-moving world. Aphrodite grew up in a world without phones or labour-saving electrical appliances, without bathrooms and without radio and TV: local gossip preceded the soap operas that have become so popular.

There were no cars, and buses were few. People often walked to Athens, or rode their donkeys: the journey took a week, and time was measured by the number of cigarettes smoked.

Roads began to be built in the 1950s, after the disastrous civil war had left not a bridge standing in the entire country. Last month a new section of the National Road was opened, toll stations and all, so that it is now possible to get from Athens to Kalamata in just three hours.

When I arrived there were few supermarkets and those that existed were small. It was difficult to buy a packet of corn flakes, peanut butter cost a king's ransom, and bananas were unavailable: with idiosyncratic Greek logic, they were not imported so that the apple industry could flourish.

Bank loans were almost impossible to acquire, and many young people still lived in a three-generation menage.

But in 1980 Aphrodite and I stood on the cusp of change: things were speeding up for everybody. Before too long Greece entered the European Community, a fact

that seemed to guarantee unheard of prosperity, involving the ready availability of consumer goods and a much higher standard of living.

Banks seemed almost literally to throw money at every Tom, Dick and Spiro, and at Spirodoula as well. Loans were available for almost anything, and credit cards seemed to many people a form of modern magic.

Well, most of us know the end result of change occurring too suddenly and too drastically.

The Greek party is now over, has been over for a good five years: it perhaps comes as no surprise that older villagers, who have in the main lived their lives as Aphrodite lived hers, who never expected a party and so did not join in the spree, have survived the *krisi* in better shape than many others.

People these days think of the Glamorous Glitzy Greece of the touristy islands and the swank resorts: for 25 years this image was cultivated. Those of us who knew an older, simpler Greece were dismayed, and feared the loss that development threatened to bring.

Much has indeed been lost. And yet, it is still possible to find the Greece of 1980. It is still possible to sit quietly under a mulberry tree outside a tiny *kafeneion*, to sip a drink and iced water as the old men, who feel the extreme heat and cannot enjoy the siesta as they once did, wander in for their late afternoon *kafethaki*. They sit and draw on their cigarettes, secure in the place where they have always lived.

They sit, revolving many memories, and these days, so far along that rocky road I first set foot on in 1980, I revolve mine.

Car crash requiem

POETRY

Philip Salom

Driving into dawn

The world is everything that is the case.

—Wittgenstein

*But what is that? How is a case? And ... what of what
is not...? Your stated silence?*

When I wake I am driving
and forwards at last at least
and shattering sounds aren't
escaping me and my thoughts
stop lurching like animals

Steering the last few corners
slowly through a small town
: its dark main street bereft
like an old church flowerless
in Lent

Something
whitens my peripheral vision
then is gone The buildings
have lost pub-brawl awnings
are head-butted and leaning
Several people stand half in
the gloom half in blackness
They are half-cards the half-
watch not quite noticing as I
pass

I learnt to drive at
seventeen I've been driving

thirty years For the first time
I know what I'm doing I am
not going to be judged I had
thought to stop here but now
I keep on put a roundabout
behind me and I drive west
all light gone except my poor
headlights considering a road
the texture of dead a bad idea
of dead This stoney bitumen
slump-shoulder leprous skin
Then indifferently up a gear
and gone

The flecks of blood
I saw briefly lit by street-lights
the red of intent too dark to
see again Uphill upnight down
Vibration a low stammering
from the left rear tries to tell
something I can not will not
hear

Death is different at night
The sound it made the lurching
Lost as I was it can't be I'm lost
here in the present tense I am
lost in driving

If not then
A cool light we gently call dawn
enters the tree tops and so enters
me I am entering the next world

Cluster-bombs of birds go off in
threes Bird-song bird-sight bird

Deception

These are my tricks.

And if I am inside its placement this is the perfect photograph of stillness
its composition classical its colours sit its light is set to body
temperature.

Shadows in a room are nothing to the five strong surfaces of light:
arms of chairs in arcs horizontal water-light lake-ing the table-top.
Unless I am looking unless I am noting this brightness its
possibles my muse is sleeping a face of Brancusi marble.
But look the blood pressure monitor is silvered and Cartesian.

It waits. My blood is invisible impossibly quiet.
The upper surfaces of forgotten apples are wrinkled and white
doughnuts of apple-light. My glasses on the table are blind.
But each lens is the same: a window and a street lamp
hang upside down they bulge in the black frames like art.

...

No no enough of this. The phone is ringing
here in my head. Answer Answer. It says
something else is happening not this
layered light and language stuff.

This and this and the mind.
Un-able to resist being solipsist.
Something is arriving. Rips at the fake
texture we are language is the surfaces
and rips at tries to return from where it is not.

...

The blood pressure monitor is dumb and is quiet.

But later I will attach it to my bicep and pump.
The heat in this room is like a body carrying its do not
kind of instrument. I am a do. I feel it against me, silent.
The trees are black as rags and torn along their rougher
edges dense against orange bleeding from the horizon.
You walk into the room and speak but only the words you
say are said. Not these behind afterwards before words
of mine. In the silence of my brain no engine that I saw
I see with saw. All that I see or saw. I am un-first-personed.
If these are my tricks who am I tricking? Am I a dualist? Not?
The table-top the apple in apple-ness the street-lamp in lenses.
This clear blood of me. This and I alter. This is the altering.

Houston report's high cost of deterrence

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan

Three honourable men without a party political agenda have reported on how they think we can honourably stop the boats. Angus Houston, Michael L'Estrange and Paris Aristotle have put 22 recommendations which should be treated as an integral package but which inevitably will be cherry picked by a hung parliament.

Putting regional agreements and the Malaysia solution on hold, they have recommended a return to John Howard's Pacific Solution while cutting the High Court out of the action.

This is a body blow to the Gillard policies to date. By way of balance, they also blow out of the water Tony Abbott's assertion that boats can be safely towed back to Indonesia.

Given the world's humanitarian crisis, the panel recommends that the Government immediately increase our humanitarian program from 13,750 to 20,000 with 12,000 of those places going to refugees. This would double our annual refugee intake offshore and onshore.

They accept the reality of population flows across the globe with people fleeing dreadful situations of persecution. Their ultimate aim is to set up a regional system which provides a genuine alternative pathway for asylum seekers who otherwise will get on leaky boats seeking a durable solution to their woes.

The panel wants government to be able to send a clear message: 'Don't bother getting on a boat and heading for Australia because you will not get to settle there any more quickly than if you do the 'decent' thing and wait in a transit country like Indonesia.'

Like all right thinking people on this issue, the expert panel espouses a regional solution for a regional problem. But in the short term, they espouse an offshore solution to Australia's distinctive problem. They know that the people smugglers have been one step ahead of Australian governments of both political persuasions, and now they want to steal a march on the smugglers.

They think it can be done decently, even if it means holding people in places like Nauru and Manus Island for three or four years.

The panel strongly endorses the need for offshore processing in the short term. The panel concedes that the so-called Malaysia solution as negotiated by the Gillard government falls short and should not be resurrected until it can be 'built on further'.

In particular, they note the concerns of many Australians that the Malaysia agreement is not legally binding and is very vague on standards of treatment

especially for unaccompanied minors. The panel believes that 'the operational aspects need to be specified in greater detail' and that 'provisions for unaccompanied minors and for other highly vulnerable asylum seekers need to be more explicitly detailed and agreed with Malaysia'.

The panel insists on the need for 'a written agreement between Malaysia and UNHCR'. This is particularly welcome for those Australians who have been straining to understand the diverse nuances in media interviews by UNHCR personnel insisting that they had not endorsed the deal in the first place.

The panel also sees the need for 'a more effective monitoring mechanism' of human rights protection in Malaysia, including participation by Australian 'senior officials and eminent persons from civil society'. The chances of Malaysia agreeing to this interference with its sovereignty would not be great. So it will be some time before Malaysia will be a goer.

Meanwhile, the panel urges a return to the 2001–7 Pacific Solution, removing asylum seekers from boats to Nauru and Manus Island. The Opposition will feel vindicated by this recommendation. But there is an enormous practical problem and ethical dilemma. The best advice to government is that Nauru and PNG will not provide the deterrent which government wants from any offshore arrangement.

This is where the panel's recommendations get hairy. They want Nauru and Manus Island to be such unattractive options that asylum seekers will decide not to pay the \$10-20,000 to get on a boat in Indonesia headed for Australia. And yet, Australia will maintain responsibility for asylum seekers while they are processed in Nauru or on Manus Island, and Australia will be the only country responsible for providing resettlement places.

Trying to maintain decency while designing a deterrent, the panel has insisted that asylum seekers in Nauru or on Manus Island would 'be provided with protection and welfare arrangements consistent with Australian responsibilities under international Law, including the Refugees Convention'. For Nauru, they specify:

treatment consistent with human rights standards (including no arbitrary detention);

appropriate accommodation;

appropriate physical and mental health services;

access to educational and vocational training programs;

application assistance during the preparation of asylum claims;

an appeal mechanism against negative decisions on asylum applications that would enable merits review by more senior officials and NGO representatives with specific expertise;

monitoring of care and protection arrangements by a representative group drawn from government and civil society in Australia and Nauru;

and providing case management assistance to individual applicants being processed in Nauru.

But then comes the crunch. The panel has suggested the need to amend the Migration Act so that the government could merely specify a country for offshore processing, and that the designation of that location would be 'a disallowable instrument'. So the government would be free to name an offshore processing country without Parliament stipulating any criteria. In future, either House of Parliament could vote against the arrangement, but there would be no need for prior parliamentary approval nor any prospect of review by the courts.

The panel's recommendation would presumably entail repealing s.198A which was inserted by the Howard government in 2001. This provision required the Minister to be satisfied that appropriate protection and welfare measures were in place. As we saw with the High Court decision a year ago, the High Court, referring to s.198A, has been able to determine whether in law and in fact the offshore country did provide the relevant protections.

Given that both Nauru and PNG are signatories to the Refugee Convention, what objection could our Parliament have to leaving the Migration Act unamended and leaving the High Court with a supervisory role determining whether these protections are in fact provided? Amending the Migration Act simply to make the old style Pacific solution less susceptible to judicial review errs on the wrong side of decency, especially when our government is wanting to design a deterrent offshore with long waiting times and which risks being out of sight and out of mind.

The Coalition and the Greens should unite in the Senate to oppose any such amendment of the Migration Act. Deterrence should not be bought at the price of decency and accountability in the protection of the human rights of asylum seekers, even when we are trying to beat people smugglers.

For what little it is worth, I still think Nauru won't work as a deterrent and Malaysia is a long way off being even half way to decent. There is no interim decent deterrent available prior to our designing a truly regional response to the regional issue. For proof, just look to the valiant, failed effort of these three very honourable Australians.

Regulation as solidarity not censorship

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

Last week was Homeless Persons Week. It also seemed to be the week of regulation.

The Prime Minister demanded the states regulate the price of electricity, News Limited continued its campaign against further regulation of newspapers, and fresh evidence of systematic robbing by British banks sparked calls for further financial regulation.

Regulation is always a controversial issue because it brings into play two values that stand in tension with one another: individual freedom and solidarity. Opponents and proponents of regulation usually ignore the claims of the value that presses against their case.

The argument against regulation is that it always infringes on personal freedom – in this case the freedom to say and write what you think, to engage in profitable transactions, and to run a sustainably profitable business. These freedoms are important both for personal flourishing and for a prosperous society.

It is common ground that personal freedom may need to be limited when it infringes on other people's freedom. For example, my freedom to stand in order to get a better view of the football may be curtailed if, by standing, I will prevent the person sitting behind me from getting any view at all.

But regulation can be justified on broader grounds than the need to resolve conflict involved in the exercise of individual freedoms. We depend on others for our capacity to exercise our freedom, and society works in human ways only if we attend to the good of the whole society, including its weakest members. The state is responsible for regulating society in a way that ensures that personal freedom is enhanced in serving the common good.

In a word, personal freedom needs to take account of solidarity.

The hacking and other media scandals in the United Kingdom showed how by exercising freedom of speech in the interests of making profits, newspapers could destroy people's reputation and lives. The claims of solidarity would argue that regulation is needed to protect the weak against the power of large corporations.

Similarly the unrestricted freedom of electricity companies, particularly of state monopolies, to increase the cost of a service so vital for daily living, could cause great harm to the weakest in society who could not afford to pay their bills. Again solidarity makes an argument for regulation.

Arguments for financial deregulation usually place great weight on the right of individuals to exercise their freedom to trade. They emphasise the benefit

conferred upon society by removing restrictions on this freedom.

The argument from solidarity asks whether such forms of trading as in complex derivatives and nanosecond share trading contribute to the common good.

If they limit the power of exchanges to do their proper job of providing capital for business, and so to the welfare both of workers and of the poor, then there would be an argument for curbing them despite (and because of) the enormous profits they brought to individuals and companies which engaged such trading.

The tension between individual freedom and solidarity means we should not ask whether to regulate or not to regulate, but how to regulate so that personal freedom is enhanced in a way that serves the good of all. Regulation does not imply control over activity but provides a framework in which it can take place.

It would be important, for example, for media to develop and live by a strong code of ethics, and to be accountable to a strong body independent of the media and of government that could adjudicate on breaches of that code. This body could also ensure that people publicly wronged could be equally publicly vindicated. The details of appropriate regulation would need to ensure both freedom of speech and accountability in its exercise.

Regulation of the electricity industry, as in any industry in which there is a public service involved, would regulate profits in a way that ensured an adequate sustainable provision of electricity. Whether regulation attached to the cost of electricity or to assistance for those most in need is a matter of detail.

Homeless Persons Week brings home what regulation should be about. In any society homeless persons are the ghosts at the banquet of individual freedoms. They point to the places and the human cost where solidarity has broken down in personal lives and in public policy. They also make the claims for solidarity in personal lives and in government policy.

Islam's depression tension

RELIGION

Irfan Yusuf

The New Testament Jesus befriended the most despised — tax collectors and sex workers. The earliest followers of Muhammad were slaves and those with no tribal connection. The word *sufi* is said to come from the phrase *as-hab as-sufra* (people of the bench) referring to the homeless who lived on a bench in the mosque.



But you don't have to be homeless or engaged in a socially despised vocation to feel marginalised or alienated. There is one form of marginalisation of the mind that can afflict just about anyone.

Some forms of depression are severe enough to drive sufferers into a monastery of hopelessness. For depressed believers, often the first place they look for solace is their congregation, the people they associate with God the most. Many recognise their negative mood as a huge threat to their faith, and try to cling to it even harder.

Sadly, the experiences of so many depressed believers I have spoken to about the subject haven't been encouraging. I can only speak about the congregations of Australian Muslims I am most familiar with.

One close friend told me he told his Melbourne imam about being prescribed anti-depressants. The imam responded: 'You don't need to take these. I will tell you some special prayer formulae which will help you.' He followed the imam's advice. In the next six months, he had attempted suicide twice.

Another said that Muslims in her religious circle kept insisting that depression is just a term of psychobabble, and that her real problem was that she had weak *imaan* (faith) and needed to exercise *sabr* (patience).

Some years back a South Asian boy in my close family circle committed suicide after struggling with depression for years. His father was plagued with guilt, made worse by people expressing views that those who commit suicide die the death of a non-believer and will burn in hell forever.

The implication was that the father should forget about praying for his son's soul.

God only knows if that father ever heard the (arguably) more theologically correct narrative — that only God decides who enters paradise and that the son's suicide should be regarded as the direct result of an illness.

The ignorance of and stigma attached to depression in Muslim ethno-religious circles is largely the result of cultural attitudes that have some (usually warped)

basis in religion. Because Muslim congregations are almost always divided along ethnic and linguistic lines, such attitudes gain greater prominence.

The result is that there are few spiritual spaces for depressed Muslims to find support.

The irony is that religious leaders deal with trauma arising from family conflict and death all the time. They are called to mediate in family disputes and to counsel the grieving. Many emerging ethnic Muslim groups also have the additional trauma faced by all asylum seekers of overcoming the impacts of war.

Imams need to become more equipped to recognise depression. Their employers and congregations would do well to have imams complete mental health first aid courses. They need to get to know and work with mental health workers, psychologists and psychiatrists in their community and in their area.

But it's unfair to just point the finger at imams and ignore the congregations and structures they are forced to work in and over which they generally have little control.

Negative mood in individuals struggling with faith and depression can only be combated when negative attitudes of their fellow believers change. The conventional religious narrative on depression in emerging communities should not be hard to change, especially if much of the self-help literature is anything to go by.

Many self-help books I have come across could almost be accused of repackaging the existing ancient wisdom of traditional religions (including Islam). It would be easy to find at least five sayings of the prophet Muhammad which can be combined to mirror the basic prescriptions of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

The same could be true of any other religious text. This, in itself, should not be reason to dismiss CBT. Instead, it should facilitate conventional treatment methods to work hand in hand with religious teaching.

Emerging congregations ignore depression at their peril. Yes, Muslims know suicide is forbidden under the sacred law. Depression often leads to suicide. This should make religious people more vigilant of recognising depression and encouraging others they suspect are suffering from it to seek help.

Most of all, the stigma attached to depression must be lifted. Depression is an illness like diabetes. Both are generally easily managed. But both can also kill.