

Sharing The Presidents' Messages

On September 11, 2013, exactly twelve years after the calamitous events of 9/11, 2001, which changed world politics forever, President Obama of the USA addressed the nation about the problems caused by the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian conflict. At the end of his speech, he asked the recipients of his message to share it with others, "to make sure they know where I stand, and how they can stay up to date on this situation."

Well, we are only too happy to put ourselves to the President's service and share his message with our readers. Few other publications reach as many people in as many nations as *The Christian Herald*.

These are momentous times in the history of this unhappy world. World commentators try to make sense of world developments from a human perspective; we look at them from a spiritual perspective, making sense not only in what they mean in the short term, but where they take the world in terms of biblical prophecies.

Our record over the two decades, since we've been doing this work, is unequalled by any publication. It took us that long to make an impact on the world, but now the momentum take us forward in ways that a few years ago we could only dream of.

The sad thing is that the world is not going in the direction wanted by our heavenly Father. He wants to save all human beings, but unfortunately not all humans want to be saved.

Mat 18:11 For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.

Mat 18:12 "What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying?

Mat 18:13 And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that *sheep* than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray.

Mat 18:14 Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

With every passing day, the world inches closer to a catastrophe from which few people will survive. The conflict in the Middle East is merely a stage in that direction.

It is in this light that one must view the following statements from President Obama and President Putin of Russia.



THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

Good evening --

I just addressed the nation about the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

Over the past two years, what began as a series of peaceful protests against the repressive regime of Bashar al-Assad has turned into a brutal civil war in Syria. Over 100,000 people have been killed.

In that time, we have worked with friends and allies to provide humanitarian support for the Syrian people, to help the moderate opposition within Syria, and to shape a political settlement. But we have resisted calls for military action because we cannot resolve someone else's civil war through force.

The situation profoundly changed in the early hours of August 21, when more than 1,000 Syrians – including hundreds of children – were killed by chemical weapons launched by the Assad government.

What happened to those people – to those children – is not only a violation of international law – it's also a danger to our security. Here's why:

If we fail to act, the Assad regime will see no reason to stop using chemical weapons. As the ban against these deadly weapons erodes, other tyrants and authoritarian regimes will have no reason to think

twice about acquiring poison gases and using them. Over time, our troops could face the prospect of chemical warfare on the battlefield. It could be easier for terrorist organizations to obtain these weapons and use them to attack civilians. If fighting spills beyond Syria's borders, these weapons could threaten our allies in the region.

So after careful deliberation, I determined that it is in the national security interests of the United States to respond to the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons through a targeted military strike. The purpose of this strike would be to deter Assad from using chemical weapons, to degrade his regime's ability to use them, and make clear to the world that we will not tolerate their use.

Though I possess the authority to order these strikes, in the absence of a direct threat to our security I believe that Congress should consider my decision to act. Our democracy is stronger when the President acts with the support of Congress – and when Americans stand together as one people.

Over the last few days, as this debate unfolds, we've already begun to see signs that the credible threat of U.S. military action may produce a diplomatic breakthrough. The Russian government has indicated a willingness to join with the international community in pushing Assad to give up his chemical weapons and the Assad regime has now admitted that it has these weapons, and even said they'd join the Chemical Weapons Convention, which prohibits their use. It's too early to tell whether this offer will succeed, and any agreement must verify that the Assad regime keeps its commitments. But this initiative has the potential to remove the threat of chemical weapons without the use of force.

That's why I've asked the leaders of Congress to postpone a vote to authorize the use of force while we pursue this diplomatic path. I'm sending Secretary of State John Kerry to meet his Russian counterpart on Thursday, and I will continue my own discussions with President Putin. At the same time, we'll work with two of our closest allies – France and the United Kingdom – to put forward a resolution at the U.N. Security Council requiring Assad to give up his chemical weapons, and to ultimately destroy them under international control. Meanwhile, I've ordered our military to maintain their current posture to keep the pressure on Assad, and to be in a position to respond if diplomacy fails. And tonight, I give thanks again to our military and their families for their incredible strength and sacrifices.

As we continue this debate – in Washington, and across the country – I need your help to make sure that everyone understands the factors at play.

Please share this message with others to make sure they know where I stand, and how they can stay up to date on this situation. Anyone can find the latest information about the situation in Syria, including video of tonight's address, here: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/foreign-policy/syria>

Thank you,
President Barack Obama

President Obama acknowledged the diplomatic role played by Russia's President Putin in his decision to postpone his planned strike against Syria.

A couple of days earlier, world media outlets sung odes to President Putin for his efforts to solve the Syrian crisis diplomatically. He won plaudits for convincing President Assad of Syria to give up his stockpile of chemical weapons.

President Putin, however, seems to have a different agenda, and seeing a weakness in America's position, he showed the world a different face just a couple of days later.

Putin to Offer Iran S-300s, Another Reactor

Emboldened by US weakness? Russian president to make the offer at a meeting with Iranian President Hassan. Russian President Vladimir Putin will offer to supply Iran with S-300 air defense missile systems, and to build a second reactor at the Bushehr nuclear plant, Russia's *Kommersant* business daily reported Wednesday.

Citing a source close to the Kremlin, the publication reported that Putin will renew an offer to supply Iran with five S-300 ground-to-air missile systems when he meets Iranian President Hassan Rowhani on Friday, at a summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization that is to be held in Kyrgyzstan.

Russia signed a contract in 2007 to supply Iran with five S-300 advanced missile batteries, which can be used against aircraft or guided missiles, at a cost of \$800 million.

In 2010, Russia's then-president Dmitry Medvedev cancelled the deal, after the US and Israel applied strong pressure on him. The US and Israel worry that the S-300 would make Iran less vulnerable to attack by either one of them, and motivate Iran to develop a nuclear weapon. The source told *Kommersant* that

Russia's offer was conditional on Iran's withdrawing a \$4 billion lawsuit that it has filed at an international court in Geneva against Russia's arms export agency, for balking on the original S-300 deal.

Kommersant wrote that Putin would offer to Iran a modified export version of the S-300 systems called S-300VM Antey-2500. The source also said that Putin was ready to sign a deal with Iran on building a second reactor for the Bushehr nuclear plant, adding that the deal was not "particularly profitable from an economic point of view, but was rather political."

The reports of the impending deal with Iran, if true, appear to jibe with recent analyses that said that Putin has been emboldened by US President Barack Obama's weak and vacillating policies regarding the Middle East. (Rowhani, IsraelNationalNews.com, Sept. 11, 2013)

Isn't this remarkable? Without wasting too much time, "emboldened by President Obama's weak and vacillating policies regarding the Middle East", President Putin showed the world that his interests do not quite match those of the western powers.

Now which is the real Mr Putin, the one who is trying to solve Syria's chemical weapons impasse, or the one that is oiling Iran's war machine and nuclear ambitions?

Or is it perhaps the one that the Scriptures speak about?

Psa 120:5 Woe is me, that I dwell in Meshech, *That* I dwell among the tents of Kedar!

Psa 120:6 My soul has dwelt too long With one who hates peace.

Psa 120:7 I *am* for peace; But when I speak, they *are* for war.

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Modern Day Miracle That No One Believes In

They say that miracles don't happen anymore. Well, they may not happen the way Jesus Christ performed them in His time, but still they do in different ways.

I grew up in communist Romania, at a time when the communists were laying the foundation for their 'paradise of earth'. They were troubled times, hungry times, and fearful times, because that is how communist luminaries thought they would build their utopia. Anybody who was somebody before the War that brought the 'liberating' communists into the country, would be picked up in the night and vanish for years, or forever. Whenever we would hear the rumbling Russian trucks in the middle of the night – gifted to the budding communists to clean up the country with – my family would stand to attention. Would they stop at our gate and pick us up as they did three of my uncles, or did they have someone else in mind? God had mercy on us and spared us the 'blessing' of the communist reeducation camps.

Although my grandfather was some kind of village leader before the War, he was probably considered too old for reeducation. My grandmother and mother had not been stained by bourgeoisie tendencies, and my father died in the war. So we survived those terror timers, and for a couple of decades we had reasonably quiet time, until the communists decided that they won't wait any longer for people to make up their minds about their utopia and proceeded to force everyone into collective farms.

I had finished a trade qualification and was working as an electrician in a factory, when one morning I was met at the gate by security people and told that I was no longer allowed to work because my parents in the country refused to join the collective farm. "Go home, convince them to join the collective farm, and then you can come back to work".

When I arrived to their home a few hours later, I found the house full of 'honorable guests', banqueting on the best that my family had to offer, things they usually kept for Holy Days and special occasions. 'I told you Mister that you would see your grandson before we leave your house! Here he is. Thank you very much for your hospitality. We leave you now; he will have things to tell you.' And left they did, after stripping bare the best my parents had in the house.

The reason my parents and most of the village refused to join the collective farm was that the first people who joined it were the poor of the community. The communists had confiscated the best land and given it to them, yet the land lay in ruins. People, like my parents, were left with the worst and most unproductive land. And yet, they managed to survive on that land while the best land of the community was not being put to use. It was not for nothing that those people were poor; they were also lazy. That's

why, in time, the communists' 'paradise on earth' became hell on earth and the communist utopia collapsed in ruins a few decades later. I often shake my head in disbelief that there are still many people in the world who extol the virtues of Left wing politics.

Of the three uncles of mine that were picked up by the communists, one was a former mayor of the village, the other owned the local grocery store, and the third was the local priest. Only the priest was well off, and could be said to belong to the bourgeoisie class; the others were average people trying to survive the best they could in extremely difficult times.

The community really felt the absence of the priest. When he was freed some seven years later, he refused to work as a priest anymore. He had been 'reeducated'. The church stood empty most of the time. About once a month, an old monk from a monastery some seven kilometres away would come and keep service when he was not too sick.

My family was proud that there was a priest 'in the family' at one time, but when he was no longer available they began suggesting to me that I should consider becoming a priest. I was about 12 or 13 years young when my mother gave me a Bible and kindly told me to read it and think about it. I tried to read it, but found its archaic language hard to digest, so I gave up after a few pages.

I found it hard to understand how my parents would want me to become a priest when the priests were haunted everywhere and were a vanishing class in all communist lands. I did not share their belief that communism would be a passing fad and that better time would come again. I could not see how that could happen when the mighty Soviet Union was the 'greatest power' the world had ever seen and no one would ever be able to turn back the tide of history. Communist utopia was the way of the future, they would tell us, and that was that.

Well, it was 'that', until I saw with my own eyes what that meant. After the village was forcefully collectivized, the same old Russian trucks would come with armed guards at harvest time, pick up the best crops and leave without explanation and without recompense. Families who did not have someone working in city factories for additional income were actually starving.

It was then that I underwent a massive transformation in my political views: from one who believed in the future of communism to one who hated it with all my being. Although I was only a teenager, I made up my mind to escape that hell and dedicate my life to fighting it. So at the age of 24, after working hard for seven years to educate and get myself a trade that would be useful in the West, I reached Vienna on the Danube River while working as a radiotelegraphic officer on a merchant ship. I immediately went to police and asked for political asylum. They did not think I was a political refugee but an economic one. I did not know the difference and did not care as long as they did not send me back.

About five months later, I immigrated to Canada. I preferred the USA, but for that I would have had to wait almost a year. I thought that once in Canada, it would be just a small step to cross the border and settle in the USA. But when I saw that country at close range, America looked very unappealing.

A couple of years later, while working as electrician in Toronto, Canada, coming home one day, I heard Garner Ted Armstrong, of the Worldwide Church of God, talking about imminent war between Germany and the English speaking countries of the world. That came as a shock to me, for I normally kept myself informed and I was not aware of any crisis in relations between those countries. As it turned out, he was not talking of crisis in world politics, but how he understood biblical prophecies. Incredibly, his disciples still preach that fallacy.

When Armstrong gave an address for 'free' literature on that topic, I quickly stopped the car on the side of the highway and jotted down his address. Some two weeks later, I had a couple of booklets in my hand which in turn recommended additional materials for further reading.

So I wrote to them again, and I included a check for what I thought would be a fair amount for all their free literature. A few days later I had a reply from them, thanking me profusely for helping them in these difficult end days, as they were trying to inform the world of the coming calamity, and not many people were helping them. My check arrived at a time of great need for the Church. It was an outrageous deception, for that was one of the wealthiest fundamentalist Churches around. I took their hook, and a few weeks later I was a 'co-worker' in the 'one and only true Church of God in the world'. What happened afterwards is well known to my readers, so I won't bother you again with that story.

Now comes the modern-day miracle. And that has to do with the miraculous education that I received from my family in Romania. Although we lived through difficult times, my parents always gave me good advice in spite of the fact that we were surrounded by 'law breakers'. Be fair, behave correctly, be respectful, be generous, help those in need, be kind to other people, be kind to animals, and so on. The communist policy was to force people to break the law, mostly by stealing food to survive. That was not meant to send them to prison, but to have them at hand, and manipulate them as they wished. Another

reason was to create a guilty conscience in them and distance them from the Church and cause them to lose faith in God.

I was an only child, but had neighbors with many more children. One evening, some of them decided to raid someone's yard for early ripening cherries. Reluctantly, I went along. After gorging ourselves, the other kids decide to take some home, so they filled their bosoms and their pockets. I hesitated to do the same, knowing that my parents would ask me where I got them from, but thinking that they would enjoy them and forgive me this time, I did the same.

It was the worst thing I could possibly have done; or perhaps the best thing, for my parents made sure I would never do that again. The next morning, they went to the owners of the orchard, and offered them compensation. Of course, I had to do in the other kids who never took me with them again.

When I think back of how my parents brought me up, I am proud of them. I just hope they would be in the Kingdom of God too, for although they were very good to me, I know that they were not perfect, in particular my grandfather, who had an eye for ladies.

I regard my desire to be fair and offer compensation to the Worldwide Church of God for its free literature as having its roots in my upbringing. This brings me to the work I am doing these days. In the Purpose Statement of *The Christian Herald*, I state:

"This work is maintained wholly by voluntary contributions from its members, who believe that by serving, honoring, and worshipping their Creator God, He will draw more workers able to continue and expand this work of love to where it is needed in the world."

Well, they don't make them anymore as they used to. We live in the 'get' generation – get and never give. It is an unbelievable fact that although we have reached millions of people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, for twenty two years, since 1992, we have not received a single cent at this office. If this is not a miracle I would like to know what it is; in the negative sense of course.

Not only that, but our competing Satanists have done everything in their power to derail this work and cause us great losses. Be that as it may, the question is why has God not drawn in more workers able to support, continue and expand, this work of love to where it is needed in the world, as we hoped He would, and as we state in the Purpose Statement of every magazine?

The answer could only be because we live in the end-days when the whole world would have fallen under Satan's spell and way of life. It is at this time that, according to the book of Revelation, the world would not only go after Satan, but take up arms and rise against the returning Christ.

This is where the preachers of today have brought this world to. And people don't believe when we tell them that humanity is already with one foot in the grave.

Rev 19:11 Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him *was* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes *were* like a flame of fire,

Rev 19:12 and on His head *were* many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself.

Rev 19:13 He *was* clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.

Rev 19:14 And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on

Rev 19:15 white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

Rev 19:16 And He has on *His* robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

Rev 19:17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God,

Rev 19:18 that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and **the flesh of all people**, free and slave, both small and great."

Rev 19:19 **And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army.**

Rev 19:20 Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.

Rev 19:21 And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.

It makes you wonder about the true condition of this world. If it doesn't, it ought to.



"This Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations, and then the end will come."

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Newsletter 27 (9/13)

Leaders Of The World, Hear The Voice Of One Crying In The wilderness

For years we have warned the world that this is what it will come to if it does not heed the voice of our Creator, but it does not look like many people have taken note of it. Prophecies about the end-time, foretold millennia ago are unraveling before our eyes, yet our wise men call them natural disasters.

Our *Newsletters* are designed to inform the world of the publication of new editions of *The Christian Herald* in which we explain in detail world developments from a spiritual perspective.

We see the world with different eyes – the eyes of the God we serve – and as such our views are radically different from those of world commentators, and more so from our religious counterparts. At a time when the world is in desperate need of spiritual guidance, the voice of those who are supposed to speak for God had fallen silent, a clear sign that the great falling away from the truth of God, spoken of by the Apostles of Jesus Christ, had taken place. The consequences are catastrophic for the world.

Long ago, our Creator God said that He announces biblical developments via His prophets. Not through Churches or a multitude of prophets, but through single voices, as it happened at the time of John the Baptist before the arrival of Jesus Christ.

Luk 3:2 while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.

Luk 3:3 And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the

Luk 3:4 remission of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: "the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'prepare the way of the lord; make his paths straight.

Luk 3:5 every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth;

Luk 3:6 and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.' "

Jesus Christ acknowledged that John the Baptist was the voice of one crying in the wilderness, but not all those events were fulfilled at that time. Every valley was not filled; the crooked places have not been made straight, and all flesh has not seen the salvation of God. Those prophecies will be fulfilled at the arrival of another Elijah, one who will 'restore all things' in preparation for the return of Jesus Christ.

Mat 17:9 Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead."

Mat 17:10 And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"

Mat 17:11 Jesus answered and said to them, "**Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things.**

Mat 17:12 But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands."

Mat 17:13 Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.

The Christian Herald has restored a Gospel that few people have known since the time of the Apostles; which means that the time is at hand for the return of our Savior, but before that some awful things will take place in this world.

Mat 24:11 Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many [*plenty of them in the world at present*].

Mat 24:12 And because **lawlessness** will abound, the love of many will grow cold.

Mat 24:13 But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

Mat 24:14 **And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.**

Mat 24:15 "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand), . . .

Mat 24:21 **For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.** And unless those days were

Mat 24:22 shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.

For more than two decades, *The Christian Herald* has taken the true Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world, yet this also has been a voice of one crying in the wilderness. People from more than 145 nations now avail themselves of our online publications, yet no one has taken the plunge to turn to God in heartfelt repentance and genuine worship.

They are curious about it; they come to us and download our materials by large volumes, but no one seems to take the Word of God seriously: not the average person, not the 'wise' of this world, no preachers, and no Churches. This is why the world finds itself on the brink of the end-time Great Tribulation

Mal 4:1 "For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," Says the LORD of hosts, "That will leave them neither root nor branch.

Mal 4:2 But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings;

Mal 4:3 And you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves. You shall trample the wicked, For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet On the day that I do *this*," Says the LORD of hosts.

Mal 4:4 **"Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, With the statutes and judgments.** [*In other words, keep the Ten Commandments*].

Mal 4:5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

Mal 4:6 And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with 'utter destruction' [*margin*].

'The great and dreadful day of the Lord' did not come at the time of John the Baptist, but now the time is ripe for it. Jesus Christ said that "because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold". Well, lawlessness abounds now more than ever, and there is hardly any love in families, let alone in the wider world. The generation gap has never been bigger, the

elders are marginalized and their voice hardly ever heeded and appreciated. And since the 'wise' of this world keep telling us that this world has no God, there is even less love between God and His creation. Add to that the recent comments in a publication like *The Sydney Morning Herald* (28 August 2013), and you can see why humanity has little chance of being redeemed from the current worldwide morass.

"Prostitution, Polygamy, Incest and Bestiality. I would argue that all of them should be legal."

They don't mention homosexuality anymore; this is widely accepted and passé as an issue now; what they advocate now are four new abominations.

Unbelievably, only three weeks later, Australia's public television network, the ABC, showed graphic bestiality images in prime time television: first supposedly as 'satire' (Gruen Planet, Sep. 11), then as 'critique' of the satire (Media Watch, Sep.16). The Media Watch reporter made the point that after the first airing of those sickening images the ABC received only one complaint. Not from a church, not from an institution, nor from a Member of Parliament, but from a lone individual. Was it because the public has become so desensitized by the plunge into this unbelievable filth, or because few people are watching this highly criticized network?

Remember how it all began some four decades ago? They wanted 'basic rights' for homosexuals. Then they changed that to 'human rights'; then 'equal rights', 'marriage rights', and finally 'brotherly love'; to which Barack Obama dutifully obliged from the pulpit of the White House in the hearing of the whole world.

He was quickly followed by Britain's Prime Minister, Cameroun, and the French President, Hollande. Now they run the risk of being overtaken by others with even more 'progressive' views. So let's hear it, Messrs Obama, Cameroun and Hollande. Those new abominations need their human rights, equal rights, brotherly love and marriage rights too. After all, Satan got them for homosexuals, so why shouldn't he get them for his new protégées.

Now those who think that God will stand by and let Satan and his cronies plunge this world into such unspeakable depths of depravity without consequences have something coming their way. As on cue, at the time and place that God's prophecies have foretold long ago, the end-time Great Tribulation is now stalking the world and few people are aware of it. Those who ought to cry aloud the sins of their people, and warn them of their consequences, have not only fallen silent, but mounted a massive campaign against us in order to prevent the Gospel of the Kingdom being preached to all nations as Jesus Christ said that it must happen at this particular time in world history.

They have not succeeded, and that Gospel is now being read in all corners of the earth – another sure sign that the end of this age, the Great Tribulation, and the return of our Lord Jesus Christ are now in the cards. So turn to God now friends, turn to God while He may be found, for the time is shorter than you think.

You can find further details of our work and of world prophetic developments in our web site: www.thechristianherald.info

In the service of Jesus Christ,

Grigore Sbarcea
Coordinator A.O.C.F.

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A Panorama Of Modern 'Truths'

Life has been good to me; it has acquainted me with many notions of truth.

I was brought up in Romania's communist truth, but that did not last with me for very long. When I saw the blessings that the communist 'paradise' brought to people, I turned against it and escaped to the democratic West.

There, I discovered a variety of truths: Catholic truth, Anglican truth, Salvation Army truth, Jehovah Witnesses truth, Scientology truth, Jewish truth, Islamic truth, Fundamentalist truth, etc. We will have a look at some of these truths, beginning with the very first one that I knew.

The Communist/Orthodox Truth

I put the communist and Orthodox truths together because they are virtually indistinguishable. It was in the Orthodox Church's lands that the communist truth took roots. Not surprisingly, throughout the existence of the Soviet Union, the Orthodox hierarchy supported it, and defended it whenever it came under attack in international forums.

My High School colleagues used to say that "A communist historian is one who predicts the past". You could not discuss that with just about anyone, and only with the closest of friends. If the nomenclature knew what was in our minds, it would have been the end of our careers. We would have become "enemies of the people" and the only job we could ever aspire for would have been of the unskilled type.

Had the communists been as good at predicting the future as they did the past, they would have known better than to build their castle on sand. A lesson from Jesus Christ could have served them well had they aspired towards God's paradise instead of the Devil paradise.

Mat 7:21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

Mat 7:22 Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'

Mat 7:23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice

Mat 7:24 lawlessness!' "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock:

Mat 7:25 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

Mat 7:26 "But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came,

Mat 7:27 and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."

Mat 7:28 And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His

Mat 7:29 teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Jesus Christ built His authority on good teachings and good deeds, not on the power of arms as do those who have no God. But how could Romania's preachers build their authority on good deeds when, according to recent media revelations, all of them were informers of the dreaded Securitate. They trampled underfoot the most inviolable of religious acts - the confession.

In the Orthodox faith, the Church is the heart of the community. Nothing happens without the knowledge and approval of the priest, especially celebrations and social events that bring people together.

I always wondered how it was possible that a regime that controlled people's lives from cradle to the grave would leave priests alone to practice their religion as they wished. Well, they didn't, but that would not be known until decades later when the communist paradise imploded upon itself.

For a while, after the revolution that toppled the communist regime, Romanian media seemed to serve the cause of democracy and truth, but as of late a spirit of conformity seems to have gripped them.

We have been the target of Romania's secret services throughout the life of this work which began immediately after the Revolution that was supposed to bring democracy and freedom of speech. Not surprisingly Romanian media has made us their target too.

A few years ago, we reported how we got a nasty virus from a Romanian newspaper that we used to read on line. We never logged on to that newspaper's web site again. Unfortunately, as of late, whenever

we log on to other Romanian newspapers, our antivirus/firewall protection immediately shuts down our internet connection. They tell us that they do so in order to protect our computer. It appears that late last year they were too slow in doing so, and our computer was hacked, causing us considerable damage and loss of some files. This edition was delayed because of that.

In any democracy, the media would clamor to investigate the assault, rape and murder of a woman in her 70's by government agents, but not in Romania's "original democracy".

We warned western leaders that if they remain silent in the face of such unspeakable crime and shake hands that are stained with blood, their hands will get stained too, and their people will pay the price of tolerating evil. They did not believe it. Even now that the spectre of nuclear annihilation hangs over their heads, they still do not believe it.

They will believe it when they see their capitals reduced to nuclear ash. Before this decade is over! Then they will know that a voice has cried out in their midst and they did not listen.

And yet for all that, God has produced an extraordinary turn of events in recent years. The atheist "Evil Empire" of yesteryear has become the upholder of God's Law while the Christian West has become the defender of Satan's practice of homosexuality. The consequences are catastrophic for the world.

Mal 4:1 "For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," Says the LORD of hosts, "That will leave them neither root nor branch.

Mal 4:2 But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings; And you shall go out And grow fat like stall-fed calves.

Mal 4:3 You shall trample the wicked, For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet On the day that I do *this*," Says the LORD of hosts.

Mal 4:4 "Remember the Law of Moses [*the Ten Commandments*], My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, *With the statutes and judgments*.

Mal 4:5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with 'utter destruction'.

Not only have the hearts of the fathers not turned to the children and the hearts of the children not turned to their fathers, but the world has descended into an unimaginable level of violence, terror, and immorality.

Only a heartfelt repentance before God and a return to righteousness and truth could save the world from terminal catastrophe. But will human beings do it? How could they when those who ought to be our fellow workers have turned against us and become our implacable enemies?

Psa 36:1 A Psalm of David the Servant of the LORD. An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked: *There is no fear of God before his eyes.*

Psa 36:2 For he flatters himself in his own eyes, When he finds out his iniquity *and* when he hates.

Psa 36:3 The words of his mouth *are* wickedness and deceit; He has ceased to be wise *and* to do good.

Psa 36:4 He devises wickedness on his bed; He sets himself in a way *that is* not good; He does not abhor evil.

Psa 36:5 Your mercy, O LORD, *is* in the heavens; Your faithfulness *reaches* to the clouds.

Psa 36:6 Your righteousness *is* like the great mountains; Your judgments *are* a great deep; O LORD, You preserve man and beast.

Psa 36:9 For with You *is* the fountain of life; In Your light we see light. Oh, continue Your

Psa 36:10 lovingkindness to those who know You, And Your righteousness to the upright in heart.

Psa 36:11 Let not the foot of pride come against me, And let not the hand of the wicked drive me away. There the workers of iniquity have fallen;

Psa 36:12 They have been cast down and are not able to rise.

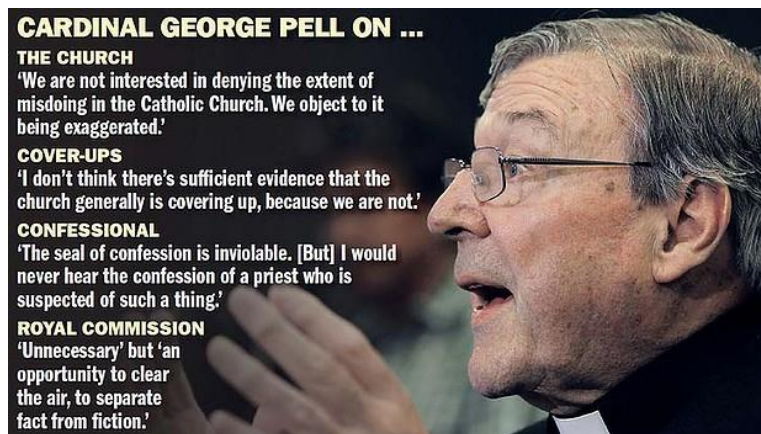
Isa 66:4 So will I choose their delusions, And bring their fears on them; Because, when I called, no one answered, When I spoke they did not hear; But they did evil before My eyes, And chose *that* in which I do not delight."

We move now to other versions of truth.

The Catholic Truth

Pell blames media 'smear'

A DEFIANT Cardinal George Pell has blamed a smear campaign against the Catholic Church for public pressure that led to a royal commission into child sex abuse. The Archbishop of Sydney said a commission into the Catholic Church was not needed, but he welcomed the broader inquiry announced by Prime Minister Julia Gillard on Monday night as "an opportunity to clear the air, to separate fact from fiction". He attacked a "persistent press campaign" and "general smears that we are covering up and moving people around", and suggested that abuse by Catholic priests had been singled out and exaggerated.



He also suggested that cynicism about the church's handling of abuse was confined to the press, and the public understood that the church was serious about tackling the problem. "We are not interested in denying the extent of misdoing in the Catholic Church. We object to it being exaggerated. We object to being described as the only cab on the rank," Cardinal Pell told a press conference in Sydney. "We've been unable to convince public opinion for basically the last 20 years that, whatever our imperfections in individual cases, we've been serious about this ... Because there is a persistent press campaign focused largely on us, that does not mean we are largely the principal culprits."

At the weekend, Cardinal Pell - defying statistics presented to the Victorian state inquiry into how the churches handled child abuse that Catholic clergy committed six times as much abuse as the rest of the churches combined - insisted the church was no worse than any other. He said it had been unfairly vilified because of anti-Catholic prejudice. On Tuesday he again defended church practices and said the royal commission - whose terms of reference and head have yet to be announced - would judge whether the claims were true or a "significant exaggeration". "We acknowledge, with shame, the extent of the problem, and I want to assure you that we have been serious in attempting to eradicate it," he said. Cardinal Pell, who launched the Melbourne Response abuse protocol used only in that archdiocese when he was archbishop in 1996, described how then premier Jeff Kennett had called him to his office and said "clean it up!" Retired bishop Geoffrey Robinson, the principal architect of the Towards Healing protocol used in every other diocese, had some sympathy for Cardinal Pell's position, saying he would rather have a royal commission conducted by a judge than the media, as was happening now.

But Bishop Robinson, 75 - who was abused as a child and headed the Australian church's efforts to tackle clerical sexual abuse for a decade, until he retired in 2004 because he was so disillusioned - had a different tack on the solution.

He said the abuse crisis was doing massive damage to the church but the changes needed were in Rome. "Until things improve by 10,000 per cent over there, everything done here will be second best. But I'd prefer all the dirt to come out now rather than dribble out over the next 20 years," he said.

Cardinal Pell suggested media coverage of abuse, which rehashed the same stories, might open old wounds among abuse victims. "I wonder to what extent the victims are helped by this ongoing furor in the press," he said. Asked whether priests who were told about abuse in the confessional should report it, he said: "The seal of confession is inviolable." But if the priest suspected that he would be told of such events, he should refuse to hear the confession. "That would be my advice, and I would never hear the confession of a priest who is suspected of such a thing."

Mr Kennett said he remembered meeting Cardinal Pell as the new archbishop of Melbourne. "I said, 'You are new to the job, your challenge is to clean up these allegations as quickly and best you can for the sake of the victims and in defence of the very good work the church does.'" Asked if he had told the archbishop that "if you don't fix it I will", he said he could not remember but it sounded like his language. "I charged him, though I had no authority to do so, to clean it up." Mr Kennett said the abuse crisis "broke the spirit" of Cardinal Pell's predecessor in Melbourne, Archbishop Frank Little. "I don't think he could bring himself to believe that in his flock people had committed these deeds." Mr Kennett said the royal commission would take years and might cost hundreds of millions of dollars, "but so be it. It has to be done." He suggested witnesses might need financial help. (Barney Zwartz, *SMH*, November 14, 2013)

Cardinal George Pell has confessed to creation of false documents and 'reprehensible' cover-ups of child sex abuse

The most prominent Catholic in Australia was grilled by a Victorian parliamentary committee for 4 1/2 hours about systemic failings by the church to deal with abuse.

Cardinal Pell said the fear of scandals drove much of the reaction to rampant abuse in the 1970s and '80s, but that a concern about money was also involved. "I am fully apologetic and absolutely sorry," he said. "I would agree that we've been slow to address the anguish of the victims and dealt with it very imperfectly," the cardinal said. In a victory for victims, Cardinal Pell said he would ask the Vatican to send all documents it holds on Victorian sex abuse accusations to the inquiry - a promise he had also made to the federal royal commission into abuse.

Cardinal Pell defended the church's compensation scheme, saying it abided by the "law of the land". But he opened the door to greater compensation for some victims saying a \$27,000 payment to a man raped 10 times was "miserable". Abuse victims at the hearing said they were unconvinced by the cardinal's apology. Some walked out soon after he began speaking.

Anthony Foster, whose daughters, Emma and Katie, were abused by Melbourne priest Kevin O'Donnell in Oakleigh in the 1980s, said he wasn't satisfied. "It's another apology. It's the same words again. It's just not backed up with the actions that we need. "What we need is real care for victims," he said. Mr Foster also hit out at Cardinal Pell's repeatedly saying he was not responsible for changing the church structure and was not the "Catholic prime minister of Australia". National MP David O'Brien said letters showed that one abusing priest should "submit a resignation as parish priest on health grounds", and asked if that was further evidence of church cover-ups. "Yes, it is," Cardinal Pell said.

Asked if it was totally un-Christlike, the cardinal replied: "I would have to agree with you."

"He (former Archbishop Little) got the bloke out but the way he did it was reprehensible," he said.

Cardinal Pell insisted that the Melbourne Response he initiated in the 1990s had helped address problems. After 242 cases of abuse were uncovered in the 1970s, Cardinal Pell said there were 82 in the 1980s and then up to 24 in the 1990s. By the 2000s he said there were only a handful.

"The Catholic environment at the moment is very safe, that is what the evidence suggests to me."

There is a cap of \$75,000 on payments at the moment, compared to payouts of about \$1 million on average in the US, the inquiry heard. MPs probed Cardinal Pell's decision to appear at court with infamous paedophile Gerald Ridsdale - with whom he had lived briefly. "At that stage nobody knew - well, I certainly didn't - what proved to be the full extent of his infamous career," Cardinal Pell told the inquiry. "I did know that there was a very significant number of charges but I had no idea about all the other things that would unfold," Cardinal Pell said. (Matt Johnston, *Herald Sun*, May 27, 2013)

Church lobby in win over charities watchdog



Illustration: Matt Golding.

If Tony Abbott is elected prime minister on Saturday he will abolish the watchdog established by Labor to keep an eye on the billions of dollars received and spent by Australian charities each year. Why?

The answer, in part at least, may be the lobbying power of church conservatives, the Catholic Church in particular, and the office of Sydney Cardinal George Pell, more particularly still. And their focus has not been the Coalition alone. Labor insiders acknowledge the impact of Cardinal Pell's office as it reduced the scope of its new national regulator, the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission. Charity leaders, church heads and political insiders have told *The Sunday Age* about the lobbying campaign over charities regulation by the Sydney archdiocese, notably Cardinal Pell's business manager and chief political envoy, Danny Casey. The pressure applied by the Sydney church through the charities debate has raised the question of the access and sway it may enjoy under Australia's first Catholic Liberal prime minister and his Catholic-strong frontbench that includes Kevin Andrews, Barnaby Joyce, Joe Hockey, Malcolm Turnbull (a convert), Andrew Robb and Christopher Pyne. . . .

In 2010, the Productivity Commission slammed the regulation regime shared by the Australian Taxation Office, the Australian Securities and Investments Commission and the states as too complex, too costly, and too short on transparency. Labor's response was the new charities commission, which opened for business in January. It is meant to be a one-stop shop that keeps a register of charities - there are 60,000 large ones and 600,000 not-for-profit groups in all - helps them meet their obligations, and investigates them when they don't.

Given the Liberals' ideological commitment to the idea of small government, suspicion about a national regulator is arguably consistent with the Liberal philosophy. Mr Andrews says Labor's commission is an unnecessary level of bureaucracy established to hunt down "mischief" it has never identified. "We don't believe that any real mischief was made out to justify a whole new bureaucracy. It is total overkill for what is required for the charities sector," he says.

Notable among the changes was a watering-down of clauses requiring small religious bodies - local parishes - to account for their income. Another was to remove the onus on organisations to prove they work in the public interest. *The Sunday Age* is aware of frustration among some Labor insiders that some of the amendments allowed the churches greater cover when, arguably, they should be facing more, not less, scrutiny. Senator Stephens says that, as Labor shaped its charities bill, the Catholic Church in particular pressed hard for modification in countless meetings with Assistant Treasurer David Bradbury. Did the church have a major hand in softening Labor's charities regime? "Yes they had a victory there," says Senator Stephens. (Royce Millar, *SMH*, September 1, 2013)

Decades of Catholic cover-up

EVIDENCE of more than 50 years of Catholic Church cover-ups, including a paedophile priest sent overseas to escape scrutiny, is to be aired finally at a special commission of inquiry in Newcastle.

The inquiry's second chapter got under way yesterday. The senior counsel assisting the commission, Julia Lonergan SC, said documents from the Maitland-Newcastle Catholic Diocese showed that as far back as 1953, paedophile priest Denis McAlinden sexually abused a young girl. Her parents reported the abuse to the church to no avail. A later victim - a boy who was abused for years from the age of five at the hands of McAlinden - told his own parish priest what was happening during one of his first confessions, but it never went further. "This boy was given penance, apparently for his sin in being abused by that priest," Ms Lonergan said. The inquiry heard a handwritten letter in 1976 from then diocesan vicar-general, Monsignor Patrick Cotter, to Bishop Leo Clarke talked about McAlinden's paedophile tendencies,

but they were dismissed as "not extremely serious". "He feels no such inclination towards the mature female but towards the little ones only," Monsignor Cotter wrote. (*Neil Keene, The Telegraph, July 02, 2013*)

UN condemns Vatican over child sex abuse

The Vatican must remove all child sexual abusers from their posts and turn them over to the police, the United Nations children's rights watchdog said on Wednesday. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child urged the Holy See to "immediately remove all known and suspected child sexual abusers from assignment and refer the matter to the relevant law enforcement authorities for investigation and prosecution purposes". In a hard-hitting report, the committee said that the Roman Catholic Church was still failing to do enough to live up to its stated commitment to stamp out child abuse by priests and lay employees, including in schools.

It underlined its "deepest concern about child sexual abuse committed by members of the Catholic churches who operate under the authority of the Holy See, with clerics having been involved in the sexual abuse of tens of thousands of children worldwide". "The Committee is gravely concerned that the Holy See has not acknowledged the extent of the crimes committed, has not taken the necessary measures to address cases of child sexual abuse and to protect children, and has adopted policies and practices which have led to the continuation of the abuse by and the impunity of the perpetrators," it added. It blasted the practice of transferring child abusers from parish to parish within countries, and even across borders, in an attempt to cover up their crimes and remove them from the clutches of justice authorities. "The practice of offenders' mobility, which has allowed many priests to remain in contact with children and to continue to abuse them, still places children in many countries at high risk of sexual abuse, as dozens of child sexual offenders are reported to be still in contact with children," it said.

The report followed a landmark hearing last month during which members of the committee - made up of 18 independent human rights experts from around the globe - grilled senior Churchmen and repeatedly called into question the Vatican's resolve.

Child sexual abuse scandals that have rocked the Roman Catholic Church:

Australia: Scandals include sexual abuse in the 1970s and 1980s in a Catholic school in Bathurst, west of Sydney. A national probe launched in April 2013 is expected to hear from some 5,000 presumed victims in religious, associative and public institutions.

Canada: The Mount Cashel Orphanage in St. John's, Newfoundland was closed in 1990 after it emerged that staff had systematically abused 300 residents over several decades. In 2002, associations representing more than 10,000 self-declared victims joined forces to seek compensation.

United States: In 2004 a criminal investigation found that 4,400 priests had sexually abused minors between 1950 and 2002, and that the abuse had affected about 11,000 children. The former archbishop of Boston, Bernard Law, was forced to resign in 2002 for having protected paedophile priests, and former archbishop of Los Angeles Roger Mahony agreed to pay \$US660 million to 500 presumed victims.

Ireland: In one of the most staunchly Catholic countries in Europe, a priest admitted to sexually abusing more than 100 children, while another said he had abused minors regularly over 25 years. A total of 14,500 Irish children are reported to have been victims of abuse by clergy.

Germany: In early 2010, hundreds of alleged cases of child sex abuse in church institutions emerged, notably at the Jesuit college Canisius in Berlin where about 20 cases were reported. In late 2012, a report said at least 66 church officials had been accused of sex abuse.

Belgium: Former bishop of Bruges Roger Vangheluwe resigned in 2010 after acknowledging that he had abused two nephews. Thousands of other potential cases have emerged since then. The Commission on Church-related Sexual Abuse Complaints, set up by the Catholic Church, has probed hundreds of cases of sexual abuse.

The Netherlands: In late 2011, a report said "several tens of thousands of minors" had been abused within church institutions between 1945 and 2010, and around 800 suspects have been identified.

Austria: A series of scandals, including years of abuse by a priest in a Salzburg monastery, has revealed some 800 cases in all. (*Sydney Morning Herald, February 6, 2014*)

Christian Brothers spent \$1 million to defend paedophile

The Christian Brothers Catholic order spent more than \$1 million defending serial paedophile Robert Best, the order has told the Victorian inquiry into how the churches handled child sexual abuse.

The order also paid \$10,000 to a private investigator to spy on a victim of another abuser, Ted Dowlan. It paid for legal advice to protect Dowlan's assets from being paid to victims in civil lawsuits, and gave him \$125,000 when he left the order.

But the brothers appearing on behalf of the order denied there were cultural problems within it.

It apologised for the "repulsive" and "inexcusable" betrayal by the abusers, and said most of the offenders had themselves been abused earlier. "I cannot defend and will not try to defend the indefensible," said Brother Julian McDonald, deputy leader of the order in Australia and the region.

The Christian Brothers ran St Alipius Parish School in Ballarat where four paedophile members taught in the early 1970s and where another paedophile, Gerald Ridsdale, was parish priest.

Brian Brandon, the executive officer for professional standards, agreed that the order had paid \$1.2 million defending Best in three cases – in 1996, 1998 and 2010.

The last case cost \$980,000, but Brother Brandon suggested this had saved the taxpayers, including victims, the cost and could be seen as generosity. Committee member Nick Wakeling: "You spend nearly \$1 million defending Best after the previous cases and him pleading guilty to abusing three children."

Brother Brandon: "Including GST." Asked how the Ballarat situation was possible, Brother McDonald said he had no explanation, describing it as "an accident of history".

He said leaders at the time saw child sex abuse as a moral failure rather than a criminal matter.

Committee member Andrea Coote said that until 1949 "buggering children" attracted the death penalty – how could Christian Brothers leaders not realise it was a serious crime?

Brother McDonald replied that he had no explanation.

He said sexual abuse had always been a crime – "a terrible, terrible crime that's ruined lives and we know that and we knew that and every leader of the Christian Brothers should have known that".

Challenged by committee member David O'Brien about the severance payment and other support for Dowlan, Brother McDonald said it was caring for people who would otherwise "end on the scrap heap".

Mr O'Brien said the order's defence of Dowlan, including misleading police, showed that, far from being repentant, it was protective of Dowlan, Best and others. Brother McDonald said the order, which had worked in Victoria since 1868, had received 266 complaints, of which 20 were not pursued. It paid \$10.5 million in compensation. Six brothers had been jailed, of whom four remained members. Police had investigated six more, but they were not convicted. "Any institution is as sick as its secrets, and there was a culture that kept things secret," Brother McDonald said. Though he denied there had been a culture of covering up, he admitted "in hindsight, certainly that's what it looks like". He said there was no evidence that the order had been infiltrated by paedophiles, though there had been "mistakes" in moving two known paedophiles from parish to parish. (Barney Zwartz, *The Age*, May 3, 2013)

Catholic clergy the worst abusers, inquiry told

CATHOLIC clergy commit six times as much abuse as those in the rest of the churches combined, "and that's a conservative figure", a child protection expert says.

Patrick Parkinson, a Sydney University law professor, told the state inquiry into how the churches handle sex abuse yesterday that the figures for the Catholic Church were strikingly out of proportion.

He proposed a 12-month amnesty from charges of perverting the course of justice if the church opened all its files on offenders alive and dead, but said those involved in cover-ups would have to resign.

Earlier, Victoria Police Deputy Commissioner Graham Ashton set the inquiry's opening day alight with more broadsides against the Catholic Church's systemic obstruction of police inquiries over five decades. He said police had statistics for sexual offences by clergy and church workers since January 1956, uncovering "shocking" figures: 2110 offences against 519 victims, overwhelmingly perpetrated by Catholic priests and mostly against boys aged 11 or 12. But in all that time the church had not reported a single crime to police. Savaging the church's Melbourne Response protocol for dealing with complaints, Mr Ashton said: "If a stranger were to enter a church and rape a child it would be immediately reported to police. But if the stranger were a member of the clergy, their special process would be wrapped around him. What is different about the clergy? It is the reputation of the church that creates the difference."

He said the Melbourne Response was "based on a flawed notion of independence", with independent commissioner Peter O'Callaghan, QC, appointed and paid for by the church.

Mr O'Callaghan replied: "Much of Mr Ashton's evidence and the police submission, both made under the cover of parliamentary privilege, are grossly misconceived, damaging and plainly wrong." He said he would "correct and refute" police evidence if he was called before the committee.

Melbourne Catholic Archbishop Denis Hart also came to Mr O'Callaghan's defence, with a public statement saying for the past 16 years the church had been "honest and open" in co-operating with police.

"Any suggestion of a lack of independence of the independent commissioners is a very serious attack on the professional integrity and competence of senior members of the Victorian bar," he said. "I reject any such suggestion." Professor Parkinson, who chaired a review of child protection laws in New South Wales and twice reviewed the church's national Towards Healing abuse protocol, said he broke with the Catholic Church over its cover-up of his independent report on the Salesians of Don Bosco.

Speaking under parliamentary privilege, he said the order sent three priests overseas to avoid police questioning, then suppressed his report on their actions.

He told the committee an American child safety expert had called the order "the most defiant and unrepentant group" in the church. Professor Parkinson said: "The lies were breathtaking, and [former Australian head] Father [Frank] Moloney was absolutely at the centre of all the untruths."

Monash University child protection expert Chris Goddard lashed the "partial and tokenistic" mandatory reporting laws in Australia that carried no meaningful consequences for those who ignored them. Professor Goddard, director of Child Abuse Prevention Research Australia, said only two people had been prosecuted since the law was introduced in 1993 for failing to report suspected abuse, and "many times loss of life has followed" that failure. He also criticised training for child protection workers, saying that "if we had the same disorganised approach for drink-driving there would be a public outcry. There should be independent visits to church homes, independent assessments of organisations, and compulsory training." Dr Daryl Higgins, deputy director of research at the Australian Institute of Family Studies, said victims were often not believed until they had reported the abuse five times. (Barney Zwartz and Jane Lee, *SMH*, October 19, 2012)

Damning statistics revealed at abuse inquiry: One in 20 priests an abuser

AT LEAST one in 20 Catholic priests in Melbourne is a child sex abuser, although the real figure is probably one in 15, the state inquiry into the churches' handling of sex abuse was told yesterday.

RMIT professor Des Cahill said his figures, based on analysing conviction rates of priests ordained from Melbourne's Corpus Christi College, closely matched a much larger American analysis of 105,000 priests which found that 4362 were child sex offenders.

The intercultural studies professor also told the inquiry that the Catholic Church was incapable of reforming itself because of its internal culture. He said the Church's Melbourne Response abuse protocol had to go, and the state would have to intervene to achieve it.

Professor Cahill said that 14 of 378 Corpus Christi priests graduating between 1940 and 1966 were convicted of child sexual abuse, and church authorities had admitted that another four who had died were also abusers, a rate of 4.76 per cent. But the actual figure was much higher when under-reporting was taken into account, along with cases dealt with in secret by the Catholic Church. "One in 20 is a minimum. It might be one in 15, perhaps not as high as one in 10," he said.

He suggested that, though the Church tried to "fudge the figures" by including other church workers, Catholic priests offended at a much higher rate than other men. If the general male population now over 65 offended at the same rate, there would be 65,614 men living in Australia who had been convicted of child sex abuse — very far from the case. Professor Cahill said the Church's "culture of caste clericalism" and its pyramid structure rendered it incapable of the systemic reform needed. The organisational culture was "verging on the pathological". "Bishops are caught between canon law and civil law, and Rome has put a lot of pressure on bishops to make sure canon law and the rights of priests are being observed, but canon law has nothing to say about the rights of child victims," he said.

The Melbourne Response — the internal protocol used by the Melbourne archdiocese — was designed to protect the image and reputation of the church and to contain financial liability, and had to be changed. **"The church is incapable of reform, so the state will have to do it,"** he said.

He suggested a new structure involving the Office of the Child Safety Commissioner and a new "eminent Catholics task force", appointed by the Government, to work with Church leadership. Possible candidates included former Supreme Court judge Frank Vincent, La Trobe professor Joseph Camilleri, former Geelong mayor Frank Costa, former deputy Prime Minister Tim Fischer, Mrs Diana Grollo, state chief health officer Rosemary Lester, retired Ballarat bishop Peter Connors, retired Melbourne priest Eric Hodgins and Australian Catholic University professor Gabrielle McMullin.

Professor Cahill said child sex abuse had existed in all ages, cultures and religions, shrouded in secrecy and poorly responded to by religious authorities. **He said a church council in 309 AD was concerned about child sex abuse in monasteries.** [*Roman Catholic monasteries, as there were no*

other Christian denominations then. A tradition well explained by Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Romans. Catholic homosexuality has been in the world from the very beginning].

One in 11 Victorians identified with a religion other than Christianity, up 68 per cent in 10 years, and Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Jews all had issues to do with sex abuse, especially in other countries.

In Sri Lanka, child sex abuse was rampant in Buddhist monasteries, and more than 100 monks had been charged in the past decade. Child sex abuse had been called "India's time bomb", especially the plight of street children, while many Muslim communities were in denial, he said. Melbourne Jewish groups were making their own submission to the inquiry. (Barney Zwartz, *SMH*, October 23, 2013)

Ex friar says half of priests are gay

HOMOSEXUALITY is a "ticking time bomb for the church", according to a gay British journalist and former friar, Mark Dowd. In a television interview, Mr Dowd said the official church teaching, repeated by **Pope emeritus Benedict XVI, was that same-sex attraction was intrinsically disordered**, yet "half, if not more, priests are gay". Mr Dowd said the former pope's brother, German priest Georg Ratzinger, told him the clergy sexual abuse crisis had taken a great emotional toll on Benedict while he was pope. "He was lying awake at night, sweating," Mr Dowd said he told him.

Homosexuality in the church has attracted international attention twice this month, first with claims of a gay sex ring inside the Vatican that is allegedly vulnerable to blackmail, then with Scottish Cardinal Keith O'Brien withdrawing from this month's conclave after allegations of inappropriate behaviour against three priests and a former priest. But many other cardinals under fire from victims for their handling of abuse claims have refused to withdraw.

Italian newspapers reported that three cardinals had given Benedict a 300-page report about the gay sex ring, and speculated that this was the final straw in his decision to resign, to the fury of Vatican spokesmen. Mr Dowd said Benedict, whose handling of clergy sex abuse has been criticised by victims as too little too late, tried to speed up the process and make it more transparent when he headed the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith under Pope John Paul II.

"He said all cases should come to his desk, but the Vatican machinery cannot process it fast enough."

Benedict spent his last day as Pope on Thursday farewelling the cardinals at Castel Gandolfo near Rome. (Barney Zwartz *SMH*, March 2, 2013)

Pope Francis and gays: A misinterpretation or a hint of the future?

Pope Francis reached out to gays, saying he won't judge priests for their sexual orientation in a news conference Monday.

One must always be careful to interpret Vatican rhetoric in context. When Pope Francis answered a question on 'the gay lobby' at the Vatican with "Who am I to judge?" the media focused on gays and judgement and missed some important points about Francis's theology.

The first point was that this rhetorical question was not an answer to a question about gays but about rumors of a 'gay lobby.' Note both words, 'gay' and 'lobby.' The first part of his answer diffused the emphasis on 'gay' by saying he'd not met any card-carrying gays at the Vatican. Instead he focused on 'lobby.' Given Francis's emphasis on the church not being a corporation or an NGO, the word 'lobby' is even more sinister in Vaticanese than in American political lingo. For Francis the word—whether connected with 'gay' or not—would imply that the lobbyists were not centered on the Gospel but on a particular ideology, i.e., they interpreted the Gospel in terms of some ideology and did not think of the church in terms of the Gospel. They were in effect creating a politics or ideology in place of the Gospel. He is not going to tolerate this whether the lobby is gay or straight.

The second point the media missed is the theological context for Francis's remark. His pastoral approach focuses on the person not the orientation. He redirected attention to highlight a person's quest for a genuine relationship with God. He is very concerned about developing a healthy theology of the human person in which to situate that relationship with God. He even admits that the Catholic Church doesn't have an adequate theology of 'woman.' In that context who is he to pass judgment on the genuine relationship of any person, gay or straight?

Third, Francis does not see his own ministry as pope as that of a top-down executive. He has not used the most famous Petrine/papal text, one that calls Peter the rock on which the church is built. Rather he uses a text from the gospel of Luke where Jesus charges Peter to be supportive of his fellow Christians. Francis takes that ministry seriously. He refers to himself not as pope but as bishop of Rome, bishop among his brother bishops.

So Francis's statement on gays, "Who am I to judge?" reveals more about his theology of church, ministry, and human nature in relation to God than of any thoughts on sexuality of any kind.

However, Vatican rhetoric needs to be interpreted not only in the context of words but also of action. Francis is something of a maverick among bishops on the question of gays. When he was Archbishop of Buenos Aires, **he is known to have supported a civil union** for the sake of pastoral ministry and civil rights—though he was voted down by his fellow bishops. **He is bringing his support for gays to his ministry in the Vatican. More important than his comment at the airline press conference is his action. The day after he spoke those memorable words the Vatican announced the resignation of Bishop Simon Bakot of Yaoundé**, former president of the National Bishops' Conference of Cameroon. Bishop Bakot did not resign for reason of age as Catholic bishops are required to do when they reach 75; he is only 66. Nor is he known to have been in ill health or under scrutiny for financial reasons or his own sexual misconduct. **The sole reason he is famous is for his staunch opposition to gays. He lumps them with pedophiles and practitioners of bestiality and calls them an affront to God's creation.** He threatens to 'out' clergy he opposed by revealing their sexual orientation. He has even been a vocal public supporter of Cameroon's national day of hatred of gays. **The fact that his resignation was accepted the day after Francis's now famous utterance casts new light on the Vatican's stance toward gays.**

So what are we to make of Francis's declaration "Who am I to judge?" The first thing is to see it in a theological context that puts the person and the person's relationship with God to the forefront—not sexual orientation of any sort. But in addition, one should not miss the historical context of Francis's own program as bishop in Argentina, one just recently reinforced in his office as bishop of Rome. **He may not judge a gay's quest for God—though he would support it—but he surely has passed judgement on a fellow bishop utters terribly negative judgments on gays, judgements that will no longer be tolerated as long as Francis is pope.** Given Francis's theology of the papacy as ministry to his brother bishops, Francis just may be suggesting that they too should see the office of bishop as one whose prime duty is that of shepherd, bringing people, all people, into a closer relationship with God. (Maureen A. Tilley, *The Washington Post*, August 7, 2013)

Pope confirms 'gay lobby' at heart of the Vatican

ROME: A scandal that dogged the Vatican in the weeks leading up to Pope Francis's election has reemerged after the Pontiff was quoted in a memo from a church group discussing the existence of a "gay lobby" within Vatican ranks.

Since the election, Pope Francis has been under pressure to move forward with an overhaul of the Roman Curia, the Vatican administrative body. A year before resigning in February, Pope Benedict XVI ordered three cardinals to conduct an extensive internal investigation into published leaks that raised questions about the Curia's conduct, including alleged financial impropriety. Benedict locked the investigation's findings in a safe so that only his successor could read them. Days before he stepped down, however, Italian media reported the inquiry had revealed the existence of a **"gay lobby" of sexually active Vatican clerics.**

The Vatican swiftly denied that the inquiry mentioned such a group, and the issue faded from public view with the election of a new Pope. *[Who promptly declared homosexuals to be his brothers and told the world that they must not marginalised but included in society, and regarded as equals].*

On June 6, Pope Francis met inside the Vatican with members of the Latin American and Caribbean confederation of religious men and women, known as CLAR by its Spanish acronym, and discussed the report commissioned by his predecessor, according to a CLAR memo of the meeting. "The 'gay lobby' is mentioned, and it is true, it is there. We need to see what we can do," Pope Francis is quoted as saying in the memo, which was leaked to Chilean website, Reflection and Liberation. CLAR issued a statement confirming the authenticity of the memo while emphasising it had been written from memory by the meeting's attendees. "The presidency of CLAR deeply regrets the publication of a text referring to a conversation held with the Holy Father Francis in the course of this past June 6," CLAR leadership said in the statement. A Vatican spokesman did not deny the report of Pope Francis's remarks to CLAR, but declined to confirm them. Since his election, Pope Francis has made Curia reform a priority, appointing a special advisory group of cardinals from around the world to help him draw up a plan to modernise one of the world's oldest bureaucracies.

Pope Benedict's papacy was overshadowed at times by infighting and dysfunction within Vatican ranks – tensions that exploded into public view when the pontiff's former butler leaked sensitive

documents to an Italian journalist documenting power struggles among top Holy See officials and internal complaints that the Vatican was mismanaging its finances.

The Vatican confirmed the authenticity of the documents. "In the Curia, there are also holy people, really, there are holy people. But there is also a stream of corruption, there is that as well, it is true," Pope Francis is quoted as saying in the CLAR memo. The reform of the Roman Curia is something that almost all cardinals asked for in the congregations preceding the conclave. I also asked for it," the memo quotes the Pope as saying. The Pope, whose humble leadership style won him praise around the Vatican and beyond, acknowledges he cannot overhaul the Curia on his own.

"I cannot promote the reform myself, these matters of administration . . . I am very disorganised, I have never been good at this. But the cardinals of the commission will move it forward," he is quoted as saying. (Stacy Meichtry, *The Wall Street Journal*, June 14, 2013)

Pope on gay priests: 'Who am I to judge?'

In an impromptu 80-minute plane press conference, a candid Pope Francis talked about gay priests, women and what he carries in his little black bag.

ROME: In another act of the kind of humble outreach that has marked the early months of his papacy, Pope Francis has called for the integration of gays into society, remarking that even as leader of the world's 1.2 billion Catholics, he has no right to "judge" gay people. "If they accept the Lord and have goodwill, who am I to judge them? They shouldn't be marginalised," Pope Francis said during a wide-ranging and candid back-and-forth that took place aboard his flight back to Rome from World Youth Day in Brazil. The comments, which were greeted with particular enthusiasm by gay and liberal Catholics, were in response to journalists' questions about allegations of corruption within a "gay lobby" of priests at the Vatican.



Pope Francis talks with journalists as he flies back to Rome after his visit to Brazil. Photo: Reuters

"When I meet a gay person, I have to distinguish between their being gay and being part of a lobby," Francis said, according to a transcript of the remarks published by the *National Catholic Reporter*. He added that "the tendency is not the problem . . . they're our brothers." While many commentators pointed out that nothing that Francis said changed church teaching on homosexuality, many also saw a consequential shift in tone that focused on God's mercy for sinners, rather than the sin.

The news conference marked the first time Francis had addressed controversial social issues such as homosexuality during his papacy. Although he had called on Catholics to show "great respect for [gay] people," **Pope Benedict XVI, Francis's predecessor, also oversaw the publication of a church document that called homosexual inclinations "disordered" and called for men with "deep-seated" gay tendencies to be barred from the priesthood.** Although Francis also commented on the role of women in the church, the Vatican Bank and numerous other topics both high-profile and more pedestrian during the news conference, his remarks on homosexuality generally and gay priests in particular set off a stream of reaction by Catholics. "Pope Francis's brief comment on gays reveals great mercy," said the Reverend James Martin, an influential Catholic commentator.

"That mercy, of course, comes from Jesus Christ. And we can never have enough of it. The pope's remarks also are in line with the catechism, which teaches that gays should be treated with 'respect, compassion and sensitivity.'" Chad Pecknold, an assistant professor of theology at Catholic University who has written on the papacy, said that "people are right to perceive a change in tone and that that tone is a pastoral tone on the question of homosexual inclinations."

"Many people recognise that Pope Benedict was a professor pope, that he was teaching theology, and that Pope Francis is emphasising the pastoral office more strongly than Benedict did." Mr Pecknold noted that during the news conference, Francis said he did not mention abortion or gay marriage before his trip to Brazil because he wanted to sound "positive." Rather than "beginning the conversation with what the church teaches about what one shouldn't do," Mr Pecknold said, Francis "wants to begin the conversation about what it means to enter into the mercy of God." Michael Sean Winters, an author who has written for the *National Catholic Reporter*, saw Francis's take on gays in the church as in line with his approachable, grace-first style. "You're seeing someone who leads with God's mercy."

Mr Winters added: "He's not saying, 'Look, there is no sin,' **although he does tend to talk of the sins of savage capitalism more than he does of secularising humanists.** He is leading with mercy. He never wags his finger." Eve Tushnet, currently working on a book about vocations for gay Catholics, is a gay convert to Catholicism who accepts the church's teaching that sexual activity is reserved for married men and women. But Ms Tushnet also thinks the church could do a lot more to welcome gay people into its flock. "The main thing that I would love to hear from the pope is, 'God is calling you,'" Tushnet said. "God is calling gay people to love, to minister to others, to serve. I personally would like to see that extended to the priesthood . . . but certainly anything that comes from the pope that says that, 'God has a specific call for you,' I think that would be huge. I think the hunger is that gay people have been told what they're not allowed to do out of love but they haven't been told what they should do out of love." Marianne Duddy-Burke, executive director of Dignity USA, an activist organisation for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Catholics, saw in the pope's comments the potential for tremendous impact. "Just imagine if you're somebody trying to come to terms with your identity and hearing the pope acknowledge that you can be a person of faith and goodwill, and still be gay or lesbian, and how that contrasts with somebody saying that your love for another person of the same sex is going to bring down society," she said. "There's such an empowerment and sense of acceptance. "I don't think anybody expected any kind of overnight change," Ms Duddy-Burke added. "What we find hopeful in this is that there may be the door opening a little bit, and I think the next step would need to be an indication that there's a willingness to listen to the stories and the experiences of LGBT people and of our families, and hear of our challenges of staying in the church and also what gifts we have to offer."

Mr Pecknold said Francis is acting as an "agent of renewal," reflected not only in his remarks aboard the plane, but in his stance of humility and championing of the poor and disenfranchised. "I think the world likes a good comeback story," Mr Pecknold said. "There's a sense in which the Catholic Church has been riled by scandal in the third quarter of the 20th century, and it's time to come back from this. "I think there's a palpable sense that people want to see the church succeed. . . I think there is this palpable sense that Pope Francis might be that agent of renewal who enables people to say, 'It's cool to be Catholic.'" (Elizabeth Tenety, *Washington Post*, July 30, 2013)

Pope to embrace his gay brothers

"We must be brothers," he said. In the most conciliatory words yet from the Vatican on the subject of gay priests, he said: "If a person is gay and seeks God and has goodwill, who am I to judge him?"

The new Pope used a talk with journalists covering his visit to Brazil to emphasise Roman Catholic teaching that says those with gay orientation should be accepted. He stressed the official position of the Church is that homosexual acts are sinful, but homosexual urges and thoughts are not. **The message that gay people should be integrated into society rather than marginalised marks a clear departure from the Papacy. In recent years the pronouncements of Francis's predecessor Pope Benedict have fiercely condemned gay rights and at one point the former Pope described gay relationships as evil.** Speaking on his flight back to Rome from Rio, the Pontiff saved his criticism for gay pressure groups and lobbies. "The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains this very well," he said. "It says they should not be marginalised because of this orientation but that they must be integrated into society."

"The problem is not having this orientation. We must be brothers. The problem is lobbying by this orientation, or lobbies of greedy people, political lobbies, Masonic lobbies, so many lobbies. This is the worse problem." But he deflected questions about a gay lobby in the Vatican, said last month to have been the subject of complaints by the Pope. "You see a lot written about the gay lobby. I still have not seen anyone in the Vatican with an identity card saying they are gay," he added. Nothing said during the 80-minute in-flight interview alters the strong Vatican opposition to gay relationships or marriage, or the Church ban on actively gay priests. But his words mark an entirely different emphasis since the retirement of Benedict in the spring.

“Before he became Pope Benedict, the then Cardinal Jozeph Ratzinger said gay relationships were evil and contrary to natural order. He underlined rules preventing active gays from becoming priests, and he repeatedly condemned gay equality laws, saying they violate the natural law upon which the equality of all human beings is grounded.”

[When the ‘gay lobby’ decides to make one’s life miserable, even a Pope cannot stand before them. They knew exactly whom they wanted as Pope: one who regarded them as equal brothers. Does anyone remember what President Obama called them? His “brothers and sisters”! He and Pope Francis met on March 27, 2014 and mutually praised each other for their role in changing the world view on homosexuality: the ‘beast’ and the ‘prophet’ of Revelation!]

“In further evidence of a softening of attitudes, Pope Francis said women should be able to make more important roles in the Church but not as priests. “We cannot limit the role of women in the Church to altar girls or the president of a charity, there must be more.” The Vatican change of tone on homosexuals comes three weeks after the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby said in a key speech on gay rights that criticism of the Church of England’s attitudes may be justified And pretending that nothing has changed is absurd.” (Hannah Roberts, *thetelegraph.com.au*, July 31, 2014)

Note: A person who repents of sin, is no longer guilty of that sin. A gay person, who repents of it, is no longer gay. One cannot be gay and Christian. If he remains gay, he is not a Christian, no matter how much “faith and goodwill” he may have. That kind of faith is not from Jesus Christ.

Yet so powerful and pervasive is the “gay lobby” in the Vatican that it forced out of office a Pope who said that homosexuality is evil and unnatural, and brought in a Pope who says that homosexuals are his brothers, and should not be marginalised, but be integrated in society, and regarded as equals.

No consideration for what the Apostles of Jesus Christ said about homosexuality.

Apostle Paul: “Those who practice such things are deserving of death”

Rom 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

Rom 1:17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

Rom 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

Rom 1:19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them.

Rom 1:20 For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are

Rom 1:21 without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Rom 1:22 **Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God**

Rom 1:23 **into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.**

Rom 1:24 **Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves,**

Rom 1:25 **who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.**

Rom 1:26 **For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.**

Rom 1:27 **Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.**

Rom 1:28 **And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;**

Rom 1:29 being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; *they are* whisperers,

Rom 1:30 backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to

Rom 1:31 parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful;

Rom 1:32 who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

Apostle Peter: God turned “the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, . . . an example to those who afterward would live ungodly”

2Pe 2:1 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, *and* bring on themselves swift destruction.

2Pe 2:2 And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.

2Pe 2:3 By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.

2Pe 2:4 For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast *them* down to hell and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment;

2Pe 2:5 and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, *one of eight people*, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly;

2Pe 2:6 **and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned *them* to destruction, making *them* an example to those who afterward would live ungodly;**

2Pe 2:7 and delivered righteous Lot, *who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked*

2Pe 2:8 (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented *his* righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing *their* lawless deeds)—

2Pe 2:9 then **the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment,**

2Pe 2:10 and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. *They are* presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries,

2Pe 2:11 whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord.

2Pe 2:12 But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption,

2Pe 2:13 *and* will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. *They are* spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you,

2Pe 2:14 having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. *They have* a heart trained in covetous practices, *and are* accursed children.

2Pe 2:15 They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;

2Pe 2:16 but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet.

2Pe 2:17 These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.

[Apostle] Jude: Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them . . . having given themselves over to sexual immorality . . . are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

Jud 1:3 Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

Jud 1:4 For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jud 1:5 But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.

Jud 1:6 And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day;

Jud 1:7 **as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.**

The Anglican Truth

Church seeks same sex marriage recognition

Anglicans in Perth have voted in favour of recognising same-sex relationships, including marriage.

The Reverend Chris Bedding of the Darlington-Bellevue Anglican parish said the church's synod had backed the resolution last year but it had been vetoed by the Archbishop.

Under the church's rules, the resolution returned this year and a two-thirds majority was needed this time for it to pass. Father Chris said he was pleasantly surprised there was a strong "yes" vote from both clergy and lay people, up significantly on last year. "A lot of people clearly changed their mind over the year," he told AAP.

The archbishop can again veto the resolution or give his asset. Father Chris said the resolution recognised diversity within the Diocese of Perth, both in terms of sexual identity and theologies of human sexuality. It also noted the support from many within the Anglican Church for committed same-sex couples being able to register their relationship as civil unions, and acknowledged that legal recognition of committed same-sex relationships may coexist alongside legal recognition of marriage between a man and a woman.

Father Chris said the aim of the policy was to counteract negative and hurtful comments about same-sex couples by other Christian groups, particularly the Australian Christians Lobby. "When they come out and say things like 'it's unnatural to be gay' or 'it's against the bible' or 'all Christians reject homosexual behaviour' ... we want to say 'that's not the case'," he said. "And if the government ... goes ahead with any kind of recognition, whether that's something as simple as changes to superannuation laws or marriage equality, we're comfortable with that.

"There are gay and lesbian people in our churches, actually lots of them, and we value them." The resolution was moved by Father Chris and seconded by Dr Carolyn Tan. (AAP/SMH, Oct. 7, 2013)

The Salvation Army truth

Salvation Army officers abuse of children 'violent and extreme'

DOZENS of children suffered "violent and extreme" abuse at the hands of five Salvation Army officers who worked together at boys' homes in Queensland and NSW over several decades, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has heard.

The men swapped jobs, shared victims and in at least one case helped each other move to new positions within the organisation in order to avoid jail, the commission has heard. Some of the children under their care were also sexually abused by other Salvation Army officers and staff, as well as members of the public, including two pensioners allowed to live on the site of one boys' home and others who were given access to the children's dormitories at night. Other deeply traumatic evidence before the commission alleges boys were raped until they bled, were beaten and kept in cages for days when they attempted to report their own abuse, and were on occasion forced to eat their own vomit.

"This hearing will bring to light the greatest failure in the history of the Salvation Army in Australia," the organisation's barrister, Kate Eastman SC, told the hearing. "The Salvation Army admits that hundreds of children entrusted to its care endured horrific experiences in its boys' homes ... Knowledge of these events causes the army profound regret." One 11-year-old victim, Raymond Carlile, was dragged from his bed and raped by a Salvation Army officer, Captain Lawrence Wilson, who the commission heard was an allegedly prolific offender and whose victims have since received a total of \$1.2 million in compensation from his employers. Giving evidence by video-link, Mr Carlile also described how, during the 1950s, he and other boys at the Riverview Training Farm near Brisbane would suffer brutal beatings at the hands of Salvation Army officers, including the then-Lieutenant Wilson. "I've seen young fellows with their hands, fingers bleeding and still getting the cane from the sadistic people there. I've even seen one boy passing out from the punishment," he said. "Lieutenant Wilson he used to glorify punishment and sometimes used to froth at the mouth when he was punishing people. He just seemed to be really enjoying what he was doing, that was my opinion as a child," Mr Carlile told the commission. Mr Wilson, who in 1994 was acquitted of sexual and assault offences relating to his time at one of the boy's homes, died in 2008. (Dan Box, *The Australian*, January 28, 2014)

Salvation Army officer abused girl then married mother

A woman who was repeatedly sexually abused by a Salvation Army officer from the age of four later watched in horror as her mother married the man, the Royal Commission has heard.

The abuse survivor's mother then kicked her out of the family home, claiming the allegations against her new husband were lies. The woman, known as JD, said she was first molested by the officer at the age of four, not long after she was formally brought into the Salvation Army through a "dedication ceremony".

About 14 years later, after suffering more abuse at the officer's hands, JD learned the man was about to become her stepfather. "I remember around Christmas my mother told me that she was going to marry him," the woman, now 40, told the Commission. "By that time there were already rumours that [he] had been abusing children. I had told my mum that [he] was a monster and a creep and that she should not marry him because the rumours were true.

"Mum didn't believe me and accused me of lying because 'I didn't want a new daddy'."

JD told the Commission she and another girl eventually went to the the commander of the Salvation Army's south-east Queensland division, Colonel Stan Everitt, and complained about the officer who had abused them. She said Colonel Everitt appeared not to believe them, saying: "Is this something you've made up?" She says he told them not to tell the police because he would "handle it".

JD said her mother kicked her out of her home after she spoke to Colonel Everitt.

"My siblings are still not allowed to mention my name," she said. "I'm dead to them."

No action was taken against the abusing officer until many years later, when the women went to the police. He was eventually convicted of child sex offences.

"I was just a little girl going to church and a predator got to me," JD said.

"When people come forward they should be believed and they should be helped."

Earlier in the hearing, Cherryl Eldridge, a woman who was physically and psychological abused at the Salvation Army's Horton House home in Queensland, gave evidence of her treatment at the hands of a matron there. "I wet the bed for the first two years at the home and when I told the matron, she would rub my face in the sheets," Ms Eldridge said. "After a while, I stopped reporting my bed-wetting and instead slept in wet, smelly sheets." After a number of years of negotiation, Ms Eldridge was offered \$40,000 compensation on the condition that she sign a waiver releasing the Salvation Army from any further legal liability in relation to the abuse she suffered. (Paul Bibby, SMH, March 28, 2014)

Salvation Army locked boy in room for days without toilet, royal commission told

A man who as a boy was locked in solitary confinement for days without a toilet at a Salvation Army boys' home said the organisation's "redress scheme" effectively continued the abuse, and likened the organisation's uniformed officers to "the Gestapo". The man, referred to as JE, told the Royal Commission into child sex abuse on Friday that he was sent to the Riverview boys' home in Queensland in the late 1960s, when he was about 15. "I remember being locked in a small room in solitary confinement with some boys who were 'wog bashing' me," JE said, fighting back tears. "There was no toilet, not even a bucket ... If you had to go to the toilet, you had to just go and they threw some newspaper to clean it up."

"I had to sleep on the same floor." JE, his brother and a number of friends made a desperate escape bid 12 days after he arrived, nearly drowning when he dived into a swollen river.

The commission heard that, decades later, when JE sought compensation, the Salvation Army effectively denied that such solitary confinement had ever taken place. In March 2008, the organisation's head of personnel, Major Peter Farthing, said the army had been "unable to identify the nature" of the solitary confinement room. In light of this, and the fact that JE had "only" been at the home for 12 days before escaping, the Salvation Army initially said it "did not find it appropriate" to offer him an ex-gratia payment. "It sounded like one of those letters you get from a hotel when complain about the room," JE said. "I feel like the Salvation Army continued the abuse by treating me like a turd."

JE continued to fight for compensation and eventually the Salvation Army agreed to pay him \$20,000 and provide a letter of apology. He said the apology looked like a form letter and had been "completely unsatisfactory". "Their main motivating factor is to keep the cost down ... keep a lid on it and get it out of here," he said. "The fact that they didn't meet with me - it was just, 'I'm sorry, good luck'."

When asked by counsel for the Salvation Army, Kate Eastman, whether he would now like to speak to an officer face-to-face, JE said: "If I see one of those uniforms come within a metre of me, you better be there, OK?" "If I see that Gestapo come near me ... I'd like them in plain clothes with an open mind and an open heart." (Paul Bibby, SMH, March 28, 2014)

Salvation Army in Australia "ashamed" and "sorry" for past brutal abuse of children

The Salvation Army says it is ashamed and deeply sorry for the brutal abuse suffered by many children in its care, following the release of an eagerly awaited report on clergy child sex abuse.

The report, launched in the Victorian Parliament on Wednesday, also recommends sweeping changes to laws behind which the Catholic Church has sheltered, and accuses its leaders of trivialising the problem as a "short-term embarrassment". Inquiry chairwoman Georgie Crozier spoke of "a betrayal beyond comprehension" and children suffering "unimaginable harm". She said the inquiry had referred 135 previously unreported claims of child sex abuse to the police.

The report, *Betrayal of Trust*, wants to establish a new crime when people in authority knowingly put a child at risk. It wants to make it a crime to leave a child at risk or not report abuse, including for clergy, but does not recommend ending the exemption for the confessional. Grooming a child or parents should be a crime, child abuse should be excluded from the statute of limitations, and the present church systems of dealing with victims in-house should be replaced by an independent authority funded by the churches, the report says. The report was the result of a Victorian parliamentary inquiry into sexual abuse that began last year. A separate national Royal Commission into abuse will prepare an interim report by the middle of next year. A member of the Victorian committee, Andrea Coote, said the Catholic Church had minimised and trivialised the problem, kept the community in ignorance, and ensured that perpetrators were not held accountable, which meant children continued to be abused. She said with one exception "we found that today's church leaders view the current question of abuse of children as a 'short-term embarrassment' which should be handled as quickly as possible to cause the least damage to the church's standing. They do not see the problems as raising questions about the church's own culture."

The Salvation Army, which operated a large number of children's homes around the country between 1893 and 1995, has apologised to victims and their families for abuse that happened under its watch. It says the offences should never have happened and was a breach of the trust placed in them.

A substantial part of evidence received by the Victorian abuse inquiry related to complaints of sexual, physical and emotional abuse in Salvation Army institutions from the 1930s to the 1980s. Besides recommending new criminal laws, the report suggests way to make it easier for victims to seek justice.

These include changes to make sure churches are held accountable and vicariously liable, and that any organisation receiving government funding or tax exemptions is incorporated and insured. This would eliminate the defence by which the church successfully argued it was not an entity that could be sued. Victorian Premier Denis Napthine said the government would act quickly to begin drafting legislation that reflected the committee's recommendations. (Barney Schwartz, *SMH*, Nov 14, 2013)

Salvation Army couple 'lied to church' over standing down

THE NSW government intends to make a formal submission to the royal commission alleging two senior Salvation Army officers lied over their account of the church's handling of a child's sexual abuse.

Cross-examining one of these officers this morning, the barrister representing the state, John Agius SC, said a letter signed by the pair describing why they were leaving a NSW country town in 1990 was "full of untruths". In the letter, sent to other local members of the Salvation Army, Colin and Kerry Haggar said "we are taking a break from the duties of officership so that we can spend time on our own spiritual growth". The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has heard the pair were forced to leave their positions after Mr Haggar admitted to sexually abusing an eight-year-old girl.

"So you lied to them, because that will be our submission at the end of the day?" Mr Agius asked Mrs Haggar, a Lieutenant Colonel in the Salvation Army, who was recently forced to stand down from her position on its "cabinet" of senior administrators.

"I don't believe we lied. At the end of the day, you're going to believe what you chose to believe," she replied. After leaving the country town in 1990, Mr and Mrs Haggar continued to live in Salvation Army accommodation, while Mr Haggar worked in a hostel for adolescent boys, the commission heard. Both were subsequently readmitted as officers of the church, and both subsequently promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Since the royal commission began its public hearings, Mr Haggar has been forced to retire and demoted in rank. (Dan Box, *The Australian*, April 14, 2014)

The Jehovah Witnesses Truth

Child in Jehovah's Witness court bid

A TRARALGON child has clubbed his pocket money together with three others, paying \$69.70 to launch a private criminal prosecution against the Jehovah's Witnesses.

The child, 11, who is due to give evidence on Monday at the state inquiry into how the churches handled child sex abuse, wanted to force the church to comply with working with children laws. After four hearings, to which church leaders did not send a representative, the church began complying and the Office of Public Prosecutions intervened to discontinue the case.

The inquiry will also hear from anti-Jehovah's Witness campaigner Steven Unthank, a former member of the church who says he and his family were ostracised and persecuted after he tried to tackle child abuse. His submission alleges the church and its incorporated body, the Watchtower Society, covered up criminal child abuse, including rape, sexual assault, death threats, blackmail and assault, across four states by ordained ministers and officers of the church.

The Victorian and Civil Administrative Tribunal will hear a religious vilification complaint against the church by Mr Unthank in May, after the church said people who left the church, as he had, were "mentally diseased". And the Victorian Health Services Commissioner is investigating a complaint by another former Gippsland church member that a Jehovah's Witness chaplain was found alone without permission with a naked toddler in a room at Latrobe Regional Hospital.

The child appearing today, who cannot be named, has asked the inquiry to determine whether the church's failure to get working with children checks between July 2008 and December 2011 amounted to criminal child abuse of all 6160 Jehovah's Witness children in Victoria.

He asks why the government and police let the church "get away with" non-compliance, and whether the state will help file a class action against the church. The submission suggests the 2000 Jehovah's Witnesses who worked with children were committing criminal offences each week. These included ministers, elders, chaplains, teachers, volunteers, publishers (a term for people who doorknock) and even people who repair the church premises, called Kingdom Halls, "as they use child labour to save money".

The child says he and his family have also been ostracised by the church and forbidden to attend services. "Because everyone protected them, I have now lost my religion.

"The state of Victoria allowed this to happen." The four children launched their prosecution with a magistrate's permission on July 26, 2011. In October 2011 the church's Governing Body wrote to all Victorian congregations, telling them to get the checks. At the final court hearing, on February 21, 2012, the Director of Public Prosecutions discontinued the case, saying it was not in the public interest.

"How can [tackling] child abuse not be in the public interest? How can criminal charges be discontinued after the person refused to turn up to court of five separate occasions?" the child asks. He wants charges reinstated against church leaders. A spokeswoman for the Office of Public Prosecutions said the charges were withdrawn because there was no reasonable prospect of conviction.

Vincent Toole, solicitor for the Jehovah's Witnesses, said the fact that the church got working with children checks had nothing to do with Steven Unthank, whom he suggested was behind the court case. "We find it disappointing that he continues to misrepresent our organisation."

Mr Toole said Mr Unthank unsuccessfully tried to get authorities to take action against the church over working with children checks, and "after none were prepared to pursue the matter, he took the extraordinary step of instituting a private prosecution".

"Jehovah's Witnesses abhor child abuse, and place the protection of children at the highest level," he said. (Barney Zwartz, *www.theage.com*, February 18, 2013)

Former Jehovah's elder on sex assault charge

A FORMER Jehovah's Witness elder who apologised to his alleged victim on Facebook has been charged with two counts of indecent assault. Richard Hill will appear in the Heidelberg Magistrate's Court on March 1 over allegations that he sexually assaulted a six-year-old girl in 1981. The victim, now 38, told Fairfax Media that Mr Hill did everything except penetrate her - "he tried, but couldn't manage". She said she "did not realise the gravity" of what had happened until she was about 14.

At that point she told her mother, who could not act because of a Jehovah's Witness rule that allegations of sexual abuse would only be acted on if two elders witnessed it, she said.

Much later, the victim confronted Mr Hill on Facebook. "He turned around and apologised," she said. "He became an elder within the church and rose quite high up. Since he was charged, he has stepped down." The Victorian inquiry into how churches handled complaints of child sex abuse heard from two former Jehovah's Witnesses on Monday, who say they have been ostracised by the church.

Fairfax Media reported on Monday that the child was one of four who clubbed together their pocket money to raise the \$69.70 needed to launch a prosecution against the church over its alleged refusal to get working-with-children checks. (Barney Zwartz, *The Age*, February 19, 2013)

The Scientology Truth

Scientology's secret agenda

The Herald Sun continues its investigation into the way Scientologists have infiltrated the state education system under the nose of the Government.

The "cult" that calls itself a "church" is known for recruiting high-profile adherents to its strange mix of science fiction and quasi-religion as laid down by American sci-fi writer L. Ron Hubbard.

It's been revealed that Youth for Human Rights, a Scientology sponsored group, established an art prize for Year 9 students using taxpayer money provided by a government water authority.

Now South East Water is investigating how it came to provide the sponsorship that allowed a student from South Oakleigh Secondary College to be flown to the United Nations in New York where he met Australian diplomats. Commonsense would indicate this should have been done before South East Water committed its money. The student might have benefited from the trip, but it is the possible spread of Scientology propaganda in schools that is of concern.

Scientology was described in Federal Parliament last week as a criminal organisation and the Victorian Government is warning school principals not to distribute its material or enter its competitions.

The Church of Scientology was formed after widespread investigations into the organisation's activities stretching back to the 1960s and its right to represent itself as a religious organisation needs to be revisited. The Church of Scientology denies there is anything sinister in its motives, but its activities in schools in Victoria and NSW, where the Government is also warning principals not to distribute its books and videos, is cause for concern. (*Herald Sun*, November 28, 2009)

The Jewish Truth

Jewish school investigated over alleged mistreatment

NSW POLICE are investigating complaints that Jewish children were abused in Sydney.

Fairfax Media understands that complaints have been made against two perpetrators, both associated with the Yeshiva Centre at Bondi, one of whom has more than one alleged victim.

A police spokesman said the allegations dated back to the late 1970s and 1980s, and referred to abuse of children by adults associated with a Jewish school operating at that time.

The spokesman said eastern suburbs detectives began inquiries in February last year after getting information from Victoria Police, and had spoken to people interstate and overseas.

These are the first formal complaints about the Orthodox community in Sydney, but there have been several in Melbourne.

Rabbi Pinchas Feldman, the spiritual leader of Sydney's Yeshiva Centre, said he was shocked to hear of the allegations, and the call from Fairfax was the first he had heard of it. "I do not recall anyone ever coming to me with such a problem. I am shocked to hear that anything of this nature has taken place here," he said, adding the centre would co-operate fully with any inquiry.

Victims advocate Manny Waks, himself abused at Melbourne's Yeshiva Centre as a boy, said other Sydney victims had come forward after publicity by Fairfax Media about comments by senior Chabad rabbi Manis Friedman minimising the effects of child sex abuse.

Rabbi Friedman, based in the US, compared abuse with a case of diarrhoea - embarrassing but private - and said victims learnt a valuable lesson from abuse. He later apologised, saying his intention was to help empower victims to move forward.

Mr Waks, founder of the Tzedek advocacy group for Jewish abuse survivors, said there had long been credible reports of child sex abuse victims within the ultra-Orthodox community in Sydney, as well as reports of cover-ups. (Barney Zwartz, *The Age*, Feb 14, 2013)

Orthodox rabbi Moshe Gutnick apologises for sexual abuse

Australia's most senior Orthodox rabbi has apologised for years of mishandling and cover-up of child sexual abuse within the Jewish community and urged abusers to hand themselves in to police.

"For whatever reason a culture of cover-up, often couched in religious terms pervaded our thinking and actions. It may even have been well-intentioned, but it was simply wrong," said Moshe Gutnick, the president of the Organisation of Rabbis of Australia, on Wednesday.

Ahead of the holiest day in the Jewish calendar, the Day of Atonement, Rabbi Gutnick told victims no one could know their pain and what they had been through.

"And the pain has only been magnified by our inaction. On this holiest of days, I sincerely beg your forgiveness on behalf of all of us who did not hear your voice.

"I can only assure you on my behalf, and on behalf of the vast majority of the Rabbinate, that we hear you now loud and clear."

To abusers, he said "you will be found. It may not be today, it may not even be tomorrow, but it will happen. There will be justice if not in this world, most definitely in the next ... Turn yourselves in."

Rabbi Gutnick's letter has been sent to the state Orthodox groups in Australia in New Zealand to be disseminated to rabbis and congregations for the Day of Atonement on Friday. He wrote: "Until we make amends with our fellow man, we cannot find atonement with Hashem." [God]

He said the Jewish community had been "affected by this scourge no differently than any other community" and that it had not handled the issue appropriately.

He recognised victims' advocacy groups such as Tzedek, whose founder Manny Waks has previously been highly critical of rabbinical denials.

On Wednesday, Mr Waks called the letter an "incredible milestone" and ground-breaking for the Australian Jewish community.

He said it was an acknowledgement victims had longed to hear. "This may very well be a world first and I am particularly proud that an Australian rabbi and the peak Orthodox organisation in Australia, have demonstrated such courageous leadership." (Barney Zwartz, *SMH*, September 11, 2013)

Jewish community embroiled in new child sex charges

A NEW child-sex scandal has hit Melbourne's Jewish community, with a man to stand trial next year on more than 25 charges of sexual intercourse with a child under 16, sexual penetration of a child under 16 and indecent acts.

The name of the man, the organisation and the alleged victims have been suppressed, but the case involves a Jewish organisation. Fairfax Media understands that the man is not Jewish, nor are some of the many victims, and some of the alleged offences took place overseas a decade ago. He will be tried in the County Court on July 15 next year. The community was already in shock over other abuse cases at two schools in Melbourne, run by the Orthodox Chabad movement and the ultra-Orthodox Adass Israel.

Manny Waks, a victim while a student at Yeshivah College - part of the Chabad movement's Yeshivah Centre in East St Kilda - said the Jewish community faced a crisis in addressing sex abuse and that the communal leadership had mishandled the scandal.

Allegations have been made against two employees of Yeshivah College. Former security guard David Cyprys will stand trial next July on 41 charges of child rape and other sexual abuse against 12 students in the 1980s, and former teacher David Kramer is awaiting extradition from the United States over claims that he abused four boys at the college between 1989 and 1992. Kramer was jailed in 2008 in the US for molesting a 12-year-old boy at a synagogue there.

In the Adass case, Adass Israel girls' school principal Malka Leifer fled to Israel after allegations that she abused several girls. Mr Waks said: "We need to ensure we respond in the most appropriate way - with sensitivity, compassion, accountability and transparency. All perpetrators, their facilitators and those engaged in a cover-up must be held to full account." He said Jewish communal groups such as the Executive Council for Australian Jewry had not made tackling child sexual abuse a high-enough priority.

Dr Danny Lamm, president of the Executive Council, said the council was unequivocal in that the welfare of children came first, perpetrators should be investigated and charged and the community organisations should co-operate fully. "The abuse of children in any way ... is abhorrent, particularly when it is perpetrated by those in positions of trust and authority. All claims of abuse must be treated with the utmost seriousness," Dr Lamm said. (Barney Zwartz, *SMH*, November 29, 2012)

The Islamic Truth

Ramadan a chance for all to reflect on charity, selflessness

For the first time in my life I have spent Ramadan working among the Muslim people of Lakemba. As a non-Muslim, who has lived and worked with mainly Christian and secular families, and had very little exposure to the Muslim faith, this holiest month in the Islamic Lunar calendar has concentrated my attention on the many noteworthy aspects the Islamic community brings to Sydney. As the acting principal of a Sydney Islamic school, a block from the large Lakemba Mosque, I have the rare privilege of sharing my days with families from Bangladesh, Lebanon, Egypt, Indonesia and many others who are fairly recent arrivals to Australia. For them, Ramadan is a unique opportunity for spiritual and social

rejuvenation and bonding. It is a time to build personal taqwa, or piety, and to commit oneself to living a kind, gentle and forgiving life. Throughout this month, school has finished at 2.30pm to allow parents time to travel home to prepare meals in anticipation of the daily breaking of the fast. In most homes, the family begins the day with prayers at sun up, breaking the fast, (Iftar) about sunset often with friends and family. During Ramadan, Muslim teachers are naturally often tired, working without food and water throughout the day. But there is an obvious sense of peace and calm about the school. Senior children who are fasting, are increasingly tired too towards the end of the school day, a condition most pronounced on the day following Laylat al-Qadr. On this Holy Night, towards the end of Ramadan, some of the teachers and senior students pray at the mosque for much of the night.

For younger children, Ramadan is a special period. Families come together - they see their relatives giving generously to others in need. Attention is outward, less on self. There is a more intense level of discipline and self-sacrifice that is obligatory in all Muslim households during this ritual. All over the world, families seek purification of spirit and body. There is no alcohol and smokers do their best not to smoke throughout the day. Children are central. They receive gifts especially at the end of Ramadan, (Eid al-Fitr), a day when the roads around the big mosques are blocked with the overflow of the community coming together in worship. During the Eid festival on Thursday, there will be many celebrations to end this holy month and I am grateful to be included, and for the level of acceptance and friendship that has been shown towards me. There is a purity in Ramadan that is refreshingly undiluted by materialism. For the month, there is a cleansing of the human spirit, that for the children models discipline, focus and kindness towards others. At a time when people are being rejected, lost at sea and turned away from our borders in a poisonous political debate, wider Australia can learn from this gentle charity. (William McKeith, *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 8, 2013)

Other Muslims, however, celebrate Ramadan differently.

At Least 30 Killed in Suicide Bombing at Funeral in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD — At least 30 people were killed when a suicide bomber detonated his explosives during a funeral service for a police official in southwestern Pakistan on Thursday, officials said. The attack in Quetta, the restive provincial capital of Baluchistan Province, was a reminder of the ease with which militants have managed to target the police and other security forces in recent weeks. All of the fatalities were police officials, and at least 40 people were wounded in the attack, according to Mushtaq Sukhera, the Inspector General of Baluchistan police. There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

The violence in Quetta started early Thursday when unidentified gunmen killed Muhib Ullah, a junior police official, and wounded his four children as he was on his way to a market. The assailants escaped.

Hours later, as the senior leadership of the Quetta police gathered for the funeral at Police Lines, considered to be a relatively secure official neighborhood that houses the lodging and offices of the police force, the suicide bomber evaded security measures and detonated his bomb. The explosion ripped through the funeral service as police officers and relatives scrambled for cover. One of the fatalities included a deputy inspector in charge of field operations, Fayyaz Ahmed Sumbal, who died in the hospital from his wounds. A low level insurgency has simmered in Baluchistan as nationalists have taken up arms against the federal government. The provincial capital has also been hit by sectarian violence as extremist Sunni militants have targeted Hazaras, a minority community belonging to the Shiite sect. Salman Masood, *International Herald Tribune*, August 8, 2013)

Suicide bombers kill 78 Christians outside Pakistan church

A pair of suicide bombers blew themselves up outside a 130-year-old church in Peshawar after Sunday Mass, killing 78 people in the deadliest attack on Christians in recent history.

Religious violence and attacks on security forces have been on the rise in Pakistan in past months, undermining Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's efforts to tame the insurgency after coming to power in June.

Two suicide bombers are believed to have entered the All Saints Church after shooting dead police guards, and detonated their explosive vests. Police said 350 members of the congregation were in the church when the bombers struck and that the death toll is expected to increase because many were being treated in hospital are in a critical condition. Dr Iqbal Afridi, medical superintendent at the city's Lady Reading Hospital said he had declared a medical emergency and all leave for surgeons had been cancelled.

"The number of dead and will be more than 200 because the Church was full to its capacity," one worshipper, Caroline White, told *The Telegraph*. She said something which sounded like a firecracker was thrown at the church before a huge explosion. The police had failed to properly protect the church, she added. Sahibzada Anees, a local government official, told Associated Press the Sunday service is popular

because worshippers receive a free meal on the lawn in front of the church following Mass. The white walls and the floor of the church, which was built in 1851, were stained with blood and splattered with rice. Parishioners said survivors were crying and hugging one another after the explosion, which had turned the church into a scene of carnage. "There were blasts and there was hell for all of us ... when I got my senses back, I found nothing but smoke, dust, blood and screaming people. I saw severed body parts and blood all around," said Nazir John. Shadqat Malik, head of the local bomb disposal unit, said most of the victims were women and children because the church is in Kohati Gate, a busy shopping market frequented by women buying food for their households. The bombers had detonated 12 kilograms of explosive, hidden in their vests, and the intensity of the blast caused considerable damage to neighbouring buildings. "We have found one head of one bomber, and are looking for the second one. The mass service had just ended so there were many people who were exiting the church when the bombers struck," says Ismail Karak, Superintendent Police Security, speaking from the location. The attack was condemned by Imran Khan, the former Pakistan cricket captain whose Tehreek-e-Insaf party controls the Khyber Pukhtunkhwa provincial government, as a "senseless" attack on innocent people. His health minister Shaukat Yousafzai said those behind the attack could not call themselves Muslims.

Residents from the area which dominated by members of Pakistan's Christian and Hindu minorities – which make up less than five per cent of the country's population, burned tyres and forced shops to close in protest at the government's failure to protect them. "We have been demanding security from the government because the religious minorities have been coming under attack in Pakistan," says Haroon Sardyal, Chairman All Pakistan Hindu Rights Movement who lives in the same neighbourhood where the church is located and was on the site moments later. "Today's attack shows that despite our warnings the government is not waking up, which is condemnable," Mr. Sardyal added. There has been an upsurge in terrorist attacks on religious minorities in Pakistan in the last decade.

Christian churches have suffered grenade and machine gun attacks, while Pakistan's Christian minorities minister Shahbaz Bhatti was assassinated in 2011 for opposing the country's discriminatory blasphemy laws. Seven Christians were burned to death in 2009 when a Muslim mob torched 40 houses and a church. (Ashfaq Yusufzai and Taha Siddiqui, The [London] Telegraph, 25 Sep 2013)

Free Syrian Army: "we killed those children because they were not Muslims"

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: On his eighth trip to fight with the rebels in Syria, in August, Abu Khattab saw something that troubled him: two dead children, their blood-soaked bodies sprawled on the street of a rural village near the Mediterranean coast. He knew right away that his fellow rebels had killed them.

Abu Khattab, a 43-year-old Saudi hospital administrator who was pursuing jihad on his holiday breaks, went to demand answers from his local commander, a notoriously brutal man named Abu Ayman al-Iraqi. The commander brushed him off, saying **his men had killed the children "because they were not Muslims,"** Abu Khattab recalled recently during an interview here. It was only then that Abu Khattab began to believe that the jihad in Syria – where he had travelled in violation of an official Saudi ban – was not fully in accord with God's will. But by the time he returned to Riyadh, where he now volunteers in a program to discourage others from going, his government had overcome its own scruples to become the main backer of the Syrian rebels, including many hard-line Islamists who often fight alongside militants loyal to Al Qaeda.

The disillusionment of Abu Khattab – who asked that his full name be withheld because he still fears retribution from jihadists – helps illustrate the great challenge now facing Saudi Arabia's rulers: how to fight an increasingly bloody and chaotic proxy war in Syria using zealot militia fighters over whom they have almost no control. The Saudis fear the rise of Al Qaeda's affiliates in Syria, and they have not forgotten what happened when Saudi militants who had fought in Afghanistan returned home to wage a domestic insurgency a decade ago. They officially prohibit their citizens from going to Syria for jihad, but the ban is not enforced; at least a thousand have gone, according to Interior Ministry officials, including some from prominent families. But the Saudis are also bent on ousting Syria's president, Bashar al-Assad, and his patron, Iran, which they see as a mortal enemy. Their only real means of fighting them is through military and financial support to the Syrian rebels. And the most effective of those rebels are Islamists whose creed – rooted in the puritanical strain of Islam practiced in Saudi Arabia – is often scarcely separable from Al Qaeda's. Abu Khattab, a slight-figured man with bulging eyes and the scraggly beard of an ultra-orthodox Salafist Muslim, embodies some of these paradoxes. He now volunteers here once a week to warn young men about the false glamour of the Syrian jihad at the government's rehabilitation center for jihadists. "There is a shortage of religious conditions for jihad in Syria," he said. Many of the fighters kill Syrian civilians, a violation of Islam, he added.

But as Abu Khattab talked about Syria, his own convictions seemed scarcely different from the jihadists he had carefully denounced (two officials from the Interior Ministry were present during the interview). He made clear that he considered Shiite Muslims and Assad's Alawite sect to be infidels and a terrible danger to his own people.

"If the Shiites succeed in controlling Syria, it will be a threat to my country," Abu Khattab said. "I went to Syria to protect my country." At times, his sectarian feelings seemed to outshine his unease about the excesses of some of his more extreme comrades. He did not deny that he had often fought alongside members of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, the brutal jihadist group affiliated with Al Qaeda. Abu Khattab also mentioned proudly that he is no stranger to jihad. He fought as a teenager in Afghanistan ("With the government's permission!") and, a few years later, in Bosnia. He chose not to fight the Americans in Iraq "because there are too many Shiites there," he said, with a look of distaste on his face. Yet this is a man who lectures inmates at the rehabilitation centre every week about ethics and war. The centre, like many Saudi institutions, has been somewhat embarrassed by the contradictions of Saudi policy with regard to Syria. Although the centre incarcerates some men who have been arrested for trying to travel to Syria, last summer the nephew of Abdelrahman al-Hadlaq, its director, was killed while fighting there. His mother posted statements on Twitter saying she was proud of him. More recently, the centre suffered an even more stinging disappointment involving one of its best-known graduates, a reformed jihadist named Ahmed al-Shayea. He became famous in Saudi Arabia after surviving his own suicide bombing in Iraq in 2004, a bombing arranged by militants with Al Qaeda's Iraqi branch.

Mr. Shayea was burned and disfigured, but after months in the hospital he emerged and proclaimed himself cured of the jihadist mind-set. He was known as the "living suicide," and in 2009 the American author Ken Ballen devoted an entire chapter to a glowing portrait of him in his book, *Terrorists in Love*. In November, Shayea slipped out of Saudi Arabia to Syria, where he is now fighting with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. He proudly trumpets his return to jihad on his Twitter feed, which features a picture of him clutching a rifle with his mangled hands.

The Saudi authorities say that they have urged their citizens not to go to Syria, but that they cannot keep track of every Saudi who wants to go fight there. "We try to prevent it, but there are limits to what we can do," said Mansour al-Turki, a spokesman for the Saudi Interior Ministry. "You cannot prevent all young men from leaving the kingdom. Many of them travel to London or other places, and only then to Turkey, and Syria." Abu Khattab's path to Syria was similar to that of many others here and across the Arab world. He read about the uprisings in 2011, but it was Syria that touched his heart. It was not just because of the bloodshed, he said, but because his Sunni brothers were being killed by Alawites and Shiites. When he first went, in the summer of 2012, he flew directly from Riyadh to the Turkish city of Antakya, near the Syrian border, he said. There were other Saudi men heading for the battlefield on the flight with him, he said, and no sign of a Saudi government effort to monitor or restrain them. In Turkey, he found many other foreign fighters, and Syrian rebels who were eager to take them to the battlefield. "They especially like Saudis, because the Saudis are more willing to do suicide operations," he said.

Over the next year, Abu Khattab said, he returned to Syria seven more times, usually on holidays, leaving his wife to care for their four children and staying for 10 days to two weeks each time. He fought with a variety of groups, seeing battle many times — in Aleppo, in Homs and in the countryside of Latakia, near the coast. He wielded a Kalashnikov rifle most of the time, but sometimes a heavier Russian-made machine gun known in the field as a 14.5.

Gradually he became disillusioned with the chaos of the battle. He often found himself among men who openly branded the rulers of Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf states as infidels, deserving slaughter. He said this bothered him, but it did not stop him from returning to the battlefield. In the end, it was the slaughter of innocents that made him decide to quit, he said, and a broader feeling that the rebels alongside him were not doing it for the right reasons. "If the fight is not purely to God, it's not a real jihad," he said. "These people are fighting for their flags."

But there was another reason he gave up the fight. "Bashar has started to put Sunnis on the front line," he said of Syria's leader. "This is a big problem. The rebels do not want to fight them. The real war is not against Bashar himself, it is against Iran. Everything else is just a false image." (Robert F. Worth, *New York Times*, January 8, 2014)

Terrorist ideology at school

LONDON: David Cameron has spoken for the first time about an alleged plot by Islamic extremists to control Birmingham schools, promising "swift action" to ensure they are not being used to spread terrorists' ideology. The Department of Education is believed to be investigating 12 schools in that district

after claims that non-Muslim members of staff were being isolated, male and female pupils segregated and assemblies used to promote the teachings of al-Qaeda.

"We will not accept any school being run by extremist views," The Prime Minister said. "It's not acceptable, we can't have that happening in our country and Ofsted have all the powers they need to intervene. They are able to get in there and inspect to see where things have gone wrong.

Allegations of the so-called 'Trojan Horse' plot to allow hardline Muslims to take over a handful of schools were revealed last month in a leaked letter, supposedly written from one extremist to another. It detailed a five-step plan designed to take over the running of several Birmingham state schools and listed examples of non-Muslim staff members who they had "forced out". The authenticity of the document has since been called into question. However, following its emergence, Birmingham City Council has been inundated with claims from teachers, parents and governors claiming that they have seen the tactics at work in their schools. (*Sunday Telegraph*, April 5, 2014)

Angola Becomes 'First Country to Ban Islam'

Southern African nation reportedly bans Islam and orders the demolition of mosques in the country.

The African nation of Angola has reportedly become the first country to ban Islam and Muslims, reports *On Islam*. Concerning the ban, Angolan President Jose Eduardo dos Santos said Sunday "this is the final end of Islamic influence in our country."

Angola's ban was first announced last Friday, when Angolan Minister of Culture, Rosa Cruz e Silva said "the process of legalization of Islam has not been approved by the Ministry of Justice and Human rights, their mosques would be closed until further notice."

India Today reports Silva's statement was made at the 6th Commission of the Angolan National Assembly, and that the ban includes orders to demolish mosques in the country. Silva reportedly said the ban was necessary since Islam is "contradictory to the customs of Angola culture."

Angola's population of 16 million is predominantly Christian, with only 80,000-90,000 Muslims, the majority of whom are migrants from West Africa and families of Lebanese origin, according to the US State Department. The crackdown on Islam comes as Christians in the Middle East are being forced from Muslim countries. Former Israeli Ambassador to the US Michael Oren noted in 2012 that the Christian population in the Middle East dropped from 20% a century ago to 5% currently amid ongoing persecution of Christians by Muslims. Oren noted in Egypt 200,000 Coptic Christians fled their homes in 2011 amid anti-Christian violence during the "Arab spring" uprising that toppled dictator Hosni Mubarak. In 2012 Saudi Arabia's top Muslim leader, Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdulaziz Al al-Shaikh, issued a fatwa (religious decree) to demolish all churches on the Arabian peninsula. Particularly in Africa, analysts have commented that Islamist forces have been killing and expelling Christians largely with negligible international criticism. Aside from Islam, other religions that have not been legalized will face similar measures in Angola. The non-legalized religions on the list "published by the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights in the Angolan newspaper 'Jornal de Angola' are prohibited to conduct worship, so they should keep their doors closed," said Silva.

The Minister of Culture added that there is a legalization process through which over a thousand religious sects are currently applying. (Ari Yashar, *IsraelNationalNews.com*, Nov 25, 2013)

Egypt cruelty death knell for live exports

AUSTRALIA'S live export trade is under renewed pressure after footage of shocking cruelty to Australian cattle in two Egyptian abattoirs was aired on the ABC last night.

The segments, one recorded by a local vet last October and the other by an Animals Australia investigation team last month, show cattle being atrociously treated, deliberately injured and cruelly slaughtered. Animals Australia has renewed its calls for the entire industry to be banned. It says the continuing occurrences of cruelty in abattoirs in Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan and Kuwait show industry and government efforts to introduce and maintain new welfare standards are not working.

Animals Australia handed footage of the two Egyptian incidents to the Agriculture Department last Wednesday. They were viewed by cattle and export industry groups on Thursday, and the voluntary suspension of all live trade with Egypt was announced on Friday night.

Federal Agriculture Minister Joe Ludwig told the ABC's 7.30 last night he had faith in the existing tracking and audit system and that "99.9 per cent" of exported cattle were treated humanely. He based that on the number of complaints received by his department and his own confidence. "It's the confidence that I can inform you and the confidence that the statistics, that the audits, which are on the website, demonstrate," he said. The Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System was established after the

Indonesian live cattle export suspension in 2011, and makes Australian exporters accountable for their animals when they go overseas. Animals Australia campaign director Lyn White said the ESCAS measures were not enough. "I think the Australian industry is treating the Australian public like fools," she said. Independent MP Andrew Wilkie last night declared the latest incident spelled the "death knell" for the live export industry and said it must be stopped.

The footage taken at the Red Sea abattoir at Ain Sokhna was recorded only a few weeks ago by a visiting Animals Australia team after an Egyptian veterinarian alerted the organisation to cruelty at the northern meatworks at Ismailia near Alexandria. He had shot an earlier video in October but Animals Australia said yesterday it had become aware of the Ismailia footage only early last month.

The Australian government is investigating the incidents, which include an injured animal being appallingly treated before being killed. Australian Live Exporters Council executive director Alison Penfold said while she was "distracted, sickened and disgusted" by the videos, banning all live exports would not advance animal welfare worldwide. "No one in our industry, and no Australian, accepts such treatment of animals, and I believe the Egyptian authorities will not tolerate this," Ms Penfold said. She said Australia was the only one of 100 live-exporting nations that was working to improve animal welfare standards. "Take us out of the marketplace (and) who is left to provide that training and the resources to provide (it)?" she said. The exporters have sent a delegation to Egypt to investigate. (Sue Neales, *The Australian*, May 07, 2013)

The Democratic Truth

I destroyed careers of Blair's ministers, admits former Brown aide Damian McBride.



Damian McBride with the then Prime Minister Gordon Brown Photo: Reuters

Damian McBride, Mr Brown's former communications chief, said he discredited the former prime minister's enemies by tipping off the media about drug use, spousal abuse, alcoholism and extramarital affairs. In an autobiography that will cast a shadow over Labour's party conference in Brighton next week, Mr McBride admits attempting to ruin the careers of the former home secretaries Charles Clarke and John Reid. Mr McBride claims that he did it all out of "devotion" and "some degree of love" for Mr Brown, whom he describes as "the greatest man I ever met".

The disclosures will cause acute embarrassment to Ed Miliband, the Labour leader, and Ed Balls, the shadow chancellor, who were allies of Mr Brown during his time in Downing Street. In the book, serialised in the Daily Mail, Mr McBride claims that he helped to end Mr Clarke's cabinet career by concocting a briefing war between him and a key adviser to Mr Blair. The former spin doctor writes that he helped to force Mr Reid to quit his Cabinet post by leaking details of alleged "drinking, fighting and carousing".

He confesses that he punished Ivan Lewis, and then a junior minister, for criticising Mr Brown by leaking claims that he had been "pestering" a female aide. These claims were completely denied by Mr Lewis. Mr McBride was forced to resign in 2009 for his part in an email plot to discredit senior Conservative ministers. His disclosures were preceded by the release of hundreds of emails revealing the extent of the civil war between Tony Blair and Mr Brown. One email suggested that Mr Brown told Mr

Blair that he should resign because the public “hate him”. Another suggested that Mr Blair allowed members of his staff to describe the attempt to oust him as “blackmail”.

The emails were released by Benjamin Wegg-Prosser, a former director of the strategic communications unit under Mr Blair. Mr McBride also uses his book to accuse Douglas Alexander, the current shadow foreign secretary, of failing to support his sister, Wendy, who was then the Scottish Labour leader. He writes that Mr Alexander “dispassionately” told Mr Brown that his sister would have to quit over an unlawful £950 donation.

Mr McBride refers in the book to the “art of leaking lies”. He conceded at one point that his treatment of Mr Lewis and the woman at the centre of the allegations was “cruel” and “vindictive”. He reveals that when Mr Brown was chancellor, he would log into his emails so that he could leak details of confidential government announcements to discredit rival ministers. He claims that ministers were oblivious and were left wondering who in their department was releasing information to the media.

Mr McBride also discloses that Mr Brown had a network of “moles” in other Whitehall departments. He claims that in the dying days of Mr Brown’s premiership he attempted to recruit celebrity advisers to bolster his image including Simon Cowell, Lorraine Kelly, Fiona Phillips and Lord Sugar. In the book, Mr McBride writes that he “completely lost his way” before his enforced resignation. However, he appears to be unrepentant. He claims that there was an “unspoken” understanding between him and Mr Brown that the former prime minister would not question his methods. Describing how he attempted to force Mr Reid to quit the Cabinet, Mr McBride says that he unearthed embarrassing details of the former home secretary’s past from his “black book”.

Meanwhile, the cache of Downing Street emails, handed to The Guardian, details the desperate attempts made by Mr Blair’s team to stop a rebellion designed to oust him from power or force him to give a date for his departure. (Peter Dominiczak, *The [London] Telegraph*, Sep 20, 2013)

At last, we see Ed in his true colours, waving the red flag

The Labour leader wants more socialism, an idea that has failed all over the world

So now we know what he wants to do with the country. It’s “socialism”, folks! For years now, Ed Miliband has been studiously blank about his intentions. To a degree that has maddened supporters and opponents alike, he has refused to say much about how Labour would govern the country. He has curled himself into an ideological foetal position – so as to present as small a target as possible – and hoped that Coalition unpopularity would allow him to stand up at the last minute and slither unobtrusively into power.

And now, in an incautious admission, he has reminded us of his core beliefs – as the proud son of a Marxist academic. He wants to restore socialism to Britain. In spite of everything, the mission of Labour under Ed Miliband is to revive a political belief system that brought Britain to its knees, that blighted the lives of hundreds of millions of people in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, that was responsible for untold murders and abuses of human rights, and that in the past 30 years has been decisively rejected across the planet in favour of liberty, free enterprise and market economics – a rival system that has lifted and is lifting hundreds of millions of people out of poverty and servitude. Someone needs to tell Ed Miliband that socialism failed, and I have just the man to do it.

He knows Ed well. They used to hang out together – in fact, they were part of the same ruthless cabal of curry-swilling Brownites who undermined Tony Blair and anyone else who tried to introduce some common sense to the Labour Party. That man is Damian McBride. I mean the man known as McPoison or McP---face, who is currently in the papers because he has decided to salve his conscience by laying bare his ghastly activities under the last Labour government.

I happen to think Mr McBride is genuinely repentant, and I know that he is working hard for good educational causes in London. But if he is to achieve full redemption he needs to think about why he behaved in that way. What was it that legitimated – in his mind – this hideous trampling over all norms of decency? He smeared ministers who seemed to stand in his way, he destroyed careers, he wrecked family lives. It seems incredible that a highly intelligent man could act like this just because he adored Gordon Brown. No, that wasn’t enough: he justified his ruthless actions to himself in the same way that socialists have always justified their ruthlessness – that the end justified the means.

He knew that what he was doing was in one sense pretty putrid – but he believed that it was part of a wider project. He was protecting the Labour Party from the Blairite sell-outs; he was acting in the best interests of the Left of the party; he was helping the Brownites to pursue their agenda of welfarist redistribution. Yes, he was able to live with himself and engage in this repulsive bullying because at the

back of his mind was always the notion that he was defending a high and noble cause. He did it in the interests of the People; he did it for sound socialistic reasons.

And that is the problem with socialism. It has always involved the use of revolting means to pursue an unattainable end. It has seen the rights and liberties of individuals trampled in the name of a collective good. Damian McBride is a small but interesting example of the mental contortions of socialists over the last century, when there is no abuse or tyranny – large or trivial – that has not been justified in the name of the people.

When the Securitate persuaded children to inform against their parents in Ceausescu's Romania, they knew – at one level – that what they were doing was creepy. But they believed it was in the wider interests of the state, and therefore of the people themselves. When thousands of Soviet dissidents and bourgeois reactionaries were hauled off to perish in Siberian gulags, the authorities knew – with one side of their brains – that this was morally no better than Nazism; but they persuaded themselves that it was for the greater good, and that you could not make an omelette without breaking eggs. When the North Koreans shoot anyone who falls foul of their deranged and psychotic regime, they don't blame their evil dictator; they think – or at least they assert – that they are protecting a system of government that is morally superior to that of South Korea and the rest of the capitalist world.

I don't mean that Ed Miliband will try to import some new form of Stalinism to Britain, or that we will see the systematic abuse of human rights. British socialism has always been a much milder strain. But the fundamental impulse is there: to use regulation or coercion to try to impose an idea of equality, when the result is the exact opposite. Why has social mobility declined in the past 30 years? Why is it that there are fewer children from poor backgrounds who make it all the way to the very best universities than there were in the 1960s?

Because – in the name of equality – Labour politicians launched a war against the grammar schools and indeed against the whole competitive ethos in education. How is a dose of socialism going to help us improve our schools, or reform the welfare state, or get a better deal from the European Union? The most important political fact since the crash of 2008 is the complete failure of the Left to provide any realistic alternative to the free market economics that have been adopted across the developing world, and that have seen a huge rise in living standards for billions.

It has its chance to offer a new model – and we have heard nothing. Now we have Ed Miliband telling us that his plan is to go back to Brownite “socialism” – the over-borrowing and over-spending that got us in the mess in the first place. Why hand back the bridge to the very people who ran the ship aground? (Boris Johnson, *The [London] Telegraph*, 22 Sep 2013)

The Journalistic truth

JOURNALISTS, the craft of journalism and the news media generally are held to a high standard of truth, and that's as it should be. The first three rules of the business are accuracy, accuracy and accuracy. There are times when the media gets it wrong – usually because of stuff-ups, misunderstandings, sloppiness or laziness, rather than by intent. In the great majority of these cases corrections are made and apologies issued.

Because of these high standards of accuracy, society is able to confidently put a mirror to itself, discuss, debate and decide on the issues of the day. But there are those who debase these ideals. They do it deliberately and often with impunity. They are called advertisers and politicians. Within the media industry, corrections and apologies are sometimes referred to, facetiously, as “grovels”. As grovels go, the telephone company Optus last week had a doozy.

In advertisements comparing its mobile coverage with Telstra's, the geniuses at Optus's advertising agency made mistakes that would have got a first-year journalism cadet fired. They confused population with landmass – probably not a big deal in, say, Hong Kong, but a vital consideration in this wide brown land. Optus claimed in its ads that the differences between its mobile network and Telstra's were minimal and insignificant. Its ad would entice any normal person to believe that Optus covered 98.5 per cent of the Australian landmass while Telstra covered 99.3 per cent. Wrong! The true figures are Optus 12.6 per cent and Telstra 30.6 per cent. What Optus meant was its network reached 98.5 per cent of the population, compared with Telstra's 99.3 per cent. It is probably true that people take advertising claims with a grain of salt. But blatant misrepresentations such as this are wrong and advertisers must not be allowed to get away with them. The Victorian Supreme Court agreed, upholding a Telstra complaint that the ads were false, misleading and deceptive.

Three years ago Optus was fined \$5.25 million by the Australian Competition & Consumer Commission for false advertising. This time the court ordered Optus to pay for a series of corrective advertisements — half-page grovels in daily newspapers.

It is a pity there are no agencies to hold politicians to account, especially at election time. While we are used to polities gilding the lily, there are times when some behaviour becomes so excessive it must be called out. Take the case of Clive Palmer in the West Australian Senate re-run. The man is out of control. His absurd obsession with Rupert Murdoch and this newspaper is bad enough, but his lies to the people of WA are worse. Palmer uses television appearances to make ridiculous assertions.

He once told Karl Stefanovic that Murdoch's former wife, Wendi Deng, was a Chinese spy. Last week he was asserting on *Studio 10* that Murdoch made daily Skype calls to the editor of this paper to pass on instructions. It's ludicrous nonsense and he must know it, but he persists because he must think he can attract votes by diverting attention from his own political policies.

I use the word policies, but the garbage that comes from his mouth is anything but. He promised the people of WA that he would return to them the entire GST revenue they contribute each year in the full knowledge that he cannot deliver. GST revenue is divvied up by the Commonwealth Grants Commission — an independent body — according to a 50-year-old formula which isn't going to be changed on the whim of a maverick Queensland politician. Attempts by interviewers to pin Palmer on these points result in more irrelevant waffle and occasionally, angry, bullying bluster. He either has a disturbing lack of knowledge about how the country is governed or he is a deliberate purveyor of plausible untruths aimed at gullible people. Either way, it's an ugly picture.

We should not be dismissive of Palmer as merely an interesting or colourful character — he should be dismissed from the parliament he regularly fails to attend. There are laws aimed at upholding truth in advertising, but none that can be applied to politicians who are specifically exempted. In their absence, it falls to the media to expose them, but in the digital age, the traditional methods once used to achieve this are faltering. A focus on delivering factual information and letting the cards fall where they may has been diverted by the search for eyeballs more interested in gossip or games.

We have recently seen the brief emergence of fact checkers. Former editor-in-chief of *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Peter Fray, had a go at this last year. His team was able to label some claims as lies while confirming others, but the impact on voters was minimal and the business was not sustainable. The ABC has a fact-checking unit but its contribution to the national debate has been negligible. What is more interesting is the ABC program *The Checkout*. This is fact-checking with bite because it puts a spotlight on the claims made by manufacturers, mainly in the food and pharmaceutical sectors. There are regulations applying to this sector but they have loopholes large enough to drive a Woolies pantechicon through, meaning, as *The Checkout* regularly points out, that the claims made on labels are frequently “98 per cent fact-free”. These misleading claims are not made by accident or because of sloppiness or misunderstandings. They are deliberate deceptions and they deserve to be called out. If *The Checkout* represents a new form of journalism, then in my book it's welcome. (Mark Day, *The Australian*, April 07, 2014)

The Fundamentalist ‘Truth’

A large part of our work had been taken by answering controversial topics raised by fundamentalist Christians. Given the emphasis we place on the Bible that did not surprise us — they do not like to have their preaching and practices exposed as unbiblical. What surprised us though was their relentless opposition to this work and the efforts they have made in order to destroy or derail it.

One topic they have raised with us many times was the role and place of the Holy Spirit in the heavenly Trinity. The first time we have dealt with this topic was in 1995, in *The Christian Herald* No 5.

It remained a dormant topic for a decade and a half, but then it burst into the open again.

The reason appears to be the Internet. As long as we were restricted by the limitations of the printed media, we could only reach a relatively small number of people, but when we put our publications on the World Wide Web, our nemesis pressed the panic button.

Having failed in their repeated attempts to put an end to this work, they shifted their attention to theological topics. For reasons that only they know, they are bent against the Holy Spirit, going mad at the idea that the Holy Spirit replaces Satan as the third member of the Trinity. They trashed that topic from every possible angle, as our readers may well remember from our last few editions.

We thought that having answered their arguments confidently from the Scriptures, they might give up their battle against the Holy Spirit, and might even repent for their blasphemies if that was at all possible. But no, they now shifted their attention to Jesus Christ Himself. Here is their latest diatribe.

“A Gift Of Truth For You”

“The woman of Rev 12 is not a church, nor Mary, nor Israel. She is the prophet like unto Moses Num 12:3 raised up of her brethren Acts 3:21-22 proving the power of God in the spirit of Elijah Matt 17:3, Luke 1:17 to restore Matt 17:11 the true word John 1:1 that prepares a people by turning their hearts to all the children of God. God our Father will not put any child of his into a hell fire no matter what their sins, no matter if they repent in this life or not. It never entered the heart or mind of God to ever do such a thing Jer7:31, Jer 19:5. Resist your carnal mind of hate, murder and revenge Rom 8:7 to hear the true Gospel going to the world as a witness Matt 24:14.

Anyone that refuses to hear the true Gospel now delivered to the world is rejecting his word not mine. Satan has deceived the whole world Rev 12:9 until now Rev 12:5-6.

*Acts 3:23 And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.

The proof is in the hearing <http://thegoodtale.wordpress.com>”

They personalized their “Gift Of Truth” specifically for us. Nice of them to honor us with their ‘truth’!

Now if that was purely for us, as they claim, it would be of little consequence. We often receive materials that go straight into the rubbish bin. But they say that they send their “true Gospel to the world as a witness”, clearly in competition with our Gospel, and that could not be left unanswered.

We have no fear that they might overtake us in the popularity stakes, for what we have seen on the Internet, the number of visitors to our competitors’ web sites are a mere fraction of what we get to ours; Sufficient to say here that our web site is now being frequented by people from one hundred and sixty five nations. A mighty successful work – the Gospel of Jesus Christ has well and truly been witnessed to the whole world.

Now so sure are the authors of this “Gift Of Truth” that they did not put any name to it. So we looked up their blog, and although that goes on for page after page, that is unsigned too. However, we are in no doubt as to who we are dealing with. Their style, reasoning, subject and history tell us that they come from the same stable as the relentless anti-Trinitarians. So let us look at the points they raised with us.

“The woman of Rev 12 is not a church, nor Mary, nor Israel. She is the prophet like unto Moses Num 12:3 raised up of her brethren Acts 3:21-22 proving the power of God in the spirit of Elijah Matt 17:3, Luke 1:17 to restore Matt 17:11 the true word John 1:1 that prepares a people by turning their hearts to all the children of God.”

Our readers may well ask themselves, what is the link between Rev 12 and the topic of this email, for there does not seem to be any? Oh, but there is. This is what we wrote in *The Christian Herald No 15*.

“Unveiling The Book Of Revelation (Part 2)”

“Every article in this edition, has dealt with one or more of the topics discussed in Revelation. For this reason, we strongly advise everyone to read those articles first, for we cannot go over those topics again. We discussed the first part of Revelation in *The Christian Herald No 14*. Here is the second part.

Rev 12:1 Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars.

Rev 12:2 Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.

Rev 12:3 And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads.

Rev 12:4 His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born.

Rev 12:5 She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne.

Rev 12:6 Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

Rev 12:7 And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought,

Rev 12:8 but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer.

Rev 12:9 So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

Rev 12:10 Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.

Rev 12:11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.

Rev 12:12 Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time."

Rev 12:13 Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male *Child*.

Rev 12:14 But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.

Rev 12:15 So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood.

Rev 12:16 But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.

Rev 12:17 And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

"This chapter presents in a concise form a huge chunk of Israel's history. The woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and a garland of twelve stars on her head, is the nation of Israel who gave birth to the Child Jesus. The twelve garlands are the twelve tribes of Israel. When Jesus overcame the Dragon and became the Christ, and rose to His Father's throne in heaven, He expelled the Dragon from heaven and sent him tumbling down to earth, where he became a deadly enemy to the people of God.

"Notice how the followers of Jesus Christ are distinguished from the rest of the world: those who keep the Commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. How many "Christians" keep the Commandments of God and believe the true Gospel of Jesus Christ? We know of none.

"For a millennium and a half, while the Roman Catholic Church held sway over the Christian world, keeping the Commandments of God was punishable by death. Even today, if you ask Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant preachers about the Commandments of God, they tell you that they have been nailed to the cross. But Jesus Christ did no such thing. He said He came to fulfill the law not to destroy it." (*The Christian Herald* No 15, p 35).

We published this edition in 2006. No one could say that people do not remember what they read in our publications. Our nemeses cannot say that.

They took issue with our statement that the woman in Rev 12 is Israel and the Child is Jesus Christ, telling us that, "She is the prophet like unto Moses Num 12:3." So let us look at Numbers 12:3.

Num 12:3 "(Now the man Moses *was* very humble, more than all men who *were* on the face of the earth.)"

Does this resemble in any way what they said: "The woman of Rev 12 is not a church, nor Mary, nor Israel. She is the prophet like unto Moses Num 12:3." Then they quoted Acts 3:21-22 as saying:

"She is the prophet like unto Moses Num 12:3 raised up of her brethren Acts 3:21-22."

So let us look at Acts 3:21-22.

Act 3:21 whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

Act 3:22 For Moses truly said to the fathers, 'THE LORD YOUR GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN. HIM YOU SHALL HEAR IN ALL THINGS, WHATEVER HE SAYS TO YOU.

Once again, their references do not support the points they are trying to make.

Can you see the problem with their reference? Acts 3:21-22, does not speak of "She", but of "He" and "Him", meaning that the Child of the woman of Rev 12 is a man and not a woman.

But maybe they are luckier with their next reference.

"The woman of Rev 12 is not a church, nor Mary, nor Israel. She is the prophet like unto Moses Num 12:3 raised up of her brethren Acts 3:21-22 proving the power of God in the spirit of Elijah Matt 17:3, Luke 1:17 to restore Matt 17:11 the true word John 1:1 that prepares a people by turning their hearts to all the children of God."

Now here is what Matt 17:3, Luke 1:17, Matt 17:11 and John 1:1 say:

Mat 17:3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.

Luk 1:17 He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'To Turn The Hearts Of The Fathers To The Children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Mat 17:11 Jesus answered and said to them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things.

Joh 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Is this, "proving the power of God in the spirit of Elijah . . . that prepares a people by turning their hearts to all the children of God"? Or rather a mangled attempt to shift the focus from Jesus Christ to "all the children of God", by which they mean the "chosen generation" of the Old Testament, as it will become apparent shortly. In their next passage they say:

"God our Father will not put any child of his into a hell fire no matter what their sins, no matter if they repent in this life or not. It never entered the heart or mind of God to ever do such a thing Jer7:31, Jer 19:5.

It pains us that we have to answer this kind of Satanism, but our Father wants us to do it, so we will. The Scriptures say:

Pro 26:4 Do not answer a fool according to his folly, Lest you also be like him.

Pro 26:5 Answer a fool according to his folly, Lest he be wise in his own eyes.

It is obvious that we are dealing with people who believe that once 'chosen' they will always be 'chosen' regardless of what they do with their life, forgetting that their choosing was conditional upon them remaining obedient and faithful to God. Have they ever read the prayer of Daniel the prophet, one of three men declared by God to be most righteous? (Even *if* these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver *only* themselves by their righteousness," says the Lord GOD. Eze 14:14)

Take note, this prayer and lamentation tells us not only the story Israel, but also the story of Messiah.

Dan 9:1 In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans—

Dan 9:2 in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years *specified* by the word of the LORD through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.

Dan 9:3 Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.

Dan 9:4 And I prayed to the LORD my God, and made confession, and said, "O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments,

Dan 9:5 **we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments.**

Dan 9:6 **Neither have we heeded Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings and our princes, to our fathers and all the people of the land.**

Dan 9:7 O Lord, righteousness *belongs* to You, but to us shame of face, as *it is* this day—to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, those near and those far off in all the countries to which You have driven them, because of the unfaithfulness which they have committed against You.

Dan 9:8 "O Lord, to us *belongs* shame of face, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because we have sinned against You.

Dan 9:9 To the Lord our God *belong* mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him.

Dan 9:10 We have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in His laws, which He set before us by His servants the prophets.

Dan 9:11 Yes, all Israel has transgressed Your law, and has departed so as not to obey Your voice;
**therefore the curse and the oath written in the Law of Moses the servant of God
have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against Him.**

Dan 9:12 And He has confirmed His words, which He spoke against us and against our judges who judged us, by bringing upon us a great disaster; for under the whole heaven such has never been done as what has been done to Jerusalem.

Dan 9:13 "As *it* is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us; yet we have not made our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand Your truth.

Dan 9:14 Therefore the LORD has kept the disaster in mind, and brought it upon us; for the LORD our God *is* righteous in all the works which He does, though we have not obeyed His voice.

Dan 9:15 And now, O Lord our God, who brought Your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and made Yourself a name, as *it* is this day—we have sinned, we have done wickedly!

Dan 9:16 "O Lord, according to all Your righteousness, I pray, let Your anger and Your fury be turned away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people *are* a reproach to all *those* around us.

Dan 9:17 Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and for the Lord's sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary, which is desolate.

Dan 9:18 O my God, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name; for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies.

Dan 9:19 O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name."

Dan 9:20 Now while I *was* speaking, praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God,

Dan 9:21 yes, while I *was* speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering.

Dan 9:22 And he informed *me*, and talked with me, and said, "O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand.

Dan 9:23 At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell *you*, for you *are* greatly beloved; therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision:

Dan 9:24 "Seventy weeks are determined For your people and for your holy city, To finish the transgression, To make an end of sins, To make reconciliation for iniquity, To bring in everlasting righteousness, To seal up vision and prophecy, And to anoint the Most Holy.

Dan 9:25 **"Know therefore and understand, *That* from the going forth of the command To restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince, *There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; The street shall be built again, and the wall, Even in troublesome times.***

Dan 9:26 **"And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself;** And the people of the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it *shall be* with a flood, And till the end of the war desolations are determined.

Dan 9:27 Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, Even until the consummation, which is determined, Is poured out on the desolate."

This passage tells us not only that Israel and Judah were sent into captivity because of their departure from the ways of God, but gives us the specific time for the arrival of the Messiah.

When Jesus Christ made His appearance in Israel some two thousand years ago, the Jewish priests, Pharisees and scribes knew that the time was ripe for the arrival of the Messiah. But they were waiting for a different Messiah, a military leader who would free them the Roman yoke. They did not know the Scriptures which spoke of a different kind of Messiah, one who would free them from sin, and give them the promise of eternal life in an eternally blessed Kingdom, not in that parched piece of land in the Middle East over which they are still fighting to this day.

And this is true not only of Israel, but of the Palestinians, and of every nation in the world, for Jesus Christ is the Messiah for the whole world.

Ever since they killed Jesus Christ for not freeing them from the Roman yoke, they have been trying to escape the stigma of deicide, which the world has wrongfully accused them of. Wrongfully not because they did not do it, or because they did it in ignorance, but because it was appointed to them to do it – because it was written in the Scriptures, and what the Scriptures say cannot be broken, as Jesus Christ clearly stated.

Joh 10:24 Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, "How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly."

Joh 10:25 Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me.

Joh 10:26 But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you.

Joh 10:27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

Joh 10:28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.

Joh 10:29 My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand.

Joh 10:30 I and *My* Father are one."

Joh 10:31 Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him.

Joh 10:32 Jesus answered them, "Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?"

Joh 10:33 The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God."

Joh 10:34 Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I SAID, "YOU ARE GODS" '?"

Joh 10:35 If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (**and the Scripture cannot be broken**),

Joh 10:36 do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?"

Joh 10:37 If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me,

Joh 10:38 believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father *is* in Me, and I in Him."

Joh 10:39 Therefore they sought again to seize Him, but He escaped out of their hand.

Yes, He escaped out of their hands at that time, but not for long. Eventually they caught Him and crucified Him, and took upon themselves the curse of His blood.

Joh 18:33 Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered him,

Joh 18:34 "Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?"

Joh 18:35 Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?"

Joh 18:36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

Joh 18:37 Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say *rightly* that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

Joh 18:38 Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all.

Joh 18:39 "But you have a custom that I should release someone to you at the Passover. Do you therefore want me to release to you the King of the Jews?"

Joh 18:40 Then they all cried again, saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber.

Mat 27:12 And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing.

Mat 27:13 Then Pilate said to Him, "Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?"

Mat 27:14 But He answered him not one word, so that the governor marveled greatly.

Mat 27:19 While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, "Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him."

Mat 27:20 But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.

Mat 27:21 The governor answered and said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" They said, "Barabbas!"

Mat 27:22 Pilate said to them, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" *They* all said to him, "Let Him be crucified!"

Mat 27:23 Then the governor said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they cried out all the more, saying, "Let Him be crucified!"

Mat 27:24 When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather *that* a tumult was rising, he took water and washed *his* hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see *to it*."

Mat 27:25 And all the people answered and said, "His blood *be* on us and on our children."

Mat 27:26 Then he released Barabbas to them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered *Him* to be crucified.

Act 3:17 "Yet now, brethren, I know that you did *it* in ignorance, as *did* also your rulers.

Act 3:18 But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled.

Act 3:19 Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,

Act 3:20 and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before,

Act 3:21 whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

And so, Jesus' blood has been on them and on their children ever since.
Now every sin must be atoned for and repented of, regardless of whether people are conscious of it or not. This is what the Old Testament says about it.

Lev 4:1 Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

Lev 4:2 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: '**If a person sins unintentionally** against any of the commandments of the LORD *in anything* which ought not to be done, and does any of them,

Lev 4:3 if the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, then let him offer to the LORD for his sin which he has sinned a young bull without blemish as a sin offering.

Lev 4:4 He shall bring the bull to the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the LORD, lay his hand on the bull's head, and kill the bull before the LORD. (. . .)

Lev 4:13 '**Now if the whole congregation of Israel sins unintentionally**, and the thing is hidden from the eyes of the assembly, and they have done *something against* any of the commandments of the LORD *in anything* which should not be done, and are guilty;

Lev 4:14 when the sin which they have committed becomes known, then the assembly shall offer a young bull for the sin, and bring it before the tabernacle of meeting.

Lev 4:15 And the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands on the head of the bull before the LORD. Then the bull shall be killed before the LORD. (. . .)

Lev 4:22 '**When a ruler has sinned, and done something unintentionally against** any of the commandments of the LORD his God *in anything* which should not be done, and is guilty,

Lev 4:23 or if his sin which he has committed comes to his knowledge, he shall bring as his offering a kid of the goats, a male without blemish.

Lev 4:24 And he shall lay his hand on the head of the goat, and kill it at the place where they kill the burnt offering before the LORD. It is a sin offering. (. . .)

Lev 4:27 '**If anyone of the common people sins unintentionally** by doing *something against* any of the commandments of the LORD *in anything* which ought not to be done, and is guilty,

Lev 4:28 or if his sin which he has committed comes to his knowledge, then he shall bring as his offering a kid of the goats, a female without blemish, for his sin which he has committed.

Lev 4:29 And he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering, and kill the sin offering at the place of the burnt offering. (. . .)

So regardless of whether people were aware of it or not, if a sin was committed by a priest, by the whole congregation, by a ruler, or by the common people, it had to be atoned for with the blood of animals. In the New Testament, however, people no longer atone for their sins with the blood of animals,

for then they would have to do it year by year, or every time they have become aware of their sin. They repent of it by invoking the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who shed His blood for the whole world.

Heb 10:1 For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, *and* not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.

Heb 10:2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins.

Heb 10:3 But in those *sacrifices there* is a reminder of sins every year.

Heb 10:4 **For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.**

Heb 10:5 Therefore, When He Came Into The World, He Said: "Sacrifice And Offering You Did Not Desire, But A Body You Have Prepared For Me.

HEB 10:6 In Burnt Offerings And Sacrifices For Sin You Had No Pleasure.

HEB 10:7 Then I Said, 'Behold, I Have Come— In The Volume Of The Book It Is Written Of Me— To Do Your Will, O God.' "

HEB 10:8 Previously Saying, "Sacrifice And Offering, Burnt Offerings, And Offerings For Sin You Did Not Desire, Nor Had Pleasure In Them" (Which Are Offered According To The Law),

HEB 10:9 Then He Said, "Behold, I Have Come To Do Your Will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second.

Heb 10:10 By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*.

Heb 10:11 And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

Heb 10:12 **But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right**

Heb 10:13 **hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool.**

Now how could those who have such relentless hostility towards Jesus Christ and against the Holy Spirit ever hope to be saved and be granted a place in the Kingdom of God? They tell us that: "God our Father will not put any child of his into a hell fire no matter what their sins, no matter if they repent in this life or not. It never entered the heart or mind of God to ever do such a thing Jer 7:31, Jer 19:5."

O yeah? Have they ever read these Scriptures?

Rev 20:12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.

Rev 20:13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.

Rev 20:14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

Rev 20:15 And **anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.**

Now this would be an appropriate place to put an end to this diatribe, but we must look at Jer 7:31 and Jer 19:5 to show you another devious interpretation of the Scriptures on their part.

Jer 7:31 And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come into My heart.

Jer 19:5 (they have also built the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire *for* burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or speak, nor did it come into My mind),

Our interlocutors hope that no one will notice their sleight of hand, for instead of referring to Jeremiah, they should have gone to Moses, their favoured prophet. But there is a good reason for that.

Deu 18:10 There shall not be found among you *anyone* who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, *or one* who practices witchcraft, *or a* soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer,

Deu 18:11 or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead.

Deu 18:12 For all who do these things *are* an abomination to the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you.

Deu 18:13 You shall be blameless before the LORD your God.

Deu 18:14 For these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, the LORD your God has not appointed such for you.

Deu 18:15 "The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear,

Deu 18:16 according to all you desired of the LORD your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.'

Deu 18:17 "And the LORD said to me: 'What they have spoken is good.'

Deu 18:18 I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.

Deu 18:19 And it shall be *that* whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.

Moses' writings are a prophecy, a direct warning to Israel. Jeremiah's writings are an accomplished fact, a condemnation of Israel for departing from the true God and embracing the pagan gods of their neighbours.

The authors of this "Gift Of Truth" turned a grievous sin into a universal doctrine of salvation: "God our Father will not put any child of his into a hell fire no matter what their sins, no matter if they repent in this life or not. It never entered the heart or mind of God to ever do such a thing."

Unbelievable, but true!

What is it that has never entered the mind of God? It has never entered His mind that His people, whom He freed from Egyptian slavery, for whom He performed miracle after miracle, whom He called "a chosen generation" and wanted to turn into a "special treasure" and "a holy priesthood" for the whole world, if they obeyed Him, turned instead to their pagan neighbours, whom they were supposed to annihilate from the face of the earth, and embraced their idolatry and practice of burning their children in fire to order to placate pagan gods.

Here is another Biblical passage that our interlocutors conveniently ignore.

2Ki 21:1 Manasseh *was* twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name *was* Hephzibah.

2Ki 21:2 And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel.

2Ki 21:3 For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; he raised up altars for Baal, and made a wooden image, as Ahab king of Israel had done; and he worshiped all the host of heaven and served

2Ki 21:4 them. He also built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem I will put My name."

2Ki 21:5 And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD.

2Ki 21:6 Also **he made his son pass through the fire**, practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft, and consulted spiritists and mediums. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke *Him* to anger.

2Ki 21:7 He even set a carved image of Asherah that he had made, in the house of which the LORD had said to David and to Solomon his son, "In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever;

2Ki 21:8 and I will not make the feet of Israel wander anymore from the land which I gave their fathers—**only if they are careful to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that My servant Moses commanded them.**"

2Ki 21:9 But they paid no attention, and **Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than the nations whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel.**

So, the "chosen" generation did more evil than the nations whom the LORD had destroyed before them. And they still think they are chosen. Now they tell us that they are "witnessing" their gospel to the whole world, obviously in competition with our Gospel.

There are a few more references in their "Gift of Truth", however people can look them up for themselves if they think they have anything to learn from them. Their arguments are not merely worse than trash, they are extremely dangerous, for some people may think that they can commit any sin they want and still are saved for the Kingdom of God.

Now a word of caution: if anyone hates another person for whatever reason should ask himself, would he like to be in that person's moccasins, to use an American Indian expression. Those who hate the Jews should ask themselves the same question: would they like to be in their shoes?

What the world forgets, or does not know because no one has told them, is that the Jews killed Jesus Christ on behalf of the whole world. Had they had not done it, other people would have had to do it.

Remember what Jesus Christ said before He gave up His Spirit?

Luk 23:34 Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."

If Jesus Christ forgave them, He expects at least that much from those who call themselves Christians, and from everyone who hopes to make it into the Kingdom of God.

The fact is that Jesus Christ was scheduled to die for us before this world was created. He knew that human beings would sin and need redemption, and that could only be done by the Creator Himself.

Joh 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Joh 1:2 **He was in the beginning with God.**

Joh 1:3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

Joh 1:10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.

Joh 1:11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.

Joh 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God.

1Co 10:1 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea,

1Co 10:2 all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,

1Co 10:3 all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink.

1Co 10:4 For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and **that Rock was Christ.**

Joh 17:1 Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come.

Joh 17:2 Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life,

Joh 17:3 that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

Joh 17:4 I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now,

Joh 17:5 O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You **before the world was.**

Eph 1:3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ,

Eph 1:4 just as He chose us in Him **before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and

Eph 1:5 without blame before Him in love, **having predestined us** to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

Eph 1:6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

Eph 1:7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches

Eph 1:8 of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known

Eph 1:9 to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself,

Eph 1:10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.

1Pe 1:3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

1Pe 1:4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

1Pe 1:5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

1Pe 1:10 Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace *that*

1Pe 1:11 *would come* to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

1Pe 1:12 To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.

1Pe 1:13 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest *your* hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

1Pe 1:14 as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, *as* in your ignorance;

1Pe 1:15 but as He who called you *is* holy, you also be holy in all *your* conduct,

1Pe 1:16 because it is written, "BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."

1Pe 1:17 And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay *here* in fear;

1Pe 1:18 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers,

1Pe 1:19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was

1Pe 1:20 **foreordained before the foundation of the world**, but was manifest in these last times for you.

Now if Jesus Christ was foreordained before the foundation of the world to shed His blood for us, it was the Jews' misfortune to have received this task. Therefore, instead of hating the Jews for killing the Messiah, the world ought to be grateful to them for doing that deed on their behalf.

The fact that Jewish leaders have ignorantly sought to exonerate their nation of the sin of deicide by committing yet more sins is not for us to judge but for Jesus Christ Himself.

State Of The World

Society and culture

Kate the queen of new class of style

IN this era of butt selfies and slut walks, Kate Middleton, aka the Duchess of Cambridge, is a revolutionary.

The royal couple flew out of Australia with baby George on Friday after a flawless tour that owed much of its success to the young mother. Kate's grace and elegance is a welcome change from the desperate self-loathing exhibitionism of most celebrity - females of her generation.

It's why she is raising hackles among snarky feminists. They have called her variously "plastic princess", "painfully thin", a "jointed doll on which certain rags are hung" and even "dangerous for our daughters."

Sunny Kate represents a threat to the pornification industry, which has somehow duped feminism into the belief that dressing like a stripper and acting like a hooker equals emancipation. Nothing could be further from the truth. You only have to look at Miley Cyrus and Lindsay Lohan to see what the end game is. Kate is the anti-slut, the antidote to everything wrong with Western culture. She has put class back into sexy, made modesty cool, and added cachet to marriage and motherhood. No wonder she has become a role model to a generation of young women, despite scornful feminists. Even arch republican and Greens loon Senator Sarah Hanson-Young admires her. She brought her seven-year-old daughter Kora to the Great Hall at Parliament House on Thursday to give a bouquet of flowers to the pretty princess.

But there is something about Kate's demure style and dutiful demeanour that grates with certain women. Kate, or Catherine, as her adoring husband William now calls her, had barely touched down in Australia when the subterranean griping started.

Republicans, with the popularity of their cause plummeting, naturally were irritated at the adulation, and brushed it off as mere celebrity. Female commentators lambasted Kate for being a privileged dress-up doll "defined" by her husband. In fact, regardless of how easy she makes it seem, Kate is a working mother who treats her role as a job. Her short, sensible fingernails tell you she is no purposeless prima donna.

Patron of seven charities, including one for terminally ill children, she has generated a 10-fold increase in donations to the Foundation of Prince William and Prince Harry since she married into the royal family three years ago.

If you watched Kate on this tour you would have seen how hard she worked. It might not be the same as toiling on a factory floor, but the discipline and effort of dressing appropriately, behaving properly and politely enduring endless hours of ceremony and small talk is real. She has a knack for making it look fun. In contrast to the troubled marriage of Diana and Charles, she and William evidently are very much in love, exchanging easy smiles and admiring looks. They managed a grumpy, teething nine-month-old George with aplomb, and spent only two nights away from him. They work together as a well-drilled team, punctual and smiling.

Sunny, self-disciplined Kate has been an inspired choice as wife. You can't imagine her rolling her eyes or affecting a glum face for the cameras, like Diana did. And you can't imagine William shooting his cuffs or being jealous or looking exasperated at his wife like his father did.

Good manners are not airs and graces but thoughtfulness and consideration for others, and Kate has these in spades.

You see it particularly when she is talking to disabled children. She bends down to engage with little people and makes sure the child is not alarmed or embarrassed. It's a skill many politicians never master. Kate was always respectful and engaged during 19 days of public appearances in Australia and New Zealand this month, but she's also a little bolshie, whether she is beating William in a sailing race or pushing past him to take the front seat of a RAAF jet. And he loves her spirit.

His wife will never feel unloved or disrespected, as his mother felt she was. The success of their marriage is due to the fact they had nine years of dating to get to know each other including their time, out of sight of the media, as relatively normal university students at St Andrews in Scotland. It was a better foundation than Diana's whirlwind courtship at 20 with a man 13 years older.

Kate is 32, five months older than her husband, and is as well educated as he is, with a degree in the history of art, and has a dignified self-possession that tells of a steely disposition. Mature, smart and respectful of each other, the marriage is one of equals working together in the family business. They are restoring the dignity of the office after decades of tawdry scandal and broken marriages. Far from being defined by her husband, Kate is redefining the monarchy.

START CUTTING AT HOME JOE

It's all very well for Joe Hockey to rail against the "age of entitlement". We know the government has been left with a fiscal mess and we'll see how bad on Thursday, when the Treasurer releases the long-awaited Commission of Audit. But if he is going to start hacking into the aged pension, as he hinted at last week, then he should also freeze the salaries and perks and pensions of politicians and public servants. Share the pain. When private sector salaries are stagnant, and pensioners struggle to pay their power bills, it's obscene that top public servants are about to win pay rises over 5 per cent, with salaries such as \$844,000, plus perks, for Ian Watt, Secretary of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and \$824,320 for Martin Parkinson, the head of Treasury.

Then there are the whopping pay rises of up to 30 per cent that politicians awarded themselves three years ago. That took the salary of then-Prime Minister Julia Gillard and now Tony Abbott to \$495,430, among the most generous in the world. That's a lot more than UK Prime Minister David Cameron's \$256,000, Canada's Stephen Harper's \$341,000 and even US President Barack Obama's \$400,000. Even more absurd are the handsome salaries of reams of quangos. For instance, the Sex Discrimination, Race Discrimination and Human rights Commissioners all earn \$332,000, plus perks. Fiscal prudence starts at home. (Miranda Devine, *The Sunday Telegraph*, April 26, 2014)

Ugly signs of the times

THE unedifying banners littered throughout the March in March last weekend distracted from the message most of the crowd who took to the streets presumably hoped to send. That is, they were ordinary voters representative of wider public discontent with the policies of the new government. But was that really the case? While there will be inevitable debate over how mainstream much of the up to 100,000 who attended the marches across the country actually were, those who stole the headlines with their offensive banners undoubtedly were anything but mainstream. These protesters served up the sort of bile that sometimes passes for commentary on social media — also overshadowing the many free-flowing exchanges on mediums such as Twitter and Facebook that can occur.

While sections of the commentariat praised the protests as some sort of transformative moment when social media protests migrated into the mainstream, many of the messages were subversive as well as offensive, anything but representative of the approach mainstream members of the public adopt. Signs describing Tony Abbott as an “evil fascist”, replete with a cartoon image of the PM with a Hitleresque moustache, do nothing to advance the public debate. Nor do many of the other signs that made their way into the crowds — “ignorant pig” and “racist sexist elitist homophobic fascist” are just two examples of a multitude of signs directed at Abbott that were designed to cause offence. A small number of attendees at the rallies wore “F. k Tony Abbott” T-shirts, replicating the clothing with body paint and hastily drawn posters.

“The protests were a perfect example of free speech in action,” says new Freedom Commissioner Tim Wilson. But he points out “people had their right (to free speech), but they didn’t exercise responsibility, expressing absurd, insulting and unreasonable commentary. Therefore, no one takes them seriously.” Other signs went further than simply causing offence, such as one that included the phrase “Kill Abbott”, inciting violence, no less, as did the comments from the secretary of the Newcastle Trades Hall Council, Gary Kennedy, who told protesters from the podium that Qantas chief executive Alan Joyce “should be shot somewhere in the back of the head”.

While the long-serving union secretary withdrew his comments in the days that followed the march, the applause in the crowd widened the ambit of poor judgment on what is and is not appropriate to the listeners, not just one of the keynote speakers.

“It is unrealistic to expect that passions won’t be a factor within political debate,” Labor member for Chifley Ed Husic argues.

“But we have to reinforce in our minds that there are boundaries people shouldn’t over step, because it risks deepening the partisan political divides that are increasingly plaguing public debate.” Banners denouncing the value of democracy because it has resulted in the election of the Abbott government — which were also on display last weekend — suggest discontent with an electoral system that neatly balances majoritarianism in the house of government (the House of Representatives) with the sorts of checks and balances political scientists appreciate in the Senate (elected via a form of proportional representation). This sort of attack on our political culture and systems is anything but mainstream, all the more coming so soon after a clear-cut election result.

Conservative commentators have inevitably decried the failure of sections of the media to condemn the March in March the same way protests associated with the Convoy of No Confidence outside Parliament House were quickly condemned. On that occasion, banners such as “Ditch the Witch” and “Bob Brown’s Bitch” were used to vilify then prime minister Julia Gillard. They were described as sexist and outrageous, which they surely were. But is there a double standard? Was indignation towards signs attacking our first female PM greater than the reaction to even more offensive signs now being directed at Abbott? Wilson says “the conduct of protesters at both events went beyond what Australians think is fair”. One important difference between the reaction to the material directed at Gillard and that now being directed at Abbott is that Labor politicians were clever enough not to attend the rallies with the bad-taste material last weekend.

Perhaps they learnt from Abbott’s mistake in early 2011 when he spoke at the main Convoy of No Confidence rally in front of Parliament House and one of the offensive signs was hoisted behind him while he and other opposition ministers were on the podium.

Abbott has claimed he didn’t know that the sign was there, and we can only take him at his word. At the very least, it represented poor advancing work from the then opposition leader’s office. A number of Labor MPs voiced support for the March in March rallies, but none appears to have attended the events. Certainly not Opposition Leader Bill Shorten. Deputy Greens leader Adam Bandt, however, did attend one of the rallies (careful not to appear alongside one of the offensive banners, mind), where he described the protests as the compassionate and humane side of the Australian population, notwithstanding the inappropriate signage. Another potential difference between the protests against the Gillard government and those now being directed at the Abbott government is that talkback radio played a lead hand in the Gillard rallies, using their programs to whip up interest for the events. But left-wing commentators used the online media as well as social media to do the same for the March in March. The messages are similar, and both remain inappropriate. Only the medium has changed. While feminists have pointed out the language used in banners against Gillard included overt sexist rhetoric, designed not only to cause offence more generally, but also specifically to deliver a sexist message, such double messaging was also on display in many of the signs directed at Abbott. Not on gender grounds, but as an ideological statement along side personal attacks. Calling a conservative politician a “fascist” and portraying his image to replicate Hitler’s is deliberately designed to undermine their ideological positioning in the same way that calling a woman a “bitch” or a “witch” carries clear sexist intent. Both are offensive, but both are also designed (by intent or otherwise) to undermine credibility in a deeper and longer lasting way. Quite obviously, neither form of protest is acceptable and both do more to undermine associated messages of discontent than to advance a particular cause. “If protesters want to get substantive messages across they should do a better job of holding their own to account for their conduct,” Wilson points out.

It isn’t just Gillard and Abbott who have been subjected to cruel and offensive protests. John Howard was portrayed in both physically and historically demeaning ways, although these sorts of attacks took longer to manifest than the insults hurled at both Gillard and Abbott after each became prime minister. Early protests in Canberra against the Howard government industrial relations changes even turned into a riot not long after the 1996 election, with protesters storming the Parliament House foyer. On that occasion, opposition leader Kim Beazley made the same mistake that Abbott did, addressing the rally. “We hadn’t even released the bill yet,” then workplace relations minister Peter Reith points out. He argues that the more over-the-top protests against Howard became over the years, the more considered and reasonable the government appeared by way of comparison. Race Discrimination Commissioner Tim Soutphommasane sees a link between outrage at the sorts of vilification that have occurred in the protests mentioned above and the need for protections against racial vilification. He points out there are many restrictions on offensive speech that exist in parliament, via defamation law as well as in criminal summary offences laws, causing him to wonder what all the fuss is about when it comes to retaining similar provisions within the Racial Discrimination Act. “Racial abuse isn’t about mere offence. It is about speech that diminishes the equal standing of others and our cohesion as a society.”

There is little doubt that when protests get out of hand or become dominated by extremists, the mainstream message is lost. Even the involvement of sexist, subversive or ideologically abusive elements can distract from events that might otherwise be designed with a legitimate democratic purpose. Protest is as important a part of democracy as are institutions designed to uphold democracy, but only when practised within the spirit of Australia’s well established political culture. (*Peter Van Onselen, The Australian, March 24, 2014*)

Miller a sad reminder of damage done

IF you want to see the toll of illicit drugs, just look at the bloated face and glazed eyes of Scott Miller. The former Olympic golden boy of Australian swimming was a pathetic, slurring, drug-addicted mess when interviewed on 60 Minutes.

Ice, aka methamphetamine, is "what my addiction is at the moment . . . That's what's got me by the balls".

The interview was done six months ago, but Channel 9 could not air it until court proceedings against Miller for drug possession were complete. He received a suspended jail sentence after being arrested twice with ice. Meanwhile, Miller, 39, has been in rehabilitation in Melbourne and is living "week by week", says an acquaintance. That is the lot of a drug addict. You never say they have fully recovered. They are forever "in recovery". But if drug liberalisers such as former Australian Federal Police commissioner Mick Palmer and his new pals at the lobby group Australia21 get their way, a lot more drugs will be a lot more available for a lot more people to get hooked on.

Miller got into cocaine and ecstasy when he returned from the Atlanta Olympics, and found his home town of Sydney awash with drugs. "First time I'd seen that sort of stuff. It was everywhere," he said. He was 21 at the time. Miller was right. Drugs were everywhere in 1996. A quasi-push for decriminalisation, under the guise of harm minimisation, meant police turned a blind eye. Nowhere was this more evident than in the then-heroin capital of Australia, Cabramatta, in Sydney's west. "The best example of what can happen if you legalise drugs is Cabramatta," says retired detective sergeant Tim Priest, who blew the whistle on the hierarchy's inaction on drug crime in the late 1990s.

"Virtually it was decriminalised by lack of action. It was just zombieland in the '90s, hundreds of addicts dying, vomiting, urinating, committing crimes. Young people flocked to Cabramatta [to] give it a go . . . Police were powerless to act; you just had this free market. Along with that comes the shootings, the murders, the stabbings, the prostitution, the diseases — it's not nirvana.

"By legalising drugs, that's what you get." But 1996 was also the year John Howard was elected prime minister. "I did not need any encouragement to embrace a zero-tolerance approach to illicit drugs," he wrote in his autobiography. "I refused to accept the argument that a tough and effective policy could not make inroads on such terrible habits as heroin and cocaine taking."

At the end of 1997, he launched the Get Tough on Drugs campaign, headed by the Salvation Army's Major Brian Watters, with the aforementioned Palmer as deputy. It was an unmitigated success. Watters cites the number of heroin deaths, which plummeted from 1116 in 1999 to 374 by 2005. "We were the only country with a heroin drought. More than 700 people a year were being saved from drug deaths.

"We worked on reducing the flow of drugs. But [the policy] was tough on drugs, not tough on drug users." For the first time in decades, drug use fell. Between 1998 and 2007, the use of cannabis halved, speed and ice fell 40 per cent, and heroin fell 75 per cent, according to the 2010 National Drug Strategy Household Survey. But by 2011, the trend had reversed. "Over the last few years we've gone backwards again," says Watters. "We're not applying the things we learned that worked." The Tough on Drugs focus weakened especially after the retirement of Palmer's successor as AFP commissioner, Mick Keelty, who had been its driving force. Watters is disappointed Palmer has so drastically changed his tune on drugs, and says it is ridiculous to say we are losing the "war on drugs", because we never had a war. We had a balanced approach, very much like Sweden." Ah, Sweden, the bane of the drug liberaliser. Learning from its disaster of extreme permissiveness in the 1960s, Sweden has moved to a zero tolerance regime that includes coercive rehabilitation. The result is the lowest drug use in Europe. That means fewer young people exposed to drugs, fewer experimenting, and fewer who wind up like Scott Miller. "It made me happy," Miller said of his ice habit. "But where it ends is not a happy place." Let's hope he can stop taking drugs. But obviously it's better not to start.

Postscript: Tragically, Miller's ex-wife, 47-year-old TV personality Charlotte Dawson, was found dead in her Woolloomooloo apartment yesterday. She suffered from depression. Among her last tweets was one about Miller: "Hoping Scott Miller, a man I loved very much, can recover & become a great dad to Jack. So sad." (*Miranda Devine, The Sunday Telegraph, February 22, 2014*)

It's high time to end drug culture

THREE days after Philip Seymour Hoffman died with a needle in his arm, Hollywood was putting up giant billboards spruiking its drug-glamourising Oscar prospect Wolf of Wall Street.

The words "because it's awesome!" appear over an image of Leo DiCaprio and Jonah Hill in one of the many scenes in which they are high as kites and having a whale of a time. The "awesome" quote comes from DiCaprio's real life character, Wall Street fraudster Jordan Belfort: "I use Xanax to stay focused, Ambien to sleep, pot to mellow out, cocaine to wake up and morphine . . . because it's awesome." Young men in one Sydney movie theatre could be heard saying: "This is sick" (excellent), as Belfort and pals snorted cocaine, popped pills, smoked crack and screwed hookers. This is a problem, in case you haven't noticed.

We now demonise the legal drugs tobacco and alcohol. Yet we turn a blind eye to the illicit drugs which are increasingly glamourised by Hollywood and pop culture. Illicit drug use is rife as Baby Boomers take their habits into old age and Gen Y launches a new era of excess. And the problem, for some reason, is now worse in Australia than in any other developed country, according to a 2012 UN report. In Sydney, cocaine busts have reportedly doubled in a year, with mothers in Double Bay restaurants snorting lines in the toilet before the school run. A study in the Medical Journal of Australia last September found ambulance call-outs for crystal meth, aka ice, had tripled in two years. When the Howard government launched its Tough on Drugs strategy in 1997, drug use plummeted for the first time in three decades. Best of all, teenage drug experimentation fell, according to the Australian Secondary School Students Alcohol and Drug Survey.

But then a new laissez faire government arrived, and the figures show drug use rose steadily from 2008. We now demonise the legal drugs tobacco and alcohol. Yet we turn a blind eye to the illicit drugs which are increasingly glamourised by Hollywood and pop culture. You can't smoke a cigarette on the silver screen but the Wolf of Wall Street can snort coke out of a prostitute's anus, giving new meaning to crack cocaine. There's something seriously wrong when the medical establishment is biased towards legalising drugs while railing against alcohol. Last week, after Hoffman died from heroin, Australia's chief drug liberaliser, Dr Alex Wodak, was still using the good name of St Vincent's Hospital, where he is "emeritus consultant" to downplay the dangers. Heroin, he told the ABC, could be used recreationally.

"It's a risk, no doubt about it," Dr Wodak said. "But there are also people who go on and use and have very functional, creative, significant lives where they contribute to the community and continue to use heroin from time to time."

When the Howard government launched its Tough on Drugs strategy in 1997, drug use plummeted for the first time in three decades. Best of all, teenage drug experimentation fell, according to the Australian Secondary School Students Alcohol and Drug Survey." Right on cue, The Guardian published an article claiming it wasn't heroin but the prohibition on drugs that caused

Hoffman's death. You could hardly send a more dangerous message at a time when authorities in Australia fear a return of the heroin epidemic of the 1990s. A more realistic response came from Hoffman's friend, scriptwriter and recovering addict Aaron Sorkin, who wrote last week that Hoffman "did not die from an overdose of heroin - he died from heroin". "We should stop implying that if he'd just taken the proper amount then everything would have been fine," Sorkin said. Hoffman once told Sorkin: "If one of us dies of an overdose, probably 10 people who were about to won't."

In other words, "our deaths would make news and maybe scare someone clean". But even if Hoffman's death did save 10 lives, it's nothing to the legions of people switched onto the glamour of drugs this Oscar season by Martin Scorsese's shameful movie. I've interviewed heroin addicts trying to break free with naltrexone treatment.

The only emotion they expressed was anger that the government had been so slack on drug law enforcement in the 1990s when they became hooked as teenagers, catching the so-called "smack express" train to Cabramatta to openly score. It was so easy, and they were left with a lifelong affliction. You can't smoke a cigarette on the silver screen but the Wolf of Wall Street can snort coke out of a prostitute's anus, giving new meaning to crack cocaine." Now we're doing it again; governments and police looking for the easy way out, happy to believe the lies of drug liberalisers and appease the drug-soaked chattering classes. Meanwhile, the so-called - alcohol-fuelled violence we are currently so worked up about ignores the fact that alcohol consumption is plummeting - we're drinking less alcohol than we have in almost a decade, and 30 per cent less than the peak in 1974-75. What has changed is the nature and extent of illicit drug use. Where alcohol is a depressant that makes you sleepy, stimulant drugs keep you alert to drink more and, sometimes, to become violent. A decade ago John Howard showed you could change drug habits. But we gave up the war almost as soon as we started. (*Miranda Devine, The Sunday Telegraph, February 08, 2014*)

PAEDOPHILIA BY ANOTHER NAME

COMMUNITY Services minister Pru Goward told 2GB radio last week that forced marriages of underage girls may be "quite common" in southwest Sydney, western Sydney and the Blue Mountains. She was speaking about the case of a 12-year-old girl allegedly married off to a 26-year-old man in a Muslim ceremony sanctioned by her own parents. That is paedophilia in anyone's language. If it so common, the police should be doing something about it immediately. (*Miranda Devine, The Sunday Telegraph, February 08, 2014*)

Women express milk at work [instead of feeding their children at home]

Women who return to work after giving birth have been forced to express milk in a car park or toilet, while others have leaked milk onto their desk after being denied the opportunity to take a break, a national inquiry has heard.

In its submission to the Human Rights Commission's pregnancy and return to work national review, Unions NSW said many women needing to express milk at work had been unable to access appropriate lactation rooms. "When another union member requested a break to express milk she was told that she needed to wait until another staff member could relieve her before she could leave her desk," the submission said. "The member was forced to wait a considerable time causing her milk to leak and increasing her risk of mastitis." Unions NSW said the right of employees to request extended parental leave and flexible working arrangements to meet caring needs should be strengthened under the Fair Work Act. It said employees should also be given an avenue to appeal any decisions made by management and employers to reject such a request. "These appeal rights should provide employees with access to the Fair Work Commission for conciliation and arbitration," the submission says. Jenny Singleton, from the NSW Public Service Association, said she had received reports of women being denied the opportunity to express milk in the workplace. She said one woman had been forced to express milk in a toilet which had a faulty lock. An employee walked in on her and then told colleagues that it was "gross when women express milk".

"Management didn't do anything about it and she was too afraid to take it further because she didn't want to risk losing her flexible working conditions," she said. A survey of Public Service Association members found that 77 per cent of 713 respondents said they had missed out on an opportunity for promotion while pregnant, and 71 per cent said they had missed out of training or development opportunities. It also found that 79 per cent of women who responded said they had been subjected to inappropriate comments by supervisors while pregnant. Ms Singleton said many women had been denied the right to seek flexible working conditions after giving birth and returning to work.

In its submission to the inquiry, the Australian Industry Group said a common challenge for employers in blue-collar industries was dealing with requests for flexible work that conflicted with rosters. The challenge did not arise to the same extent in white-collar jobs. "The main reasons for this are that flexible working hours are more easily accommodated and options such as job-share or working from home are more accessible to both the employer and employee," the submission said. "Nonetheless, some smaller employers...find it challenging to accommodate requests for part-time work in circumstances where the employee, prior to parental leave, was employed on a full-time basis."

"Many of these employers report that, despite their best efforts, the requests could not be accommodated, or were very difficult to accommodate, because of the direct and indirect costs for the employers in recruiting a new employee...."

The submission said inflexible provisions in workplace awards "also create barriers to the accommodation of requests for flexible working arrangements made by employees returning to work from a period of parental leave".

A draft submission by the Australian Council of Trade Unions said many women resigned from their job to have a baby because of limited access to unpaid leave and flexible return to work options. Many also experienced a loss of seniority and access to training and career paths and unreasonable refusal by employers to accommodate them. (*Anna Patty, SMH, February 11, 2014*)

Looking for a shot at redemption: supporters push for return to favour for Mel Gibson

Some in Hollywood want an end to what they see as the star's quiet blacklisting, but others are still not ready to forgive.

Eight years after Mel Gibson's anti-Semitic rant during a drink-driving arrest, Hollywood is debating the rehabilitation of an Oscar winner who was once one of the industry's most bankable stars. The discussion was sparked by a March 12 opinion piece in *Deadline Hollywood* by Allison Hope Weiner, a journalist who covered his fall from favour and now considers him a friend. Her appeal for an end to what she called a "quiet blacklisting" has drawn more than 5700 comments on Yahoo.com's movie page and more than 800 on the *Deadline Hollywood* site, read by many in the industry. "He has been in the doghouse long enough," Weiner wrote. "It's time to give the guy another chance."

Gibson's movies, from *Mad Max* to *Braveheart* and *Apocalypto*, have grossed \$3.6 billion, according to research company Rentrak, providing an incentive for studios and agencies to consider absolution. His particular transgressions, however, and the number of them over the years, mean it is unlikely to come easy. Forgiving Gibson "is not the same thing as forgiving Lindsay Lohan

for partying too late", says Elizabeth Currid-Halkett, author of *Starstruck: The Business of Celebrity* and an associate professor at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. "Anti-Semitism is not just behaving badly." While the 58-year-old still directs and acts, recently starring with Sylvester Stallone in *The Expendables 3*, major studios "are either wary of him or prefer not to work with him", says *Deadline Hollywood* film editor Michael Fleming. "I am surprised this has lasted this long. The guy has made a lot of people a lot of money."

The back-and-forth by commentators on Weiner's piece boils down to a question of whether what someone says or does off-screen, however repugnant, should have any effect on his fitness to make movies. Gibson is a long-running case in point. The hits to his reputation are not limited to those from his tirade about Jews being "vitriolic and harmful words", delivered as he was arrested in 2006 in Malibu, California. In 2010, audio tapes surfaced of threats, laced with racial epithets, he made to his then girlfriend, Oksana Grigorieva. The next year, he pleaded no contest to a misdemeanor battery charge after a dispute with Grigorieva, the mother of his youngest child.

In 2004, he came under fire for what the Anti-Defamation League and others saw as anti-Semitism in *The Passion of the Christ*, a blockbuster he directed, co-produced and co-wrote. He reacted to a Frank Rich column about it in *The New York Times* by telling *The New Yorker*: "I want to kill him. I want his intestines on a stick. I want to kill his dog." In 1992, he offended the gay community with remarks in a Spanish newspaper interview and later told *Playboy* that he would apologise "when hell freezes over".

He did apologise after his Malibu arrest for what he said were his "vitriolic and harmful words", and, after pleading no contest to a misdemeanor drink-driving charge, was sentenced to three years' probation. Alan Nierob, a Rogers & Cowan publicist who represents Gibson, says his client should be allowed back in the fold. "People should know that he is now healthy once again, both physically and mentally, after suffering a breakdown," Nierob says. "He is an artistic genius, and the industry should benefit once again from his enormous talent."

Weiner, describing herself as an observant Jew, wrote in *Deadline Hollywood* that Gibson today "is clearly a different man, one who has worked on his sobriety since that awful night in Malibu". The movie industry, she said, is hypocritical, willing to "work with others who've committed felonies and done things far more serious than Gibson". She cited Mike Tyson, a convicted rapist who has been in the *Hangover* films. Gibson was dropped from a cameo in *The Hangover Part II* in 2010 after "a lot of people" working on the film protested, director Todd Phillips told the *Hollywood Reporter*. "Gibson has been shunned not for doing anything criminal; his greatest offences amount to use of harsh language," Weiner wrote. She says she chose to publish it on the 10th anniversary of *The Passion of the Christ*, which she describes as "about an innocent man's willingness to forgive the greatest injustice".

The independent release grossed \$612 million at the box office, and Gibson personally made \$210 million in 2004, according to Forbes. His fortune was estimated at \$850 million by the *Los Angeles Business Journal*, and *People* magazine reported that his 2011 divorce halved that. In recent years, Weiner says, Gibson has befriended rabbis, attended Passover seders and donated to Jewish causes. He invited to coffee the Los Angeles County Sheriff's deputy who took him into custody in Malibu. He was at Weiner's son's bar mitzvah, where she says he charmed her family. "My friendship with Gibson made me reconsider other celebrities whose public images became tarnished by the media's rush to judge," Weiner wrote. "Whether it's Gibson, Tom Cruise or Alec Baldwin, the descent from media darling to pariah can happen quickly after they do something dumb." Hollywood is littered with stars who fell from grace - Charlie Sheen after a rant against the producer of *Two and a Half Men*, Robert Downey Jr after arrests for illegal drug use, Cruise after jumping on Oprah's couch and admonishing Brooke Shields for treating her postpartum depression with pharmaceuticals - and who bounced back.

Downey, Gibson's co-star in *Air America* in 1990, has been among his staunch defenders. He asked that Gibson be on stage to present him with a life-achievement award from American Cinematheque in 2011, and said in his acceptance speech that his friend deserved from Hollywood the same forgiveness it had afforded him. Gibson had helped revive Downey's career when he was considered uninsurable, by paying his insurance bond for 2003's *The Singing Detective*. Gibson rose to international fame with the *Mad Max* and *Lethal Weapon* films, and won Oscars in 1995 for best picture and best director for *Braveheart*, in which he also starred. He garnered acclaim for *Apocalypse*, about the end of Mayan civilisation, which he financed through his Icon Productions. Disney distributed it. Released five months after the Malibu arrest, it did well at the box office. "Say what you will about him - about his problem with booze or his problem with Jews - he is a serious filmmaker," wrote *New York Times* critic A.O. Scott. One of Gibson's big hits as an actor before Malibu was *Signs*, a 2002 thriller by M. Night Shyamalan that grossed \$228 million. One of his biggest flops was *The Beaver* in 2011 with Jodie Foster. He bypassed cinemas with *Get the Gringo* in 2012, releasing it on pay-television. Last year, he starred with Sheen in *Machete Kills*, which was not a critical or commercial success. In Hollywood, "there are some who may forgive and some who never will," says Michael Sitrick, chairman and chief executive of Sitrick Brincko Group, a Los Angeles-based public relations and crisis-management firm that has represented rapper Chris Brown, baseball player Alex Rodriguez and socialite Paris Hilton. "It's not about spin. It has to be genuine." (Anousha Sakoui, *SMH*, March 23, 2014)

Science and the Environment

The heat is on, but rain's still a mystery

AUSTRALIA is getting hotter and the window for bushfires is growing but there is no clear trend in heavy rainfall or cyclones, according to the biannual climate report released today by CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology.

The State of the Climate report said the nation's average temperatures had increased by almost 1C during the past century, with seven of the 10 hottest years occurring since 1998. This compares with average surface temperatures on a global scale, where nine of the 10 warmest years have occurred since 2002. Bureau of Meteorology spokesman Karl Braganza said it was not possible to compare continental and global surface temperatures because of the influence of oceans at the global scale. According to the report, rising average temperatures were occurring against the background of high climate variability, "but the signal is clear". "Warming has seen Australia experiencing more warm weather and extreme heat, and fewer cool extremes," the report said. "There has been an increase in extreme fire weather, and a longer fire season, across large parts of Australia." (*Graham Lloyd, The Australian*, March 04, 2014)

Charles compares climate sceptics to headless chickens

PRINCE Charles yesterday branded climate change deniers as "headless chickens." In an inflammatory speech, the heir to the throne spoke out against "the barrage of sheer intimidation" from what he described as powerful interest groups.

Addressing young environmental entrepreneurs at Buckingham Palace, he said sceptics were turning accepted scientific wisdom on its head. "It is baffling that in our modern world we have such blind trust in science and technology that we all accept what science tells us about everything until, that is, it comes to climate science," he said. "All of a sudden, and with a barrage of sheer intimidation, we are told by powerful groups of deniers that the scientists are wrong and we must abandon all our faith in so many overwhelming scientific evidence."

Benny Peiser, of the climate-sceptic Global Warming Policy Foundation, described the attack as aggressive and contentious. Charles's scathing attack came as The Environment Agency issued six of the most serious "threat to life" warnings and more than 200 flood alerts as rain and gales are set to batter Britain, bringing more flooding chaos. More than 100 alerts have been issued in the south-east which has been worst hit by the floods in recent weeks. Up to 40mm of rain is forecast in areas of the south-west and 120km/h gusts in conditions which forecasters say are likely to continue until mid-February. (*The Telegraph.com*, Feb. 2, 2014)

Death tolls rises as storms continue to batter Britain

THE death toll is rising as Britain's weather bureau warns the nation is currently under "multi-pronged attack" — the worst since World War II. Forecasters say the UK's unsettled weather that has brought heavy rain and flooding is set to stay.

In the biggest emergency services response since World War II the UK was again pummelled by torrential rain, winds up to 140km/hr ripping roofs off buildings, seas over 10m high on the south coast about Dorset and even snow blizzards about Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland causing havoc . . . The Atlantic storm, caused by cold polar air clashing with warmer moist air from the tropics travelling further north than usual, struck the west of the country about Cornwall early yesterday morning. Shipping containers being used as a temporary sea wall were breached causing further flooding and evacuations. The storm is combining over the Atlantic with the one that has dumped as much as 101cms of snow in parts of the US. Satellite images from NASA's Worldview shows the monster storms swirling 'arm-in-arm' across the ocean.

Become friends . . . The storm that dumped snow and ice across the US has linked with the weather system battering England's south. By the end of this weekend, a further 3000 homes in the UK could be flooded with 24 severe "danger to life" warnings being issued by authorities. More than 1000 people along the River Thames, hitting its highest level since 1947, west of London were evacuated as the river broke its banks in various places . . . But it's the sodden watertable after more than four weeks of persistent rain that caused chaos, the ground unable to cope with even more and pushing water back through street drains, home sinks and even toilets. Five centimetres of rain fell in just six hours on the south coast. The Environment Agency's head of strategy Pete Fox said the headline threat was far from over with rain on one side of the country set to affect the other side in two or three days time with "unprecedented" groundwater levels. "Those high levels are going to maintain for weeks and cause flood risk for weeks to come yet, into March and beyond," he said. "On the Thames, we have been advising that the number of properties we are expecting to flood is in the high hundreds, but because the flood plain is so wide a 20mm change in water levels make the difference between high hundreds and maybe two or three thousand." The Met Office described the weather as a multi-pronged attack with almost every pocket of the UK experiencing significant downpours, gale-force winds or snow. Severe gales, large waves and high sea levels were also threatening coastal flooding on the Dorset coast and landslides . . .

More than 2200 soldiers were deployed across England, including Gurkhas, who had been based in Brunei, brought in to erect flood barriers west of London about Staines. They were joined by sailors from HMS Collingwood who were also sent out to sandbag properties against rising Thames tides. More than 5000 homes have been flooded since December when the unprecedented storm band began. Rainfall is at the highest levels for 250 years. The headline in The Times yesterday says it all: "A Nation Unites" as the royal family join thousands of military and emergency personnel and volunteers to hold the country together. (*Charles Miranda, News Limited Network*, February 15, 2014)

UK panics over climate

LONDON: After summer floods, droughts, freezing winters and even widespread snow in May this year, the Met Office has called a crisis meeting to discuss the cause of Britain's extreme weather. Leading meteorologists and scientists will try to determine the cause of the unseasonal weather spells — and whether it's down to climate change, or just typical. It follows the coolest spring in more than 50 years, as well as droughts and floods in 2012, the freezing winter of 2010 and incredible snow falls across the continent last month.

Experts will gather at the forecaster's headquarters in Exeter on Tuesday for the meeting. Attendees are expected to debate whether the changing weather pattern in the UK, and in northern Europe, is because of climate change or simply variable weather.

"We have seen a run of unusual seasons in the UK and northern Europe, such as the cold winter of 2010, last year's wet weather and the cold spring this year," a Met Office spokesman said. "This may be nothing more than a run of natural variability, but there may be other forces impacting our weather. "There is emerging research which suggests there is a link between declining Arctic sea ice and European climate — but exactly how this process might work and how important it may be among a host of other factors remains unclear. Experts will identify what further research is needed and discuss whether climate models need to be revised to take into account any recent changes to weather patterns. It comes after the National Farmers' Union reported that wheat harvests are likely to be around 30 per cent lower than last year.

Earlier this month the Met Office said below average temperatures throughout March, April and May made it the fifth coldest spring in national records dating back to 1910. March was "exceptionally" cold, averaging 2.2C. In more bad news, this week forecasters warned unsettled and wet conditions could last until the end of July and into August.

The last two weeks of warmer, clear days have been replaced by erratic conditions, including rain and high winds of up to 5km/h, interspersed with pockets of warm, sunny and dry periods. Forecasters have attributed the unpredictable stretch — which is being caused by a south shifting jet stream — to just another "typical British summer".

The "blink and you'd miss it summer" is the latest in six months of unsettled weather, including a particularly bitter winter, and unseasonably cold spring, which saw the coldest Easter Sunday on record. (*Sunday Telegraph*, June 6, 2013)

US South hit by 'catastrophic' winter storm and blackouts

ACROSS America, winter-weary residents have been hit by yet another ice storm, with forecasters warning of potentially "catastrophic" weather events — and at least one documented case of 'snow plough rage'. From Texas to the South's business hub in Atlanta, roads were slick with ice, thousands were without power, and a wintry mix fell in many areas. The Weather Channel reported that more than 167,000 customers were without power in Georgia, while nearly 158,000 were without power in neighbouring South Carolina. A further 70,000 people were blacked out in North Carolina and 33,000 in

Louisiana. The Mid-Atlantic region also was expected to be hit. Officials and forecasters in several states used unusually dire language in warnings, and they agreed that the biggest concern is ice, which could knock out power for days in wide swathes. Elected leaders and emergency management officials warned people to stay off the roads. It seemed many in the metro Atlanta area obliged, with streets and highways uncharacteristically unclogged Tuesday and Wednesday. On Tuesday evening from the Georgia Emergency Management Agency's special operations centre, Georgia Governor Nathan Deal and Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed implored people to get somewhere safe and stay there. "The message I really want to share is ... wherever you are, you need to plan on staying there for a while," Mr Reed said. "The bottom line is that all of the information that we have right now suggests that we are facing an icing event that is very unusual for the metropolitan region and the state of Georgia."

In an early Wednesday memo, the National Weather Service called the storm "an event of historical proportions." It continued: "Catastrophic ... crippling ... paralysing ... choose your adjective." Eli Jacks, a meteorologist with National Weather Service, said forecasters use words such as "catastrophic" sparingly. "Sometimes we want to tell them, 'Hey, listen, this warning is different. This is really extremely dangerous, and it doesn't happen very often,'" Mr Jacks said.

Around the Deep South, slick roads were causing problems. In North Texas, at least four people died in traffic accidents on icy roads, including a Dallas firefighter who was knocked from an Interstate 20 ramp and fell 15 metres, according to a police report. Also in Texas, an accident involving about 20 vehicles was reported Tuesday along an icy highway overpass just north of Austin. Delta cancelled nearly 2200 flights on Tuesday and Wednesday, most of them in Atlanta. (AP, February 13, 2014)

IPCC to deliver 'darkest' draft yet

UN scientists are set to deliver their darkest report yet on the impacts of climate change, pointing to a future stalked by floods, drought, conflict and economic damage if carbon emissions go untamed. A draft of their report, seen by the news organisation AFP, is part of a massive overview by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, likely to shape policies and climate talks for years to come. Scientists and government representatives will meet in Yokohama, Japan, from tomorrow to hammer out a 29-page summary. It will be unveiled with the full report on March 31. "We have a lot clearer picture of impacts and their consequences ... including the implications for security," said Chris Field of the US's Carnegie Institution, who headed the probe. The work comes six months after the first volume in the long-awaited Fifth Assessment Report declared scientists were more certain than ever that humans caused global warming. It predicted global temperatures would rise 0.3C-4.8C this century, adding to roughly 0.7C since the Industrial Revolution. Seas will creep up by 26cm-82cm by 2100. The draft warns costs will spiral with each additional degree, although it is hard to forecast by how much.

Warming of 2.5C over pre-industrial times — 0.5C more than the UN's target — may cost 0.2-2.0 per cent of global annual income, a figure that could amount to hundreds of billions of dollars each year. "The assessments that we can do at the moment probably still underestimate the actual impacts of future climate change," said Jacob Schewe of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany, who was not involved in the IPCC drafting. Many scientists concurred, he said, that recent heatwaves and floods were evidence of climate change already on the march — and a harbinger of a future in which once-freakish weather events become much less rare. Among the perils in the draft: Rising greenhouse-gas emissions will "significantly" boost the risk of floods, with Europe and Asia particularly exposed. In the highest warming scenarios of untamed greenhouse gas emissions, three times as many people will be exposed to severe river flooding as with lower warming. For every 1C rise in temperature, another 7 per cent of the world's population will see renewable water resources decline by a fifth.

If no measures are taken, "hundreds of millions" of coastal dwellers will be displaced by 2100. Small-island states and East, Southeast and South Asia will be the biggest land-lossers. Average yields of wheat, rice and corn may fall by 2 per cent per decade, while demand for crops is likely to rise by up to 14 per cent by 2050 as population grows. The crunch will hit poor, tropical countries worst. A "large fraction" of land and freshwater species may risk extinction, their habitat destroyed by climate change. Poverty, migration and hunger are invisible drivers of turbulence and war, as they sharpen competition for dwindling resources, the report warns. (AFP, March 24, 2014)

Ten ways you personally will notice the effects of climate change

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's latest major update claims the effects of a changing climate are being felt across the globe. On Monday, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released its latest report on the impacts of global warming. Here are 10 ways that climate change will affect you in your home.

- 1. Rising power bills from using your airconditioner:** With temperatures set to rise between 0.6 and 1.5 degrees by 2030, your airconditioner use will become a significant expense. On the plus side your heating costs will most likely go down. Heating and cooling account for 15 to 25 per cent of a typical Sydney household's electricity use.
- 2. Warmer temperatures overnight:** Pack away your doona as evening temperatures are also predicted to increase in the future. Since 2001, extreme heat records at night have outnumbered extreme cold records by 5 to 1, which may make sleeping more difficult for some.
- 3. Crowded beaches:** Rising sea levels will put extra pressure on our beaches. Storm surges will continue to cause erosion, adding to the reduced shoreline from higher sea levels. Where will you put your towel?
- 4. High-speed windscreen wipers:** Rainfalls are likely to increase in intensity. This will mean more flash flooding and need for the high-speed setting on your windscreen wipers as short, sharp downpours become part of life.
- 5. Infrastructure chaos:** City infrastructure struggles at the best of times but you can expect more rail outages due to extreme heat, water shortages due to failures in treatment plants from bushfires or floods and airport delays due to storms.
- 6. Going on a holiday?** You better visit some of your favourite local attractions soon because many won't stay the same for long. Ocean acidification and rising temperatures are expected to have a significant effect on the Great Barrier Reef. The Gold Coast has been identified as a hotspot of vulnerability due to the concentration of coastal development. The Kakadu wetlands may be subject to increased saltwater intrusion from higher sea levels, affecting the delicate balance of the ecosystem.
- 7. Increases in food prices:** If the driest future scenarios eventuate, there will be increased pressure on the Murray Darling Basin — where one-third of our food supply is produced.
- 8. How does your garden grow?** If you're a green thumb, you've probably noticed changes to the flowering time of some plants. Warmer temperatures mean some species will bloom earlier and for longer, while other plants will wither and die in the heat. Last year in Sydney, the magnolias came into bloom about four weeks earlier than usual due to the mild weather.

9. **High fire danger:** The number of days with very high and extreme fire weather is expected to increase. In Sydney the extreme values of the fire danger index have increased by about 2 per cent per decade over the past 30 years. Implications include increased building costs in bushfire risk zones and more pressure on already stretched firefighting services.

10. **Staying out of the heat:** An increase in heatwaves will most likely result in more admission to hospital and deaths from heat-related illnesses. In the 2009 Victorian heatwave in the week before the Black Saturday bushfires, the number of emergency call-outs to ambulances in Melbourne increased by almost 50 per cent over the three hottest days. (Fiona Johnson, *SMH*, March 31, 2014; Fiona Johnson is a University of NSW lecturer. She is Fairfax scientist-in-residence, organised by the Australian Science Media Centre)

Blame the brain

A new branch of law is exploring the complex relationship between neuroscience and crime.

After an argument with his elderly mother about his smoking, Terrence Kain strangled her to death. Then, he phoned his sister. "Mum's dead," he told her. "I strangled her. She's dead." Kain, of Goulburn in NSW, openly admitted to killing his mother. While the confession may make it seem like an open-and-shut case with a clear murder verdict, that was not what the court decided. In sentencing the 48-year-old earlier this year, Justice Michael Adams said while Kain realised he was seriously hurting his mother, he had not intended to kill or harm her.

Kain had a history of heavy drinking. He had also had one of his legs amputated after shooting himself and, most importantly for his defence, he suffered from chronic brain damage and dementia. In other words, if it had not been for his brain damage, Kain would never have harmed his mother. The court accepted he was not in control of his actions and he was charged with manslaughter, rather than murder, eligible for release in 2015. As more is uncovered about the complexities of the brain and its role in behaviour, neuroscience is increasingly coming into play in court cases such as Kain's. Neuroscience and behavioural genetics, which aims to uncover the role of genetics in determining behaviour, are making criminal sentencing harder. The interaction between those fields with civil and criminal law is known as neurolaw, and it is attracting increasing interest from lawyers, neuroscientists, behavioural geneticists, forensic psychiatrists, forensic psychologists and philosophers. Allan McCay, a former associate solicitor with global law firm Baker and McKenzie, is involved in constructing the first Australian neurolaw database at Macquarie University's Centre for Agency Value and Ethics in Western Australia. It aims to establish how neurolaw is playing out in Australia and provide a resource for legal practitioners, legal academics and philosophers involved in complex cases. "Is what we do just a matter of luck in how we are constituted, and down to events relating to neurotransmitters and enzymes in our brain?" McCay asks. "If this picture of us is correct, are we really responsible for what we do? Some of the questions raised by neuroscience bring us close to the free will debate that has perplexed philosophers throughout the ages. "The interest in these issues goes beyond purely legal interest and into philosophy, as some of the issues that are raised in neuroscience cases call into question our place in the world." Using scientific evidence, however, is not always easy. While studies in behavioural genetics show certain gene and environment combinations correlate with antisocial conduct, many of the studies have not been replicated, which raises questions about their reliability. "But even if the science is credible, then one might ask: what can be inferred from it about a person's moral and legal responsibility for what they have done?" McCay says. "Another question is that of the degree to which the law does and should care about the degree of responsibility of blameworthiness. "Perhaps the law should focus more on protecting others from the dangerous. Science cannot answer the further questions like this. The answers have to come from ethics and law." In 2000, renowned American neuroscientist and director of the University of Kansas Alzheimer's Disease Centre, Russell Swerdlow, published a patient case study that has become famous in the field of neurolaw.

In the journal *Archives of Neurology*, Swerdlow wrote that a 40-year-old married schoolteacher began to have a sexual interest in children seemingly out of the blue. The teacher downloaded and viewed child pornography. When his stepdaughter complained that he was making sexual advances towards her, the man was arrested. A court ordered him to go through a rehabilitation program if he wanted to avoid jail, but he continued to make advances towards the staff there and was expelled. Because he had failed the program, he would need to face the court and jail time again. However, the night before sentencing, he went to a hospital emergency department complaining of headaches. He urinated on himself, sexually harassed staff, could no longer write legibly and spoke about wanting to rape his landlady. A magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan revealed the teacher had a large, egg-sized orbitofrontal tumour on an area of his brain associated with social behaviour. Surgeons removed the tumour and his criminal behaviour ceased. He successfully completed the sexual rehabilitation program and it was determined that he was no longer a threat to society. Yet one year later, he was discovered collecting child pornography again. He also complained that his headaches had returned. A scan revealed the tumour had regrown. It is thought that while everyone has hidden desires and urges, they are able to keep a lid on them through the area of the brain that controls decision-making and behaviour. With this area impaired, that lid was completely lifted in the man, taking away his ability to control his hidden and inappropriate urges.

Swerdlow was among those treating the man and said while abnormal behaviour was quite commonly seen in patients with brain tumours, it was the first case he knew of that had led to paedophilia. He provided a testimony at the man's sentencing.

"I never maintained he should be blamed or not blamed for his actions," Swerdlow says. "I was in a position that allowed me to be impartial and non-judgmental. "I simply pointed out his behaviour probably would not be expected to have happened in the absence of the tumour, and also pointed out that surgery, rather than incarceration, was more likely to bring about the desired outcome – to no longer pose a threat to others." However, a complicating factor in the case was that although the patient seemed unable to control his urges, he was aware his behaviour was wrong. So if actions are determined by how well the brain is working, what does that say about free will? It's a murky area that needs to be considered in each case like this. This complexity occurred in a similar case in the United States, where a previously law-abiding man began to download child pornography after surgery to remove a piece of his brain to treat severe epilepsy. Eventually, he was diagnosed with Kluver-Bucy syndrome, caused by damage to the anterior temporal lobes in the brain and leading to irresistible urges for food and sex. Although he downloaded the illegal material at home, he never did so while at work. The prosecution argued this showed he was in control of his behaviour at least some of the times, and he had an obligation and the capacity to take responsibility and seek help. But instead he wasn't found out until federal police discovered his downloads and turned up to arrest him. While he was sentenced to a federal prison for two years, the prosecution had pushed to lock him away for five. In the end, the judge agreed the man had shown some evidence of being in control of his actions, at least while at work. Since writing about this case, Swerdlow says he has occasionally been asked to review other court cases by defence lawyers, but often, using neurolaw is inappropriate and people may try to abuse the field. "Most of the time I have told the defence lawyers I suspect at face value I would not be able to help them – the claims were kind of silly. It is my impression, though, that this type of legal defence is being tried more and more often." (Melissa Davey, *SMH*, February 3, 2014)

Economics

Hollande's old-school network brings France to its knees

LIKE advancing sclerosis they have taken over the body of state, occupying company boardrooms and government ministries. Not even the President has been able to break their pernicious stranglehold on France. He, too, is of their number.

Meet the *Enarques*, as the elite graduates of the ENA, or the Ecole Nationale d'Administration, are known. They are France's highly academic but often incompetent ruling caste and, despite decades of grumbling about their influence, it appears to be growing. Consider President Francois Hollande's recent government reshuffle in response to calamitous losses in local elections: it demonstrates the clout of a particular clique of *Enarques* who graduated in 1980 and, ever since, have been working their way into positions of power. Known as the "Promotion Voltaire" — each year's graduates, like vineyards, get an appellation — members include not only Hollande but also Segolene Royal, the mother of his children.

A photograph of the class of 1980 tells the whole story. Standing beside the young Hollande is Sylvie Hubac, today his principal private secretary. Next to her stands Royal, now the environment minister and No 3 in the government. Not far away is a youthful Michel Sapin, Minister of Finance. Hollande's best friend, Jean-Pierre Jouyet, who became the President's chief of staff, is also there. He replaced another classmate from the Promotion Voltaire, Pierre-Rene Lemas, who was shunted into Jouyet's former job at the head of a prestigious government fund. About 50 per cent of Hollande's cabinet went to the ENA and a handful of other "*grandes ecoles*", highly selective, elite schools operating outside the woefully underperforming university system.

Filled exclusively with students who excel at maths and have been groomed by ambitious parents since primary school, these hallowed establishments feed France's embassies and boardrooms. A recent survey found 84 per cent of the top 546 executives in France had graduated from them. Does it matter? According to some observers, France's elitism is to blame for many of its difficulties today. The IMD business school in Lausanne puts France 47th out of 59 countries for government efficiency. Other surveys show that in companies dominated by a "school tie" network, executives are overpaid and tend to underperform. "If France were a brilliantly run country nobody would bother where its leaders went to school," said Peter Gumbel, the author of *France's Got Talent: The Woeful Consequences of French Elitism*. "But it is not." Whereas Britain has evolved, says Gumbel, and the dominance of its "Oxbridge" elite has declined over the past few decades, France has not.

Compared to Oxford and Cambridge, which produce several thousand graduates a year, the ENA turns out only 80, ranked according to excellence, and the Ecole Polytechnique, known to alumni simply as "X", another 400. All are guaranteed jobs for life in the administration. The ENA was created after the last war as a fast track for brainy young citizens into the civil service. For a while they delivered: such was France's post-war economic success that the next 30 years came to be known as the "*trente glorieuses*". Things are different today: not since France beheaded its aristocrats in the revolution in 1789 has its elite been more despised. One of the reasons is the sense of a self-perpetuating caste cut off from reality and insulated from the hardships of economic crisis. Just as resented as the political and business elites are the cultural and media worlds: to the general public both seem permanently intertwined. The media has been accused of neglecting events because journalists are often either married to, or sleeping with, ministers and are reluctant to betray their secrets. Valerie Trierweiler, the former "first girlfriend", was a political reporter for *Paris Match* when she met Hollande.

Former president Nicolas Sarkozy saw value in enlisting the world of showbiz but his marriage to Carla Bruni, the singer, fuelled criticism of him as "President Bling Bling". Then Hollande, who had vowed to be "President Normal", left Trierweiler for Julie Gayet, an actress who had sung his praises in his election campaign. The romance between Economy Minister Arnaud Montebourg and the actress Elsa Zylberstein surprises no one, nor do the recent photographs of Alain Delon, the 1960s film idol, strolling arm in arm in Paris with Trierweiler. One of Hollande's latest appointments was Manuel Valls and some see in the new Prime Minister a glimmer of hope for ending the sclerosis that has long gripped the French state. Valls ranks as an outsider, not only because he was born in Spain but also because he did not go to any of the right schools — a handicap that may soon prove an advantage. (Matthew Campbell, *The Times*, April 14, 2014)

Paul Howes: Tactics versus compact - The art of union warfare

I've always thought *The Art of War*, the ancient Chinese treatise on military tactics, was a book primarily read by corporate psychopaths. Or at least that it was a book bought for such men by their wives, so they could feature it prominently on their bookshelves.

"All warfare is based on deception," a Wolf-of-Wall-Street-type might mutter to himself as he makes a trade on an insider tip.

"To know your enemy, you must become your enemy," he whispers as he shorts a juicy stock.

But it seems Paul Howes, the head of the Australian Workers Union, has also been taking notes from the playbook of Sun Tzu.

The most telling line of Howes' speech to the National Press Club on Wednesday came towards the end.

"Nothing throws a sworn enemy off their guard quicker than a genuine concession," he said gnomically. He went on to give a genuine (sounding) concession by saying that "the union side" of the industrial relations divide could admit there had been a pattern of unsustainable wages growth in "some parts of the economy". He singled out the "leapfrog wage outcomes" in the offshore sector as unsustainable for the long term. "We could be pricing ourselves out of the market," he said.

Howes also suggested that unions and business extend a hand to each other to negotiate a "grand compact" to rein in high wages and lift productivity. This invited comparisons with the famous Hawke/Keating Accord, and evoked strong headlines, as

Howes must have known it would. Howes used his speech to argue, very reasonably indeed, that the last decade or so of industrial relations had been a see-saw: each side biding its time before the pendulum swung back, at which point it could use the momentum to exploit its enemy. As a consequence, neither business nor the unions has any certainty, and productivity has suffered. But it is difficult to escape the conclusion that Howes' speech was an assault-dressed-as-peace-offering, timed because he knows the union movement is currently on the wrong end of the see-saw.

Union membership is at an all time low (20 per cent of full-time employees belong to a union). Anti-union sentiment is strong, and not just on the conservative side of politics, where the government has this week asked the Fair Work Commission to assess whether the minimum terms and conditions built into awards are still relevant, and where an internal Liberals dispute has erupted over whether or not workers' wages and conditions at the SPC Ardmona cannery are too generous. Howes tacitly acknowledged this ill-sentiment when he criticised the aggressively macho, bikie-and-thug-flecked elements of the movement (a not-so-subtle dig at the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union), and when he used loaded language to decry the union "traitors" who rip off their members. One of these alleged traitors is former MP and Health Services Union boss Craig Thomson, against whom no one in Labor or the union movement's leadership spoke until he moved to the cross-benches in 2012. The allegations against him had been around since about 2008.

Former prime minister Julia Gillard inflicted irreparable damage on Labor by continuing to support Thomson as the stench of his alleged corrupt dealings grew stronger. Gillard was then damaged by historic allegations against her from her time working as a solicitor for the Australian Workers Union. There was absolutely no evidence Gillard had done anything wrong, but it brought to light yet another union corruption scandal with tendrils encircling the government. Gillard's puzzling stance against same-sex marriage was put down, by many, to her reliance on the support of Joe de Bruyn, the head of the conservative Labor Right Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association. And, of course, she was famously backed into the job by a coalition of Labor Right factional warriors, with Howes among them.

If the union movement has a "brand", then six years of Labor government did a lot to tarnish it. Its reputation will only take a further battering when the federal government establishes a formal judicial inquiry, possibly a royal commission, into union corruption, on which an announcement is expected as early as next week. Howes knows this, which is why he made a bold effort on Wednesday to get out in front of the bad press, to move the conversation away from union corruption and onto his reasonable-sounding idea of a "grand compact" between unions, business and government. Howes was presenting as a peacenik who just wants to sit down with business/government; if they don't want to, well, they are the recalcitrant ones, not him. As my *Age* colleague Ben Schneiders wrote on Thursday, this is in contrast to Howes' previous rhetoric towards business, which has been insulting in the extreme. In 2011 he accused Rio Tinto of "sucking the blood" out of its workforce and warned the company's management: "You cannot hide behind your slimy, grubby mates in the Coalition because we're coming after you." Would you sit down at the table with someone who spoke to you like that?

The idea of a "grand compact" is a grand gesture, easily made because it's very unlikely to ever be accepted by a Coalition government, or by business. And while Howes said that "the industrial relations system is dragging us down", the only specific area of possible concession he named was the high wages in the offshore sector - this is the lowest-possible hanging fruit. High offshore sector wages is hardly a mainstream, "middle Australia" issue, and as the mining boom tapers off it will be less of a problem anyway. When asked about Howes' "grand compact" idea on Thursday, the Prime Minister sounded unconvinced. "That was very 1980s, all of that," Tony Abbott said. Despite Coalition assurances to the contrary before the election campaign, it does appear the government is preparing a push on minimum wages and conditions, including penalty rates. This is despite the fact that economy-wide, wages growth is at historically low levels (a point Howes made in his speech, and which is true across the world). The union movement cannot afford to get stuck in the '80s - unable to admit that the economy is now digital and seven-days-a-week. The stakes for workers are too high. Howes made some interesting noises this week, but it is difficult to believe he wants to lay down arms in the unions-versus-capital war. More likely he is taking another piece of Sun Tzu's centuries-old advice: "Appear weak when you are strong, and strong when you are weak." (*Jacqueline Maley, SMH, February 8, 2014*)

How unions manipulate us

UNION membership in Australia might halve overnight if all state governments outlawed payroll deduction of union fees and the federal government outlawed the forcible unionisation of small business by big business.

Unions have always foreseen that such laws might pass. For decades the ACTU has been trying to insure against widespread membership losses by training union officials by the "organising model", a technique learned from US unionists.

With various degrees of success, Australian unions have been making the transition from the "servicing model" to the organising model.

Unions believe that only those who make this transition will survive D-day, the day government and corporate support evaporates.

The servicing model is where members of unions see themselves as clients who receive services from the union. The problem with the servicing model is that when members are dissatisfied with services they leave the union. This is unsatisfactory for the union hierarchy.

The organising model is where every member is turned from a client into an activist. Members are persuaded they actually are "the union".

That way, when the union fails them, they have only failed themselves. Hence, resigning union membership doesn't rectify the failure. The failure is rectified by becoming a better activist and recruiting workmates to participate in the activism and join the union. This is satisfactory for the union hierarchy. The organising model unionises unionised workplaces via an "organising campaign". Drawing from my own training experience and written material from a New York construction union, here is "organising campaign" theory:

There are four basic stages of a campaign. The first stage is target selection and planning. Businesses are "primary targets" and are discussed: who is growing, who supplies existing union sites, who is bidding for government or business contracts, who has a social connection to a union leader. Once a target is selected an "organising plan" is drawn up. The plan must include both "bottom-up pressure" and "top-down pressure" to be used against the employer. Bottom-up pressure is when workers participate in and grow the campaign.

Top-down pressure is when people in high places who have the "ability to alter the behaviour" of the employer apply force. For example, a state government may make it clear a good relationship with unions is needed to get a grant or work contract. The second stage is to "engage contact". Any existing members are recruited into the campaign. If there are no members, a way into the

workplace via social means is found. Social media can be used to initiate contact or the workplace is watched to see where people go at lunchtime or after work. A union official befriends workers on Facebook or bumps into them at a pub or coffee shop with the intent of striking up an acquaintance and securing a social meeting, to be held outside the workplace. The goal of the first meeting is to identify any discontent with work and harvest information about the workplace so it can be "mapped". Chit-chat leads to talk about the workplace, how it runs, what the people are like and who the influencers are. Questioning leads to one crucial point: is there anything at all, no matter how small, the person doesn't like about their work? This topic is explored gently; how does it make them feel and may other workers feel the same way? If so, would they be agreeable to invite someone else from work to the next social meeting, just to talk? The next meeting sees the process repeated. More and more meetings occur, always outside the workplace. The group grows over many months. The emotion attached to individual grievances about work is used as fire-starter material. Eventually a collective fire of discontent rages against the boss: energy is harnessed, fear is abandoned and bold action is agreed on. When the emotional heat reaches its peak the third stage is achieved. Bottom-up and top-down tactics are "deployed simultaneously".

The union official enters the workplace, informs the employer that unionisation has occurred and tables a list of demands. At the same time, key people in high places inform the employer of their expectation to keep the union happy.

The final stage is reached when the union achieves "surrender by the employer that is being pressured". In my opinion, the evangelical organising technique is manipulative and verges on stalking. Many union people feel the same way. Nevertheless, the leadership has determined the troops learn organising just in case the legislative change they fear ever occurs. After all, without the support of governments or corporations, unions would barely survive. (*Grace Collier, The Australian, March 22, 2014*)

Labor must not allow itself to be a prisoner of unions

GIVEN two union leaders with senior roles in the Labor Party were sentenced to jail last week for stealing money, and a royal commission into union corruption is under way, you would think unions would be keeping a low profile. If they wanted to arrest the decline in membership — now just 13 per cent of the private-sector workforce — and regain any sort of influence, let alone respect, this would be a sensible strategy. But Tony Sheldon, national secretary of the Transport Workers Union, would prefer to trash the remaining morsel of credibility unions have left. Mr Sheldon has threatened a campaign of "civil disobedience" unless the TWU receives job guarantees from Qantas.

Sabre-rattling of this kind is to be expected from militant unionists. The problem for Mr Sheldon is that he is also Labor's national vice-president. Worse, his rally was attended by Labor MPs, including federal deputy leader Tanya Plibersek. Does Ms Plibersek condone unionists wreaking havoc by blocking roads to stop travellers accessing airports? Moreover, does the Labor Party, in which Ms Plibersek and Mr Sheldon hold senior positions, support activity that skirts, if not breaks, the law? Unions are understandably concerned about possible job losses at Qantas. But the airline needs to cut costs and restructure its operations to save jobs, if not the airline itself. Union leaders and past MPs, who recognised the need to support the national interest rather than maintain fidelity to a fading cause, would understand this.

It underscores a larger problem for Labor: it has become a prisoner of the unions. The party, formed by organised labour in 1891, is today suffocated by these archaic links. Writing in these pages yesterday, former Labor national president Stephen Loosley suggested Labor should make votes at conferences — where unions are dominant — non-binding. This would help to break the union stranglehold on the party. Yet if delegates to state conferences remain half appointed by union secretaries, then the unions will continue to exercise undue influence over administrative bodies, the selection of candidates and officials and, critically, policy. There is no case for unions to appoint 50 per cent of conference delegates but represent only 18 per cent of all full-time employees. Nor is requiring party members to be union members justified. Union influence inside Labor reached its apogee when Julia Gillard told the Australian Workers Union conference last year that she did not lead a social democratic party but a party of labour. Yet it was not a surprise given her government's retrograde workplace and industry policies. Labor must rise to the challenge of reforming the party-union nexus. Bill Shorten, a former AWU national secretary, has not yet shown that he understands the problem or is prepared to fix it. (Editorial, *The Australian*, April 01, 2014)

Former Labor minister Ferguson backs Tony Abbott's planned changes to Fair Work Act

Labor elder statesman Martin Ferguson says the ALP should support the return of the Coalition's construction watchdog, industrial relations reforms and warned Australia's high labour costs and low productivity risk billions in revenue. In comments that will embarrass Opposition Leader Bill Shorten and ramp up political pressure on Labor to pass workplace law changes through the Senate, the former Rudd and Gillard government minister and ACTU president belled the cat on the Coalition's government's "modest" reforms to Fair Work laws. Mr Ferguson's intervention comes as the Coalition introduced a raft of changes to the Fair Work laws to the Parliament on Thursday that tighten right-of-entry rules for unions, allow employees to trade penalty rates for more flexible hours and close so-called "strike first, talk later" loopholes. In a speech in Perth on Friday, the now chairman of the Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association said complacency threatened 23 years of uninterrupted growth and that he was pleased "sensible" industrial relations reform was on the agenda.

While the future of gas investment had been "all blue sky" three years ago, he said billions in export revenue and taxation were at risk because of over-regulation. "High labour costs and low productivity are an unsustainable mix," Mr Ferguson said. "And therefore elements of the Fair Work Act must be looked at." Mr Ferguson said the Coalition's plan to restore the Australian Building and Construction Commission should be seen as a step that would encourage investment in Australia.

"Rather than seeing the ABCC as a tool that allows one side to get an upper hand over the other in some never-ending ideological skirmish, it should be seen for what it was: a mechanism that holds both sides to account and which can help deliver projects on time and on budget," he said. "As the son of a bricklayer, I know a thing or two about the building industry. "But it is time that some in today's union leadership recognised that their members' long-term interests are aligned with their long-term job security." Labor and the union movement are implacably opposed to the ABCC, which was introduced by the former Howard government after the Cole royal commission on the building industry and then abolished by the Gillard government. The Abbott government argues the restoration of the ABCC is necessary to crack down on lawlessness and corruption in the building industry. In recent months, Fairfax Media has carried a series of reports linking the construction union and building industry figures with organised crime, extortion and corruption, helping to trigger a royal commission.

Mr Ferguson singled out the militant Maritime Union for a short-sighted approach to bargaining over pay and conditions as it sought to ratchet up wages and conditions for new "greenfields" projects and called for longer-term agreements to ensure major projects were delivered.

In Parliament, Leader of the House Christopher Pyne said the government's bill would assist businesses that faced excessive workplace visits from unions when employees were not union members, ensure good faith bargaining took place and ensure greater flexibility. (James Massola, *SMH*, February 28, 2014)

Toyota exit no cause for alarm

In the 1960s manufacturing accounted for about 25 per cent of all the jobs in Australia. But it's been declining steadily since then and today it's about 8 per cent. The obvious question is, why? One advantage of getting old is meant to be a greater sense of perspective. You've seen a lot of change over your lifetime and seeing a bit more doesn't convince you the world is coming to an end. Unfortunately, getting old can also leave you convinced every change is for the worst as the world goes to the dogs. A lot of people have been disturbed by the news that Toyota's closure as a car maker in 2017 will bring an end to the manufacture of cars in Australia, with the loss of many jobs also in the parts industry.

But my guess is the most disturbed observers will be the old, not the young. I doubt if many young people had been hoping for a career in the car industry. And I know that few people - young or old - buy Australian-made cars. That's not a cause for guilt, but for being sensible. To regret the passing of an industry whose products few of us wanted is just sentimentality, making no economic sense. A lot of the dire predictions we're hearing won't come to pass. However many jobs the vested interests are claiming will be lost, they're almost certainly exaggerating. That's particularly true of the alleged flow-on effects, which are often calculated on the assumption that any money which would have been spent buying the product in question will now not be spent on anything. I've never believed car making was of special strategic significance to advanced technology. Every industry claims to be special. And I've heard the claim that this spells "the end of manufacturing in Australia" too many times in the past to believe it.

You think 35,000 is a huge number of jobs to be lost? It isn't. It's 0.3 per cent of all jobs, equivalent to about two months' net job creation in a normal year. You think this could put the economy into recession? We're overdue for another recession but this isn't nearly big enough to be the main cause of one. Even if it was, it wouldn't happen until 2017. It's true some of the workers who lose their jobs won't be able to find alternative jobs, and some that do won't find jobs as well paid. But far more *will* find jobs than many of us imagine. Naturally, it's important for governments to give affected workers a lot of help to retrain and relocate. Some people assume an imported car creates no jobs. Far from it. Are you able to buy an imported car for anything like the price at which it crosses our docks? Of course not. Most of the gap between the landed price and the retail price goes on creating jobs for Australian workers in our extensive car-distribution industry.

The fact is the sale, fuelling, servicing and repair of cars has always involved far more jobs than the making of cars and car parts has. I've been responding to people's fears about the decline in manufacturing for almost as long as I've been a journalist because manufacturing's share of total employment began declining well before I joined Fairfax in 1974. The truth is the industrial structure of our economy has been changing slowly but continuously since the First Fleet. A lot of angst has been generated over that time but the fact remains we're infinitely more prosperous today than we were then - with a much higher proportion of the population in the paid workforce.

The changing mix of industries is actually a primary cause of our greater affluence. Countries that try to prevent their industry structure changing are the ones that stop getting richer. To put the latest developments into context, let me show you the bigger picture of Australia's economic history, drawing on a Reserve Bank article. Throughout much of the 19th century, agriculture accounted for about a third of the nation's total production, with mining bigger than manufacturing. By Federation, agriculture provided about 25 per cent of total employment, with manufacturing providing 15 per cent and mining about 8 per cent. By the 1950s, however, manufacturing had grown to 25 per cent, agriculture was falling towards 10 per cent and mining was down to 1 per cent. So as the shares of agriculture and mining declined, manufacturing's rose. But from the 1960s, manufacturing's share of total employment started falling from its peak of about 25 per cent to be down to about 8 per cent today. Remember, however, that an industry's declining *share* of the total doesn't necessarily mean it's getting smaller in absolute size. Although today agriculture accounts for only about 3 per cent of the total, the quantity of rural goods we produce has never been higher. And manufacturing's output began falling only in recent years.

So an industry's share falls mainly because other industries are growing faster. And, with the exception of mining, the sector that has provided virtually all the growth is services. It accounted for half our jobs even in the 19th century, but from the 1950s, its share took off, rising sharply to about 85 per cent today. Most of the growth has been in health, education and a multitude of "business services". Many older people find the relative decline of manufacturing disturbing but I can't see why. Services sector jobs tend to be cleaner, safer, more skilled, more value-adding, more satisfying and better paid. ((Ross Gittins, *SMH*, February 12, 2014). Ross Gittins is economics editor.

Germany suspects its stolen cars travelling to Tajikistan

Berlin: What started as a technological aid to police has turned into an international diplomatic incident, as German authorities are now convinced that scores of high-end autos stolen here have ended up in the possession of those with family or business ties to the president of Tajikistan. The Tajik government of President Emomali Rahmon has responded by saying it would look into the matter but called the allegations a "provocation" and "astounding." The Tajikistan ambassador to Germany issued a statement noting that "German cars cross several state borders before reaching Tajikistan. Any falsified documents would have been discovered by customs services on those borders." German press reports note that the German government has been quietly asking for help in resolving the issue since 2011.

It began with reports of 200 stolen cars, including 93 high-end BMWs. German press reports note that while car theft is common in the capital, helping police in these cases was the fact that the high-end cars had secretly embedded GPS systems, installed as anti-theft devices and programmed to self-activate if the car shows an unusual driving pattern. Berlin detectives weren't surprised when the secret GPS reports indicated the cars had been stolen and taken outside of Germany. Lots of cars get stolen in Germany and then hauled off to points around Eastern Europe. Poland is such a common destination for stolen cars that there are even rhyming poems about it: "Heute gestohlen, morgen in Polen" (Stolen today, tomorrow in Poland), or the Berliners' mocking and oft-repeated notion for a Polish tourism slogan, "Come to Poland, your car is already here." Poland, after all, is only 50 miles from Berlin. But when police looked at the stolen cars on computer maps, they were pinging from Tajikistan. Even for German stolen cars that was a bit unusual. And unusual for stolen cars here takes some doing. For instance, the Ukrainian justice minister drives a Mercedes-Benz stolen from Germany. But these cars had passed beyond the Black and Caspian seas and then would have had to pass through either Russia or Iran to get to Tajikistan, on the northeastern edge of Afghanistan. Berlin detectives went to Tajikistan and reported that the cars were being used by Mr Rahmon's inner circle. The German newspaper *Bild* reported that Tajik

officials denied the German allegations, though they also refused to produce the purchase records for the vehicles. Earlier this year, the Tajik foreign minister canceled an official visit to Berlin as a protest against the allegations. (MCT/SMH, Dec 26, 2013)

PBS: Extreme winter weather causes widespread disruption for U.S. economy

The latest round of storms in the South and Northeast may be over, but places that have spent much of the winter digging out or bundling up are also feeling an economic bite. Mark Zandi of Moody's Analytics joins Jeffrey Brown to discuss how cold, snow and serious drought have disrupted employment, retailers, housing and automakers, all still recovering from the recession.

TRANSCRIPT

JUDY WOODRUFF: This week's storms in the North — or, rather, in the South and the Northeast were the latest punch to businesses, retailers, government offices and employees coping with a tough winter.

JEFFREY BROWN: It's just the middle of February and many states have seen more than their usual share of snow days. Even in the Midwest and Plains states, where harsh winters are normal, there have been weeks where subzero temperatures have frozen activity. Mark Zandi is watching and assessing the fallout as chief economist of Moody's Analytics.

Well, Mark, generally, first, what kind of negative economic impact is the bad winter having so far?

MARK ZANDI, Moody's Analytics: Well, it's really hurt.

And it's been really cold since early December, and now we're getting a string of storms that are really disrupting economic activity. You can see it best in the job market. We lost roughly 50,000 jobs in the month of December because of the atypical weather, not quite that in January. And given what happened this last week, I expect we will lose 75,000 to 100,000 jobs in the month of February. So, it's really hurting the economy at this point.

JEFFREY BROWN: And this goes beyond what's normally accounted for already, the so-called seasonally adjusted type of assessment?

MARK ZANDI: Yes, that's exactly right.

So, you know, obviously, in the wintertime, it's cold and you don't see as much economic activity normally. But we account for that. Economists account for that. The government statisticians account for that in their data. They seasonally adjust the data. But, obviously, the weather we have been getting is way outside of anything we see normally, and thus the impact on the economy is not typical. It's much bigger than normal in the winter months.

JEFFREY BROWN: Break it down a little bit by sectors or types of businesses.

MARK ZANDI: Well, you know, it's really — it's hurt the auto industry a lot. Auto sales are way off. We got some industrial production data and auto production is down as a result. Anything, obviously, related to construction, housing — the housing recovery is just in its infancy, and this has put it back on its feet.

Retailing hit really hard, restaurants, travel, the airlines. If you move anything around, transportation, distribution, warehousing, that is stuff moving around, that gets disrupted, so widespread disruption. And I think one key thing is, since a lot of people in most of the country is having to spend a lot more just to heat their homes, they have a lot less to spend on everything else, and it hurts everybody else.

JEFFREY BROWN: We should mention, I guess, today is Valentine's Day, so the candy and flower industries?

MARK ZANDI: Yes, you know, getting those cut flowers to the stores I'm sure is a little bit difficult where I'm from, here in Philadelphia. And just looking at the site, I went to buy wife a Valentine's card and it was — it as crowded as it normally is. I'm sure Valentine's is being disrupted as well.

JEFFREY BROWN: How about regionally? Because, of course, one of the phenomena has been — hit the — place like the Southeast particularly hard.

MARK ZANDI: Yes, and it's not — obviously, the Southeast generally doesn't get this weather. I mean, we have had ice storms in Dallas and parts of Louisiana. Atlanta and Charlotte were basically — been basically shut down for a good part of the last few weeks. And so it's been incredibly disruptive there. The Northeast has been real — hit really hard. Of course, in the Northeast, we're more used to this, we're prepared for it, but this is beyond the pale. Lots of people have lost power. And that's affected their ability to do their work.

Even the Midwest, as you mentioned, it's been brutally cold, so cold, that it has cut down on construction activity in that part of the country, which, normally, you know, they can weather a lot of weather. So — and it's also important to point out, it's not the winter, but we have got a big drought in California which is also having an impact.

JEFFREY BROWN: The — just finally, within the larger picture, just to put it in a larger context, Mark, the economy still struggling to get a foothold, right? So how do you look at what is going on in these months as affecting that?

MARK ZANDI: Well, Jeff, you know, I — this is temporary. I mean, we will overcome this once we get more typical weather as we move into March and April. Things will bounce back.

You can't get everything back. You can't get those airline trips back, but — and those cut flowers for Valentine's back, but we will get most of it back and the economy will get back on track. It's just, obviously, very discouraging.

The recovery is now four-and-a-half years old, and it really hasn't kicked into high gear. I thought that we would late last year, but the winter has really delayed things. But, ultimately, this economy is moving in the right direction, and I think once we get more typical weather, we will see that.

JEFFREY BROWN: All right, Mark Zandi, thanks so much.

MARK ZANDI: Thank you. (PBS, February 14, 2014)

Realising farming boom potential

ONE of the consequences from the mining boom in Australia and its role in "saving" the country from the recession that beset other economies in the wake of the global financial crisis was the lack of attention to issues affecting the country's non-mining industries. Next week The Australian hosts the second of its Global Food Forums, which will attempt to tackle some of the challenges facing Australian agribusiness. Or maybe more accurately, Australia's problems in grasping the opportunities presented by the rapidly growing middle classes of Asia and their demand for higher quality food -- and more of it.

Just how has Australia been able to produce global resource champions such as BHP Billiton and Rio Tinto, yet in a country with abundant fertile land, high standards of food production and good relations with our Asian neighbours including China, it has been unable to produce a global agribusiness company like New Zealand's Fonterra? Or international grain trader Cargill from the US midwest?

The agricultural industry in Australia is one of the most efficient in the world, operating on a lower cost structure and lower levels of government subsidies than many other regions of the world, particularly North America and Europe. One reason that Canada's Saputo paid more than \$500 million for Warrnambool Cheese & Butter was to diversify beyond that country's high-cost dairy sector. As Macquarie's head of agricultural funds management, Tim Hornibrook, who is a speaker at next week's conference, points out in today's paper, the industry in Australia is highly fragmented. The Australian farming industry, particularly the grains and dairy business, has its roots in small family farms. While this is not a new issue facing the global agricultural industry, the continued reliance on small fragmented units makes raising capital difficult and prevents step-change investments, research and development and large-scale innovation. It also puts a premium on developing strong industry bodies. Investing in agriculture is a long-term business, beset with weather shocks and the swings and roundabouts of the commodity cycle. However, few major Australian institutions now have any significant exposure to the industry. One of the last big investors of note was AMP's long-standing investment in the Stanbroke Pastoral Company, which was sold in controversial circumstances for a cheap price more than a decade ago, adding to the apparently gloomy view of agriculture as an investment.

As Hornibrook points out, the mining industry is also beset with very big swings in commodity prices, yet investors in Australia still manage to cope with that. Foreign investment in our agricultural and food industry is a critical source of capital but also of links to international markets and expertise. Clearly, moves to reject foreign investment such as last year's bid by American-owned ADM bid for Graincorp, cannot be taken lightly. Political, industry and debate leaders need to ensure that this is a rare exception to an open for business rule. As Hornibrook also comments, a lot of the day-to-day coverage of the farm business is about the latest piece of bad news -- be it drought or floods or debt. The advantage of next week's conference is that it allows for a focus on the agricultural sector as an industry in its own right and will throw up debate on constructive ideas to take the industry forward. This week's Deal magazine, which is published in The Australian on Friday, also seeks to talk to some of the speakers at the conference and other players in the industry. Some of the themes to be debated include how to build Brand Australia as a name in the world food market. Given the fragmented nature of the farming industry, what can be done to provide a more co-ordinated industry in the future? Rebecca Dee-Bradbury, who had just stepped down as head of Mondelez (nee Kraft) and is a speaker at next week's conference, talks about the need for more collaboration within the food industry. Dee-Bradbury points to the example of the establishment of the Food Innovation Centre in Melbourne. The Deal's cover photo features Victorian wheat farmer Stewart Hamilton, whose family has been in the business for generations. He loves farming and thinks there is a good news story to tell about the business. There is no easy "mining boom" solution to developing the real potential of our agribusiness industries, but shining the spotlight on the issues is a start. (*Glenda Korpelaar, The Australian, March 19, 2014. Glenda Korpelaar is the editor of The Deal magazine*)

National

Pension costs us way too much

THE last commission of audit recommended a cold bath for pensioners. Gough Whitlam's 1972 benchmark that pensioners should receive a quarter of the average male full-time wage was no longer a relevant indicator of a minimum living standard and should be abandoned, it said.

The 1996 commission, headed by Melbourne University academic Bob Officer, gave the Howard government a number of options, starting with scrapping indexation of pensions altogether and agreeing to periodic reviews of their adequacy. If the government insisted on indexation, it would be preferable to link pensions to the consumer price index. If that was a step too far, pensions should be linked to "median" wages (the level that divides the workforce in half) rather than the average, which is skewed by very high income earners and which grows more rapidly.

The median wage is a little more than \$50,000, whereas the average is closer to \$85,000. Understanding the political clout of the pensioner lobby, John Howard rejected all options and instead enshrined the 25 per cent of average male earnings in legislation.

Since the previous audit report, the political influence of the aged lobby brought further improvements to the pension, which is now set at just less than 28 per cent of earnings, and consumes \$40 billion or 10 per cent of all government spending.

The combination of these policy changes with baby boomers retiring and people living longer means total pension expenses have been rising by 11 per cent a year for the past decade. Taming this growth, which has paralleled increasingly generous concessions to superannuation, has been one of the highest priorities for the Abbott government's commission of audit. Despite the growth, Australia is not particularly generous to its elderly. The OECD records that the 3.5 per cent of GDP we spend on pensions is one of the lowest (only Iceland and Mexico spend less) and is less than half the average. The OECD considers that 35 per cent of over-65s live in poverty in Australia, almost three times the average and much higher than in peer countries such as Britain, New Zealand and the US. The number in poverty rises to more than 40 per cent for those older than 75. This means that the commission of audit's efforts will aim primarily at controlling the growth in the numbers of people eligible for the pension, rather than the adequacy of the payment. It will aim to encourage more people who can be self-reliant to finance their retirement without recourse to the pension. The International Monetary Fund is pressing countries to increase the retirement age. The average life expectancy from age 65 has risen from 16 years in the early 1980s to 23 years now, and is expected to reach 27 years by 2050. The Rudd government, as part of its payment for increasing the pension rate, introduced a very gradual increase in the pension age, to 67 years by 2023. One option, which is pursued by Denmark, is to index the pension age to life expectancy. It has been suggested that the retirement age may be raised gradually to 70 years, although this would have to be matched by a safety net to support those unfit for work in their late 60s.

Superannuation is working to reduce the cost of age pensions, with the proportion receiving the full age pension falling by about 10 percentage points over the past decade to about 40 per cent of people older than 65. The number on the full pension will fall further as the pool of super savings rises. Another 35 per cent receive part pensions, with either savings or work supplementing their income. Assets tests could be tightened, with their scope broadened to include high-value homes. At present, a couple may have financial assets of \$1.1 million in addition to the family home and still receive a part pension. There is an equity issue with salary earners on relatively low incomes paying taxes to support pensioners with assets they could never dream of possessing. However, there are practical issues in capturing high-value homes. A \$1m Launceston home is very different to one in Sydney. The income tests are where the audit commission is most likely to move. At present, a couple may have combined earnings of \$73,000 and still receive a part pension. The pension is withdrawn at the rate of 50 cents for every dollar earned. This "taper" rate may be increased to 60c or 65c in the dollar for income earned from superannuation or other financial assets.

Studies by the University of NSW's Centre for Population and Ageing Research have found that the rate at which the pension is withdrawn has a big impact on people's preparedness to undertake paid work, but almost no effect on savings behaviour. The high effective marginal tax rate as pensions are withdrawn while taxable income is earned stops people from working. There is already a rebate to minimise this effect. But the high effective marginal tax rate on super earnings as pensions are withdrawn has little impact on people's readiness to save. This is an obvious path to pursue that would encourage greater self-reliance on super earnings. (David Uren, *The Australian*, April 10, 2014)

We can learn from a man who has class

THE vicious attacks on the expert chosen by Christopher Pyne to review the national education curriculum show just how much is at stake for the cultural revolutionaries dumbing down our schools.

Dr Kevin Donnelly is their worst nightmare, appointed to snatch the curriculum back from the brink of disaster.

For his trouble he has been falsely branded a paedophile, Islamophobe, homophobe, misogynist and Christian. In the sewers of Twitter, people have wished him dead and asked him for his opinion on vibrators. "Go f... yourself Kevin Donnelly." Among his and Queensland academic Ken Wiltshire's tasks is to decide whether the three priorities of the new curriculum - sustainability, indigenous history and culture and Asian engagement - make any sense. Absurdly, even in maths the curriculum claims "sustainability provides rich, engaging and authentic contexts for developing students' abilities in number and algebra".

Good grief. Pyne has rightly queried this politically correct attempt at brainwashing. He ought to rip the curriculum to shreds, but he is taking the gentle approach. Clear-thinking Donnelly is the perfect choice. An unabashed critic of moral relativism, he wants education to be about "objectivity and truth". He believes students should understand the foundations of Western civilisation and Australia's Judeo-Christian heritage. He thinks academic rigour and phonics and even - shock, horror - rote learning might be a good thing. He is against the fashion of students "constructing" their own knowledge. When university students need remedial reading classes, he knows something is wrong. "The penny has dropped that what we are doing isn't working well enough," Donnelly told me. "In terms of falling standards something has to be done." Most parents would agree but the Marxist teacher unions are beside themselves, trawling around for something, anything, to discredit him. The latest ploy was a story this week claiming Donnelly is homophobic because he once wrote, in his 2004 book *Why Our Schools Are Failing*, that teachers should not push leftist propaganda on gender and sexuality. Donnelly criticised Australian Education Union policy that "homosexuality and bisexuality need to be normalised" in the classroom and "heterosexism" (the idea that heterosexuality is the norm) must be stamped out. He cited the example that Cinderella and Romeo and Juliet are "condemned as heterosexist because they privilege traditional views about heterosexual love". Essentially, Donnelly's view was that sex education is a sensitive and controversial topic and that parents have the right to know what is happening in the classroom. The AEU seized the bogus story as "yet another reason why Kevin Donnelly shouldn't be anywhere near a curriculum review". Others on Twitter claimed he would "rather have our youth committing suicide than be educated ... If Kevin Donnelly comes anywhere near my children I can't be held fully accountable for my actions. What a creep."

The denizens of Twitter take their lead from the bile emanating from the education establishment, unions and academics who have presided over falling standards. Worst was former NSW education director-general Ken Boston, who took to ABC radio last month with an extraordinarily unhinged tirade: "Kevin Donnelly is a polemicist. He's not taken seriously. He doesn't engage with reasoned argument or evidence. His views, or rantings frankly, are well-known and have been disregarded for many years. His publications are regarded as specious nonsense." And on and on he went for five minutes. Talk about the pot calling the kettle black.

Donnelly could hardly be better qualified. He holds a master's of education and a PhD on school curriculum, was on the panel of examiners for Year 12 English in Victoria and the Board of Studies. He also was a secondary school teacher for 18 years. He is a thoughtful man who has devoted his life to education. Boston, on the other hand, has a doctorate in "coastal morphology". The 70-year-old devoted himself to the study of saltmarsh grasses into his 30s when he changed careers to become an education bureaucrat in Ballarat. Remarkably, he rose to the top of the NSW Education Department and landed a plum job in London as chief executive of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority but left in 2008 in a national fiasco over school tests. London's conservative *Daily Telegraph* said that during Boston's six years at the authority it "presided over the dumbing down of the curriculum, a decline in the rigour of tests and hyper-inflation in the results". He is hardly in a position to criticise Donnelly. But all the vitriol is like water off a duck's back to Pyne. The more the Left criticises Donnelly, the more he knows he's on to a good thing. For our children's sake, let's hope its not too late. (Miranda Devine, *The Daily Telegraph*, February 05, 2014)

Bad luck Sarah, but that boat won't float

OUR ABC, and Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young, choked the pre-election airwaves with wild predictions that the Coalition's turn-back-the-boats policy was unworkable. Now the evidence is in that a number of boats have been successfully turned back, both the national taxpayer-funded broadcaster and the Greens immigration spokesman are conducting their own reversal of sorts - they are now noisily protesting that the boats should not have been turned back.

Hanson-Young, who appears to have been given a permanent news slot at "our" ABC, is competing with the cicadas for cacophany. The Senator flippantly shrugged off any Greens responsibility for contributing to the deaths of about 200 people who tried to enter aboard an illegal people smuggler boat in December 2011 with the astoundingly superficial comment: "Tragedies happen, accidents happen."

Hanson-Young is now dismayed the Australian naval personnel may be responsible for saving lives at sea.

Speaking to "our" ABC after Indonesian authorities reported at least two illegal people smuggler boats had returned to Indonesia (there have been more), the pointless South Australian said the people-smuggler passengers "could have drowned".

Her stupidity was in marked contrast to the measured words of the Indonesian police chief Senior Commander Hidayat on the island of Rote, who explained to Indonesia's Antara news service why the Australian navy provided the passengers with life vests and communication equipment before sending them back into Indonesian waters. "The Australian Navy knows the local ship crews will usually put leaks in boats that aim to enter Australian waters, thus they took the initiative to anticipate it," Hidayat said. It is obvious from the Indonesian media reports that the Abbott government's policy of permitting the Australian military to oversee Operation Sovereign Borders in concert with its Indonesian counterparts is bearing fruit. Unlike the Rudd government's unsuccessful policies, supported by Hanson-Young and her Greens colleagues, the new approach has already discouraged hundreds, if not thousands, of people from risking their lives attempting to enter Australia illegally.

Indonesian military commander General Moeldoko has said the Australian government's decision to turn back a boat carrying would-be migrants attempting to reach its shores was "justifiable" as he had made an agreement with the Australian Defence Force.

He said both countries had agreed to the action: "Following (our) halted military co-operation with Australia, (Australia's) defense force chief (General David Hurley) called me to discuss several issues, including how to deal with the boat people. "He told me Indonesia should understand if Australia drove back undocumented migrants attempting to enter the country using Indonesian boats or if any Indonesians were found aboard. I have agreed. Therefore, we don't need to feel offended." General Moeldoko would be bemused to learn his clarity of thought would enrage Hanson-Young and those at "our" ABC, who have worked so hard to undermine Australia's national interest by fomenting distrust between Australia and Indonesia. Former Labor leader Mark Latham was absolutely correct when he said the Greens and the Labor left and their "so-called compassionate" approach to asylum seekers was causing deaths at sea. "You can't be compassionate and you can't have a good heart, you can't have a good soul, if you encourage people to get on boats that sink," Latham told Sky in 2011.

"And people just need to understand that the real compassionate policy is to stop the flow of the boats."

The Indonesian police have confirmed that the boats turned back were "rented" from Indonesian fishermen and the crews which were endeavoring to help the undocumented arrivals enter Australia were Indonesians. Unfortunately they escaped after the local Indonesian police transferred them as well as other crew and passengers to Kupang. The contrast between the Abbott government's approach to illegal entrants and that of the Rudd and Gillard governments could not be sharper. Former Labor prime minister Kevin Rudd trumpeted his foreign policy forays at mega-volume, dismaying our neighbours and eroding their trust. Similarly, Julia Gillard showed a total lack of diplomatic skill when she shut down the important live cattle export trade without any consultation with either the Australian beef industry or the Indonesians.

Having Australian generals deal with their Indonesian counterparts collaboratively on the people-smuggler policy has isolated grandstanding politicians like Hanson-Young, and the Labor Opposition leadership team of Bill Shorten, Anthony Albanese, Tanya Plibersek and Tony Burke. Even Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa, ANU-schooled and Labor-leaning, has been dealt out of the main game, which he hinted at by refusing to comment on the reports of boats being towed back to Indonesia because they were operational matters. Natalegawa is too shrewd a politician to take on the large and important Indonesian military institutions within months of a national election in Indonesia, no matter how much air time and print space the ABC and Fairfax offer him.

With the "unachievable" policy of turning back the boats looking better every day, it is the Labor left, the Greens and their media cheer squad who have been left high and dry. (*Piers Akerman, The Daily Telegraph, January 10, 2014*)

Silent over 1000 deaths, but a Somali sings his hand and ...

GOD bless our caring, compassionate friends from the left, who are now calling for an official government investigation into an asylum seeker's blistered hand.

This is an excellent idea, although two conditions should apply. Firstly, any maritime investigation should be backdated to cover events beginning around, say, early 2008. That was when leftists achieved their dream of a more humane asylum seeker policy, which eventually led to more than 1000 deaths at sea. You might remember leftists pleading, as the body count rose, that those deaths not be politicised. No calls for an investigation then. But show them a singed Somali and they're hot for it, so to speak. As a condition of any investigation into scorched Somali fingers, it should be headed by Sarah Hanson-Young. The Greens Senator demonstrated a couple of weeks ago, during Senate questioning of Australian Customs and Border Protection Service CEO Mike Pezzullo, that she has all the forensic ability to solve any maritime mystery.

Hanson-Young, who memorably dismissed 200 deaths from one sunken boat disaster in 2011 with the line "accidents happen, tragedies happen", seemed to become confused during that questioning session. Her line of inquiry led Pezzullo to ask if she was referring to the fictional Sea Patrol TV series. Well, let Sarah set the record straight. After her performance was mentioned in last week's column, Hanson-Young fired in an angry email. "My line of questioning was in regard to the Channel 7 program 'Border Security' and the same channel's new reality show 'Coastwatch Oz'," the senator claimed. "I was simply pointing out the fact that the government is promoting and publicising the activities of border security operations on the one hand while, on the other hand, refusing to answer questions about illegal operations it is undertaking on the high seas." Hanson-Young was asking Australia's Customs and Border Protection Service CEO about a show aired only once at the time, and that has nothing at all to do with customs or border protection. Coastwatch Oz mostly follows the activities of fisheries officers. As one reader put it: "Sarah Hanson-Dumb can't see any difference between checking the legal length of a flathead and the Royal Australian Navy executing Operation Sovereign Borders." All of which qualifies her to lead the probe into allegations of navy torture at sea. (*TIM BLAIR, The Daily Telegraph, February 10, 2014*)

How Labor booby-trapped Australia's future

When Joe Hockey was growing up and dreaming of becoming prime minister, he would not have imagined that his dream would lead him to joining a bomb disposal unit. Tomorrow, he will unveil the first bomb he must dismantle and it is almost nuclear in its capacity for destruction. At 12.30 on Tuesday, Hockey, who has also been the stand-out thespian of the new federal parliament, will unveil the real horror, dysfunction and narcissism of Kevin Rudd's contribution to Australian political history, disabably assisted by Julia Gillard. Hockey will release the mid-year economic and fiscal outlook, known in the trade as MYEFO, which will show a budget deficit much worse than Labor led us to believe, probably close to \$50 billion, debt obligations much higher than Labor led us to believe, and unfunded liabilities that are so irresponsibly crushing the government will have to walk away from many of them. The most monumental folly is the National Broadband Network, whose economic rationale was worked out on a piece of paper by Rudd. The scheme subsequently created by former communications minister Stephen Conroy would cost more than \$70 billion and never recover its cost of capital. The Abbott government will have to start again.

Rudd also authorised the spying on the President of Indonesia and his wife, a booby trap that duly exploded in the face of his Coalition successor. Rudd also poisoned the relationship with China, with his lectures to Beijing, which has also come back to haunt the Coalition government. Then came Gillard, who directed a decisive shift of funding and power to the unions. She exposed the Commonwealth to a massive unfunded financial obligation for the National Disability Insurance Scheme. She provided political cover for the disgraced union official Craig Thomson. And she set up and then stacked the Fair Work Australia bureaucracy with former union officials and Labor lawyers. Labor booby-trapped the future. It is also busy booby-trapping the present, putting improvised explosive devices everywhere, with the help of the Greens. Together, they have engaged in scorched-earth, rearguard, morally bankrupt obstructionism as if the 2013 federal election was a meaningless exercise, the will of the people has no moral authority, and the idea of a mandate, delivered by the only poll that matters, is an empty ideal to be ignored. The worst among equals in this cynicism are Labor's leader, Bill Shorten, his deputy, Tanya Plibersek, and the Minister for Gutter, Anthony Albanese, assisted by the deputy leader of the Greens, Adam Bandt. Contrast their scorched-earth cynicism with the response of the defeated

Coalition government in 2007, when it conceded the public had rejected its Work Choices industrial relations policies and Labor had a mandate to create what would become Fair Work Australia. This was the great issue in 2007 (after the unions spent millions to make it so) just as the carbon tax and curbing people-smuggling were the great issues of 2013.

For the past year the Coalition restricted itself to a small but emphatic range of policies that clearly differentiated it from Labor: repeal the carbon tax, repeal the mining tax, re-introduce temporary protection visas (which closed off asylum status), re-introduce the Australian Building and Construction Commission and end Labor's deficit spending. This was the message. These policies became the mandate when Labor was thrown out of office in a landslide and the Greens suffered an even more emphatic 28 per cent plunge in their vote and lost the balance of power in the Senate. And what do we get? Labor and the Greens opposing all four mandates, and everything else, and some of Labor's booby traps already exploding. Rudd's authorising of spying on Indonesia's President and his wife blew up on Tony Abbott, who suffered further damage as he doggedly covered up for Labor. Labor's multi-billion-dollar expansion into school education, a state issue, also exploded when Education Minister Christopher Pyne ineptly fumbled his attempt to rein in its costs and impositions.

The government must now wait until July 1 next year, when the new Senate is sworn in, and hope the independents and the eccentric Palmer United Party senators are more moral and pragmatic than the Greens, who think 8 per cent is a moral majority and a mandate to obstruct everything. Everything, that is, except removing the debt ceiling, where the Greens sided with the government, but only because they feared if they did not the government would start slashing spending with a chainsaw.

The key figures in dealing with Labor's booby traps are Hockey and Eric Abetz, the leader of the government in the Senate. Hockey has shown the most ticker in dealing with debt and deficit, and Senator Abetz has carriage of the crucial reform agenda in industrial relations. After Hockey, he has the most bombs to defuse. Crucially, in addition to restoring the Australian Building and Construction Commission, and tackling the tainted culture of Fair Work Australia, Senator Abetz must navigate the Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Amendment Bill into law. This is the bill that will drag the unions out of the 19th century. It establishes an independent watchdog, the Registered Organisations Commission, with powers modelled on those of the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, to bring union governance into line with corporate governance. The bill is designed to create a stronger, cleaner and more transparent union sector. Labor and the Greens are opposing the bill at every step. (Paul Sheehan, *Sydney Morning Herald*, December 16, 2013)

Price of joining the global economy is giving up the right to call our own shots

"Twenty years from now, Holden's departure will be just another marker on a journey the direction of which is clear and irreversible." In the short term, there's no consistency in politics. Back when the Gillard government announced the carbon tax, it took about six seconds for the Coalition to scream this would cost jobs and devastate entire towns. Bollocks, retorted Labor, occasionally by way of karaoke. Sure, some industries would be hit, but they were the kind of industries the environment needed us to scale back. Meanwhile, we would create shiny, eco-friendly jobs. People would retrain and find new opportunities. The workforce was adaptable and dynamic.

Now, with nobody really noticing, Labor and the Coalition seem to have swapped positions. As Labor inspects the carcass of the Australian car industry, it foreshadows monstrous job losses, the devastation of manufacturing towns in South Australia and Victoria, and protests that you can't simply ask people who have spent their lives assembling cars suddenly to work in nursing homes. And the Coalition is suddenly brimming with confidence that these things are always transient, evolving and ultimately leave us stronger. But in the long run, things are far more consistent than all that. The truth is that the death of Australian car making did not begin on election day, September 7, but 30 years ago, when the Hawke government began abolishing tariffs and opening us to global competition. This was declared a necessary step in Australia's economic evolution. It would bring growth, dynamism and, after some pain, prosperity.

When Labor today argues the Coalition is sacrificing blue-collar workers at the altar of an economic theory, it omits that, in Australia, Labor was that very theory's midwife. Ask Paul Keating. Actually, don't bother. He's already given his answer when asked what he'd say to blue-collar workers whose jobs disappeared on his watch: "What do I say? 'What's your new job like.' ... I mean, did we ever hurt anybody liberating them from the car assembly line?" For now, an argument rages on whether more government money would have saved Holden. The opposition insists \$150 million would have done it. The government points out that Holden, like Ford before it, has been "saved" in this manner several times before, only to be unsaved and threaten to leave again. The truth is we'll never know because Holden won't tell us, and even if it did, it would be guessing. Either way, the government's argument is interesting because it boils down to the assertion that there is nothing it could reasonably have done to prevent this; that this decision was out of its hands and was based on economic factors largely beyond its control. But in defending itself, the government has made an epic admission: that we're not really in control of our economy. And that much is the heretical truth. We chose to make it true when we threw our lot in with the global free market. We'll never admit this in stark terms. We'll continue to argue over each sensational development such as this week's. But the grander theme cannot be resisted: we do not call our own shots; no longer is there a hierarchy with the nation-state on top and everyone else - corporations, civil society and citizens - below.

Power is shared now. Companies play countries off against each other looking for the best deal, much as we haggle over a shop purchase. Our world isn't exactly borderless - and some countries are more protectionist than others - but those borders now seem to denote zones rather than dominions. The world is a country now, and nations are its cities. That's where the difficulties start. The idea of an economy is that people can move within it, that labour flows to where it is most needed. In the case of car making, our workers just aren't needed. Not because they're not good at what they do, but because countless other people are good at it, too, and for a fraction of the cost. It's not just Australia experiencing this. Take Japan, that car-making behemoth. It's lost about a quarter of its industry in the past five years. Even South Korea, whose workers earn about half of what ours do, has been in decline since 2011. These cars are now made in China and Thailand. Cheaply.

Remember Gina Rinehart's declaration that Australia can't compete while Africans are prepared to work for \$2 per day? The problem with her argument is not that she's wrong. It's that, by the global free market's own lights, she is scandalously right.

Those lights tell us to specialise; to do what we can do better, or cheaper than anyone else. That's the logic we've embraced. Just last week we signed a free trade agreement with South Korea, which both major parties had worked on. The upshot: great for agriculture, bad for car making. Labor didn't quibble. Trade Minister Andrew Robb said the agreement was about "backing our strengths". That's what we do now. But nations are diverse. People within them have a huge range of skills. Globalisation's demand that every nation specialise sits in contradiction with the social fact that not everyone is well placed to fit within our specialties. The market has its solution to that, too: labour mobility. You either acquire new skills or go where your skills will be rewarded. But the

social and political reality is more complicated. Perpetual reskilling is expensive and not always successful, and Holden's workforce isn't about to move to Thailand.

The larger story here isn't really about our car industry, or whether we could have delayed Holden's decision to some other day. It's about the fact our politics don't match our economics: that the assumptions of a hyper-specialised global free market and its effortlessly mobile labour force don't reflect the more diversified, comparatively static nature of our societies. Twenty years from now, Holden's departure will be just another marker on a journey the direction of which is clear and irreversible. We'll continue shedding industries. We'll continue developing new ones. But no one can honestly guarantee the same people harmed in the first process will be rescued by the second. And the political heat this generates will merely disguise the fact that this is a matter of political consensus. (*Waleed Aly, Sydney Morning Herald, December 13, 2013*)

Despite biases, the ABC will not be shuttered up

The ABC has got off very lightly, so far, for the claims it aired about the navy torturing asylum seekers. Well done to Defence Minister David Johnston for his passionate defence of the men and women of the Australian navy. The ABC can dish it out but it's not so good at taking criticism, including from its own Media Watch.

The ABC gave me a much harder time on the 2001 "children overboard" issue, when claims were made that adult refugees on boats heading for Australia were throwing their children overboard to force the navy to pick them up. The issue started with the immigration minister Phillip Ruddock, then prime minister John Howard. By the third day the media were pressing me, as Defence Minister, to comment. I told Howard I would speak but only after I had first been briefed by the chief of the Defence Force Admiral Chris Barrie. While I was Defence Minister, Barrie never changed his initial advice. I did not initiate the claim and I relied on his advice. I was a lot more careful then than the ABC has been now in dealing with a more serious claim. Even though I retired at the 2001 election, Labor paid me the faux compliment of saying I won the election because of the children overboard affair. This was not true, but I became the punching bag for all those who were disappointed Howard won the election. I believed the children overboard story to be true at the time, although it was later found to be untrue by a Senate Select Committee. I believed it was just one of a series of attempts by refugees to force the navy to pick up boat people. In the context of more than a thousand people drowning at sea and billions of dollars being spent as a result of Labor's diabolical policy, it's a wonder the ABC should now try to undermine the efforts of the new government to stop the boats. It is a classic case of bias.

The ABC has long had its pet subjects such as asylum seekers and climate change. The ABC's recent problems started with the running of the Edward Snowden revelations of Australia's spying activities during Labor's time in government. The story had a sense of journalistic "gotcha". It was badly managed. And reporting into Indonesia under the Australia Network contract is problematic. That story and now the torture story have left the public wondering about the ABC. The ABC's bias is cultural, deeply ingrained and not about to stop. I do not say the ABC is politically wedded to Labor's fortunes. But it does not understand the Coalition's perspective, as exemplified recently by ABC chairman Jim Spigelman. On the topic of bias, he said the ABC would commission a report by someone from the BBC. Having lived for six years in Britain, I can say the BBC today is no better than the ABC. BBC founder Lord Reith would roll over in his grave if he could see it today. I am amazed Spigelman cannot see a BBC person will most likely have the same view as someone from the ABC. But a cultural war is not about to erupt, even if the ABC refuses to offer the apology being sought. There is no appetite in the government to go after the ABC. The most likely outcome of this melee will be found in the May budget. The ABC will be cut hard but in much the same way as everything else. Its efficiency review will be the extent of the cuts. Later, there may be some changes to the ABC board. Additionally, the ABC will probably lose its small contract for the Australia Network, which is not a core business anyway.

Of course, there is a strong argument that government should not be running a TV business. But I would not sell the ABC simply because of its bias. Bias is always a problem for media outlets, not just the ABC. There is no such thing as unbiased opinion. Everyone has a different view; different media outlets have their own cultures. The objective of public policy is to encourage diversity of outlets and hence opinion. Then it is for the public to make their assessments. If the audience doesn't like what it sees, it will switch. Australia should not be taxing consumers for a government service that can be provided by free enterprise. We don't need the government to supply viewers with quiz shows and constantly repeating news programs that can all be delivered commercially and probably at a lower cost. The world has changed; convergence of internet, TV and other devices is broadening the information and entertainment businesses. The recent independent tender process for the Australian Network demonstrates the obvious reality that the private sector is able to provide a better service than the ABC. But to all the ABC fans, don't worry; Australian politics is far too conservative for that sort of free enterprise approach. (*Peter Reith, SMH, February 11, 2014. Peter Reith was a Howard government minister*).

International

Say nyet now — or watch Putin's appetite expand

IN just over three weeks, the Kremlin has invaded and seized control of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula, installed a local government headed by a pro-Russian politician with a criminal past, enacted legislation through its well-trained Russian parliament facilitating annexations of other people's territories, supported the conduct of a hasty plebiscite at the point of a gun that achieved truly Soviet results (allegedly 97 per cent in favour), and commenced the accelerated approval of an appeal from Crimea to be annexed. The procedure was crassly illegal from start to finish, secured virtually no support from the international community and effectively disenfranchised the Crimean Tartar community, whose grandfathers' generation had been brutally deported by Stalin towards the end of World War II with a fatality rate of 50 per cent. The survivors and their families were allowed to filter back to the peninsula only 45 years later. Not surprisingly, they decided to boycott the shotgun poll.

The model thus demonstrated has proved so attractive that Transnistria, a Russian-supported and largely Russophone enclave in mainly Romanian-speaking Moldova, which shares no common border with Russia, has indicated its wish to be annexed.

The West has so far responded to this machinegun-fire of facts on the ground with shock, disapproval and non-specific warnings of "costs" and "consequences". But when the US and EU presented parallel programs of targeted sanctions on March 18, these scarcely made a dent in the triumphalist mood of Vladimir Putin's celebratory annexation speech in the Grand Kremlin Palace the next day. Meanwhile, the Russian stockmarkets, which had been showing signs of nervousness about possible serious sanctions, have rebounded this week. Further US sanctions announced on Thursday, however, do land some telling blows against some of Putin's KGB and judo billionaire cronies. One in particular, Gennady Timchenko, is widely believed to be Putin's personal bagman.

But sanctions, to be truly effective, must emanate from the EU, the source of most of Russia's fading prosperity. Further steps are under discussion, and some European leaders, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel, seem at last to be seized of the matter, but the pain for both sides of serious trade sanctions, and the continuing divisions in EU circles, suggest nothing too dismaying for Moscow is likely to emerge.

In 1904, Russian interior minister Vyacheslav Plehve justified his support for the Russo-Japanese war by arguing that to avert a revolution Russia urgently needed a "short, victorious war". Since launching his Crimean triumph, Putin's ratings have gone up 10 per cent. While to an outside observer it may seem his increasingly police-state methods are holding domestic malcontents in check, Putin may not see it that way. The Russian President has an obsessive fear of popular revolts that can take over the streets and topple autocrats. Twice he has seen it happen in Ukraine, in 2004-05 and again in 2013-14. And just ahead of the "greatest political catastrophe in the 20th century" (the fall of the Soviet Union), he saw it, unnervingly, at first hand in the streets of Dresden in East Germany, where he was posted as a modest-ranking KGB officer. Lately the Russian economy has been in increasing trouble, with growth down to 1 per cent and further decline likely, particularly given Putin's extravagant \$700 billion rearmament program superimposed on the defence budget.

Unproductive expenditure on his vast and ever-expanding security forces and corrupt civil bureaucracy has led to cuts in health, education and infrastructure, all of which urgently require greater investment. But Crimea is an alluring symbol for the 80 per cent of voters who depend on Russia's increasingly mendacious and xenophobic state television programs for their news and views. Thanks to the blanket propaganda from official media, the proportion of opinion-poll respondents who favour Russian interference in Ukraine has increased from a small minority to an overwhelming majority within a month. Leaving nothing to chance, Putin is simultaneously cracking down further on his domestic opponents, right-wing super-patriotic extremists are increasingly setting the tone for Russia's public life (as the eminent Australian expert Robert Horvath has demonstrated in *Inside Story*), while the surviving moderates in the President's entourage are marginalised. In seeking rational explanations, even justifications, for Putin's behaviour, commentators sometimes forget the basic principle that an autocracy's foreign policy will depend in large measure on the head noises of the autocrat and his current circle of favourites.

While Crimea has been a splendid achievement for Putin, he will not now want to stop there, unless he is very energetically resisted. He has invested a great deal in destabilising the eastern provinces of Ukraine, sending in volunteers and probably also, as in Crimea, spetsnaz (special) forces in mufti. Together with local Russian patriots, the newcomers have provoked repeated clashes with supporters of the government in Kiev, seizing public buildings and trying to install "popular governors". These struggles are probably meant to create a fresh *casus belli* for Russian military intervention. Such clashes are not typical of Ukraine, where, despite their differences, eastern and western Ukrainians have got along pretty well. But Moscow has run the narrative that its "fellow countrymen" in Ukraine generally, as in Crimea, are at risk of terrible and violent persecution, which supposedly imposes on Russia an R2P (Responsibility to Protect) obligation.

This is largely rubbish, as the Russians have not been in danger and are in fact close to a majority in the cities of the southeast. But under the radicalising stress of invasion and further threatened incursions, it could become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Putin will not withdraw those irregular forces until he has gained a good return on his investment. He will have had time to assess the Western response. Putin is known to hold Western leaders in contempt, referring to them privately but audibly once as "hamsters", and viewing their cumbersome decision-making processes as dysfunctional. He will have been observing all the internal disputes about sanctions and policy towards Russia in the EU, and the frequent trans-Atlantic disputes triggered by the drip-feed of Kremlin-friendly leaks from the idealistic Edward Snowden, safely resident in that mecca for human rights, Moscow. Unless Western leaders can suddenly reverse the momentum of recent months and set him back on his heels with some resolute decision, he will feel a strong impulse to move on to more venturesome scenarios. If Moscow can maintain a state of disorder in southeastern Ukraine, it may try to settle for a federalisation scenario. In a curious echo of Soviet secret police NKVD's strategies in Eastern Europe in 1944-48, Russia has this week proposed that a "support group" be created to oversee a rewriting of Ukraine's constitution to overcome the "crisis" in the country and replace the "illegitimate" government.

The new constitution should, among other things, provide for a federative structure, with extensive autonomy for the provinces where Russians are allegedly under threat; ensure the country be permanently neutral and precluded from joining NATO or the EU; prevent Ukraine from again adopting a "neo-Nazi" ideology; and require it to accept Russian as a second state language.

Not surprisingly, the Kiev government has dismissed this modest proposal, describing it as an "ultimatum".

For Putin, Ukraine is at once the jewel in the crown and, as he said to George W. Bush, not a real country. Its Ukrainian inhabitants are little brothers when they behave nicely, and particularly when they speak Russian or identify as ethnic Russians (as some 17 per cent do), or fascists and Banderists when they look westwards. He covets Ukraine's extensive Soviet-legacy defence industries, which could be vital to his huge military build-up. A recent article in a Russian specialist publication went so far as to suggest Ukraine's defence industries were more necessary to the Russian defence complex's functioning than vice versa. Putin would also be glad of the infusion of 46 million Slavs with a relatively small Muslim community. In Russia, at least 15 per cent of the population is made up of Muslims, many of them increasingly alienated by government crackdowns on Muslim migrants in Russia's big cities and harsh anti-insurgency operations.

Russia is going through a demographic trough where the cohorts of young people entering the age group for employment and military recruitment are very low. The establishment of a compliant, pro-Moscow government in Kiev, happy to join the Moscow-led Customs Union and post-Soviet security structures, and with guaranteed autonomy for the Russophone regions of eastern Ukraine, would be a big step forward from Moscow's point of view. Nor may Crimea and possibly parts of eastern Ukraine exhaust Putin's territorial demands. Clearly, plans are afoot for Moldova. And he may not yet have given up on Georgia, where Russia already occupies one-fifth of the country and half its Black Sea coastline.

Moldova and Georgia are keen to conclude association agreements with the EU this year in a search for security. Moscow will want to torpedo any such development one way or another. Even the Baltic states, despite their NATO and EU membership, may not yet be safe. Estonia and Latvia each have large populations of suffering Russians who — strangely — do not want to leave. In 2007, Russia conducted a very aggressive campaign against Estonia over the removal of a Russian statue from central Tallinn to the suburbs, with extensive cyber-attacks on government institutions and a sudden outburst of angry demonstrations by aggrieved Russians in Estonia. This week a Russian diplomat in Geneva drew an ominous parallel between discrimination against Russians in eastern Ukraine and Estonia. Aggressive and very large Russian-Belarusian military exercises and aerial patrols in the Baltic-Nordic area have become regular events in recent years. For too long the Western responses to these provocations have been tepid and tactful. It is high time they became more emphatic. (*John Besemeres, The Australian, March 22, 2014. John Besemeres is an adjunct fellow at the Australian National University's Centre for European Studies.*)

Dithering West misses the point about Putin's Crimean conquest

IF I were Vladimir Putin, I'd invade eastern Ukraine this week. Strike while the iron is hot.

Never again will the taking be so easy. Never again will the government in Kiev be so helpless. Never again will the administration in Washington be so inept, its threats so hollow. Never again will the powers in Europe be so feeble and dependent. Never again will Western monetary policy do so much to prop up energy prices.

While the Russian President is at it, he might consider invading one of the Baltic states. Barack Obama isn't about to ask Americans to die for Estonia, where a quarter of the population is ethnically Russian. The US President wants "nation-building at home", after all. Even now, the West misses the point. We have convinced ourselves that Russia is inherently weak; that its economy would collapse if the price of oil were to fall; that human and financial capital are in flight; that its population is shrinking (and frequently drunk); that the regime has lost the support of an urban middle class disgusted by endemic corruption. And so on. All true. And all the more reason for Putin to strike. We've come to think of Putin as the embodiment of ruthlessness. He's that. But he also has a genius for self-reinvention. Agent of Soviet communism turned political patriarch of Russian Orthodoxy. St Petersburg technocrat turned Moscow strongman. Enemy of the oligarchs turned godfather of the oligarchs. Law-and-order economic moderniser turned old-school Russian revanchist. Maybe the disguises go with the KGB training. Maybe it's just a well-honed survivor's instinct. Whichever way, Putin has been frog-like in his ability to jump off his lily-pad the moment it begins to sink under his weight. He's never had trouble landing on another one.

A staple of political commentary since Putin seized Crimea is that he is making a big mistake. Typical of this view is an op-ed in Monday's *New York Times* by Oxford historian Robert Service, who compares Putin to Nicholas I, the reactionary 19th century tsar who blundered into the disastrous Crimean War. The comparison would be somewhat more apt if NATO were making plans to lay siege to Sevastopol. Oh, but we'll soon lay siege to Russia's economy, right? Wrong. German Chancellor Angela Merkel attended an industrial trade fair in Hannover over the weekend where a company named Tavrida Electric was displaying its wares. Tavrida's chief executive is one of 33 people sanctioned by the European Union as governor of the new pro-Russian regime in Sevastopol. And yet, *The Wall Street Journal* reported, "the impact on Tavrida has been zero so far". It's true that sanctions could be made a lot tougher. We could impose asset freezes and travel bans on, say, executive suites at Gazprom and Rosneft and other state-controlled Russian companies. Questionable bank accounts in Switzerland and Cyprus could be frozen. We could subject the Russian economy to the kind of treatment we imposed, briefly, on the Iranian economy. And we could accept the consequences of such sanctions, as the Kremlin responds tit-for-tat by cutting off gas supplies to the Baltics, shipping advanced anti-aircraft missiles to Iran, or freezing us out of the International Space Station. In short, the West could win a sanctions war with Russia, but it would take an iron political stomach. Putin knows Obama. He knows the US President has the digestive fortitude of a tourist in Tijuana. And that's why Putin should move quickly. Russia's chokehold on Europe's energy supplies won't last forever. The easy Fed money that jacks up the price of commodities won't last forever. Even Obama's presidency won't last forever. On present course, Russia will get weaker, which leaves Putin with two options: liberalise or conquer. The first option would ultimately require him to step down from power and put him at risk of legal prosecution. The second option gives him the chance to re-legitimise his regime by whipping Russians into a nationalist frenzy and stay in power till he dies in bed. If you were Putin, which option would you choose?

That's what makes the White House's repeated offers of an "exit lane" so silly. For the Kremlin, foreign conquest is the exit lane. And if a Western exit lane is offered with every fresh Russian insult and assault, why take the first one? If the Obama diplomatic freeway has an exit lane every few miles, it means Putin is probably betting he can drive all the way to the state line before he pulls over to fill the tank. Which, in his case, is a T-72. Obama has a habit of underestimating his foes. He thought al-Qaeda was on the run. He thought Bashar al-Assad would be gone by now. He thinks Iran will abandon its nuclear programs in exchange for sanctions relief. He thinks of Putin as the kid with the bored expression, slouching in the back of the classroom. News for the law professor. That kid is smarter than you are. He's bored because you bore him. He's about to eat your lunch. (*Bret Stephens, The Wall Street Journal, April 10, 2014*)

3 Presidents and a Riddle Named Putin

WASHINGTON — Bill Clinton found him to be cold and worrisome, but predicted he would be a tough and able leader. George W. Bush wanted to make him a friend and partner in the war on terror, but grew disillusioned over time. Barack Obama tried working around him by building up his protégé in the Kremlin, an approach that worked for a time but steadily deteriorated to the point that relations between Russia and the United States are now at their worst point since the end of the Cold War.

For 15 years, Vladimir V. Putin has confounded American presidents as they tried to figure him out, only to misjudge him time and again. He has defied their assumptions and rebuffed their efforts at friendship. He has argued with them, lectured them, misled them, accused them, kept them waiting, kept them guessing, betrayed them and felt betrayed by them. Each of the three presidents tried in his own way to forge a historic if elusive new relationship with Russia, only to find their efforts torpedoed by the wiry martial arts master and former K.G.B. colonel. They imagined him to be something he was not or assumed they could manage a man who refuses to be managed. They saw him through their own lens, believing he viewed Russia's interests as they thought he should. And they underestimated his deep sense of grievance.

To the extent that there were any illusions left in Washington, and it is hard to imagine there were by this point, they were finally and irrevocably shattered by Mr. Putin's takeover of Crimea and the exchange of sanctions that has followed. As Russian forces now mass on the Ukrainian border, the debate has now shifted from how to work with Mr. Putin to how to counter him. "He's declared himself," said Tom Donilon, President Obama's former national security adviser. "That's who you have to deal with. Trying to wish it away is not a policy."

Looking back now, aides to all three presidents offer roughly similar takes: Their man was hardly naïve about Mr. Putin and saw him for what he was, but felt there was little choice other than to try to establish a better relationship. It may be that some of their policies hurt the chances of that by fueling Mr. Putin's discontent, whether it was NATO expansion, the Iraq war or the Libya war, but in the end, they said, they were dealing with a Russian leader fundamentally at odds with the West. "I know there's been some criticism on, was the reset ill advised?" said Mr.

Donilon, using the Obama administration's term for its policy. "No, the reset wasn't ill advised. The reset resulted in direct accomplishments that were in the interests of the United States." Some specialists said Mr. Obama and his two predecessors saw what they wanted to see. "The West has focused on the notion that Putin is a pragmatic realist who will cooperate with us whenever there are sufficient common interests," said James M. Goldgeier, dean of international studies at American University. "We let that belief overshadow his stated goal of revising a post-Cold War settlement in which Moscow lost control over significant territory and watched as the West expanded its domain."

Presidents tend to think of autocrats like Mr. Putin as fellow statesmen, said Dennis Blair, Mr. Obama's first director of national intelligence. "They should think of dictators like they think of domestic politicians of the other party," he said, "opponents who smile on occasion when it suits their purposes, and cooperate when it is to their advantage, but who are at heart trying to push the U.S. out of power, will kneecap the United States if they get the chance and will only go along if the U.S. has more power than they."

Eric S. Edelman, who was undersecretary of defense under Mr. Bush, said American leaders overestimated their ability to assuage Mr. Putin's anger about the West. "There has been a persistent tendency on the part of U.S. presidents and Western leaders more broadly to see the sense of grievance as a background condition that could be modulated by consideration of Russian national interests," he said. "In fact, those efforts have been invariably taken as weakness."

After 15 years, no one in Washington still thinks of Mr. Putin as a partner. "He goes to bed at night thinking of Peter the Great and he wakes up thinking of Stalin," Representative Mike Rogers, the Republican chairman of the House intelligence committee, said on "Meet the Press" on NBC on Sunday. "We need to understand who he is and what he wants. It may not fit with what we believe of the 21st century."

Bush's Disillusionment

Mr. Clinton was the first president to encounter Mr. Putin, although they did not overlap for long. He had spent much of his presidency building a strong relationship with President Boris N. Yeltsin, Mr. Putin's predecessor, and gave the benefit of the doubt to the handpicked successor who became Russia's prime minister in 1999 and president on New Year's Eve.

"I came away from the meeting believing Yeltsin had picked a successor who had the skills and capacity for hard work necessary to manage Russia's turbulent political and economic life better than Yeltsin now could, given his health problems," Mr. Clinton wrote in his memoir. When Mr. Putin's selection was ratified in a March 2000 election, Mr. Clinton called to congratulate him and, as he later wrote, "hung up the phone thinking he was tough enough to hold Russia together."

Mr. Clinton had his worries, though, particularly as Mr. Putin waged a brutal war in the separatist republic of Chechnya and cracked down on independent media. He privately urged Mr. Yeltsin to watch over his successor. Mr. Clinton also felt brushed off by Mr. Putin, who seemed uninterested in doing business with a departing American president. But the prevailing attitude at the time was that Mr. Putin was a modernizer who could consolidate the raw form of democracy and capitalism that Mr. Yeltsin had introduced to Russia. He moved early to overhaul the country's tax, land and judicial codes. As Strobe Talbott, Mr. Clinton's deputy secretary of state, put it in his book on that period, George F. Kennan, the noted Kremlinologist, thought that Mr. Putin "was young enough, adroit enough and realistic enough to understand that Russia's ongoing transition required that he not just co-opt the power structure, but to transform it."

Mr. Bush came to office skeptical of Mr. Putin, privately calling him "one cold dude," but bonded with him during their first meeting in Slovenia in June 2001, after which he made his now-famous comment about looking into the Russian's soul. Mr. Putin had made a connection with the religious Mr. Bush by telling him a story about a cross that his mother had given him and how it was the only thing that survived a fire at his country house. "I don't have a bad personal relationship with Putin. When we have conversations, they're candid, they're blunt, oftentimes they're constructive. I know the press likes to focus on body language and he's got that kind of slouch, looking like the bored kid in the back of the classroom." — *In a news conference in August 2013*

Not everyone was convinced. Mr. Bush's vice president, Dick Cheney, privately told people at the time that when he saw Mr. Putin, "I think K.G.B., K.G.B., K.G.B." But Mr. Bush was determined to erase the historical divide and courted Mr. Putin during the Russian leader's visits to Camp David and Mr. Bush's Texas ranch. Mr. Putin liked to brag that he was the first foreign leader to call Mr. Bush after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and he permitted American troops into Central Asia as a base of operations against Afghanistan. But Mr. Putin never felt Mr. Bush delivered in return and the relationship strained over the Iraq War and the Kremlin's accelerating crackdown on dissent at home. By Mr. Bush's second term, the two were quarreling over Russian democracy, reaching a peak during a testy meeting in Slovakia in 2005.

"It was like junior high debating," Mr. Bush complained later to Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair, according to notes of the conversation. Mr. Putin kept throwing Mr. Bush's arguments back at him. "I sat there for an hour and 45 minutes and it went on and on," Mr. Bush said. "At one point, the interpreter made me so mad that I nearly reached over the table and slapped the hell out of the guy. He had a mocking tone, making accusations about America."

He was even more frustrated by Mr. Putin a year later. "He's not well-informed," Bush told the visiting prime minister of Denmark in 2006. "It's like arguing with an eighth-grader with his facts wrong." He told another visiting leader a few weeks later that he was losing hope of bringing Mr. Putin around. "I think Putin is not a democrat anymore," he said. "He's a czar. I think we've lost him."

'A Stone-Cold Killer'

But Mr. Bush was reluctant to give up, even if those around him no longer saw the opportunity he saw. His new defense secretary, Robert M. Gates, came back from his first meeting with Mr. Putin and told colleagues that unlike Mr. Bush, he had "looked into Putin's eyes and, just as I expected, had seen a stone-cold killer."

In the spring of 2008, Mr. Bush put Ukraine and Georgia on the road to NATO membership, which divided the alliance and infuriated Mr. Putin. By August of that year, the two leaders were in Beijing for the Summer Olympics when word arrived that Russian troops were marching into Georgia. Mr. Bush in his memoir recalled confronting Mr. Putin, scolding him for being provoked by Mikheil Saakashvili, then Georgia's anti-Moscow president. "I've been warning you Saakashvili is hot-blooded," Mr. Bush told Mr. Putin. "I'm hot-blooded too," Mr. Putin said.

"No, Vladimir," Mr. Bush responded. "You're coldblooded."

The common thread is that the United States wants to bully Russia in ways that we would find totally unacceptable if the situation were...

Mr. Bush responded to the Georgia war by sending humanitarian aid to Georgia, transporting its troops home from Iraq, sending an American warship to the region and shelving a civilian nuclear agreement with Russia.



Putin has rebuffed overtures from the West since taking office. Credit Alexei Druzhinin/RIA Novosti Kremlin.

Worried that Crimea might be next, Mr. Bush succeeded in stopping Russia from swallowing up Georgia altogether. But on the eve of the collapse of Lehman Brothers and the global financial meltdown, he did not impose the sort of sanctions that Mr. Obama is now applying.

"We and the Europeans threw the relationship into the toilet at the end of 2008," Stephen J. Hadley, Mr. Bush's national security adviser, recalled last week. "We wanted to send the message that strategically this was not acceptable. Now in retrospect, we probably should have done more like economic sanctions." If Mr. Bush did not take the strongest punitive actions possible, his successor soon made the point moot. Taking office just months later, Mr. Obama decided to end any isolation of Russia because of Georgia in favor of rebuilding relations. Unlike his predecessors, he would try to forge a relationship not by befriend Mr. Putin but by bypassing him. Ostensibly complying with Russia's two-term constitutional limit, Mr. Putin had stepped down as president and installed his aide, Dmitri A. Medvedev, in his place, while taking over as prime minister himself. So Mr. Obama decided to treat Mr. Medvedev as if he really were the leader.

A diplomatic cable obtained by WikiLeaks later captured the strategy in summing up similar French priorities: "Cultivating relations with Russian President Dmitri Medvedev, in the hope that he can become a leader independent of Vladimir Putin." Before his first trip to Moscow, Mr. Obama publicly dismissed Mr. Putin as having "one foot in the old ways of doing business" and pumped up Mr. Medvedev as a new-generation leader. Mr. Obama's inaugural meeting with Mr. Putin a few days later featured a classic tirade by the Russian about all the ways that the United States had mistreated Moscow. Among those skeptical of Mr. Obama's strategy were Mr. Gates, who stayed on as defense secretary, and Hillary Rodham Clinton, the new secretary of state. Like Mr. Gates, Mrs. Clinton was deeply suspicious of Mr. Putin. In private, she mockingly imitated his man's-man, legs-spread-wide posture during their meetings. But even if they did not assign it much chance of success, she and Mr. Gates both agreed the policy was worth trying and she gamely presented her Russian counterpart with a "reset" button, remembered largely for its mistaken Russian translation.

Obama's 'Reset' Gambit

For a time, Mr. Obama's gamble on Mr. Medvedev seemed to be working. They revived Mr. Bush's civilian nuclear agreement, signed a nuclear arms treaty, sealed an agreement allowing American troops to fly through Russian airspace en route to Afghanistan and collaborated on sanctions against Iran. But Mr. Putin was not to be ignored and by 2012 returned to the presidency, sidelining Mr. Medvedev and making clear that he would not let Mr. Obama roll over him. Mr. Putin ignored Mr. Obama's efforts to start new nuclear arms talks and gave asylum to Edward J. Snowden, the national security leaker. Mr. Obama canceled a trip to Moscow, making clear that he had no personal connection with Mr. Putin. The Russian leader has a "kind of slouch" that made him look "like that bored schoolboy in the back of the classroom," Mr. Obama noted. In the end, Mr. Obama did not see how the pro-Western revolution in Ukraine that toppled a Moscow ally last month would look through Mr. Putin's eyes, said several Russia specialists. "With no meaningful rapport or trust between Obama and Putin, it's nearly impossible to use high-level phone calls for actual problem solving," said Andrew Weiss, a former Russia adviser to Mr. Clinton and now a vice president at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "Instead, it looks like we're mostly posturing and talking past each other." As Mr. Obama has tried to figure out what to do to end the crisis over Ukraine, he has reached out to other leaders who still have a relationship with Mr. Putin, including Angela Merkel, the German chancellor. She privately told Mr. Obama that after speaking with Mr. Putin she thought he was "in another world." Secretary of State John Kerry later said publicly that Mr. Putin's speech on Crimea did not "jibe with reality."

That has sparked a debate in Washington: Has Mr. Putin changed over the last 15 years and become unhinged in some way, or does he simply see the world in starkly different terms than the West does, terms that make it hard if not impossible to find common ground?

"He's not delusional, but he's inhabiting a Russia of the past — a version of the past that he has created," said Fiona Hill, the top intelligence officer on Russia during Mr. Bush's presidency and co-author of "Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin." "His present is defined by it and there is no coherent vision of the future. Where exactly does he go from here beyond reasserting and regaining influence over territories and people? Then what?" That is the question this president, and likely the next one, will be asking for some time to come. *Peter Bakr, International Herald Tribune, March 23, 2014*

Putin 'trying to splinter Europe'

ELITE Russian troops firing into the air and backed by armoured vehicles have stormed a Ukrainian airbase in Crimea as Moscow's defiant march across the rebel peninsula rolled on despite sanctions and growing global

isolation. The dramatic takeover provided the most spectacular show of force since Russia sent troops in to Crimea three weeks ago before formally absorbing the flashpoint peninsula last Tuesday. It came as the chill in East-West relations intensified with a charge by Germany — a nation whose friendship the Russian President Vladimir Putin had nurtured — of a Kremlin attempt to “splinter” Europe along Cold War-era lines.

Europe’s most explosive security crisis in decades will now dominate a nuclear security summit that kicks off in The Hague today and will include what may prove the most difficult meeting to date between US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. The diplomats’ encounter will come with Russia facing the loss of its coveted seat among the G8 group of leading nations and Putin’s inner circle reeling from biting sanctions Washington unleashed for their use of force in response to last month’s fall of a pro-Kremlin regime in Kiev. Crimea’s rebel authorities estimate they, together with Russian forces, control at least half of Ukraine’s bases on the Black Sea peninsula and about a third of its functioning naval vessels.

Russian troops on Friday marked a treaty sealing the Kremlin’s absorption of the mostly Russian-speaking region by seizing Ukraine’s only submarine in the region. The hulking Zaporozhye vessel flew the Russian navy flag over the weekend as it was moved to a bay controlled by the Russian Black Sea fleet. Several hundred protesters also raised the Russian flag after storming a Ukrainian air force base in the western Crimean town Novofedorivka while pro-Kremlin forces watched. And, in Sevastopol, armed men seized control of the Slavutich, one of the last navy ships in Crimea still flying Ukraine’s flag. The weekend’s most dramatic episode saw Russian forces break into the Belbek airbase near the main city of Simferopol after an armoured personnel carrier had blasted through the main gate. Two more armoured personnel carriers followed late on Saturday and gunmen stormed in, firing automatic weapons into the air and pointing guns at Ukrainian soldiers who had earlier received an ultimatum to surrender from the surrounding Russian troops. Stun grenades could be heard before the situation calmed and the gunmen lowered their weapons. Several of the base’s unarmed soldiers began singing the Ukrainian national anthem during the ensuing lull.

“It’s so disappointing,” one said. “So disappointing that I don’t have any other words to say.” Ukraine’s Defence Ministry later confirmed its men had left the base and said a journalist and a Ukrainian soldier had been wounded in the incident.

Germany — whose economic power is playing a decisive role in forging Europe’s response to Mr Putin’s increasingly belligerent stance — warned after talks with Ukraine’s besieged interim leaders that the continent’s future was at stake. “The referendum in Crimea ... is a violation of international law and an attempt to splinter Europe,” Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said after meeting Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk. The Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, brought his own message of support for “courageous” Ukrainians on a first visit by a G7 leader since Crimea staged a contentious March 16 independence vote that the international community almost unanimously proclaimed illegal. The show of diplomatic solidarity may play an important psychological role in Kiev as it faces new pressure from Russia that includes open threats to throw Ukraine’s wheezing economy into convulsion by raising its gas rates and demanding colossal payments for disputed debts it could not afford. The biggest such signal from Europe came at the weekend with the signing in Brussels of the very agreement on closer EU-Ukraine relations whose rejection by the Moscow-backed regime sparked three months of deadly protests that led to its February 22 fall. But Ukraine is unlikely to hear its calls for US and EU military support answered. Mr Yatsenyuk said he had discussed “military and technological co-operation assistance” with Mr Steinmeier, but reported no further progress. A demonstration was to be held in Kiev overnight to call for Ukrainian unity. It will be followed by a cabinet meeting of Ukraine’s government.

The US and Europe have limited their retaliation against Mr Putin to targeted travel and financial sanctions that concern officials, but do not impact the broader economy. Washington’s steps have been more meaningful because they hit what US officials call a Putin “crony bank” as well as oligarchs who are believed to be closest to the Russian strongman and — in one case — running a joint business with him. Moscow appears to have been taken aback by the force of President Barack Obama’s message, as well as the threat to hit Russian industries. Its response has been to bar nine US officials and legislators from entering the country. (*The Australian/AFIP*, March 24, 2014)

NATO drafts troop deployment plan

NATO’s top military commander in Europe, drafting countermeasures to the Russian military threat against Ukraine, said they could include deployment of American troops to alliance member states in Eastern Europe now feeling at risk. US Air Force General Philip Breedlove told The Associated Press he wouldn’t “write off involvement by any nation, to include the United States.” Foreign ministers of the 28-nation alliance have given Gen. Breedlove until Tuesday to propose steps to reassure NATO members nearest Russia that other alliance countries have their back. “Essentially what we are looking at is a package of land, air and maritime measures that would build assurance for our easternmost allies,” Gen. Breedlove told the AP. “I’m tasked to deliver this by next week. I fully intend to deliver it early.” In March, Russian troops took control of Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula, whose inhabitants then voted in a referendum to secede and join Russia. The US and other Western countries have accused Moscow of massing troops on Ukraine’s border to maintain the pressure on the government in Kiev, and possibly for military use. Speaking at the end of a NATO conference in Paris, Gen. Breedlove told the AP the Russian armed presence near Ukraine’s frontier continues unabated.

To illustrate his point, the general’s staff provided AP with a set of commercial satellite photographs they said showed Russian warplanes, combat helicopters, armour, artillery and a probable airborne or special forces brigade deployed in locations east of the Ukraine-Russian border, including along the coastline of the Sea of Azov. It was not immediately possible to independently verify the content of the photographs, which DigitalGlobe, the commercial provider, said were taken in late March. “What we see there is a force of about 40,000,” Gen. Breedlove said. “I would characterise it as a combined arms army. In other words, this is an army that has all of the provisioning and enablers that it needs to accomplish military objectives if given them.” The Russians’ assets include fixed and rotary wing aircraft, artillery, field hospitals, communications and jamming gear, he said. Kremlin objectives remain unclear, the NATO commander said. The force could stand pat and intimidate Ukraine solely by its presence, drive south to create a land bridge with Crimea, push along the Black Sea coast to the Ukrainian port city of Odessa and the largely Russian Trans-Dniester enclave of Moldova, or invade other areas of eastern Ukraine where ethnic Russians are demanding unity with Russia, he said. However the Russian contingent might ultimately be used, it’s “ready to go essentially at command. We talk about inside of 12 hours,” Gen. Breedlove said. NATO has already reinforced its Baltic air patrols and is performing daily AWACs surveillance flights over Poland and Romania. Gen. Breedlove said he has already received enough pledges of maritime assets from NATO member states to carry out beefed-up maritime operations through the end of the year.

“The tougher piece is, how do we do the assurance piece on the land,” the general said. “Because these are measures which are more costly (and) if not done correctly, might appear provocative. And everything we are trying to do in the air, on the ground and at sea we are trying to completely characterise as defensive in nature.” Asked again if American soldiers might be sent to NATO’s

frontline states closest to Russia, the four-star US general said, "I would not write off contributions from any nation." "There is not a shortage of what we can use. It's how do we use this in a measured way that indicates defensive capability so that we don't provoke. And that's what we will be working on," Gen. Breedlove said before departing for NATO's military headquarters near Mons, Belgium. (AP, April 10, 2014)

Putin can smell weakness, desires a Greater Russia

AFTER the way he vacillated, then retreated, from the "red lines" he tried to impose over Syria's chemical weapons, Barack Obama cannot be surprised by the contempt Vladimir Putin has shown for Washington's repeated warnings about the consequences that would follow if he persisted with his intervention in Ukraine. It is unlikely, however, that Syria was the only consideration in the Russian leader's calculation that he could get away with brazenly annexing Crimea after the announcement of extremely dubious results in a suspect referendum. On a host of issues the Obama administration has shown what Mr Putin has perceived as weakness. Plainly, the West is going to have to act if Crimea's annexation is not to be the harbinger of more aggression by Mr Putin aimed at asserting control over his country's so-called "near abroad" and reclaiming for Russia the geographic and strategic influence it wielded as the Soviet Union. What is far from clear is how the international community, including the UN, will actually do that.

For five years Mr Obama has been telling the world that "the tide of war" is receding. As US missile defence plans have been scaled back and a new strategic arms reduction treaty has required significant cutbacks by America, but not Russia, Mr Putin has seen a lack of resolve in Washington. NATO's enlargement was put on hold. Mr Obama reflected the war weariness of Americans and slashed defence budgets, with the determination to bring troops home judged more important than attainment of strategic objectives. Mr Putin saw the circumstances, when the crisis in Kiev developed, in which he could act with impunity to seize the strategic prize that is Crimea.

If Mr Putin sets out to stir up irredentist pressures in Russophone parts of eastern Ukraine, there is not much Kiev can do about it. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, leading to Ukraine's independence, Kiev had the world's third largest nuclear arsenal with 1900 nuclear warheads. In terms of the trilateral 1994 Budapest Memorandum, however, Ukraine agreed to transfer all its strategic nuclear warheads to Russia for elimination — in return for assurances by Russia, the US and Britain that Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity would be secured. Had it not handed over its nuclear weapons, Ukraine might now be in a different situation. The cause of nuclear disarmament has suffered a great blow; states with nuclear capacity or ambitions will remember Ukraine's plight.

Mr Putin regards the collapse of the Soviet Union as "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century". Kiev remains a target for Mr Putin. So, too, do some small states — Moldova, which, like Ukraine, has been pursuing a European future, and Georgia, said to be "in great danger", and a "chain of frozen conflicts" around the Black Sea "ripe for exploitation". People in eastern Moldova's province of Transnistria are ethnic Russians and have Russian citizenship. Mr Putin is ruthlessly stoking irredentist tensions, as he has been in Georgia's South Ossetia where many people, too, have Russian passports. Elsewhere across the near abroad, Mr Putin is pressuring other states in a way that recalls the heavy-handed ways of the Soviet Union. In Belarus he has moved swiftly to thwart a proposed EU deal. Armenia rapidly caved in when Moscow responded to proposed integration with the EU by threatening to arm rival Azerbaijan. In so defiantly pursuing his ambitions for a Greater Russia, Mr Putin's calculation is clearly that the West, led by the US, is in no mood to confront him and that, as he sets about reasserting Moscow's domination over the near abroad, keeping Russian oil and gas exports — so vital to EU economies — will win out over any serious drive for sanctions. Crimea must not be allowed to set a template for Mr Putin's grand designs. Yet, as the West scuttles about invoking sanctions and seeking diplomatic solutions, it is galling to think how years of inaction and demilitarisation have left it with such pitiful options. (Editorial, *The Australian*, March 20, 2014)

Obama attacks 'weak' Moscow

President talks tough on Crimea takeover

US President Barack Obama has hit out at Moscow's expansionism as a "sign of weakness" following Russia's takeover of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula. "Russia is a regional power that is threatening some of its immediate neighbours, not out of strength but out of weakness," Mr Obama told journalists after a nuclear security summit in The Hague. Mr Obama said, while the US also has influence over its neighbours, "we generally don't need to invade them in order to have a strong co-operative relationship with them. The Crimean crisis has sparked the most explosive East-West confrontation since the Cold War and fanned fears in Ukraine's capital Kiev that Russian President Vladimir Putin now intends to push his troops into southeast Ukraine.

"The fact Russia felt (the need) to go in militarily and lay bare these violations of international law indicates less influence, not more," Mr Obama said, rejecting Mr Putin's claim that Russian speakers had been threatened in both Crimea and Ukraine. "There has been no evidence that Russian speakers have been in any way threatened," Mr Obama said, the day after western powers cancelled a Group of Eight summit by suspending Russia from the club of rich nations. Meanwhile, the Ukrainian Defence Minister has resigned as thousands of Ukraine troops began withdrawing from the Crimea Peninsula, now controlled by Russia. In an address to parliament, Igor Tenyukh said he rejected criticism he hadn't given clear instructions to troops. Politicians initially refused his resignation. A majority then voted to appoint Gen Mikhail Kovalyov as replacement defence minister. Authorities in Ukraine have come under criticism for their hesitant reaction to Russia's annexation of Crimea, which was formalised following a hasty referendum this month. In Crimea, Ukrainian soldiers piled on buses and began their journey to Ukrainian territory, as a former comrade saluted them from outside a base over-run by Russian forces. Mr Tenyukh said he had received requests to leave Crimea from about 6500 soldiers and family members — meaning about two-thirds of the 18,800 military personnel and relatives stationed there were so far taking their chances in the peninsula newly absorbed by Russia. (*thetelegraph.com.au*, March 27, 2014)

China and Russia get cosy under winter blanket

THE global power balance has tilted east, following the Sochi Olympics Opening Ceremony, where Vladimir Putin and his Chinese counterpart President Xi Jinping clapping each other on in the VIP box.

Two of Australia's most prominent businessmen, Lachlan Murdoch and James Packer, looked on as Sino-Russian relations got cosier while America kept itself out in the cold. It was the first time a Chinese president has attended a major overseas sports event, with Xi flying in to Sochi days before the spectacular opening at the personal invitation of the Russian president.

Xi has travelled to Russia twice since assuming the presidency last year and, on this trip, held an intimate meeting with Putin to make further strategic plans for bilateral cooperation this year. When China's 138-strong team marched into Sochi's Fisht Olympic Stadium, Xi rose to his feet and clapped enthusiastically, with those around him, including Putin, joining in. "The Chinese

and Russian leaders standing together at the Opening ceremony speaks volumes about the changing geopolitical landscape,” said Mr Packer, who was seated just below the two world leaders in the \$679 million purpose-built stadium. “It is an ever changing world,” he said. Australia’s International Olympic Committee vice-president John Coates, wearing an Australian Olympic scarf, sat only a handful of seats to the Chinese president’s left. The show of strong friendship between Russia and China is a sharp reminder to the United States’ allies, including Australia, that broader, more sophisticated foreign diplomacy is required. Mr Packer, who has multi-billion dollar casino investments in Macau, has said in the past that Australia should take an independent view and be sure not to be seen as just America’s friend.

U.S president Barack Obama gave Russia the cold shoulder by failing to attend or send his vice-president. First Lady Michelle Obama, who attended the London Olympics, this time remained snug inside the White House. He sent former Homeland Security chief Janet Napolitano to wave a limp U.S. flag. Even more provocatively, in a nod to elements of his domestic constituency, Obama included in his hand-selected delegation three openly gay athletes. One of them, tennis great and gay rights campaigner Billie Jean King, ended up staying back in Arizona to be with her ailing mother. It was the first time since Sydney in 2000, that the U.S. delegation to an Olympics did not include a president, vice president or first lady. Hollywood film director Brett Ratner, who travelled to Sochi as Mr Packer’s partner in his Ratpac entertainment venture, said he was disappointed his country did not send a more senior representative. He said such a gesture would have been appropriate since it was Russia’s first hosting of an Olympics since Moscow in 1980, which America boycotted. “President Obama should have come,” Mr Ratner said. British Prime Minister David Cameron, German President Joachim Gauck and French President Francois Hollande also stayed away.

But Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe showed his support, sitting in the VIP area close to Putin and United Nations secretary general, South Korea’s Ban Ki-moon. (*John Lehmann, The Daily Telegraph, February 09, 2014*)

Hagel tells China to play fair

THE US Defence Secretary has warned China against unilateral action to resolve territorial disputes with its neighbours, drawing a parallel with Russia’s incursion in Ukraine as he announced two more warships would be sent to Japan. Seeking to reassure Washington’s longtime ally Japan, Chuck Hagel’s remarks and promise of more missile defence ships came as Tokyo rows with Beijing over islands in the East China Sea. “All nations deserve respect, no matter how large or how small,” Mr Hagel said yesterday during a visit to Tokyo. “I think we’re seeing some clear evidence of a lack of respect, and coercion and intimidation with ... what the Russians have done in Ukraine,” he told a news conference with his Japanese counterpart, Itsunori Onodera. In a veiled reference to China and its territorial arguments with Asian neighbours, Mr Hagel said smaller countries had the same sovereign rights as larger states. “You cannot go around and redefine boundaries, violate territorial integrity and sovereignty of nations by force, coercion and intimidation — whether it’s in small islands in the Pacific, or large nations in Europe,” Mr Hagel said. “So I want to talk to our Chinese friends about this.” As “a great power,” China has “great responsibilities”, Mr Hagel said. (*AFP, April 07, 2014*)

North Korea Rushing Imminent War Preparations

North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un further escalated tensions of war on Wednesday, putting his army on notice for imminent combat during an inspection of troops accompanied by North Korea’s top 3 military leaders.

“We must greatly hurry preparations for battle, not forgetting that war is not the kind of thing that you advertise when you’ll do it,” said Kim, according to Japanese-language *NHK News*. Kim’s bellicose statements came while inspecting the Command of Large Combined Unit 526 on Christmas Eve, as reported by the state’s official Korean Central News Agency. The latest threats of war follow a fax by North Korea to its southern neighbor last Thursday, saying it would “attack it without mercy and without notice.” In response to the increasing tensions, South Korean President Park Geun-Hye on Tuesday visited a frontline army post, her first visit since taking office in February. There, Park called the situation “ominous” and demanded “watertight security readiness.” North Korea’s aggressive stance has quickly grown since Kim had his uncle Jang Song-Taek executed in a rare Jang, who was married to the sister of the late Kim Jong-Il, played a key role establishing the leadership of the young Kim and was considered to be pulling the strings from behind the scene. The second anniversary of the death of Kim Jong-Il was held last Tuesday. The preparations for war come as former NBA star Dennis Rodman is in North Korea training the national basketball team, in preparation for a planned exhibition against other former NBA players in January. Rodman met Kim for the first time in January. At the time, Rodman told the North Korean dictator “you have a friend for life.” In late November the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported that North Korea appears to be restarting its Yongbyon nuclear reactor, which was destroyed in 2008 as a confidence building measure. The reports were confirmed Tuesday by a Johns Hopkins University report, which indicated “a more wide-ranging, extensive effort by North Korea to modernize and restart the Yongbyon complex dating back to 2009 than previously understood.”

It was revealed in November that North Korea and Iran pledged to continue cooperation in developing nuclear missiles.

The east Asian region is poised on the brink of potential war, as China’s recently declared “air defense identification zone” triggered a standoff on land disputes between China, Japan and South Korea. During US Vice President Joe Biden’s visit to the region, South Korea expressed its intentions to expand its own air zone. China is the prime backer of fellow communist North Korea. (*Ari Yashar, AFP/IsraelNationalNews.com, December 25, 2013*)

WATCH: Iranian TV Simulates Attack on Israel, US

Iranian state television ran a documentary showing simulated air attacks on Israel and the United States Friday, as revealed in an inflammatory clip uploaded to YouTube. The clip shows Iranian drones and missiles carrying out simulated strikes on the American aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, striking American military targets in the Persian Gulf and downing US aircraft.

In a more graphic part of the documentary, drones and missiles are shown bombing Haifa, Ben-Gurion Airport, and the Dimona nuclear reactor. It was aired just one day before Iran’s Revolutionary Guard issued threats Saturday, warning the US that its drones and missiles could reach American vessels in the Persian Gulf. Featured throughout the documentary are clips from the Islamic Republic’s Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, making threatening remarks against both countries in a 2011 speech.

The documentary is not the first to be aired depicting military strikes on Israel. In November, clips aired on Iranian state television showing a simulated missile strike on Israel, including in Tel Aviv.

The clips surface at a particularly trying time between the US and Iran. Tensions between the two countries continue to escalate, despite Iran’s alleged “charm offensive” against Israel and other Western powers. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei verbally attacked the US earlier Saturday, calling it “controlling and meddlesome” and taunting that it is unable to topple the Islamic Republic. Khamenei recently threatened the United States, suggesting that the Americans “exercise self-restraint,” after Secretary of

State John Kerry said that the military option was still on the table if Iran fails to live up to its part of the agreement that was signed with it in Geneva. Senior parliamentary officials in Tehran also denounced Kerry's remarks and threatened a "crushing response" if the United States attacked Iran. Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu reiterated the importance of keeping vigilant with the Islamic Republic during his weekly cabinet meeting Sunday. "The international easing of the sanctions against Iran have not led Iran to moderate its international aggression; the complete opposite has occurred," he noted. "The Iranian Foreign Minister recently met with the head of Islamic Jihad, Iran is continuing to supply terrorist organizations with deadly weapons, Iran continues to be complicit in massacres in Syria and to all this may be added the leader of Iran's crude and sharp attack against the US, alongside sending warships to the Atlantic Ocean." "What is happening here is that the international community has reduced the sanctions on Iran and Iran is stepping up its international aggression," Netanyahu summarized. "This is the real result of the steps up until now." (Tova Dvorin, IsraelNationalNews.com, February 9, 2014)

'Whoever Attacks Us Will Bear the Consequences'

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu opened his weekly cabinet meeting by responding to Gaza rocket attacks, Iranian military maneuvers. "Our resolute policy against terrorism may be summed up in a single principle: Whoever attacks us or plans to attack us – will bear the consequences," he stated, responding to last week's rocket attacks against Israel. Saturday night, a rocket fell in the northwestern area of the Negev; no injuries or damage was reported. On Thursday, Israel suffered from three attacks; a grad rocket was fired at the Eshkol Regional Council, terrorists fired a rocket at Ashkelon, and another rocket was fired at the Hof Ashkelon Regional Council. The IAF responded Sunday by wounding a senior Gaza terrorist, 29 year-old Abdulla Harti. Harti has been directly involved in the attacks.

Netanyahu also related to Saturday's escalation in tensions between Iran and the US, after Iran sent a military fleet to US maritime borders. "The international easing of the sanctions against Iran have not led Iran to moderate its international aggression; the complete opposite has occurred," the Prime Minister noted. "The Iranian Foreign Minister recently met with the head of Islamic Jihad, Iran is continuing to supply terrorist organizations with deadly weapons, Iran continues to be complicit in massacres in Syria and to all this may be added the leader of Iran's crude and sharp attack against the US, alongside sending warships to the Atlantic Ocean."

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Netanyahu Warns World Over Iran Aggression

Prime Minister begins weekly Cabinet meeting with warning to the West over Iranian political and nuclear policy.

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu opened his weekly Cabinet meeting Sunday with more words of warning to the West over Iran. "The major powers' talks with Iran will resume this week. Until now, it must be said, it is Iran which has gained without giving anything significant," he began. "It has received a major easing of sanctions and the Iranian economy is already responding appropriately. Iran is also continuing its aggressive policy both inside Iran and outside Iran." "Inside Iran, it is executing innocent people," Netanyahu continued. "Outside Iran, it supports the continued killings by the Syrian regime, which would be unable to act without it, without its support." "Iran is also continuing to arm terrorist organizations with advanced, deadly weapons and, of course, it is continuing to call for the destruction of the State of Israel. At the same time, Iran is continuing with advanced research and development of centrifuges. Iran is not prepared to concede even one centrifuge."

"Israel's policy is clear and is active on two tracks: First, to expose Iran's unchanging aggressive policy. Second, to demand the dismantling of Iran's enrichment capacity," the Prime Minister reiterated. "Iran does not need any centrifuges for nuclear power for civilian purposes." On Tuesday, Iran's atomic chief Ali Akbar Salehi announced that new centrifuges were being developed that are 15 times more powerful than what Iran currently uses for its uranium enrichment. Salehi insisted that the development was not in violation of a November 24 agreement between Iran and six world powers that has imposed curbs on Tehran's nuclear drive and states that Iran cannot increase its number of centrifuges.

Iran currently has nearly 19,000 centrifuges, including 10,000 of the so-called first generation being used to enrich uranium. Some 1,000 second generation machines, three to five times more powerful, have been installed but are not in service. (Tova Dvorin, IsraelNationalNews.com, February 16, 2014)

Opinion: Israel 'Can't Survive Another Destruction and Exile'

The President now wants to bail out his Secretary of State who also lives in a dream world. Peace is given by misguided expectations. Charles Krauthammer, in his bestseller "Things That Matter," quotes Milan Kundera who defines a small nation as "one whose very existence may be put in question at any moment; a small nation can disappear and it knows it".

Israel fits this definition of small nation status and that is why it does not have the luxury of time, when it comes to Iran, or for that matter, any of Israel's neighbors who seek its destruction. Krauthammer laments that "the stakes could not be higher. It is my contention that on Israel - on its existence and survival - hangs the very existence and survival of the Jewish People...They cannot survive another destruction and exile.

"The Third Commonwealth - Modern Israel...is the last."

Obviously, Providence ultimately determines Israel's fate. But we all must do what we can to maintain Israel's survival. In all of the diplomatic shuttling, in all of the conversations, in all of the negotiations, is Israel's right and actual existence ever guaranteed? Krauthammer indeed points out that in the Oslo Agreements of 1993, the PLO, "which was forced into ostensible recognition of Israel", was still ruled by a charter "that calls in at least 14 places for Israel's eradication.

Krauthammer further points out that even years later, despite four specific promises to amend the charter, it remained unamended. He indicates that this shows how deeply embedded Israel's destruction is in the Arab consciousness. Unfortunately, the West never seems to get it. The West cannot fathom that there exists an intractable enemy that would rather die than live.

The West cannot comprehend an enemy that seeks Israel's destruction, no matter the price. Only Israel knows who its neighbors are. Only Israel knows their true intentions. Senator John McCain has called President Obama the most "naïve" President ever. He is unfortunately being quite generous in his description. The President now wants to bail out his Secretary of State who also lives in a dream world. Prospects of peace are driven further and further away by misguided expectations and misleading understanding. The President keeps on making the same mistake. Arab demands get more and more ridiculous because the President has done all of their work. They just keep resetting the "bar" higher and higher making it impossible. Krauthammer gives ample insight and perspective in his book "Things That Matter". I suggest that both the President and his Secretary of State read it before proceeding. (Dr. Joseph Frager, *IsraelNatalNews.com*, March 2, 2014)

Kerry's efforts have poisoned push for peace

AS the Israel-Palestine peace process promoted by US Secretary of State John Kerry appears doomed, a prominent Arab Israeli recently visiting Australia says this is not the "tragedy" of which Kerry warns — since from the start, his efforts have made relations worse. Khaled Abu Toameh says: "Relations with Palestine are now more tense, because if you force the two sides to place all the core, explosive issues between them on the table, you escalate them. "For the five years before the talks, relations were quieter. Kerry showed up and said, 'Folks, you have nine months to solve this 100-year-old problem.' Since then, he says, conditions and pre-conditions, and demands have multiplied, as tempers have worsened. "Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu can't give 100 per cent even if he wanted to, while Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas can't accept anything less than 100 per cent."

The core problem preventing any prospect of a deal, he says, is that "we have radicalised our people in the Arab world to the point where we can't make any formal concessions to Israel. Anyone who even talks of doing so is deemed a traitor." Abu Toameh, an Arab Muslim Israeli journalist who is today Palestinian affairs correspondent for *The Jerusalem Post*, says Abbas might be a "peace partner", but an ineffective one, who can't deliver. "If he stands in a public forum and talks about peace with Israel, he would be lucky to get away with being shot in the leg. Six months after the peace talks supposedly began, you can't find a Palestinian official to go on record supporting them." Instead, Kerry and the US are using up credibility, he says. "But if the US isn't involved in the region, others will be. I'd rather have them than the Russians or Europeans or Iranians. But they can't impose solutions. You might be able to force two sides to sign, but it won't create a real peace." Abbas originally said he wouldn't return to talks unless Israel freezes settlement construction and recognises a Palestinian state. "Kerry forced him to abandon these demands, undermining his credibility among Palestinians." And the younger generation of Palestinians, Abu Toameh says, are more dogmatic than their elders. "The older generation knew Israelis. The new generation — including the journalists I know — are opposed to any co-operation with Israeli counterparts, they lead anti-normalisation campaigns.

"They are radicals — not necessarily terrorists, but they oppose compromise. And they feel distant from the leadership of the Palestinian Authority, whose average age is 73. There are no free elections, therefore no clear mandate, no free media, no functioning parliament." Abu Toameh was born on the West Bank under Jordan, and raised in Jerusalem under Israel — without his family moving house. The situation moved instead, he says. Now he is one of 1.5 million Arab Israelis, 20 per cent of the population, "and we want to see a two-state solution ... but how? Our dilemma is that our state is in conflict with our people. But we've made our choice. "A physical separation from the Palestinians is a solution for Israel. But inside Israel there is no official separation. I went to Hebrew University. Do we have problems? Yes. But we lead normal lives." He says he used to feel safe in Ramallah, and worked for the major Palestine Liberation Organisation newspaper. But there has been a crackdown on critics there, while "I can express myself freely in Jerusalem. My editors have never told me what to write. "I like the freedom and the power of the Israeli media, where in the Arab world journalists tend to be expected to be loyal to the government and the line." The Gaza dilemma is grim, he says. "It's a lost cause. If Hamas is brought down, it'll be followed by something worse. But it and the PLO are both in trouble." One of the side-effects of the pressure for peace talks, he says, is the intensification of a diplomatic war against Israel. "It's being waged on several fronts, including here in Australia, on university campuses. What can one do about such a massive campaign to de-legitimise and isolate Israel? The country has coped with suicide bombers and missiles, but this is more difficult to counter." Even Abbas, he says, is opposed to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement that has its supporters on Australian campuses. "I've met these people," he says. "It's about anti-Semitism, not about helping Palestinians living in the West Bank, who need to buy Israeli milk and to sell goods in Israeli shops."

The most likely outcome of the talks is a face-saver for Kerry in which the sides agree to agree at some time in the future. "We've seen this old movie before," says Abu Toameh. He doesn't expect much to change as long as the relentlessly hostile media and education vilification campaign against Jews and against Israel persists in Palestine and the Arab world at large. "I have become a member of an endangered species: a moderate Arab. We were hoping the so-called Arab Spring would bring us positive changes. But now we find nothing Arab or springy about it. It's an Islamist tsunami of violence." He says: "People in the West think it's about better living conditions. I wish. "The only way to improve living standards is through education, and we aren't looking at that in the Arab world, which has raised an entire generation on suicide bombings, death to Israel and death to the US. "If they're not killing Jews they're killing each other." (Rowan Callick, *The Australian*, April 07, 2014)

John Kerry backing 'anti-Semitic' efforts, says Israel

Jerusalem: The US Secretary of State was accused of supporting "anti-Semitic" interests on Sunday after warning that Israel faced an economic boycott if it failed to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians.

John Kerry made the comment as he held talks with his Iranian counterpart, Mohammad Javad Zarif, in Munich, where they promised to step up diplomacy on Tehran's nuclear programme. Ministers in the cabinet of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused Mr Kerry of effectively endorsing "anti-Semitic" efforts to impose sanctions on the country. "The risks are very high for Israel," Mr Kerry told the conference. "People are talking about boycotts. That will intensify in the case of failure. "Do they want a failure that then begs whatever may come in the form of a response from disappointed Palestinians and the Arab community?" The remarks were made against a backdrop of new European Union regulations barring deals with Israeli businesses based in West Bank settlements, but they provoked claims that he was threatening Israel in peace talks with the Palestinians. Israel's Intelligence and Strategic Affairs Minister Yuval Steinitz said: "The things Kerry said are hurtful, they are unfair and they are intolerable. "Israel cannot be expected to negotiate with a gun to its head when we are discussing the matters which are most critical

to our national interests." Naftali Bennett, the Industry Minister and head of the far-right Jewish Home party, said: "We expect of our friends in the world to stand by our side against the attempts to impose an anti-Semitic boycott on Israel, and not to be their mouthpiece."

An official in the Settlers' Council, Adi Mintz, accused Mr Kerry of "an anti-Semitic initiative". Mr Netanyahu told a cabinet meeting that efforts to impose a boycott were "immoral and unjust" and doomed to fail. The US State Department denied that Mr Kerry, who is trying to draw up a framework agreement between Israel and Palestine, was backing an embargo. "His only reference to a boycott was a description of actions undertaken by others that he has always opposed," said Jen Psaki, a State Department spokeswoman. "[Mr Kerry] expected opposition and difficult moments in the process, but he also expects all parties to accurately portray his record and statements." Meanwhile, President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority, has proposed to Mr Kerry that a US-led NATO force patrol a future Palestinian state indefinitely, with troops positioned throughout the territory, at all crossings, and within Jerusalem. Mr Abbas told *The New York Times* that Israeli soldiers could remain in the West Bank for up to five years - not three, as he previously stated - and that Jewish settlements should be phased out of the new Palestinian state along a similar timetable. Palestine, he said, would not have its own army, only a police force, so the NATO mission would be responsible for preventing the weapons smuggling and terrorism that Israel fears. "For a long time, and wherever they want, not only on the eastern borders, but also on the western borders, everywhere," Mr Abbas said of the imagined NATO mission. "The third party can stay. They can stay to reassure the Israelis, and to protect us. We will be demilitarised. Do you think we have any illusion that we can have any security if the Israelis do not feel they have security?" (Robert Tait, *Telegraph*, London, Feb 3, 2014)

Japan's Shinzo Abe eyes biggest military rule change since WWII

Tokyo: Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, pressed by China and seeking to strengthen ties with the United States, is considering Japan's biggest change in military engagement rules since World War II. Barred by its interpretation of a pacifist constitution from protecting other nations' troops, Japan needs broader deployment abilities, according to Mr Abe, 59. Having increased defence spending two years running and set up a US-style National Security Council, Mr Abe is now seeking to allow Japan to come to the aid of its allies, telling parliament yesterday that "it's about whether we can exercise this right that every country has."

China's escalating challenge to Japan over disputed islands in the East China Sea played into Mr Abe's plans to strengthen the military, said ruling Liberal Democratic Party lawmaker Katsuei Hirasawa. The initiative, which requires backing by Mr Abe's coalition partner, faces public opposition and risks further straining ties with China and South Korea that soured in December with Mr Abe's visit to a war shrine in Tokyo. "Abe is determined to do this now because otherwise it is very difficult to get support," said Tsuneo Watanabe, senior fellow at The Tokyo Foundation research centre. When regional tensions are low "people don't see the need for it." Mr Abe has shown a willingness to expend political capital on national security. His approval rating dipped below 50 percent after he passed a bill in December to stiffen penalties for leaking state secrets that was favoured by the US but opposed by a majority of Japanese. His popularity is back above 55 percent and there are no national elections before 2016, giving him some protection from the fallout of loosening the rules on collective self-defence. Enabling collective self-defence could help ensure the United States backs Japan militarily if China asserts its claims over the islands known as Senkaku in Japanese and Diaoyu in Chinese. In November, China set up an air identification zone over part of the East China Sea covering the islands, increasing the risk of confrontation with Japan and the US.

Japan was stung by accusations of "checkbook diplomacy" after the country contributed \$US13 billion and no troops to the US-led 1991 Gulf War, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The government then began changing policy, allowing the first substantial contribution of troops to a United Nations peacekeeping operation in Cambodia in 1992. Still, the 600 troops sent to Iraq in 2004 to support the US-led war were limited to non-combat duties and had to be protected by Dutch and Australian soldiers. Yousuke Isozaki, a special adviser to Mr Abe on security policy, is spearheading the effort on collective self-defence and says the change will deepen security ties with the US and allow Japan to reach out to other allies. "We want to be able to discuss security with friendly countries other than the US," he said in a January 17 interview. "If we are bound hand and foot, we cannot talk. We cannot even say we will protect one another if something happens." Mr Isozaki guided Mr Abe's unpopular secrecy bill through parliament while thousands of protesters chanted outside the building. "There's no time to sit around," he said. The process will accelerate once an advisory panel of mostly academics submits its recommendations in April. Mr Isozaki is looking for the LDP and its pacifist partner New Komeito to adopt a joint position by June, and expects bills related to the change to be presented starting in autumn. "Japan will be a more effective alliance partner if its Self-defence Forces are able to help defend American soldiers or sailors if they are attacked," US Ambassador Caroline Kennedy told the *Asahi* newspaper. (Isabel Reynolds, SMH, February 7, 2014)

MEET THE MOST POWERFUL WOMAN IN AMERICA

Suppose you were a committed leftist revolutionary who somehow got elected president of center-right America.

Suppose you were great at making speeches, but little else. You masked your socialist agenda in the appealing rhetoric of fairness and justice, but secretly loathed the American system of constitutional government and free-market capitalism.

Suppose you also had developed into a pathological narcissist with an absurdly grandiose view of yourself and almost no tolerance for criticism and disagreement. Suppose your ego was so fragile, your worldview so distorted, your mind so angry beneath your charismatic exterior, and your self-image of being a divinely gifted leader now in danger of disintegrating in the light and heat of mounting geopolitical turmoil and your own stunning failures as president. Suppose, in short, you were Barack Obama. To "stay the course" you were on - of forcing hardcore socialism on an unwilling capitalist country, despite mounting cries for you to stop - you would need help. A very special kind of help. Before we get there, let's just tighten our zoom and focus a little more closely on Obama's current situation: As of 2014, a great many people who supported him say they regret their vote. America's economy is still in shambles and its standing in the world arguably worse. The "Affordable Care Act" has been an unqualified catastrophe with millions losing health insurance and tens of millions more expected this year.

Yet Obama feigns confidence in his programs, lies as easily as breathing and always seems to be playing golf, vacationing or fundraising. He admits he is lazy. He openly boasts about legislating from the Oval Office, refusing to work with Congress as the Constitution requires. Indeed, he doesn't even *like* people, as former aide Neera Tanden, president and CEO of the highly influential progressive Center for American Progress, shockingly revealed. "The truth is," Tanden said of the increasingly insular president, "Obama doesn't call anyone, and he's not close to almost anyone. It's stunning that he's in politics, because he really doesn't like people." So here's the question: If you were Obama, how would you be able to continue to lead the country leftward in the face of overwhelming and undeniable evidence it is absolutely the wrong direction?

First of all, you'd need a fierce personal protector from all criticism, as well as a skilled enabler constantly reassuring and comforting your gigantic but fragile ego, not to mention a consigliere whose counsel you unreservedly trusted and followed. You would also need a mentor with the almost transcendent ability to rekindle and renew your faith in your core values, however misguided and destructive. You would need – in many respects – a worldly savior. Meet Valerie Jarrett, whom savvy Beltway insiders regard as the most powerful woman in Washington.

And yet, most Americans have never even heard of her, let alone know who she is or what she does. For someone widely considered the most powerful adviser in the White House, a person the former editor in chief of the News York Times Magazine describes as “in many ways the *de facto* president,” Jarrett is virtually invisible. For example, she never seems to make the cut for Forbes magazine's annual list of “The United States' Most Powerful Women.” Named in the 2013 list are Michelle Obama and Hillary Clinton, of course. Also Janet Napolitano, Kathleen Sebelius and Nancy Pelosi. But not Jarrett. From the business world, Forbes acknowledges the power and influence of Melinda Gates, co-chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; Sheryl Sandberg, chief operating officer of Facebook; Jill Abramson, executive editor of the New York Times; Virginia Rometty, president and CEO of IBM; Google VP of consumer products Marissa Mayer; and Oracle President Safra Catz. Forbes also honors news media luminaries like ABC's Diane Sawyer and Christiane Amanpour; Tina Brown, editor in chief of Newsweek and the Daily Beast; Fox News Channel's Greta Van Susteren; and Huffington Post Co-founder Arianna Huffington. Likewise, powerful women in the entertainment world are celebrated, including Oprah Winfrey, Angelina Jolie and Ellen DeGeneres. Even Jennifer Lopez, Beyonce and – yes – Lady Gaga made the list of America's “most powerful women.” These, says Forbes, are the nation's most powerful women. But not Valerie Jarrett, who pushed Obama to ignore the advice of more moderate advisers like Rahm Emanuel and instead to destroy the greatest health-care system in world history. For it was she who convinced Obama to “go for broke” with Obamacare, which ultimately was forced down the throats of an unwilling American public and Congress, using bribery, parliamentary tricks and every conceivable tactic, including some of the most infamous political lies (“You can keep your plan/doctor/hospital”) in history.

Apparently, the woman who continues to shape America's future by successfully convincing the president to steer left at every juncture is not as powerful and influential as Christina Aguilera and Lady Gaga. However, this is all quite intentional, part of the mystique of what Chicago Magazine calls “The mystery woman of the White House.” “VJ,” as she is known within 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., operates largely in the shadows.

And yet, in the elite circles of the executive branch, Jarrett is well known, and by many names, among them: “The night stalker,” “The Obamas' consigliere,” “The most powerful woman in Washington,” “The spine of Obama,” “His mentor,” “The keeper of the essence,” “She who must not be challenged” and others – one of the most common being “Obama's Rasputin.”

‘Obama's Rasputin’

Rasputin, of course, was the reputed Russian “mystic” who served as the private and enormously influential adviser to the final Russian czar, Nicholas II, and especially his wife, Alexandra. Utterly unprepared and unqualified for the position of czar, Nicholas made mistake after mistake, and worse, was inflexible and disinterested in his own people. (Sound like any leader you know?) Rasputin, though secretive – he supposedly never spoke in public – exerted an uncanny influence on the czar and zarina, while also contributing greatly to the royal family's ever-deepening isolation from the public. Ultimately the out-of-touch monarch, aided by the mysterious Rasputin, inadvertently led Russia into the 1917 revolution, the czar's abdication and civil war.

Fast-forward almost a century and we are confronted with another breed of out-of-touch czar. Indeed, Jarrett has been responsible for bringing the most bizarre of presidential advisers to the Obama White House, including:

- “Green jobs czar” Van Jones, who has described himself as a “rowdy black nationalist” and radical “communist,” having founded the communist group Standing Together to Organize a Revolutionary Movement, or STORM. One day after the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks, Jones led a vigil expressing solidarity with Arab and Muslim Americans and those he called victims of “U.S. imperialism” around the world;
- Federal Communications Commission “chief diversity officer” Mark Lloyd, who once advocated having “white people” step down from positions of power to make room for “more people of color [and] gays,” who discussed instituting a 100 percent tax on broadcast outlets to fund alternative viewpoints, and who advocated reinstatement of the blatantly unconstitutional “Fairness Doctrine” to throttle conservative talk radio. Lloyd once praised Venezuelan Marxist dictator Hugo Chavez for leading “really an incredible revolution – a democratic revolution”; and,
- Cass Sunstein, the powerful White House “regulatory czar” who has advocated that U.S. taxpayers' wealth be redistributed to poorer nations and that government infiltrate chat rooms and social network sites to clandestinely undermine citizens' belief in what he considers “conspiracy theories” – including the belief that global warming is a deliberate fraud. Sunstein also favors radically changing the nature and interpretation of the Constitution by 2020 and openly pushes for a new socialist-style bill of rights for Americans. Besides bringing such off-the-charts, leftist, utopian control freaks to the White House, what else has Jarrett done for Obama? Journalist and author Richard Miniter, in his book, “Leading From Behind: The Reluctant President and the Advisors who Decide for Him.” cites a source within the U.S. military's Joint Special Operations Command who helped plan the operation to kill Osama bin Laden. It turns out Obama, on the advice of Jarrett, canceled *three different times* the operation to take out bin Laden – over fear of the political fallout should the mission fail. Finally, he approved the mission. Miniter provides a revealing window into the inner sanctum of the current White House and Jarrett's role there. In “Leading from Behind,” he writes of Obama: [H]e can confide in almost no one, because opening up would break the spell that he has managed to cast over people with opposing views, making opponents believe he secretly agrees with each of them. The exceptions are his wife, Michelle, and his mentor, Valerie Jarrett. The president himself says he talks to Jarrett several times a day, and that he rarely makes a major decision without consulting her. While every Nixon has his Kissinger, one of the things that make Jarrett unique in presidential history is that she is also the first lady's mentor. Indeed, she has guided the careers and lives of both Obamas for twenty years.

At every turning point in Obama's career, Jarrett was there to introduce, to solve or resolve, to console or confirm. She was in the room when Obama decided to run for president. And she was there on a warm summer night in July 2007 when Obama was afraid he was losing to Hillary Clinton. Jarrett's White House role is unprecedented. She meets privately with the president at least twice a day with no one else present. Her influence is enormous and wide-ranging. She wields informal power, like a first lady; scheduling power, like a chief of staff; and power over policy, like a special envoy. She has the unusual freedom to put herself in any meeting she chooses and to set the priorities as she sees fit. When the New York Times' Robert Draper asked Obama if he “runs every decision past her,” the president answered immediately: “Yep. Absolutely.” Jarrett's radicalism has caused major eruptions with top White House personnel. As National Review Online reporter Andrew Stiles has pointed out, “Former White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel, who clashed often with Jarrett, likened her and senior aide Peter Rouse to Saddam Hussein's maniacal sons,

Uday and Qusay.” As Stiles notes, many books and articles in recent years have detailed the inner workings of the Obama White House and provided a clearer picture of Jarrett’s role: Jarrett’s personal friendship with the president and first lady dates back more than two decades, before the couple was married, and before Barack Obama launched his political career in Chicago. The president has said he views her “like a sibling” and trusts her “completely.” As a result, she enjoys “unlimited, almost mystical access” to the president, write Politico’s Mike Allen and Jim VandeHei, and is known as “The Keeper of the Essence,” the “defender, protector, and avenger” of all things Obama.

Edward Klein, who previously served as foreign editor of Newsweek and editor in chief of the New York Times Magazine, wrote a critical book about the 44th president, titled “The Amateur: Barack Obama in the White House.” Based on a multitude of interviews with sources both Republican and Democrat, including many close to the Obamas, Klein paints a disturbing portrait of a president utterly dependent on a Rasputin-like adviser: She is Ground Zero in the Obama operation – the first couple’s first friend and consigliere, the last person to leave the Oval Office after meetings, and the only White House official who dines with the first family in their private quarters at night.



Klein quotes a longtime Jarrett friend: “She functions as the eyes, ears, and nose of the president and first lady. She tells them who’s saying what about who, who’s loyal and who’s not. She advises them about who they should see when they visit a city or a foreign country. She determines who gets invited to the White House and who is left out in the cold.” Focusing on internal White House battles that largely escaped media attention, Klein reveals: “During the savage internecine warfare between Jarrett and Obama’s first two chiefs of staff – Rahm Emanuel and Bill Daley – Obama sided most of the time with Jarrett, a classic limousine liberal who believes that Obama was elected president in order to engineer social change. Ultimately, Jarrett emasculated Emanuel and Daley and forced them from their jobs.” How good is Jarrett’s advice? She approved the “\$535 million taxpayer-funded loan guarantee to Solyndra, the California solar company that went belly up,” writes Klein, who notes that Jarrett had “close ties to the George Kaiser Family Foundation, which controlled 35.7 percent of Solyndra.” And it was Jarrett that pushed Obama to personally travel to Copenhagen in an attempt to bring the Olympics to Chicago, only to come home rebuffed, empty-handed and humiliated. Much of Jarrett’s extraordinary influence, explains Klein, “stems from the fact that Jarrett is the president’s trusted watchdog”: She protects the vainglorious and thin-skinned Obama from critics and complainers who might deflate his ego. No one gets past Jarrett and sees the president if they have a grievance, or a chip on their shoulder, or even an incompatible point of view.

I heard this complaint about Jarrett from practically everyone I interviewed – Republicans and Democrats, African-Americans and Jews. They all blamed Jarrett for keeping the president isolated even from those whose good opinion he needed the most.

Late last year when the big story was “Republicans shut down the government,” Klein revealed, after interviewing more than a half dozen White House and former presidential advisers, that Jarrett was the “architect” of the strategy of refusing to negotiate with Republicans over Obamacare. “She convinced the president that a government shutdown and default offered a great opportunity to demonize the Republicans and help the Democrats win back a majority in the House of Representatives in 2014,” he explained. “Valerie also came with the idea of using the words ‘hostage,’ and ‘ransom’ and ‘terrorists’ against the Republicans.”

Jarrett’s advice to Obama, according to Klein’s White House sources: “Do not cooperate one iota on Obamacare. Don’t give an inch. Let the Republicans stew in their own juice.” In the end, said Klein, “Republicans walked into a trap set up by Valerie Jarrett and President Obama.” The bottom line on Jarrett, writes the former Newsweek and New York Times Magazine honcho: “Despite her lack of international experience and background in economics and fiscal policy, she is in many ways the *de facto* president. Against the advice of more seasoned advisers, Jarrett steers the president toward decisions that make our economy less robust and our nation less safe.”

‘Mystical’ power

All this still leaves a giant question: Where does Valerie Jarrett get her quasi-“mystical” power over this president and first lady? The most oft-cited factor is that she virtually formed his identity. As writer Karin McQuillan writes in the American Thinker essay, “Obama’s strange dependence on Valerie Jarrett”: “To understand why Obama relies so heavily on Jarrett, we must remember the president’s identity crisis as a black man, which is the main subject of his memoir, “Dreams from My Father.” Valerie Jarrett’s adoption of the Obamas as her friends and protégés in Chicago’s upper-crust black society was one of the greatest things that ever happened to Obama. Until becoming a community organizer, Obama tells us he felt himself to be an inauthentic American black. Nothing in his life helped him understand or fit into the American black community. ... When Valerie Jarrett hired Michelle to work for [Jarrett’s boss, Chicago Mayor Richard] Daley and befriended her, the Obamas gained access to the exclusive world of upper-class black Chicago politics. Valerie knew everyone whom it was important to know in black and Jewish money circles. She gave Barack entrée and legitimacy. She financed and promoted his ambitions for national office. Obama finally belonged.

Remember also that Obama – a mixed-race child abandoned by his drunk, bigamist, communist father, and who later also lost his Muslim Indonesian stepfather to divorce – ended up filling the resulting parent-vacuum with morally and ideologically perverse mentors like Frank Marshall Davis, a member of the Communist Party USA and known pornographer, and later various Marxists

(college professors he admits he “gravitated toward”), racists (Rev. Jeremiah Wright), terrorists (Bill Ayers) and criminals (Tony Rezko). So imprinted was Obama by these toxic influences that even though, with Jarrett’s help, he embraced what he considered an “authentic” black identity, in reality he developed no *real* identity. That is, he never developed any sense of integrated selfhood that comes from an inner bonding with, and natural response to, common sense, truth, wholesome values, conscience, God – an inner-connectedness that alone can result in being truly whole and happy. Quite the opposite: Obama grew into someone who strongly identified with an ideology rooted in envy, blame and payback – an ideology on whose behalf he sees himself (thanks to his inflated sense of self-worth) as a national and world leader. It is a delusion Jarrett carefully and lovingly embraces, nurtures and protects at every turn.

‘Just too talented to do what ordinary people do’

Perhaps the most potent reason she is Obama’s Rasputin is crystallized in the following statement Jarrett made to author David Remnick, published in his 2010 book, “The Bridge: The Life and Rise of Barack Obama”:

“I think Barack knew that he had God-given talents that were extraordinary. He knows exactly how smart he is. ... He knows how perceptive he is. He knows what a good reader of people he is. And he knows that he has the ability – the extraordinary, uncanny ability – to take a thousand different perspectives, digest them and make sense out of them, and I think that he has never really been challenged intellectually. ... So what I sensed in him was not just a restless spirit but somebody with such extraordinary talents that had to be really taxed in order for him to be happy. ... He’s been bored to death his whole life. He’s just too talented to do what ordinary people do.”

There you have it. That is how Valerie Jarrett exercises such a quasi-hypnotic hold over both of the Obamas. While the country crumbles, and while the light of reality threatens at every turn to annihilate the delusion, the epic pretense, that Obama is a great man, a great intellect and a great leader, Valerie Jarrett is there to reverse the tide, if only in Obama’s mind. She is, in more than a metaphorical sense, the shadow president. She is Obama’s conscience. Jarrett is his radical-left Jiminy Cricket, keeping him on track to fulfill the dreams of his father. After all, even wealthy Chicago entrepreneur and close friend of Obama, Martin Nesbitt, told the New York Times Jarrett channels the Obamas’ inner voice, telling them, for instance: “That’s not you. You wouldn’t say that. Somebody else is saying that. Barack Obama wouldn’t say that.” Or as Jarrett told Vogue magazine, “I kind of know what makes them [the Obamas] who they are.” Or as she told the New York Times, “We have kind of a mind meld. And chances are, what he wants to do is what I’d want to do.”

One might even be so bold as to ask, who is the real president and who is the shadow president? Who is reflecting whom? Who is actually setting the agenda in the Obama White House? Historians will no doubt look back and ask how it’s possible that America’s 44th president, Barack Hussein Obama, could possibly have been so disastrously out of touch with reality, so consistently wrongheaded in his decisions, never course-correcting in any meaningful way despite staggering evidence at every juncture. With the clarity and objectivity that comes with the passage of time, they will surely conclude a great deal of credit goes to Valerie Jarrett, Obama’s Rasputin, for enabling the president to stay the course – a course she herself was instrumental in setting his feet upon decades earlier. (DAVID KUPELIAN, *WORLDNETDAILY.COM*, MARCH 24, 2014)

(David Kupelian is an award-winning journalist, managing editor of WND and editor of Whistleblower magazine. A widely read online columnist, he is also the best-selling author of “The Marketing of Evil” and “How Evil Works.”)

Hamas: We Will Treat NATO Forces as ‘Occupiers’

Hamas spokesman rejects Abbas’s suggestion that NATO be deployed in the future Palestinian state.

Palestinian Authority (PA) Chairman Mahmoud Abbas’s suggestion that NATO forces be deployed in the future Palestinian state is not well-received by his rivals, the Hamas rulers of Gaza. A spokesman for Hamas said Friday that the faction would regard any international military presence within a future Palestinian state as “occupation” forces, reported the Ma’an news agency. During a rally in southern Gaza, spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri said that any international forces stationed in “Palestine” as a result of a peace agreement with Israel would be treated the same as “the Israeli occupation.”

Abu Zuhri called on Abbas to withdraw from negotiations with the United States and Israel, saying the talks only served to “terminate the question of Palestine and what is left of Palestinian rights and principles.” “Nobody has authorized you (Abbas) to speak on behalf of the Palestinian people, or on behalf of Hamas or any other faction,” he said, according to Ma’an. “Why don’t you tell the truth about what is going on in the secret negotiations? If you are honest, go out to your people and tell the truth and give them details.” Abu Zuhri urged all factions to oppose the ongoing peace talks and any emerging agreement, saying that after decades of on-and-off talks, negotiations have proved a “mirage.”

Abbas’s suggestion was made in a recent interview with the New York Times. In that interview, he said he would agree to let Israeli troops remain in the Palestinian state for a transitional period of five years. After the five-year transitional period, Abbas said, the Israeli forces could be replaced indefinitely by an American-led NATO force, with troops throughout the territory, at every crossing and within Arab eastern Jerusalem, along with Palestinian Arab police and security units. The NATO forces could stay “for a long time, and wherever they want, not only on the eastern borders but also on the western borders, everywhere ... For a long time, for the time they wish. NATO can be everywhere, why not?” said Abbas. The issue of the Jordan Valley has become a point of contention in the talks between Israel and the PA, which insists on full control of the Jordan Valley – along with all other land that was under Jordanian control from 1948 to 1967. Israeli experts have warned that the area is strategically critical. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said last week that Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu opposes the idea that NATO forces will secure Israel’s borders in the event of a withdrawal from Judea and Samaria.

However, he stated that the possibility of a third-party being tasked with Israel’s security still “is something for the parties to work out.” One of the PA’s long-standing preconditions for peace is an Israeli withdrawal to the borders that existed before the 1967 Six Day War. Withdrawing to these borders, which former Foreign Minister Abba Eban referred to as the “Auschwitz borders”, would place central Israel, including the Ben Gurion Airport, under the threat of missiles and would guarantee Israel’s destruction. Hamas, which has been at odds with Abbas’s Fatah faction since 2007, has never been supportive of peace talks to begin with. As the talks restarted, the movement stated they were “futile” and “purely a means for the occupation (Israel) to look good to the international community.” Hamas has also pointed out that “whoever negotiates on the part of the people who is not chosen by them, represents only himself. The Palestinian people will not accept this.” Abbas’s term as PA Chairman officially ended more than four years ago, but he continues in his role despite no one having given him the mandate to do so. The PA parliament which was elected for a four-year term in 2005 has yet to be dissolved, despite the fact that nearly two terms have already passed since its election. (Elad Benari, *IsraelNationalNws.com*, February 16, 2014)

Egypt, Russia Seal \$2B Arms Deal

Saudi Arabia and UAE foot the bill for sale of advanced defense systems, helicopters, aircraft and anti-tank missiles.

Egypt has concluded an arms deal with Russia worth \$2 billion, a senior official source told Egyptian daily newspaper *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, noting that the Egyptian and Russian sides reached agreement on all details of the agreement over the past few weeks. The source, who asked not to be named, said the two Gulf kingdoms of Saudi Arabia and the UAE played a "vital role" in sealing the deal. The official revealed that the first tranche of Russian weapons to Egypt will be delivered before mid-2014. The delivery and payments will both be phased, he explained.

In November, Russia declared that it had received an Egyptian offer to buy advanced defense systems, military helicopters, MiG-29 aircraft and anti-tank missiles with a combined value of \$2 billion. The overall cost of the purchase was in fact double, but cash-strapped Egypt would only pay half of that, according to the source. The apparent show of Russian largess was no act of altruistic generosity, however; the Kremlin has been aggressively capitalizing on perceived American weakness in the Middle East to - particularly over crises in Iran and Syria - to expand its own sphere of influence in the Arab world, which until recently was limited to Syria. According to reports in a Kuwaiti newspaper late last year, one of the objectives of the arms deal was to enable a newly pro-Russian Egypt to achieve military parity with the United States' closest ally in the region: Israel. Saudi Arabia and the UAE, along with Kuwait, have been Egypt's top Arab financiers following the overthrow of Islamist president Mohammed Morsi, with financial and in-kind aid totaling about \$12 billion. Since the overthrow of Morsi's predecessor Hosni Mubarak in 2011, the north Africa state has seen its economy go into a virtual free-fall, and now relies heavily on foreign support.

Saudi Arabia's intelligence chief, Prince Bandar Bin Sultan al-Saud, reportedly told European diplomats in October that his country plans to scale back its cooperation with the US in efforts to arm and train Syrian rebels, according to the Wall Street Journal. The decision was said to be the result of Riyadh's "frustration" with the Obama administration's foreign policy in the Middle East, and reflects a growing sense of discontent by one of America's staunchest Arab allies. That statement came days after the Gulf Kingdom surprised observers by turning down a temporary position on the United Nations Security Council, in what it said was a protest at the Security Council's ineffectiveness in solving regional conflicts. Saudi Arabia is also said to be concerned about American overtures to its arch-foe, Iran, and alarmed at what they see as an incoherent and weak American Middle East strategy. "The Saudis are very upset. They don't know where the Americans want to go," WST quoted a "senior European diplomat" as saying. (Gil Ronen and Ari Soffer, *IsraelNationalNews.com*, February 9, 2014)

Poison Used In Syria

New York: Chemical weapons have been used at least five times during the Syrian conflict and in some cases, children and civilians have been slaughtered, according to a UN report. The final report of a UN mission, released on Thursday, cites "credible evidence" and "evidence consistent with the probable use of chemical weapons" in the Syrian district of Ghouta, Khan Al Asal, Jobar, Saraqueb and Ashrafieh Sahnaya.

Syria's President Bashar al-Assad admits his forces hold chemical weapons, and has vowed to surrender them to international experts, but insists his forces did not target civilians. (*AFP/Newcastle Herald*, December 14, 2013)

Cracks are showing in Iran

WHEN Iran recently staged televised presidential debates and when the candidates took to Twitter, my heart sank. I can handle a sham election I have lived in police states for half of my professional life but not when it deploys the desperate measure of Western LOL gimmickry. The ayatollahs are running scared in the run-up to today's presidential vote, as well they might. In 2009 they stole the election, returning the hapless provocateur Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to power. This brought thousands of disappointed protesters on to the streets in what was prematurely labelled a green revolution. The rebellion was beaten down, the leaders are under house arrest but it sapped the authority of the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, and made a lame duck out of Ahmadinejad. This time, Khamenei doesn't want any slip-ups. The six remaining candidates (the original 670 were sifted by the Guardian Council) all have some kind of relationship with him and some with the Revolutionary Guards. Out in front are Saeed Jalili, who is the main nuclear negotiator with the West; Ali Akbar Velayati, who is the Ayatollah's main foreign policy adviser; Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, the ex-airforce commander and current Mayor of Tehran (famed in the capital for introducing public toilets and cutting down the rat population); and Hassan Rowhani. In so far as we have a horse in this race, it might be Rowhani, since he claims to have studied for a while in Glasgow and was once a shrewd negotiating partner on curbing Iran's atomic plans. The reasonable expectation, though, is that there will be some kind of stitch-up. Khamenei wants a president he can deal with, and he will get one, whatever the voting figures purport to show. So why should we care, beyond a sense of sadness, about the chronic mismanagement of a once-proud, civilised society? Our essential interest in the election boils down to two questions. Which constellation of power could allow Iran to back down from its nuclear program? One of the reasons we have come so close to a showdown with Iran over the past four years is the fractured relationship between Khamenei and Ahmadinejad. A new alignment might but only might ease tensions in the Middle East.

Second, we have a strong interest in Iran opening up, entering a conversation with the West, even about non-nuclear issues. We need to at least talk with Tehran about its deepening involvement in the Assad regime's bloody struggle in Syria. The new Iranian government may push for a trade-off whereby it is allowed to enrich some uranium in return for concessions on Syria. We should think about this: how credible, after all, is the Western commitment to preventing an Iranian nuclear bomb if we cannot agree on a strategy for stopping the Assad regime?

When the Iranian election debate turned to nuclear matters last week, the foreign policy and intelligence community had its ears peeled. Jalili, thought to be an Ayatollah favourite, was given a drubbing on television by Velayati, an Ayatollah confidant. "You want to take three steps and you expect the other side to take 100 steps," said Velayati.

"We can't expect everything and give nothing!" That sparked some excitement in Tehran. Perhaps it was just a stunt to push up voter turnout tomorrow. But something is up: public cracks in the elite are important in closed societies. They certainly played a role in the fall of communism. The Polish pattern in the 1980s was: street and factory protests, crushed by force; Western sanctions and economic stagnation; divisions in the communist leadership, growing disillusionment of the ruling class, followed by some kind of power-sharing. There are obvious differences with Iran but many young Iranians hope clerical rule will crumble just as communism collapsed in Eastern Europe. Yes, Iran has been saddled since 1979 with a conservative government that crushes dissent and claims revolutionary credentials. And yes, the opposition to it, inside the country at least, is urban, young, nervous, easily manipulated. That state of affairs, though, is not frozen in time. Regimes can learn from dissent; street protesters can build a structured opposition, forge links between workers and students, city and countryside.

The key for Westerners is this: listen more carefully to what is actually being said in Iran and avoid the lazy labelling of politicians as hardliners and reformists. The dissident Jacek Kuron used to say: "I don't believe in a reforming wing of the party, only in the pragmatism of those who want to retain power." That is the point. It's not looking good for the Iranian regime at the moment sanctions are really biting and a cornered leadership may reach out for some form of limited accommodation with the West.

In the midst of martial law in Warsaw, the publisher Robert Maxwell turned up at the British ambassador's dinner table and proclaimed his admiration for the "reformer" General Jaruzelski. "Solidarity is dead," he boomed, in between guzzling double portions. "And my newspapers are going to have nothing to do with it." Five years later there was a Solidarity government and communists, reformers and hardliners, were a busted flush. Change can come fast when dictatorships start to rot. Ayatollahs, take note. (*Roger Boyes, The Times, June 14, 2013*)

Iran Calls Obama 'Two-Faced' On Saudi Rights

Tehran slams Obama's 'hypocrisy' for not raising Saudi human rights breaches during visit last week.

Iran has accused US President Barack Obama of being "two-faced," after he failed to raise the issue of human rights breaches with Saudi Arabia during his visit there last Friday. Obama promised Saudi King Abdullah that he would not accept a "bad deal" on Iran's nuclear program in the visit. Iranian General and political commentator Yadallah Jawani accused America and the West of being hypocritical on human rights. As an example, he brought the case of Saudi Arabia, saying it has been ruled for many years by a royal family that breaches the rights of its citizens, and in particular its women. Jawani pointed the finger at Obama for not mentioning the human rights abuses during his visit, accusing him of hypocritical lip-service for human rights while only advancing his own interests, presumably interests in Saudi oil.

Saudi Arabia has come in for criticism after Saudi princesses revealed in an interview last Friday, the day Obama spoke to King Abdullah, that they were being held as "hostages" and being starved in a royal compound, after going public with their story of abuse last month. A study last November found Saudi Arabia has the third worst women's rights in the Arab world. In February several education departments banned female employees and visitors not wearing a face veil from entering girls' schools. Saudi women are not issued driving licenses.

Iran for its part has a far from stellar human rights record. In the first 21 days of 2014, two Iranians were executed each day, on average; Iran was behind a reported 369 death sentences in 2013, and was only outpaced in killing its citizens by China.

Jawani further claimed America and Israel had collaborated in the recent kidnapping of two Iranian soldiers near the border with Pakistan. In making the accusations, Jawani said the US threats that "all options are on the table" regarding Iran's nuclear program constituted "terror," and caused instability in the region.

In early March, Iranian officials called Obama's threats of preventing the Islamic regime's nuclear aspirations from materializing "the joke of the year." In terms of "terror" and causing instability, Iran's accusations may sound hypocritical to many, given that Iranian lawmaker and Majilis (council) member Mohammed Nabavian said in January that "having a nuclear bomb is necessary to put down Israel." Obama's Saudi visit has received other criticism as well. A report released before the visit revealed the US has kept secret an extensive study of Saudi textbooks, traditionally rife with Islamic extremism, since the end of 2012. (Dalit Halevi, Ari Yashar, *IsraelNationalNews.com*, March 31, 2014)

Health

Kids' brains damaged by diesel

DIESEL emissions can damage the brains of children living near busy roads, altering the way they develop and raising their risk of developing schizophrenia, autism and other diseases.

Scientists have found powerful evidence that long-term exposure to the tiny particulates emitted by diesel engines alters the way children's brains grow, potentially also making them less intelligent.

Some scientists have likened the impact of diesel particulates to those emitted by lead in petrol. This was banned in 1999 after scientists found that the lead additives caused brain damage in exposed children — reducing their IQ and increasing their propensity for violent and criminal behaviour. The research suggests the danger comes not just from peaks in pollution but from long-term exposure, especially to the young. The emerging threat from particulates is summed up in a report on European air pollution recently published by the World Health Organisation.

It spoke of "possible links between long-term PM2.5 exposure (of particles less than 2.5 micrometres in diameter) and neuro-development and cognitive function ... including impairment of cognitive functions in adults and children".

California research reported last year in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* involved a study of 525 children, 279 with autism. It found pollution levels experienced by mothers in pregnancy and the children in their first year of life were strongly correlated with the risk of developing autism. (*The Times*, April 07, 2014)

Melanoma not just a beach risk

Avoiding the beach is no protection against melanoma — new figures show 10 people a week are diagnosed with it in Western Sydney. While coastal areas have had higher rates of the deadly cancer, Cancer Institute NSW figures for 2011 show 497 people in south western and Western Sydney contracted it. Institute chief executive David Currow said it was a common misconception that avoiding sitting on a beach was protection. "We have to be sun-smart year round and everywhere in Australia," he said. "We have the concept that the person with the fair skin and freckles is most at risk — and yes, they are at risk — but we know all skin types are at risk of cancer, even in olive skinned people."

The figures show the Hunter Valley and New England districts had higher rate of melanoma at 57.5 per 100,000 people compared with the Central Coast, where the disease struck 53 per 100,000 people. Northern NSW tops the state for melanoma with double the state average. Australia has the world's highest melanoma rate. It is our third-most common cancer. (*thetelegraph.com.au*, April 27, 2014)

Baby wipes cause rash of dermatitis skin complaints

A PRESERVATIVE used in baby wipes is causing a rash of skin complaints.

The problem is an increasingly common allergic reaction to a preservative used in some brands.

But it's parents' hands, not babies' bottoms, that are breaking out, according to a research letter published in the latest issue of the Medical Journal of Australia. But the rashes could also appear on other parts of the body because the preservative, Methylisothiazolinone (MI), is also used in make-up removal wipes, shampoos, conditioners, body washes, moisturisers, sunscreens and deodorants. "MI is now the most common cause of allergic contact dermatitis among our patient population," write dermatologist Dr Jennifer Cahill and her colleagues. "The most common source of MI is disposable wet wipes, now commonly used in nappy changing." She and her colleagues at the Skin and Cancer Foundation in Melbourne routinely test people with rashes for the allergy. The proportion of positive tests has soared from 3.5 per cent in 2011 to 11.3 per cent in 2013.

"Ironically it is the parents who are consulting doctors with rashes on their hands," co-author Associate Professor Rosemary Nixon told AAP. But there could be under-diagnosis among babies, partly because nappy rash is common and partly because they are unlikely to be tested. People with concerns should look for MI among the ingredients on their product, she said. The best thing was to try determine the cause of a rash through a process of elimination. If it failed to go away or returned, people should see a GP. (SMH/AAP, March 03, 2014)

Do cranberries relieve cystitis?

According to an old piece of good advice, cranberry juice is efficient against cystitis, and scientific experiments indicate that it is true. Bacteria such as *E. coli* feature long protein threads, which feature long protein threads, which can bind to the bladder wall and cause inflammation. But apparently, proanthocyanidin and glucose, which are contained in cranberry juice, prevent bacteria from binding to the cells, and instead they are rinsed out in urine. A daily intake of cranberry juice may thus reduce the risk of cystitis in some women. (Science Illustrated, Issue #24, July 24, 2013)

Broccoli could help fight arthritis

EATING broccoli could help prevent or slow the most common form of arthritis. Researchers from the University of East Anglia found that sulforaphane - a compound found mainly in broccoli but also in sprouts and cabbage - slows down the destruction of cartilage in joints associated with painful and often debilitating osteoarthritis. Ian Clark, professor of musculoskeletal biology at the Norwich university, said: "The results from this study are very promising. "We have shown that this works in the three laboratory models we have tried, in cartilage cells, tissue and mice. "We now want to show this works in humans. It would be very powerful if we could. "As well as treating those who already have the condition, you need to be able to tell healthy people how to protect their joints into the future." More than 8.5 million people in the UK have osteoarthritis, a degenerative disease affecting the hands, feet, spine, hips and knees. Ageing and obesity are the most common contributors to the condition and it is predicted the number of people seeking treatment will rise sharply by 2035. Alan Silman, Arthritis Research UK's medical director, said: "This is an interesting study with promising results as it suggests that a common vegetable, broccoli, might have health benefits for people with osteoarthritis and even possibly protect people from developing the disease in the first place. "Until now research has failed to show that food or diet can play any part in reducing the progression of osteoarthritis, so if these findings can be replicated in humans, it would be quite a breakthrough. "We know that exercise and keeping to a healthy weight can improve people's symptoms and reduce the chances of the disease progressing, but this adds another layer in our understanding of how diet could play its part." The study was funded by medical research charity Arthritis Research UK, the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council's Diet and Health Research Industry Club and The Dunhill Medical Trust. Previous research has suggested that sulforaphane has anti-cancer and anti-inflammatory properties, but this is the first major study into its effects on joint health. (AAP/The Australian, August 28, 2013)

Broccoli fights prostate cancer

SCIENTISTS have discovered so-called "superfoods" can help fight prostate cancer. Broccoli and pomegranate have been scientifically proven to help combat the disease, along with turmeric and green tea. A six-month trial involving 203 men with prostate cancer showed that prostate-specific antigen (PSA) levels of those who took a capsule of essence of pomegranate, green tea, turmeric and broccoli were 63 per cent lower than those who did not. (thetelegraph.com.au, June 4, 2013)

Parsley – more than just a garnish

Commonly used to decorate meals, parsley is a highly nutritious herb that is also an excellent diuretic. It is used by herbalists to treat kidney and bladder problems, as well as urinary tract infections and fluid retention. It is rich in bone-building calcium, iron and B vitamins, which our body needs to support red blood cell production. It can be grown at home in a pot on a windowsill. Add a handful to fresh juices or toss through a salad. (The Sunday Telegraph/bodyandsoul.com.au, April 1, 2012)

Beetroot boost to easy pressure

DRINKING beetroot juice every day could help to lower blood pressure, say researchers. They found one cup may help people with high blood pressure, cutting their readings by about 7 per cent. Tests suggest the effect is produced by beetroot's naturally high levels of nitrate. High concentrate of nitrate are also found in celery, cabbage and other leafy green vegetables such as spinach and some lettuce. Amrita Ahluwalia, professor of vascular pharmacology at the Barts and The London Medical School, said: "We were surprised by how little nitrate was needed to see such a large effect." (thetelegraph.com.au, April 17, 2013)

Brain decay link

POOR dental health and gum disease may be linked to Alzheimer's disease, a British study has found. The brains of deceased dementia patients were found to contain signs of *Porphyromonas gingivalis*, the bug responsible for unhealthy gums. University of Central Lancashire scientists believe when the bacteria reaches the brain it triggers an immune response that kills neurons, driving the changes that are typical of Alzheimer's, causing confusion and memory loss. (thetelegraph.com.au, July 31, 2013)

Genetic saliva enzyme link to obesity

PERHAPS it should be renamed the Atkins gene. Scientists have found a small piece of genetic code that seems to have a strong effect on how well we break down carbohydrates and starch — and whether or not we are fat.

"This is the first metabolic clue that the same person eating the same food is going to get fatter compared to someone else in the same situation," said Professor Tim Spector, of King's College London. His study, published in the journal Nature Genetics, has

found that changes in the number of copies of a gene called AMY1 are strongly correlated with obesity, even in twins who otherwise have the same diet and lifestyle.

AMY1 provides the information for the body to make amylase in saliva, which is used to process carbohydrates. People with more of this enzyme seem to gain more nutrition from bread and vegetables — so much so that those in the top 10 per cent for the number of AMY1 "copy number variations" are eight times more likely to be obese than those in the bottom. "People with extra copies of this amylase gene are able more efficiently to digest carbohydrates and starch," said Professor Spector. "By a small percentage difference, over time they put on more calories than those who have less copies — even if given the same food. "The same person eating the same amount of potatoes but with more copies will have more calories. The effect is much larger than anything we have seen before." The research was carried out by looking at the copy number variations of the gene — the number of times it is repeated — in around 5,000 people, including 972 twins. This figure was then compared to their weight. Professor Spector said that for some of the fraternal twins where one was a lot bigger than the other the work came as a relief. "They were absolutely sure that up until 18 they were fed exactly the same food," he said. "One just kept getting bigger and bigger though. They said it is nice to know that it wasn't just that they were greedier or had less willpower than their twin — which is what most people ascribe obesity to." Ironically, while having high numbers of AMY1 might today seem a disadvantage, geneticists believe that it was originally a positive adaptation, possibly arriving around the time of agriculture.

Then it would have enabled people to digest food better — in the same way as another mutation evolved to enable us to digest cow's milk. "They would have survived when people were desperate for food, now they find that they are the ones too efficient for our environment. It just shows how our genes can't keep up with our environment." Prof Spector said that the work could now be applied to producing obesity treatments, perhaps centring around suppression of this amylase. Professor Jimmy Bell from Imperial College, London welcomed the paper, but said that it underscored the complexity of obesity. "This is not a straightforward thing that can be easily understood. It is tempting for geneticists to look for a single reason, without also looking at the social and economic factors behind it." He argued that there were also other interpretations of the research. "It might be worth considering choice of food too. People with high copy number variations might get more of a sweet taste in their mouth when they eat complex carbohydrates, so would keep eating." For those with low copy number variations, carbohydrates would not be broken down. "For them, the food might just be more boring." The Atkins Diet involved limiting carbohydrate consumption to encourage the body to consume its fat stores. (*Tom Whipple, The Times, March 31, 2014*)

Diet drinks link to heart attacks, strokes

WOMEN who drink two diet drinks or more a day could be 30 per cent more likely to suffer a heart attack or stroke later in life, research has shown. A study of 60,000 women in their fifties and sixties found a strong link between consuming large amounts of apparently "healthy" soft drinks and heart disease. Researchers from the University of Iowa found that women who drunk two or more diet drinks a day were 30 per cent more likely to suffer a heart attack or stroke and 50 per cent more at risk of dying from heart-related problems.

These women were also 30 per cent more likely to die from other illnesses unrelated to heart problems.

The scientists suggested that this could be because diet drinks tend to be popular among the overweight and diabetics, who are more at risk of heart disease in the first place. Another theory is that aspartame, the artificial sweetener used in most diet drinks, interferes with chemicals in the body that cause us to crave sugar. "We found an association, so we can't say diet drinks cause these problems," researcher Dr Ankur Vyas said. (*thetelegraph.com.au, April 1, 2014*)

The taste of love: what to eat for better sex

Want an extra boost in the bedroom? Load up your trolley with these all-natural aphrodisiacs.

For centuries man has attempted to boost his sex drive with potions, lotions and pills. If you've lost that loving feeling, the answer to increasing your sexual appetite might not be locked away in your underwear drawer or medicine cabinet but found down the supermarket aisle. Certain foods contain specific enzymes and vitamins that increase circulation, stimulation and the production of hormones linked to increased sexual drive and stamina. "There are many factors that can affect your sex drive including the foods we eat," says Sydney naturopath and nutritionist Lisa Guy, who wrote *The Art of Healing*. "Eating a variety of wholesome foods with natural libido-enhancing properties, may be just what you need to spice things up in the bedroom. Whether it's a food that lifts your mood, calms you down, or stimulates your circulation, they can help contribute to a healthier sex life."

Sexy food: spice up your sex life by eating the right foods.

Pumpkin seeds: "Sunflower and pumpkin seeds are packed with zinc, which is one of the most important minerals when it comes to reproductive health. [It's] especially important for sperm health, boosting testosterone levels," recommends Guy.

Basil: Since Italian courtesans created perfume from basil powder and oil to attract the opposite sex, this herb's aroma has been associated with arousal. "Basil is also a circulation booster," explains Guy.

Porridge oats: Plenty of us wake up to a bowl of piping hot porridge without being aware of its sexual potency. Research has found oats help to unlock testosterone production in the body.

Garlic: It might not aid getting into bed but once there, chopped garlic will get blood flowing as it's packed with the compound allicin. "This helps stimulate blood flow to your sexual organs," reveals Guy.

Honey: In ancient Persia, couples drank honey mead (an alcoholic drink made from honey) every day for a month after they married to get them in the mood for love (known as the honeymoon). The fructose content aids stamina and provides a slow and steady release of energy.

Chillies: Turn up the heat with a massive dose of capsaicin, a chemical which releases mood-enhancing endorphins and increases blood flow and the heart rate to stimulate nerve endings. "Adding chillies to meals is a great way to naturally spice things up," recommends Guy.

Avocado: The avocado's phallic shape was not lost on the Aztecs, who called this the "testicle tree". Guy reveals, "High in vitamin B6 which boosts male libido and also potassium, which regulates the female thyroid, avocados are rich in folic acids and healthy heart fats."

Watermelon: Although it's 92 per cent water, the remaining 8 per cent of this juicy fruit is jam-packed with vital nutrients for sexual health. Both the rind and flesh have amino acid citrulline, which relaxes the blood vessels and increases blood flow to the genitals, the same effect as Viagra without a prescription.

Dark chocolate: Chocolate with high cacao levels has the compound phenylethylamine, the "love drug", which quickens the pulse and tricks the brain into thinking it's falling in love. A study by the *Journal of Sexual Medicine* found women who ate a single

piece of chocolate every day enjoyed a more active sex life than those who didn't. "Go for at least 70 per cent cocoa solids or 'raw chocolate' which is also rich in powerful antioxidants," encourages Guy.

Celery: This vegetable boosts production of androsterone, the odourless hormone released via male perspiration, which acts as a pheromone to turn women on. "Celery also contains chemicals that can help dilate blood vessels and enhance climax," says Guy. Food for thought. Dietitian Lisa Renn advises: "While there are links between certain foods and sexual and reproductive health, there is no scientific evidence proving eating a specific food will result in a higher libido. Your best chance of achieving this outcome is steering clear of popular low carb diets, which can cause constipation, bad breath and reduced energy levels – and instead make healthy food choices across the five food groups and exercise regularly". (Melissa Shedden, *SMH*, August 14, 2013)

Sun Comes Up, Blood Pressure Goes Down

Just 20 minutes of sunlight exposure can reduce blood pressure and save lives. British scientists have found that sunlight lowers blood pressure by increasing levels of nitric oxide, a chemical linked to blood pressure. In a recently published paper, researchers at the universities of Southampton and Edinburgh said that skin cancer may contribute to more heart deaths as people avoid the sun or block its rays with sunscreen. "We're concerned that well-meaning advice to reduce the comparatively low numbers of deaths from skin cancer [in the UK] may inadvertently increase the risk of death from far higher prevalent cardiovascular disease and stroke," they concluded. Cardiovascular disease, which is often linked to high blood pressure, accounts for 30 per cent of deaths around the world annually. Both of these conditions vary according to season and location, with higher levels reported in winter and in countries further from the equator, where the sun's ultraviolet radiation isn't as high.

Good News For Berry Lovers

Eating high levels of certain flavonoids found in berries, tea and chocolate can protect against type 2 diabetes, research published in *The Journal of Nutrition* shows. A UK study of 2000 people found that high intakes of anthocyanins and flavones are associated with lower insulin resistance and better blood glucose regulation. The scientists found those who ate the most anthocyanins were "least likely to suffer chronic inflammation" linked to diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease and cancer. (*bodyandsoul.com.au*, February 9, 2014)

The power of love on health

Loving and being loved can have profound impacts on your physical and mental health.

Partners... they can drive you nuts. All those wet towels on the floor and epic gift-giving fails, what's a girl or boy to do? Try leaning over and giving them a huge hug because whether your partner realises it or not, by loving you and being loved in return, they're doing your body and mind the world of good. Check out these 10 heart-warming health benefits.

Love protects your heart

Give your heart to someone worthy and you can enjoy serious cardiovascular benefits – that's the finding of several US studies. Research by the University of Pittsburgh found that women in strong marriages have a much lower risk of cardiovascular disease than those in new or high-stress unions, while a study by the University of Rochester found that women who undergo open heart surgery while in a happy relationship are three times as likely to be alive 15 years later.

Love makes you smarter

Although it can often lead you to do stupid things, love can also increase your brain health. The reason is that when you fall in love, it raises levels of nerve growth which helps restore the nervous system and improve memory by triggering the growth of new brain cells. A 2009 Swedish study also found that living as a couple decreases your risk of cognitive impairment.

Love helps beat cancer

Good relationships can provide one more line of defence against the Big C, according to a study by the University of Iowa. It found that women with ovarian cancer who felt a strong sense of connection to others had more forceful "natural killer" cell activity – white cells that kill cancerous cells – at the tumour site than those who didn't have such close bonds.

Love improves your complexion

Ever noticed how people tend to glow when they fall in love? It's not just because they're fresh from an amorous session in the bedroom, but because all those wonderful love endorphins increase blood flow to the skin and counteract free-floating cortisol which often causes stress-induced acne. What's more, a study by the Royal Edinburgh Hospital in Scotland also found that women who make love four times a week or more tend to look 10 years younger than their actual age – so get cracking!

Love reduces blood pressure

Of course, that dizzy feeling you get when you look at your partner could be from the "butterflies" in your tummy, but it's most probably the lower blood pressure you're enjoying since you paired up. According to a study by the University of North Carolina in the US, couples who spend plenty of time having regular and close physical contact – such as hugging and kissing – actively help to lower their blood pressure levels.

Love lowers Cholesterol

Many of us tend to put on a few kilos in the first flushes of love but, remarkably, this period can have a positive effect on your cholesterol levels. A study in the journal *Human Communication Research* found that people who wrote about their feelings of love and affection for someone special in their life had significantly lower cholesterol levels than those who didn't. Time to start writing those love letters...

Love improves quality of sleep

We may complain about snoring and doona-hogging, but sharing a bed can give you a better night's sleep, according to research from the University of Utah. In the study, 34 couples were tested for the stress hormone cortisol before, during and after they were separated for several days. Results showed the couples were more stressed while separated, which affected their sleep quality.

Love helps guard against pain

Have you heard the saying "love is the drug"? It really could be according to research from Stanford University in the US, which found that feelings of intense love can relieve pain. The researchers studied the brain's response to pain under three different conditions and discovered that looking at a picture of a loved one reduced moderate pain by 40 per cent and severe pain by 10 to 15 per cent compared to viewing a picture of an acquaintance.

Love decreases your risk of mental illness

The benefits of love aren't only limited to the physical – there are plenty of mental health benefits, too. A study by the University of Otago in New Zealand found that people who were in a relationship for five years or more were less likely to feel depressed and

attempt suicide. Another US study, from The State University of New York, found that people in a loving, stable relationship were less likely to suffer from anxiety; other studies have had similar results, revealing that married people report lower levels of depression and general distress.

Love lengthens your life

This is no surprise given all the other health benefits, but the research proves it. As part of The Australian Longitudinal Study of Ageing, researchers at Flinders University looked at the social networks of 1477 people over the age of 70 for 10 years and found those with strong friendships lived longer than those who weren't as social. This isn't just because our mates make us happy, they concluded. Close friends also offer emotional support during tough times and can help influence positive lifestyle choices such as taking up exercise and not smoking, adding valuable years to your total tally. (*Dilvin Yasa, SundayTelegraph/National Features, February 08, 2014*)

What's love got to do with it

Affection, space and commitment are all vital ingredients for a healthy relationship

THE three main ingredients for a lasting relationship may surprise you because they're not love, sex or money.

The Beatles sang that you "all you need is love". But if that's all you have, chances are that your relationship may struggle to go the distance – that's what the love scientists and researchers are saying, based on several studies.

If couples want to last the 50 years to celebrate their golden anniversary, they need to bring more pragmatic stuff to the relationship than just the sparkly, shiny feeling of being in love. So what are two of the main ingredients in the recipe for everlasting togetherness? The answer is commitment and space, according to two studies. These attributes may not be romantic or earth-moving, but experts say that mixed with generous dollops of respect, caring and affection, they can help your relationship shuffle happily into the twilight years.

Commit to going the distance The median age for divorce in Australia has been rising steadily for two decades and is now 41.3 years for women and 44.2 for men. In 2006, a third of divorces occurred in marriages of 20 years or more at a stage in life when many would feel the real hard work of raising kids, establishing careers and paying off mortgages could be behind them. So why are these long relationships busting open just when they can see the light of good times ahead? The Relationship Institute at UCLA in the US says it boils down to the level of commitment to the relationship that couples take into the marriage at the start. Researchers followed 172 newlyweds for 11 years and found that the marriages that went the distance – 78.5 per cent – were made up of couples who were willing to "make sacrifices" for the sake of the marriage. The researchers said the couples with successful relationships were committed not only to each other but to the overarching relationship, and were determined to protect it.

Relationship educator and counsellor Denise Reichenbach, of Relationships Australia, uses an analogy in which the relationship is the roof of a building and the couple are individual pillars working as a team to keep the roof from caving in. She agrees that while love is important – and being in love is likely what got the whole thing started in the first place – a successful relationship that lasts for decades requires a commonsense approach and an initial deep and real commitment to making it work in good times and bad. "The relationship is the higher shared goal," Reichenbach says. "With couples making a commitment to doing what they have to do to keep it strong. It's about putting the relationship first and facing the unavoidable reality that it can't always be smooth sailing and good times.

Space is BETTER THAN SEX

In a US study on couples, twice as many were unhappy with their lack of privacy and space than their sex lives, according to psychologist Terri Orbuch, a research professor at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research and author of *5 Simple Steps To Take Your Marriage From Good To Great* (Delacorte Press).

Orbuch found that 29 per cent of spouses said they didn't have enough "privacy or time for self" in their relationship, with more wives than husbands reporting not having enough space. The importance of space, she says, is that it gives people time to process thoughts, pursue hobbies and relax without responsibilities to others.

Reichenbach agrees that it's important to allow partners to also pursue their own dreams, too. "Not every goal can be a joint one," she says. "A relationship needs to have the trust and respect within it to allow each person to also be individuals."

Affection keeps the love alive

Cuddling and caressing were found to be more important ingredients for couple's long-term commitment in a 2011 study by the Kinsey Institute in the US, which looked at relationship and sexual satisfaction. And contrary to stereotypes, tenderness was found to be more important to the men than the women. Another interesting finding was that women's sexual satisfaction within the relationship grew over time, with those who'd been with their partner for less than 15 years less likely to report sexual satisfaction than those who'd been with their partner for more than 15 years. Sex and relationship expert Dr Gabrielle Morrissey insists that while relationships can survive without sex, this physical intimacy is what most people "signed up for" when they started the relationship.

"Sex can be the glue that keeps a couple together or feeling connected – it can be what helps them feel bonded, despite the challenges in their everyday life," Morrissey says. "Without it, they often grow apart. Couples who enjoy a regular sex life, tend to nag less, fight less and feel as if they have an ally in their life, no matter the problems."

6 STEPS TO LONG LASTING LOVE

Morrissey recommends building these actions into you and your partner's life to make sure you are going the distance:

1. Lough together and have fun, just the two of you – not always with family and friends.
2. Communicate. Be honest and open about everything, even the little things.
3. Listen to each other, especially when tensions are high and it feels harder to do.
4. Touch every day – don't ever let it become strange, occasional or unfamiliar.
5. Tune in to one another so that you grow together rather than apart.
6. Carve out "alone time". Monthly is good, fortnightly is great, weekly is ideal.

(*Fiona Baker, bodyandsoul.com.au, February 9, 2014*)

Medicines Made in India Set Off Safety Worries

NEW DELHI — India, the second-largest exporter of over-the-counter and prescription drugs to the United States, is coming under increased scrutiny by American regulators for safety lapses, falsified drug test results and selling fake medicines.

Dr. Margaret A. Hamburg, the commissioner of the United States Food and Drug Administration, arrived in India this week to express her growing unease with the safety of Indian medicines because of “recent lapses in quality at a handful of pharmaceutical firms.” India’s pharmaceutical industry supplies 40 percent of over-the-counter and generic prescription drugs consumed in the United States, so the increased scrutiny could have profound implications for American consumers.

F.D.A. investigators are blitzing Indian drug plants, financing the inspections with some of the roughly \$300 million in annual fees from generic drug makers collected as part of a 2012 law requiring increased scrutiny of overseas plants. The agency inspected 160 Indian drug plants last year, three times as many as in 2009. The increased scrutiny has led to a flood of new penalties, including half of the warning letters the agency issued last year to drug makers. Dr. Hamburg was met by Indian officials and executives who, shocked by recent F.D.A. export bans of generic versions of popular medicines — like the acne drug Accutane, the pain drug Neurontin and the antibiotic Cipro — that the F.D.A. determined were adulterated, suspect that she is just protecting a domestic industry from cheaper imports. “There are some people who take a very sinister view of the F.D.A. inspections,” Keshav Desiraju, India’s health secretary until this week, said in a recent interview. The F.D.A.’s increased enforcement has already cost Indian companies dearly — Ranbaxy, one of India’s biggest drug manufacturers, pleaded guilty to felony charges and paid a \$500 million fine last year, the largest ever levied against a generic company. And many worry that worse is in store.

“If I have to follow U.S. standards in inspecting facilities supplying to the Indian market,” G. N. Singh, India’s top drug regulator, said in a recent interview with an Indian newspaper, “we will have to shut almost all of those.”

The unease culminated Tuesday when a top executive at Ranbaxy — which has repeatedly been caught lying to the F.D.A. and found to have conditions such as flies “too numerous to count” in critical plant areas — pleaded with Dr. Hamburg at a private meeting with other drug executives to allow his products into the United States so that the company could more easily pay for fixes. She politely declined.

India’s drug industry is one of the country’s most important economic engines, exporting \$15 billion in products annually, and some of its factories are world-class, virtually undistinguishable from their counterparts in the West. But others suffer from serious quality control problems. The World Health Organization estimated that one in five drugs made in India are fakes. A 2010 survey of New Delhi pharmacies found that 12 percent of sampled drugs were spurious. In one recent example, counterfeit medicines at a pediatric hospital in Kashmir are now suspected of playing a role in hundreds of infant deaths there in recent years. One widely used antibiotic was found to contain no active ingredient after being randomly tested in a government lab. The test was kept secret for nearly a year while 100,000 useless pills continued to be dispensed. More tests of hospital medicines found dozens more that were substandard, including a crucial intravenous antibiotic used in sick infants. “Some of the fake tablets were used by pregnant women in the post-surgical prevention of infections,” said Dr. M. Ishaq Geer, senior assistant professor of pharmacology at the University of Kashmir. “That’s very serious.” Investigations of the deaths are continuing, but convictions of drug counterfeiters in India are extremely rare. (Gardiner Harris, *International Herald Tribune*, Feb 14, 2014)

Benefits of cord blood

DELAYING clamping of the umbilical cord after birth can benefit newborn babies, a study shows. While the practice in most high-income countries is to wait less than a minute to clamp the cord, the La Trobe University study found that waiting at least a minute increases a baby’s blood and iron levels. Professor of Midwifery Susan McDonald said the benefits of delayed cord clamping needed to be weighed against the small additional risk of jaundice, which is treated by light therapy. The study supports the World Health Organisation recommendation of cord clamping for between one and three minutes after birth. (thetelegraph.com.au, July 12, 2013)

When nature calls, Sydney responds



Modern toilets, like these ones at Pirrama Park, will replace the old blocks. *Photo: Lidia Nikonova*

It has long plagued the minds, and bladders, of Sydneysiders: where is the closest public toilet, and what squalid horrors will confront the user on arrival? But when nature calls, the City of Sydney listens - releasing a proposal on Wednesday for public toilets every 400 metres in central Sydney, pop-up urinals, more rigorous cleaning and a scheme encouraging businesses to open their lavatory doors to the public.

Dank, old-style toilet blocks would be decommissioned, sparkling, accessible new facilities would be built and an app would help people identify the closest source of bladder relief. The \$8.3 million plan would make central Sydney a more attractive place, the council’s director of city operations, Garry Harding, said. “We are doing all we can to encourage people into the city ... and people expect to be able to find and use a safe, secure public toilet,” Mr Harding said. A recent council survey revealed that public toilets are a hot-button issue. It found they were hard to find and more were needed. There was a strong preference for single-sex over unisex facilities, particularly among women, who also expressed lower satisfaction than men with cleanliness and design. Nine in 10 people had used a public toilet in the council area in the past year and 57 per cent used one at least once a week. The strategy would provide a public toilet within 400 metres of any point in central Sydney. “Pop-up” urinals that rise from the ground would be

deployed in George Street and Kings Cross. Self-cleaning toilets would be built at nine centres including Newtown, Redfern, Haymarket and Paddington. Existing automated toilets, where a 50¢ fee was scrapped three months ago, would remain free.

Toilet blocks in bad condition or in poor locations will be closed. New facilities will be built at six parks including Wentworth Park at Glebe and Victoria Park at Chippendale, and an extra \$800,000 a year spent on cleaning and servicing toilets across the council area. The strategy said ultraviolet light - which prevents drug users finding their veins - reduced visibility and should not be used, and seats encourage loitering. The strategy proposed a "City Cares" program under which businesses open their toilets for public use. Mr Harding said it was a chance for vendors to "enhance their business and provide a public good". But Patricia Forsythe, the Sydney Business Chamber executive director, said the idea of people traipsing through restaurants looking for toilets was "difficult", and "a business has to have some control over who comes through the premises". Disability Discrimination Commissioner Graeme Innes said new facilities should cater to those with limited mobility and vision. The draft strategy will be considered by the council this month and released for public comment. ([Nicole Hasham](#), SMH, July 18, 2013).

Religion

Dance craze waddles into Saudi wowsers

ABDULAZIZ al-Qahtani, an 18-year-old Saudi university student, closed his bedroom door and in the privacy of his own room began. Sidekick-sidekick. Sidekick-sidekick.

Bunny-hop forward. Bunny-hop back. His mother's voice rang out through the walls.

"I know what you're doing in there!" she cried, in an episode Mr Qahtani recounted two weeks later. "Cut it out!"

Mr Qahtani's mother had warned him about the penguin dance, a conga-line of bounces and kicks that landed in Saudi Arabia from out of nowhere late last year. It has been sweeping this most traditional, un-bouncy of kingdoms ever since. In a land where a strict interpretation of Islamic law means cinemas and many other diversions are banned, nightclubs are unthinkable and the weight of tribal custom is heavy, Saudis in large numbers are discovering the thrill of a little sidekick-sidekick bunny-hop. "Last night I swayed, I chanted, I penguin danced," a Saudi girl wrote on Twitter. In a Riyadh shopping mall, Nourhan Ashraf, 26, an Egyptian who has spent her life in Saudi Arabia, beamed when asked about the dance. She pulled her mobile phone from her purse. "The penguin dance? We've got it on our ringtone!"

"Penguin dance," or "raqsat al-batriq" in Arabic, is sweeping school playgrounds, wedding parties and rug-draped living rooms of Saudi Arabia, Saudis say, and videos posted online attest. Saudis share videos of themselves — the men in white robes called thobes; and, dancing out of sight of the men, the women in all-enveloping black abayas — on the social-networking site Keek and on YouTube. One of the most popular videos, featuring a man in traditional attire waddling around the living room with his little daughter, has had 1.8 million views.

Nobody knows where the penguin dance came from. "Layla," as she calls herself, is a Finnish nurse married to a Saudi man in Riyadh. She writes the popular English blog "Blue Abaya" on Saudi Arabia. She says she sees a dead-ringer for a Finnish folk dance. Some Western-educated Saudis say they see more than a hint of the *Hokey Pokey*. Many a video on YouTube shows a co-ed version danced at what appear to be blowzy eastern European weddings. And, then, there's the *Chicken Dance*. With the kingdom's limited range of acceptable public entertainment, Saudis are one of the leading world consumers of YouTube, Keek and other video-sharing media. That has helped spread the dance. "We saw it on videos," says Mr Qahtani, like many, when asked where he learned of it. It is not without controversy that the penguin dance has waddled into Saudi Arabia. In the eastern city of Dammam, the capital of Saudi Arabia's oil centre, an argument broke out at a wedding in January when the groom's family wanted to celebrate with a little penguin dancing. The bride's side protested the penguin dance as un-Saudi, and a brawl ensued. Ms Ashraf tried in vain to get the DJ to play the penguin dance at the all-female party for her wedding this year. Marriage means she and her new husband now can penguin dance to their hearts' content, in the privacy of their home, she says.

At evenings at home with her female friends, Ms Ashraf said, she sometimes wants to propose a little penguin dancing, but she doesn't dare. "Here, we sit. We drink tea," Ms Ashraf said. The mother of Mr Qahtani opposed penguin dancing as both untraditional and unmasculine, he said. ([Ellen Knickmeyer](#), *The Wall Street Journal*, April 14, 2014)

Church resists gay acceptance

SEVERAL church pastors in Jamaica have led a revival meeting to oppose efforts to overturn the Caribbean country's anti-sodomy law and turn back what they see as increasing acceptance of homosexuality. About 1500 people gathered in a central Kingston park for a spirited religious service two days before a court challenge to Jamaica's anti-sodomy law.

The island's Supreme Court is scheduled to begin hearing tomorrow a petition by a gay rights activist who hopes to challenge the constitutionality of the 1864 law under a charter of rights revamped in 2011. ([thetelegraph.com.au](#), June 25, 2013)

Church receives 1500 complaints of abuse

THE Catholic Church has received at least 1500 complaints of abuse by priests across Australia, about a third of which are thought to relate to alleged child abuse. The number, revealed in separate statements made this year by the archbishops of Sydney and Melbourne, is almost certainly an underestimate, as the church says it is unable to provide an accurate national figure.

About two-thirds of these complaints were made in NSW, under the Towards Healing program established in 1996, with most of the rest made under its Victorian equivalent, the Melbourne Response. Many of those who have been through these processes, however, describe being "re-traumatised" or "re-abused" by the experience. One victim of pedophile abuse by a priest criticised a lack of independence, saying complainants were "reintroduced to the same environment they experienced in childhood". "They're effectively forced back into contact with that . . . and that's where the re-abuse comes from." . . . Chrissie Foster, whose two daughters were abused by a priest, found her experience of the Melbourne Response to be "highly insulting". "It's a trauma we had to go through that could have been avoided," she said. In 1998, the Fosters received a letter of apology from then archbishop of Melbourne George Pell as well as a separate letter offering \$50,000 in compensation. The money "provide(s) a realistic alternative to litigation that will otherwise be strenuously defended," it said. A spokesperson for Cardinal Pell, now the Archbishop of Sydney, said "by far the majority of people have welcomed the approach of Towards Healing".

The Archbishop of Melbourne, Denis Hart, could not be contacted yesterday. ([Dan Box](#), *The Australian*, September 03, 2012)

Benedict says his resignation as pope was valid



Illustration: Cathy Wilcox No pressure: Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. Photo: Getty Images

Almost a year to the day since his historic resignation, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI has denied he came under pressure from within the Vatican to quit. In a rare public statement, the 86-year-old former pontiff insisted he had freely taken the decision to become the first pope since the Middle Ages to resign the seat of St Peter, a move that shocked the Catholic Church and made headlines around the world.

There was intense speculation his resignation was prompted by deep dismay over a scandal in which his butler stole confidential Vatican documents that were leaked to the media and revealed corruption, nepotism and mud-slinging at the heart of the Holy See. "There isn't the slightest doubt about the validity of my resignation from the Petrine ministry," Benedict wrote in a letter, published on Wednesday in *La Stampa*, an Italian newspaper, in reply to questions from its Vatican correspondent. Benedict left the Vatican for the last time as pontiff on February 28 last year after saying he no longer had the "strength of mind and body" to continue. He also addressed an argument by a prominent Catholic writer that he had not resigned of his own volition and therefore technically remained pope, meaning the election of Francis last March was invalid. "The only condition for the validity is the full freedom of the decision," he wrote. "Speculation about its invalidity is simply absurd."

Benedict defended wearing the white cassock and white skull cap of the papacy, saying it should not be interpreted as a sign he still wanted to be regarded as the pope. He lives in a former convent within the Vatican, spending his days praying, reading, caring for his cats, walking in a small garden and playing the piano. (Nick Squires, *Telegraph*, London, February 28, 2014)

A final, unsolicited tip for Pell and Heart

The Catholic Church must make a clean sweep and break with a sullied past by excising its tainted leaders.

Last December, when I was about to leave Fairfax Media, I prepared a final column that was not published because I agreed to stay another year. It began: "This is probably the world's most public job application - and the most futile. As I lay down my pen after 31 years as a Fairfax journalist, I believe I still have something to offer one large employer: the Catholic Church in Australia. "I have generously given so much advice for free on these pages and in my blog, but it is human nature not to esteem what you get for free compared with what you pay for."

"All joking aside - and I've lost count of how many times I've been told that the Catholic hierarchy detests me - the one thing that George Pell and Denis Hart need is someone who will speak bluntly about how they are perceived inside and outside the church." A year on, as I really am saying farewell, I would no longer prescribe that. The church in Australia has made real progress, certainly in relations with the wider world.

There are two main reasons. Within Australia, the bishops have created the Truth, Justice and Healing Council, a lay-led advisory body, to liaise with the royal commission examining clergy sexual abuse and represent the church. Its chief executive, Francis Sullivan, who replaced Pell as chief spokesman on sexual abuse, has been excellent. Second is the new Pope, whose humility, gentleness and pastoral priorities brought a swift and welcome rejuvenation of hope and energy to a church battered by the abuse crisis. However, what the church needs, I suggest, is new archbishops in Sydney and Melbourne. It needs men with no connection to the clergy sex abuse crisis who are capable of inspirational leadership and example. Sydney's Pell and Melbourne's Hart are now the figureheads for a discredited approach to tackling sexual abuse within the church and for a narrow, authoritarian clericalism explicitly rejected by Pope Francis. The church in Australia must move on if it is to restore its credibility and appeal to those who are deserting in droves.

Francis has proved the value of inspirational, fresh, people-centred leadership. That he wants his bishops to emulate him is shown by his exhortations, his example, and last week's removal of hardline US cardinal Raymond Burke from the Vatican body that appoints the world's bishops. Pell and Hart have explicitly identified with the church's two sex abuse protocols (Towards Healing and the Melbourne Response) that have been condemned by secular inquiries, and both exemplify the clericalist caste Francis wants to change. Pell has constantly portrayed himself as the solution rather than the problem in tackling clergy sexual abuse. Secular investigators have not agreed. Both archbishops, as the key Catholic leaders in Australia (Hart is chairman of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference), were excoriated in the November report of the Victorian inquiry into clergy sexual abuse, which said church leaders trivialised child abuse as a short-term embarrassment that did not require self examination. The church is having to admit the protocols are seriously flawed. Brisbane Archbishop Mark Coleridge conceded to the royal commission earlier this month that they were marked by "spectacular bungling" and "drastic failure", with bishops caught "like rabbits in a headlight". Even if we accept that Pell's motives were entirely benign - though they seem to have been highly mixed, with the top priority to protect the institution - his name is indelibly associated with a system he set up and grimly defended to the end.

Nor is it merely the abuse issue. The constrained orthodoxy and generally defensive posture of the past 20 years - retreating behind the battlements and complaining about secularism - is no longer appropriate. Francis, as I wrote earlier, has changed everything while changing nothing - the core Catholic doctrines are untouched, but hope has bloomed again. Again, let's turn to Francis: "I prefer a church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a church which is

unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security." He is attuned to the words of Christ who "did not come to be served but to serve", and is trying to restore that first principle. The church in Australia needs a seismic shift to move past the sex abuse crisis, and that is simply not possible while the last-generation leaders remain in charge. But the pair's resignation as archbishops would provide it, a step backwards for them that would propel the wider church forward. Hart, who has preferred a modest public presence, might feel aggrieved at being included in the call to step down, but he is seen as joined at the hip to Pell, two close friends who entered seminary on the same day.

Pell still has influence in Rome. Resigning his see might even increase it. Both know one of the biggest problems in the Catholic Church in Australia is the lack of parish priests. Why not return to pastoral ministry? In any case, when it comes to their archdioceses, as Oliver Cromwell told the beguilingly named Rump Parliament, "in the name of God, go!" (Barney Zwartz, *SMH*, December 26, 2013)

Super rich, but no cash for victims

THE Catholic Church's Sydney Archdiocese controls an incredible \$1.238 billion in funds - most of it tax free. It was the first time the wealth of the church has been revealed as the royal commission into institutional responses to child sex abuse delved into its finances and examined the church's response to victims. The archdiocese's cash reserves are \$321 million and the church has been making a profit of up to \$43 million a year through investments since 2001. But the commission has been told that, instead of settling former altar boy John Ellis's sexual abuse claim for the \$100,000 he asked for, it offered him just \$30,000 and then spent \$1.5 million fighting him in court. Most claims are settled for between \$50,000 and \$70,000. The money maze was unveiled as the archdiocese's business manager, Danny Casey, gave evidence to the commission yesterday. The funds are ultimately controlled by the archbishop, who since 2001 has been Cardinal George Pell.

Since then, the church had increased its net asset base by 86 per cent from \$103 million to \$193 million, the commission was told. In the same time, just \$5.5 million has been paid to victims of sexual abuse by church clerics.

"The state of those funds is such that it would be possible for the church to spend significantly greater moneys in assisting people who have been abused than it has spent so far," commission chair Justice Peter McClellan said.

Mr Casey: "Yes your honour, there is always an opportunity to redirect existing expenditure."

The diocese's wealth has remained a secret to anyone outside a few within the church hierarchy because it is generally not required to file its affairs with any outside agency such as the Australian Securities and Investments Commission. Mr Casey said that the church's funds were income tax exempt and capital gains tax free as charities, although it was liable to pay stamp duty on some transactions. He said that, as at the end of last year, the archdiocese had \$810 million in the Catholic Development Fund, which he said operated as an "internal treasury" for the archdiocese. That included the \$321 million cash reserves. (Janet Fife-Yeomans, *Daily Telegraph*, March 26, 2014)

What we did to victim was unchristian: Pell

CARDINAL George Pell fought a child sex-abuse victim through the courts in order to encourage other victims to "think clearly" about suing the Catholic Church, a royal commission has heard. The former archbishop of Sydney said yesterday he regrets the way the litigation was handled and had been motivated by a desire to protect the church's trustees, who control its wealth. During his second full day in the witness box, the cardinal said he had long been concerned that the Australian church might face similar abuse claims to those that had bankrupted several dioceses in North America. In 2004, he endorsed his lawyers' decision to dispute whether the victim, John Ellis, had ever been abused by a Sydney priest, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse heard. This was done despite the cardinal having accepted the fact of the abuse, and the resulting court case was "harmful and painful" to Mr Ellis, he said.

"In a legal sense, I believe there was nothing done that was inappropriate . . . but from a Christian point of view I do not believe we dealt fairly (with Mr Ellis)," Cardinal Pell told the commission. He was also mistaken to decline three attempts by Mr Ellis to settle the case out of court, and did so partly to protect the archdiocese's trustees from further legal action. He also agreed that payments made to other abuse victims were "totally inadequate". (Dan Box, *The Australian*, March 27, 2014)

Cardinal Pell has said sorry

Cardinal Pell has said his closest advisers were wrong in the evidence they have given to the royal commission about his involvement and knowledge of the controversial case of former altar boy John Ellis. On eight occasions when they have given significant evidence, they were wrong, Cardinal Pell said. Even his personal secretary, Dr Michael Casey, who had worked with him in Melbourne before moving with him to Sydney in 2001 when Cardinal Pell was appointed archbishop and only left the job last week, was wrong. "He would know your arrangements very well, would he not cardinal?" said counsel assisting the royal commission Gail Furness SC.

Cardinal Pell: "Not - he is completely honest and completely reliable but he's not the archbishop and he knows what he knows and there are some things he didn't know." He said that John Davoren, who had been the inaugural director of the church's NSW professional standards office was wrong in his evidence that in every case, it was the archbishop who decided whether a victim of sex abuse should receive compensation. Mr Casey was wrong when he said that money matters relating to amounts of compensation under the church's Towards Healing process would be discussed with the archbishop and also wrong that the archbishop would have sought out information about matters of reparation. He was also wrong when he said that all claims of child sex abuse made against church personnel would have been discussed with him. "I'm not a micro-manager," the cardinal said. The former chancellor of the Sydney diocese, Monsignor Brian Rayner, was not only wrong in his evidence that he discussed the offers of \$25,000 and \$30,000 made to Mr Ellis to settle his claim, Cardinal Pell said he found some of it "grotesque." The cardinal said it was "grotesque" to suggest he would have authorised just another \$5000 after hearing that Mr Ellis had lost his job at a major law firm because of the ongoing effects of his sex abuse by a priest as a teenager.

Ms Furness said that the current director of professional standards, Michael Salmon, had given evidence that the cardinal would have known that Mr Ellis had been willing to settle his claim for \$100,000. "Now is he wrong in that regard?" said Ms Furness.

Cardinal Pell: "He was."

Not one case had ever succeeded in any court in Australia.

Cardinal Pell has said that "a number of cases, for example schools, the incidents (of child sexual abuse) are found not to be validated." There was applause from the public gallery when counsel assisting the commission, Gail Furness SC, called for the Catholic Education office to provide that data.

Church sex-abuse victims compared with Nazis

EARLIER, Cardinal Pell told the inquiry that victims of child sex abuse were once viewed as enemies of the Catholic Church, much like the Nazis and the communists, Cardinal George Pell said today. He said that in the mid-1990s, the Vatican's attitude towards what he called the "scandal, the crimes" was inadequate. In Australia, a committee had been set up in 1988 to look at child sex abuse. It was called a "special issues committee". "Sexual abuse is an ugly term and this was a euphemism," Cardinal Pell.

In his first appearance before the royal commission into institutional responses to child sex abuse, he began by saying that a written statement he had earlier made to the commission was true and correct - except in one or two places which he said he would "develop" because they were incomplete. They involved the amounts of money which were offered by the Sydney diocese to former altar boy John Ellis during the Towards Healing process, he told the commission. Mr Ellis went on to sue the church but lost his case after the church fought not only the fact that he had been sexually abused but that they were not a legal entity and therefore could not be sued. In his statement, Cardinal Pell said he did not know that Mr Ellis had agreed to settle his case for \$100,000 before the church ran up costs of \$1.5 million fighting him. Other witnesses who were in Cardinal Pell's inner circle have told the commission that the cardinal knew about the \$100,000 and had directed the Sydney diocese to offer Mr Ellis \$25,000 and then \$30,000, which Mr Ellis refused. He said that the Vatican even in the mid-90s believed that the accusations of child sex abuse were made exclusively or predominantly by enemies of the Catholic Church.

This changed when a deputation of American bishops visited the Vatican. "They explained that it was not the enemies of the church who were doing this as the Nazis and possibly the communists had done but they were genuine complaints and good people, people who loved the church were saying it's not being dealt with well enough," Cardinal Pell said. He continues to give his evidence ahead of his farewell ceremony tomorrow when he officially leaves the Sydney Diocese. (*Janet Fife-Yeomans, The Daily Telegraph, March 24, 2014*)

George Pell: Vatican said enemies of the church made abuse allegations

Cardinal George Pell has told the child sex abuse Royal Commission that the attitude of some people in the Vatican was that accusations against priests "were being made exclusively or at least predominantly by enemies of the church to make trouble and therefore should be dealt with sceptically". Pell has begun his evidence to the commission this morning in its investigation into the handling of the case of John Ellis, a former altar boy who was abused by Father Aidan Duggan from the age of 13. Pell admitted in his statement to the commission that he "explicitly endorsed the major strategies of the defence" in the litigation which left Mr Ellis a broken man. Pell had not been aware that his lawyers told the court Mr Ellis had no one to sue other than the Archdiocesan trustees or himself, Pell's statement says.

The Ellis case established that the trustees could not be sued because they only held the Archdiocese's assets but were not responsible for the behaviour of priests, and the Archbishop could not be sued because he had not been in charge at the time of the abuse. That precedent has protected the church from victims' damages claims in similar cases. Cardinal Pell said in his statement this was "not his understanding" but he would "welcome clarification on this point". He said it was his view that the church "should be able to be sued in cases of this kind". "The resources of the Church should be available to the extent necessary to meet any judgment," the statement says.

The Cardinal also apologises in his statement to Mr Ellis for the "gross violation and abuse committed by Aidan Duggan", a now dead priest of the Sydney Archdiocese. Pell acknowledged and regretted that "mistakes were made by me and others in the Church that resulted in driving Mr Ellis and the Archdiocese apart rather than bringing healing". Giving evidence the Cardinal said he could not remember "ever being asked my opinion on how much money might be paid for reparation compensation to a Towards Healing victim".

The evidence of his then-Archdiocesan Chancellor Brian Rayner that the Cardinal always made the final decision on offers to victims was not correct, the Cardinal said. He said the suggestion that he had offered Mr Ellis an extra \$5000, taking it to \$30,000, after Mr Ellis lost his job as a partner of Baker & McKenzie was "grotesque". He also said his private secretary Dr Michael Casey was wrong to assume that the chancellor discussed with him all offers to be made to victims. "That didn't happen," he said. He said it was "too universal" to assert, as Dr Casey did, that all matters about child sexual abuse would have been discussed with him. Mr Ellis' offer to mediate before suing the Catholic Archdiocese for the sexual abuse he suffered as a boy should not have been rejected, Cardinal Pell said in his statement.

And once two witnesses had come forward to corroborate Mr Ellis' account, the church's "non-admission of the allegation of the abuse should not have been maintained", he stated. The trajectory of the litigation which the Royal Commission has heard caused harm and suffering to Mr Ellis "would have been different" if an accurate assessment of his case had initially been made, Cardinal Pell said.

But he said John Davoren, director of the church's Professional Standards Office responsible for organising such an assessment was a "muddler" and "sometimes not logical" who "didn't seem to have a scrupulous understanding or commitment" to following the Church's protocol. "Did you take any measures to remove him from the position?" counsel assisting the Commission Gail Furness SC asked.

"No, but I was very relieved when he retired through ill health", the Cardinal responded. "Of his own volition?" Ms Furness asked. "Of his own volition", the Cardinal confirmed. Earlier Cardinal Pell told the commission that up until 1996 Australia was leading the way in the Catholic Church's treatment of victims of sexual abuse by priests. He said it was "a mighty issue for us because it is so contrary to what we should be about". But "whatever the deficiencies, I think we were ahead of some countries", he said. (Catherine Armitage, *SMH*, March 24, 2014)

Royal commission: Email had tried to pin blame on John Ellis

An email sent by the Catholic Church's solicitor to its barristers suggested sex abuse victim John Ellis, as a boy of 14 or 15, used to "force himself" on the ageing priest who was sexually abusing him. The email was sent during the court case in which Mr Ellis sought damages for abuse, which began when he was a 13-year-old altar boy at the hands of Father Aidan Duggan at the Sydney Archdiocese's Bass Hill parish.

Tendered in evidence at the royal commission on child sex abuse, the email promises the barristers they will be "greeted with open arms at the Pearly Gates". Solicitor John Dalzell is now a partner at Gadens Lawyers but was then a senior associate at Corrs Chambers Westgarth, which was being instructed by Cardinal George Pell, who was a defendant. The commission has been trying to establish who was responsible for the church's conduct in the case, which not only left Mr Ellis a broken man, but also insulated the church against claims from other future victims. At court, the church had disputed whether the abuse had even occurred. Mr Ellis was cross-examined vigorously for four days, with his character and credibility being challenged. Mr Dalzell said he had been acting on instructions in putting the fact of the abuse in dispute at court. He said he could not remember whether he had informed his client when two people came forward during the litigation with stories that tended to support Mr Ellis' story. He did tell the senior counsel he had been instructing in the case, Stephen Rushton, SC.

His July 2005 email states that a woman, Judith Penton, had come forward "in support of Father Duggan". "Duggan was a regular house guest of this lady," it says. "On occasions, he brought Ellis with him (I know this bit doesn't look good). Apparently Ellis used to bash Duggan (who was in his 60s - Ellis was aged 14-15) and force himself upon the ageing priest! She recalls one time when Ellis grabbed Duggan and started to kiss him in front of her. She remembers Duggan pushing Ellis off!" the email says.

Royal commission chairman Justice Peter McClellan put it to Mr Dalzell that he knew the church had a "legally perfect" assessment from its own assessor concluding that Mr Ellis was telling the truth and that Mr Dalzell knew the church had other evidence that tended to support Mr Ellis' case. Yet "you sat there while your counsel put in dispute whether or not Mr Ellis was telling the truth about having been abused, that is the position isn't it?" "Yes," Mr Dalzell responded. Mr Dalzell said he did not remember clearly how the decision to dispute the fact of the abuse came about, but "I do remember being instructed and that the defence was conducted according to those instructions".

Justice McClellan asked Mr Dalzell whether he understood he had an obligation not to mislead the court, and that saying he acted on instructions was no defence. Mr Dalzell said he did understand. (Catherine Armitage, *SMH*, March 21, 2014)

In the beginning was the debate, but there were few converts

Ken Ham started off teaching his theories in Queensland public schools. Now he's making waves in the US, writes Nick O'Malley in Kentucky. During the debate between the Australian creationist Ken Ham and the American popular scientist Bill Nye, an ice storm blankets Ham's Creation Museum in a thick pelt of gritty, frozen rain. Afterwards, the road out of the museum, which sprawls on a semi-rural acreage in northern Kentucky, is not impassable but dangerous and slow, and many who have booked taxis to take them into nearby Petersburg or across the Ohio River into Cincinnati find themselves stranded and began looking about the audience for help. An internet entrepreneur and Nye fan who has flown in from Boston to see the debate pays a youth minister from Ohio \$200 to drive him - and Fairfax Media - back into town.

As the car slips and slithers over the uncleared roads, the atheist and the minister talk amiably. Both agree that Nye - a communicator famous, even beloved, for his children's series *Bill Nye the Science Guy* - has demolished Ham, who in his unflappable, unflagging monotone failed to land many blows for his cause.

It doesn't matter. The minister remains sure that the world is 6000 years old; the entrepreneur's atheism is unchallenged.

Throughout the week, the debate continues to attracted attention across the US. Many observers cite a poll taken by an evangelical website that finds 92 per cent think that Nye won the debate. Even some leading Christian conservatives criticise Ham - most notably Pat Robertson, one of the US's most prominent evangelical leaders. Speaking on his TV show *The 700 Club*, the flagship program of the Christian Broadcasting Network, Robertson implores Ham, basically, to shut up. "Let's face it, there was a bishop [James Ussher] ... who added up the dates listed in Genesis and he came up with the world had been around for 6000 years," Robertson begins, referring to the method by which so-called young earth creationists such as Ham have dated the planet. "There ain't no way that's possible ... To say that it all came about in 6000 years is just nonsense and I think it's time we come off of that stuff and say this isn't possible.

"We've got to be realistic that the dating of Bishop Ussher just doesn't comport with anything that's found in science and you can't just totally deny the geological formations that are out there. Let's be real, let's not make a joke of ourselves." Robertson's criticism seems all the more extraordinary given that he is not a man averse to making dramatic biblical pronouncements. In 1976, he announced during a broadcast of *The 700 Club* that the world would come to an end in October or November 1982. "I guarantee you by the end of 1982 there is going to be a judgment on the world," Robertson - who went on to seek the Republican presidential nomination - told his listeners. But another school of thought is that Ham won the debate even before it began simply by provoking Nye into taking the stage with him.

"This event is going to make money to support creationism," University of Chicago professor Jerry Coyne writes on his blog *Why Evolution Is True*. "The proceeds, except, I suspect, minus whatever fee Nye gets, will go to support the Creation Museum and Ham, as well as other creationist organisations, are selling DVDs of the video. Even if Nye somehow 'wins' the debate, the dosh will still go to support what he hates: peddling lies about science to kids." In *Slate*, contributor Mark Joseph Stern argues that Nye had no chance of winning the debate because he had the "burden of being tethered to facts" while Ham enjoyed "the luxury to create his own fiction". "By seriously engaging with Ham at the international home of creationism in front of more than half a million people watching the webcast, Nye legitimised Ham's creationist lunacy more than any weird and declining museum ever could," Stern writes. What is not clear, though, is if the huge amount of attention will be enough to save Ham's \$33 million Creation Museum, which, unknown to many in the audience on Tuesday night, faced a financial do-or-die deadline just three days later. Ham first conceived of the Creation Museum as a high school science teacher in Queensland, he tells Fairfax Media in an interview before the debate. He had become convinced as a religious young man that evolution was clearly wrong and the only logical explanation of our origins was that the Old Testament book of Genesis was literally true.

Ham came to understand that God created the universe, the plants and the animals, in six days about 6000 years ago, a time frame established by adding together the ages of all those people mentioned in the Bible. Sin was introduced in the Garden of Eden, after which suffering and death appeared. About 4000 years ago, the world was engulfed by the flood. Life today, he believes, is descended from the animals and people saved by Noah on the ark. According to Ham, during the 1980s and 1990s he taught his students in the Queensland public school system elements of his belief as well as their course textbooks. "I just wanted them to think critically," he says.

Back then, he says, the school system was much more reasonable about such things. He mused that it would be much easier to challenge the myth of evolution that students saw explained in natural history museums if he could take them to a creation museum. Ham's proselytising took over his teaching. This was, he says, a burden conferred upon him by God. As he developed relationships with US creation groups, he and supporters established Creation Ministries International in Brisbane.

Eventually Ham and others involved in the Brisbane group split bitterly, with an internal report accusing Ham's US organisation, Answers in Genesis, of "unbiblical/unethical/unlawful behaviour" towards the Australian ministry. Creation Ministries International sued Ham and AiG, citing concerns about the amount of money being spent on directors and the focus on fund-raising. By the time the parties settled, Ham had already opened the \$27 million Creation Museum. Though some call northern Kentucky "the buckle on the bible belt", Ham explains he chose to base the Creation Museum in the area for its location. Here, he says, the museum is under a day's drive from two-thirds of the US population.

Last year, the museum estimated that it had attracted nearly 2 million visitors since it opened in 2007. Ham acknowledged that though it had its highest patronage in the year after it opened, it was still attracting more visitors than it had predicted. Others are not so sure, noting that it has since opened a children's zoo and a zip line as new attractions. Driving back into Cincinnati after the debate, the minister explains that he has taken several of his youth groups to the museum but says it was difficult to see why you would buy a season ticket. Once you have seen humans and dinosaurs sharing their animatronic lives once, there is little reason to return. Dinosaurs are crucial to the museum and feature throughout its exhibits. By showing people and dinosaurs side by side, the museum emphasises that all life was created at once. Also, Ham considers dinosaurs to be a shibboleth of those who believe in an ancient earth and evolution. "We're putting evolutionists on notice: we're taking the dinosaurs back," he said before the museum opened, according to *The Kansas City Star*. "They're used to teach people that there's no God and they're used to brainwash people. Evolutionists get very upset when we use dinosaurs. That's their star."

With attendance stagnant at best, Ham and AiG have spent the past few years raising money for a dramatic expansion of the Creation Museum. They want to build a full-scale replica of Noah's ark. Should it be completed, it would be the largest wooden structure in the US and it would serve as proof that Noah was able to fit on-board the 7000 odd pairs of animals from which life as we know it is descended.

The problem is that the ark is big and expensive. The 300-cubit craft described in the Bible would be 115.4 metres long when completed. According to a Bloomberg report, the first phase of construction would cost \$73 million. Ham and AiG raised about \$14 million before seeking to raise another \$55 million in unrated municipal bonds. By the beginning of January, AiG had managed to sell \$26.5 million of the securities. But to avoid triggering a redemption of all the bonds, it needed to sell the other \$29 million to investors by Friday, just three days after the debate.

"We still need those ark supporters who weren't able to purchase the ark bonds at closing to prayerfully consider participating in a secondary bond delivery at the level they had indicated to us," Ham wrote in an email to supporters this month, according to the Bloomberg report. Ham tells Fairfax Media that underwriters have instructed him not to comment on the deal but says of the Bloomberg story "don't believe everything you read". He says the debate's timing had nothing to do with the fund-raising effort.

Even if the ark project fails, and whatever the outcome of the debate, many are still concerned about the continuing impact of creationism on US schools. Indeed, before the debate, Nye said this was the very reason he accepted the challenge.

"To allow our students to come of age without the knowledge gained through the extraordinary scientific insights and diligence of our ancestors would deprive them of understanding of nature and our place in the cosmos," he wrote for CNN. "It would also rob our students of their future. Without scientists and engineers to create new technologies and ways of doing society's business, other economies in other countries will out-compete the United States and leave our citizens behind." And though polls find Nye to be the winner last Tuesday night, the prevalence of creationism still troubles many teachers and scientists in the US.

While Ham's young earth creationism remains relatively rare, a recent survey by the Pew Research Centre found that one-third of Americans believe that humans have existed in their present form since the beginning of time. And there are signs that belief in some form of creationism in the US is coming to be a function of political ideology and, as the nation divides politically into red states and blue states, even of geography. Another Pew survey last year found that 48 per cent of Republicans voters do not believe in evolution, up from 39 per cent in 2009.

Just beneath Kentucky lies Tennessee, where, in 1925, the infamous Scopes trial took place. A local teacher had been charged with illegally teaching evolution in the classroom. The teacher, John Scopes, was found guilty, though the decision was overturned on a technicality and the national attention the trial gathered is thought to have discredited creationism around the country. But today, under a 2012 state law in Tennessee, public school teachers may teach "scientific strengths and scientific weaknesses" of theories that can "cause controversy", specifically citing evolution, global warming and cloning. A recent *Slate* survey found that, in 14 states, similar laws have been enacted to allow public schools - or students being taught in private schools with public funds in so-called charter schools - to challenge evolution or teach creationism.

In Texas alone, the *Slate* investigation found 17,000 students in the Responsive Education Solutions charter system were learning from their textbooks that some residents of the Philippines were "pagans in various levels of civilisation", that feminism forced women to turn to the government as a "surrogate husband" and that "some scientists even question the validity of the conclusions concerning the age of the Earth". In Texas, as in many states, elected school boards approve textbooks. As far-right conservatives have organised after the Tea Party revolution of 2010, many are targeting school boards as the first step in efforts to take over more senior elected posts. Though it remains unconstitutional to teach creationism since a 1987 Supreme Court ruling, creationists duck the law by teaching it as one of a handful of "competing theories", the *Slate* investigation found. Raising creationism to equal footing with evolution was explicitly what Ham sought to do as he debated Nye. He argued that a distinction existed between "observational science", which could be tested by observing current phenomena, and what he called "historical science", which he said depended on scientists using assumptions to interpret the past. When Nye listed the myriad ways scientists measured time and estimated age, Ham argued that none were as reliable as God's testimony.

When, in his frustration, Nye suggested Noah would have needed superpowers to build the largest wooden vessel in history and pack it with animals, Ham implacably retorted that since neither man had met Noah it was unfair to judge his skills as a shipwright. It was then that Nye should have realised that he was not going to change many minds in the packed auditorium. Even so, Noah and the ark might still bring down Ham too. (Nick O'Malley, *Sydney Morning Herald*, February 9, 2014)

PATHETIC WAY TO GAIN FAME

It's hard to think of a show designed to be more pathetically offensive to the Christians than the Adelaide Fringe theatre's "Come Heckle Christ". Inviting audience members to shout abuse at a man dressed as Jesus, it bills itself as a comedy act for "Disgruntled former Christians, priests (and by extension sexual deviants), altar girls and boys, atheists, anyone who enjoys yelling at Jesus while watching a dramatic re-enactment of everyone's favourite fairy-tale: The Crucifixion of Jesus The Christ." But if comedians really want to prove how edgy and original they are, why don't they stage "Come Heckle Mohammed". You can imagine the outcry then. (Miranda Devine, *The Telegraph*, Feb. 01, 2014)

'Help' for a dad to mutilate his girls

THERE'S a scene in Sacha Baron Cohen's *The Dictator* where Baron Cohen — playing an Islamic despot lost and unknown in New York — attempts to gain sympathy from local girl Zoey (Anna Faris) by claiming he was the victim of sexual abuse. "They raped me," he announces, "in a very unprofessional way". Zoey falls for it. "We have to get you to the rape centre," she says, but Admiral General Haffaz Aladeen misunderstands the centre's role. "You have a centre for rape here?" he says, excitedly. "Great! I'd love to go! You know, hire a limo, have some cocktails, bring my rapin' shoes ..."

A similar moment of cultural confusion also occurred in real life, according to the BBC, which recently reported the very first attempted prosecutions in Britain for female genital mutilation. One of the leads pursued by police followed what the BBC delicately described as a "misunderstanding": "A suspect contacted a helpline to request the procedure for his two daughters. He misunderstood the purpose of the service for victims." Er, yes. US columnist Mark Steyn offered this take on the chap's puzzlement: "What an unfortunate 'misunderstanding'. The gentleman had called the female genital mutilation helpline thinking it was a helpline set up by Her Majesty's government to help you find someone to genitally mutilate your daughters. In the rich, vibrant diversity of the modern multicultural state, it's easy to see why the poor fellow might make that assumption. Just give it a couple more years, sir." Indeed. Even more remarkable than this bloke's mistaken notion of how a mutilation helpline works is that Britain is only now taking serious legal steps against those who brutalise young girls for the sake of Islam. There have been no prosecutions in the UK despite FGM being outlawed nearly 30 years ago. (*Tim Blair, The Daily Telegraph, March 24, 2014*)

Education

The thought police telling kids heterosexuality's not the norm

SO now it's a thought crime to regard heterosexuality as the norm in human relationships.

This is called "heterosexism", joining racism and sexism as the new no-go zone, and the Proud Schools pilot program rolled out to 12 Sydney and Hunter high schools over the past two terms is aimed at stamping it out. The program defines "heterosexism" as the practice of "positioning heterosexuality as the norm for human relationship", according to the Proud Schools Consultation Report. "It involves ignoring, making invisible or discriminating against non-heterosexual people, their relationships and their interests. Heterosexism feeds homophobia."

So there it is. If you think the vast majority of people are attracted to the opposite sex and that heterosexual human relationships are the norm, you are feeding homophobia. The state government would prefer you didn't know about its Proud Schools program against homophobia, "transphobia" and "heterosexism". It features professional learning for teachers, "celebrations of diversity for students" and "embedding discussion of sexuality and gender diversity into the classroom". Education Minister Adrian Piccoli wants you to think it is all the work of his predecessor Verity Firth, who started the whole project in the dying days of the Labor government. But Piccoli kept the program, which cost \$250,000, despite the fact that there is no evidence that homophobic bullying is a big problem in NSW schools and despite the fact anti-homophobia elements are already incorporated in the existing PDHPE syllabus. At least a dozen MPs, from the Coalition, Labor and independents including Fred Nile, have discussed their concerns with Proud Schools in recent weeks.

One has provided The Daily Telegraph with extensive information about the program obtained under freedom of information or in questions on notice to Piccoli in Parliament. From 175 pages of material, including a Proud Schools consultation report produced by Family Planning NSW and in minutes of meetings of the Proud Schools Steering Committee, a disturbing picture emerges of a program that appears designed more for indoctrination and propaganda than to eliminate bullying. In Victoria a similar program, the "Safe Schools Coalition" to "support sexual diversity" in schools, holds that gender and sexuality are not fixed but fluid concepts. Students are taught not to think about gender and sexuality in a "binary" way, as in male/female or gay/ straight, but as part of a continuum of choices.

What are pubescent children supposed to make of that? The assumptions which underpin the Proud Schools program seem questionable, at best. For one thing, a position paper produced for the project by Latrobe University claims there is "strong evidence in 2011 that approximately one in 10 young people are sexually attracted to people of their own sex, or are unsure".

It also quotes another figure of "between 7 and 9 per cent" who are same-sex attracted. This paints a picture at odds with figures around the world which put homosexuality at 2-3 percent of the population. In fact the most comprehensive survey of sexuality in this country was also by LaTrobe University, in its 2003 Sex in Australia report which found 1.6 per cent of Australian men identify as homosexual and 0.9 per cent as bisexual. For women the figures are 0.8 per cent who identified as homosexual and 1.4 per cent as bisexual.

Another LaTrobe study which informed the Proud Schools consultation report, Writing Themselves 3, found that 80 per cent of homophobic abuse and violence for young people occurs at schools and that "violence and abuse is sustained and embedded in school culture". It claims homophobia, "has increased rather than decreased over the past five years and that there are strong and significant links between the experience of homophobic abuse and self harm". Yet this is not the experience of the principals quoted in the Proud Schools Consultation report produced by Family Planning NSW. "There's not a great deal of overt homophobia" says one. "Not many cases of overt discrimination but there is name calling", says another.

"I haven't had any issues of homophobic violence at this school", says another.

One principal said: "We have some openly gay male students. Some are embraced but some are bullied. If they're popular they're OK but if they're not they get bullied." Another said: We have one obvious transsexual student who doesn't associate well with other students. Not because of his gender but because of other family issues. He does struggle with his identity. He gets sympathy from staff but gets ignored by students." A teacher is quoted in the Proud Schools report saying: "The problem is language rather than overt discrimination. Gay is still used as a derogatory term. What I see is language that is inappropriate, 'That's so gay', etc."

This teacher's comment, concludes the report, "highlights the way in which some teachers continue to fail to recognise homophobic language as a form of violence and discrimination". But the report seems to want to find a big problem with little evidence that one exists.

Over the past seven years The Daily Telegraph's education reporter Bruce McDougall has been monitoring NSW Education Department safety and security incident reports of violence and other problems at schools. He has not seen one report relating to homophobia. Yes, bullying and violence occurs at schools and every effort should be made to prevent it. But it does not primarily

relate to sexuality, and false claims that it does could promote a backlash or even send the message that bullying for other reasons is not as bad.

The report also described as "worryingly simplistic" and "out of line with contemporary ideas of sexuality" the question raised by some teachers and students of whether people are "born that way or exercise choice with respect to same sex attraction or gender diversity". The contemporary view, according to the report is: "Spectrums of attraction and complex interactions with the social world influence sexual and gender identity." Whatever. It's not up to academics to dictate attitudes to society via indoctrination of captive children in classrooms, and it's irresponsible of politicians to allow them to do so.

Parents expect their children to go to school to learn basic skills, and become socialised. They expect a safe environment in which everyone is treated with respect and without bullying. But they also don't expect that their values should be subverted by homosexual or any other propaganda. And they don't expect that widespread acceptance of heterosexuality as the most common human experience would be demonised. (*Miranda Devine, The Daily Telegraph, October 17, 2012*)

Students may be disadvantaged by starting school at 5 years old



Country comparison: The average ages of entry into primary school.

Children in Australia start school younger than almost anywhere else in the developed world, up to two years ahead of students in top-performing countries such as Finland and Korea. Experts say the early transition could be detrimental to both the learning and well-being of students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. In a major international study of 15-year-olds in 2012, 58 per cent of Australian students reported they started primary school at the age of five, 27 per cent started at six, and 3 per cent were seven. Twelve per cent were aged four. The average starting age among Australians was 5.2 years, which was lower than most developed countries and similar to Britain, the data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development showed.

In Singapore, Shanghai and Finland, three of the highest performing education systems according to the major international ratings, the average starting age was almost seven, with 13 per cent of students in Shanghai starting at eight. A Cambridge University expert in the cognitive development of young children, David Whitebread, said "overwhelming evidence suggests that five is just too young to start formal learning".

He says children should be engaged in informal play-based learning until about seven. "The empirical evidence is that children who have a longer period of play-based early childhood education, that goes on to age six or seven, finish up with a whole range of clear advantages in the long term," he said. "Academically they do better and they experience more emotional wellbeing." He says the benefits of delaying formal schooling are particularly significant for disadvantaged children, often forced into school early in Australia by the high costs of childcare. "That, of course, is entirely the opposite to how it should be," Dr. Whitebread said.

The rate of preschool attendance among Australian students was also lower than a majority of developed countries, with 52 per cent saying they had attended for more than one year. For Finland, that figure was 63 per cent. For Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore it was above 90 per cent. A later starting age has been proposed in submissions to the government's inquiry into childcare and early childhood learning.

The University of Sydney's honorary professor in early childhood education, Alison Elliott, said it was not the starting age that was important but rather what children were doing at school. "If children are allowed to come to school at the age of four, then we as teachers have to provide that early learning environment," she said. "Teachers know, or should know, how to provide appropriate learning environments for those very young children." (*Amy McNeilage, SMH, January 26, 2014*)