

Britannia, Britannia, what have you done to yourself?

In a spiteful defiance to God, Great Britain joined her sister America in the sin that God hates the most. America sealed its fate when its President, Barack Obama, told the nation that homosexual marriage is a 'good thing', that homosexuals should be treated as equals (See *TCH's* 21 and 24). Now the British Government thinks that these practices are good for its people too.

"Downing Street has defended plans to change the status of civil ceremonies to allow gay and lesbian couples in England and Wales to get married. . . The prime minister's spokeswoman confirmed that the government intended to legislate on gay marriage by the end of this parliament." (*BBC*, June 12, 2012)

Only a few decades ago, if an Anglo-Saxon leader told its people that it is good for the nation if homosexuals are allowed to wallow in their filth, and their practice be recognized as 'marriage', he would have been hounded out office. A few centuries ago, he would have lost his head for it too. But now we live in an 'enlightened age', and enlightenment means that everything goes. After all, why do we have world institutions such as the United Nations if not to ensure that no nation is allowed to 'discriminate' against homosexuals? The UN leader, Ban Ki Moon, quickly passes on the message to any nation that intends to rule against homosexuals that it would no longer receive any help or donations if it does so. And since the nations of the third world have not enlightened themselves sufficiently on this matter, they often come under the attention of Ban Ki Moon.

These are catastrophic developments for the Anglo-Saxons and for the world. For the Anglo-Saxons because they had forgotten what happened to their sibling tribe, Benjamin, when it allowed such practices in its midst, and protected the 'enlightened ones' who indulged in them (see Judges 19-21). And for the world because the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (Britain and America respectively) had the God given duty to keep the faith and rule of law, keep the world on a straight course, and maintain a civilized balance in the world. When these tribes fail in their duty, the world will be finished; hence the Great Tribulation from which so few people will survive.

Many people regard with disdain any notion that the people of Europe trace their origins to the tribes of Israel. We have written much on this topic, and pointed out that there are still many sources, both ancient and recent, which testify to the fact that the so-called 'lost Ten Tribes of Israel' did not disappear from the Middle East, but migrated under the tutelage of their captive rulers, the Assyrians, in a north-westerly direction and settled in the rich and fertile lands of Europe. The Roman Empire, and all European Empires that have ensued since then, can be traced to the 'lost Ten Tribes' of Israel.

It is interesting to note that there is currently a great debate among historians and archaeologists about the origin of the Romanian people. For centuries it was thought that they were descendants of the Roman colonizers who occupied southern part of Dacia for a little over a century and a half. Romanian language is solidly part of the Latin or Romance languages – Italian, French, Spanish and Portuguese. The problem is that the Romans occupied only about a third of Dacia and traditional explanations cannot account for the spread of the Latin language to the rest of Dacia. People do not abandon their language in order to embrace the language of occupiers who ruled over some of their brothers hundreds of kilometres away. The problem is complicated by archaeological discoveries which link the people of Dacia not so much with the Romans as with the people of north Western Europe, in particular the Dutch, the Germans and their surrounding lands. The word 'Dacia' (pronounced Dutchia with a soft t) is very similar to the words 'Dutch' of Holland and 'Deutschland' of Germany.

The problem with our contemporary 'wise' men is that they seek answers in evolutionary terms. They believe that the people of Europe 'evolved' in their lands after arriving from Africa in a distant past, half-monkeys half-men. Were they to look into the most authoritative book ever written, the Bible, and into the historical books that have survived the purging of contemporary historians, they would learn that the Indo-Caucasian languages are related because they originated in the same place – the Middle East.

The similarity of language and character traits between the Latin peoples can be explained by the fact that at one time in their ancient past they all belonged to the same family of people, the same tribes of Israel. When the migrations started, and they did not all occur at the same time, some of them went via the Mediterranean Sea to south west Europe, while others followed a northern route to central and north west Europe. The differences in language, physical appearance and character traits between various tribes of Israel are explained by the fact that although they all had one father, they had four mothers. And mothers are the ones who pass on the language, the emotional, psychological and other character traits to their children.

The area of Romania and its surrounds is full of names, geographical and human, that link it to the tribes of Israel, particularly the tribe of Dan one of the most aggressive of them: Danube, Don, Donetsk, etc. In my own village, there are many people whose family name is Dan. My own family name is of recent origin, so it sheds no light on its original roots. For a long time I believed that it originated in the tribe of Judah, but after more careful and extensive research I became convinced that in fact it belonged to the tribe of Ephraim.

It is not for nothing that the Spirit brought me to a former dominion of Ephraim. This was neither my first nor my only choice, but wherever I wanted to settle I was not successful, until I tried Australia, and I never looked back. No other country could have given me the freedom and conditions to successfully carry out this end time work. In fact, some countries did their very best to hinder and prevent it, the country of my birth, Romania, being one of them. When they could not reach me, they destroyed my mother. To this day, the Romanian government protects those who are guilty of a hideous crime – assault, violation, and eventual death of an innocent woman.

They came very close to taking my life too when I visited that country half a dozen years ago, as I explained it in *The Christian Herald No 16*. Though I was a Romanian citizen, they gave me a visa for only three months. The man and woman who were assigned to stick with me while I was in Romania, became very sad and quiet when they realized that I was making hasty preparations to go to the airport and leave the country in a hurry one month before my visa expired. Two years later they were both dead, he of 'suicide' at his office, and she of cancer; both specialties of the hideous Securitate who still very much pulls the strings of Romania's political and economic life. These people are not joking with those who fall out with them.

Did my minders pay with their life for unwittingly saving mine? We cannot know that now, though I believe this to be the case, but we shall know it shortly when Jesus Christ returns. All we know for sure now is that we are dealing with deadly forces which are getting very uneasy at the outcome of this work, particularly when they see that world developments follow the pattern we outlined years and decades in advance. My inheritance lies in ruins in Romania, because its 'original democracy' made sure that it would be a deadly exercise for me to try to reach it.

I feel sorry for the Romanian people who do not deserve their fate, or the governments they've been getting. It is a reflection of an extremely low level of political class, who seem to have no notion of national interest, and only of personal or ideological interest. It's a legacy of 50 years of the cruelest form of communism, which decimated the nation's intellectual class.

It is interesting to note that after manipulating another 'coup-de-tat', (a parliamentary one this time) and placing their left wing stooges in power once again, the new Foreign

Minister called for the severing of ties with European Union and reestablishing them with Russia, even before he was sworn in office. And sure enough, as soon as they took office they revived the old bogey, 'we are not selling the country to foreigners', meaning they do not want to privatize the state decrepit institutions which suck up much of the nation's budget. Why? Because they are full of leftover Securitate apparatchiks who could not be accommodated in banks, political parties, other state institutions, and in the Romanian Orthodox Church! Privatizing those inefficient institutions could throw the apparatchiks and their sons out and force them to get real jobs, and they would have none of that. As for the Romanian Orthodox Church, the media had been making the point that Romania had more bishops than the other Orthodox Churches combined. They could not understand why. The reason is simple: other Orthodox Churches did not have to accommodate secret service apparatchiks.

Being mere priests was not enough; Securitate men had to be made bishops. Almost every village and local administrative centre has a bishop. In Romania, bishops receive the equivalent of ministerial salaries, in addition to what they receive from the people. Those who thought that ending up in a Church was a disgrace, were grievously mistaken; they have the more cushy jobs.

That's what Ion Iliescu's 'original democracy' is all about – keeping the demons happy.

I warned European leaders that when they shake hands with those whose hands are stained with blood their hands become stained too and they become partakers in their sins and consequences. They did not believe it then; perhaps they believe it now. They should consider how their countries evolved during the decade or so since then. They must have thought that only a mad man would think that the mighty European Union would get into trouble for such a 'trifling' matter (assault, violation and murder of an innocent woman because her son 'betrayed' the Securitate and turned to God). Everything was rosy, the growth of their wealth seemed to have no limit, and a dozen other countries were knocking at the door, eager to get in and have a share of their pie; yet now the whole continent finds itself on the edge of a bottomless precipice.

People refuse to learn the lessons of the past, and keep repeating them. What would be more natural for the people of Europe than to pay attention to the lessons of the Bible, which gave them the base and strength of their civilization? This is what the New Testament is telling us.

- 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,
1Co 10:4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.
1Co 10:5 But with most of them God was not well pleased, for *their bodies* were scattered in the wilderness.
1Co 10:6 Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.
1Co 10:7 And do not become idolaters as *were* some of them. As it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND ROSE UP TO PLAY."
1Co 10:8 Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell;
1Co 10:9 nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents;
1Co 10:10 nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.
1Co 10:11 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, **upon whom the ends of the ages have come.**

In other words, behave in a civilized manner and abstain from fleshly lusts, or face punishing consequences.

Jos 7:11 Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put *it* among their own stuff.

Jos 7:12 Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, *but* turned *their* backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you.

God is not with any nation that transgresses His covenant and harbors 'the accursed'. Israel did just that and as a result it could no longer stand against its enemies, and it lost the nation and its identity.

This is the lesson that today's world fails to heed. It should therefore not be surprised if the consequences are similar. The Israelites must have prayed incessantly in their captivity, for in the end God turned it to their advantage. He can do that to any people who return to Him. God does not act any differently these days, for He does not change.

Mal 3:1 "Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," Says the LORD of hosts.

Mal 3:2 "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire And like launderers' soap.

Mal 3:3 He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the LORD An offering in righteousness.

Mal 3:4 "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem Will be pleasant to the LORD, As in the days of old, As in former years.

Mal 3:5 And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness Against sorcerers, Against adulterers, Against perjurers, Against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, And against those who turn away an alien— Because they do not fear Me," Says the LORD of hosts.

Mal 3:6 "For I *am* the LORD, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.

Mal 3:7 Yet from the days of your fathers You have gone away from My ordinances And have not kept *them*. **Return to Me, and I will return to you,**" Says the LORD of hosts.

Mal 3:14 You have said, 'It is useless to serve God; What profit *is it* that we have kept His ordinance, And that we have walked as mourners Before the LORD of hosts?

Mal 3:15 So now we call the proud blessed, For those who do wickedness are raised up; They even tempt God and go free.' "

Mal 3:16 Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, And the LORD listened and heard *them*; So a book of remembrance was written before Him For those who fear the LORD And who meditate on His name.

Mal 3:17 "They shall be Mine," says the LORD of hosts, "On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them As a man spares his own son who serves him."

Mal 3:18 Then you shall again discern Between the righteous and the wicked, Between one who serves God And one who does not serve Him.

When people return to God, He returns to them. But when they transgress against Him they become His enemies and 'doomed to destruction'.

The nations that have kept the world on a civilized course are now chief transgressors of God's laws. God does not forget the fact that as soon as He placed them on top of the world, they offered germinating conditions for Darwin's evolutionary theory, Marx's atheistic communism, and Hollywood's dehumanizing of family life. Since these evil notions have to be wiped out from the face of the earth and from human consciousness, their sources will need to be wiped out too; hence the mortal danger to Ephraim and Manasseh.

It is no longer possible for any nation to vanish from its midst the 'accursed sinners', because they are protected by the bastions of our time – the United Nations and the European Union.

The European Union – the 'lost Ten Tribes' of Israel – accepts no member which has laws against homosexuality. Little do they know what spirit they serve, and that in so doing they had doomed themselves to destruction.

It is hard to believe that the world could have reached such a depraved state, yet true nevertheless. This is why God spoke of the Great Tribulation. Knowing the nature of human beings, and that in their natural state they go from bad to worse, God foresaw the need for a general cleansing of the earth of its physical, moral and spiritual pollutions, in preparation for the Millennium Kingdom of Jesus Christ. The Great Tribulation will achieve that and more; it will cleanse the earth of its sinners too.

We have given up trying to convince the world that the Bible is essential for life today, and that the blessings and cursing of ancient times are just as valid now as they have ever been.

What astonishes us is that those who ought to be at the forefront of warning the world of the danger it faces for its wayward ways, are at the forefront of opposing us instead. Our hope is that enough of God's elect will wake up and mend their ways so that God will cut those days short and prevent the complete annihilation of life on this planet. Where these elect are nowadays we do not know, except that they are asleep and under the influence of people who are leading them to perdition. Here are the prophetic words of Jesus Christ that speak of those dreadful times.

Mat 24:3 Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

Mat 24:4 And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you.

Mat 24:5 For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many.

Mat 24:10 And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.

Mat 24:11 Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.

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 24:16 "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

Mat 24:17 Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house.

Mat 24:18 And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes.

Mat 24:19 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!

Mat 24:20 And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.

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.

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

Mat 24:23 "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe *it*.

Mat 24:24 For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

Mat 24:25 See, I have told you beforehand.

Mat 24:26 "Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; *or* 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe *it*.

Mat 24:27 For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

Mat 24:28 For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.

Mat 24:29 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Mat 24:30 Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Mat 24:31 And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Mat 24:32 "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer *is* near.

Mat 24:33 So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!

Mat 24:34 Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.

Mat 24:35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

Mat 24:36 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.

Mat 24:37 But as the days of Noah *were*, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

Mat 24:38 For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark,

Mat 24:39 and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

The question is how far is humanity from the Great Tribulation? The buildup to it has already started. The global financial crisis, the tottering European Union, the heightening of the Israeli – Palestinian conflict, the Iranian military buildup and its existential threats to Israel, the Arab risings and the real prospect of superpowers involvement in the Syrian conflict, are all prophetic developments associated with the Great Tribulation.

No one can tell you with certainty when the Great Tribulation will explode upon the world, but prophecies indicate that it will happen at the conclusion of the age of man (six thousand years of human history) and the beginning of the age of Jesus Christ (beginning of the Millennium Kingdom). Biblical chronology tells us that we are at this exact time in history. Since the signs are all there, and the protagonists identified and locked into position, it means that it could happen any time.

Britain and America have turned their backs on God and on His laws when they need Him most. The nations that are supposed to uphold the moral and spiritual standards of this world have become more sinful than any other nation.

They have done so when their very survival is at stake.

The entire world will be much the loser for that.

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Pro 1:7 The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of knowledge, *But* fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Pro 9:6 Forsake foolishness and live, And go in the way of understanding.

Pro 9:7 "He who corrects a scoffer gets shame for himself, And he who rebukes a wicked *man only* harms himself.

Pro 9:8 Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; Rebuke a wise *man*, and he will love you.

Pro 9:9 Give to a wise one, and he will be still wiser; teach a just one, and he will increase in learning.

Pro 9:12 If you are wise, you shall be wise for yourself; but *if* you scorn, you alone shall bear *it*.

The Fifth Commandment - a matter of life and death

The book of Exodus gives us the Ten Commandments which have formed the foundation of the Judeo-Christian civilization. Here they are as God gave them to Moses for Israel.

Exo 20:1 And God spoke all these words, saying:

Exo 20:2 "I *am* the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

Exo 20:3 "You shall have no other gods before Me.

Exo 20:4 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness *of anything* that is in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth;

Exo 20:5 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me,

Exo 20:6 but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

Exo 20:7 "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold *him* guiltless who takes His name in vain.

Exo 20:8 "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Exo 20:9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work,

Exo 20:10 but the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the LORD your God. *In it* you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who *is* within your gates.

Exo 20:11 For *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

Exo 20:12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

Exo 20:13 "You shall not murder.

Exo 20:14 "You shall not commit adultery.

Exo 20:15 "You shall not steal.

Exo 20:16 "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Exo 20:17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that *is* your neighbor's."

Leaving aside those who preach otherwise, the Ten Commandments have been as valid in the New Testament as they were in the Old. Jesus Christ and His Apostles have made several statements to this effect. We have amply discussed them in our articles, and are not going over them again, but some clarification and additions are required in the light of recent prophetic developments.

According to James, the writer of the New Testament epistle by the same title, all Commandments are important and the breaking of one is tantamount to breaking them all.

Jas 2:10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all.

Jas 2:11 For He who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," also said, "DO NOT MURDER." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

Nevertheless, the order of their setting indicates that some Commandments are more important than others. For example, no one could equate the first Commandment, "I am the LORD your God ... you shall have no other gods before Me" with the last, 'You shall not covet your neighbor's house, wife, and goods'.

To amplify this difference, Jesus Christ made the point that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is unforgivable, whereas sins like adultery can, under certain circumstances, be forgiven.

Joh 8:10 When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?"

Joh 8:11 She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

Now compare that with what Jesus said about the sin against the Holy Spirit.

Mat 12:22 Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw.

Mat 12:23 And all the multitudes were amazed and said, "Could this be the Son of David?"

Mat 12:24 Now when the Pharisees heard *it* they said, "This *fellow* does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons."

Mat 12:25 But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.

Mat 12:26 If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?

Mat 12:27 And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? Therefore they shall be your judges.

Mat 12:28 But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.

Mat 12:29 Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.

Mat 12:30 He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.

Mat 12:31 "Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy *against* the Spirit will not be forgiven men.

Mat 12:32 Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the *age* to come.

The Pharisees were committing blasphemy by offending the Holy Spirit. For them, it was a small matter, a throwaway line on the spur of the moment perhaps, designed to safeguard their reputation before their followers, but for Jesus Christ it could not have been more serious. They were committing a sin that could never be forgiven; in this world or in the world to come. [*Jesus Christ believed in a world to come. For those who wonder what salvation is all about, it is qualifying for that world by changing one's lifestyle, taking control of his carnal impulses, and learning to live his life according to God's rules*]. We know that the Pharisees did not believe what they said either, for one of them came to Jesus Christ by night and said as such.

Joh 3:1 There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

Joh 3:2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

That made their sin all the more unforgivable, for although they knew that He came from God, they still accused Him of doing the works of the Devil.

It is no different in our time. If someone comes in the name of God, does His work and speaks according to the Scriptures, yet he is accused of doing the work of the Devil, the accusers commit unforgivable blasphemy.

Four decades ago, God sent me with a message to the leaders of the Worldwide Church of God. The minister of the Toronto branch, which I used to attend in those days, expelled me from the Church immediately. I expected that from him, but not from the hierarchy of the Church. The message being very important, I determined to deliver it personally to the headquarters of the Church. So I flew to Pasadena, California, but when I arrived there they did not receive me either. I went back to my hotel room, I wrote an explanation of about six pages, I paid a secretary to type it and make several copies, and then I sent a copy to each one of the top evangelists. I waited a few days, but since no one replied I returned to Toronto, only to find myself locked out of the flat which I used to share with two Church 'brethren'. The minister apparently had told them that because I had 'abandoned' the flat, they were

entitled to help themselves to whatever I had. And so they did, taking everything: furniture, kitchen utensils, bed linen, clothes, books, Bibles, personal items, tools, etc. I was left with nothing but what I was wearing at that time. That is what fundamentalist 'Christians' do to 'brethren' who question their doctrines.

What they did was so unbelievable I found it hard to accept that it was real. But real it was, and when I realized that they would not change even after taking time to read and analyze what I said, I left Canada for Australia.

Time passed, always thinking why it happened to me that way and why God had not helped me when what I did was for Him and not of my making? But God did help me, and was with me all the time, only that it would take me years, decades in fact, before I fully understood His methods. He knew that although I had a lot of enthusiasm and a good background in the Bible after three years of study, it was not enough to take on the boys of the big end of town so to speak.

In Australia, I carved myself a new career, obtaining a BA with majors in ancient history and study in religions, a Diploma of Education and a Diploma in Librarianship. The normal course of study for me would have been electrical engineering as I had vocational training and experience in electrical trades, but my heart decided that I must undertake humanity studies instead. [*God works through human heart, mind and conscience*].

About two decades later, after another hard encounter with the Worldwide Church of God, I started publishing *The Christian Herald*. In retrospective, I could see that only then did God think that I could undertake this kind of work.

A few years ago, almost two decades after the appearance of the first edition of *The Christian Herald*, and four decades after being expelled from the WCG, an extraordinary event took place. A former high ranking evangelist in the WCG wrote on my Facebook page that he wanted to be my friend. I could not believe my eyes.

Most of the evangelists from that time were dead by then, but he being one of the youngest, yet a very capable one, was still alive and leading a string of 'Churches of God'. Now he wanted to be my friend, but without saying sorry or apologizing in any way for what they did to me in those early days. Like the story of the man who fell among thieves and was robbed, stripped of clothing, wounded and left for dead (Luke 10:25-37). Later the thieves changed their mind, returned to him, stood over him and without returning his goods or doing anything to help him, said, 'We want to be your friends, do you accept it?' As the saying goes, 'There is no honour among thieves.' (I have closed my Facebook account since then)

I hesitated to answer him, but after almost a year, I decided to accept his friendship. Then I added, "I suppose you are ready to return to me the value of the things I was robbed of at that time". He replied, "I knew nothing of what happened to you then." Then I said, "You certainly knew because I sent you a copy of the letter I sent to all top evangelists of the Worldwide Church of God." A long pause followed, and then our conversation ended abruptly.

I thought that since God requires restitution, with interest, of things acquired illegally he would be more than happy to make amends and come clean before Him. But no, he would rather go before God like that than part with any money now. He confirmed the Scriptures which say that those who fall away from the truth of God could never be brought back again.

The point is that even if he did not know about it then, and found out only when I told him about it, he should have taken responsibility for it, for two reasons: 1) he was a very high ranking evangelist, just below the two leaders, H.W. Armstrong and Garner Ted Armstrong, when those things happened, and 2) he was still preaching all, or most, of the doctrines of the Worldwide Church of God, therefore his responsibility extended to that time.

How he envisioned his friendship with me when one of the purposes of my work is to expose false preaching, especially that of the Worldwide Church of God and its remnant Churches, he never explained and I may never know. [*The other purposes of this work are to*

restore and preach the true Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to pass on God's end time messages to this world].

Why concentrate especially on the false preaching of the Worldwide Church of God and its remnant Churches? Because that Church claimed the identity of one of the seven Churches of God from the book of Revelation, namely the Philadelphia Church of God. In truth, the WCG did have a relationship with the Philadelphia Church of God, but not the one claimed by its leaders. This is a great mystery, and one we hope to reveal in a new edition soon, God willing.

And so, after four decades of demonizing me, and two decades of doing everything in their power to destroy or derail this work, it seems the perpetrators have finally realized that they made a grave error. Unfortunately, when people allow the Devil to take over their minds and hearts, through envy or wicked deeds, he does not give up easily his prisoners.

Isa 14:12 "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! *How* you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations!

Isa 14:13 For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north;

Isa 14:14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'

Isa 14:15 Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, To the lowest depths of the Pit.

Isa 14:16 "Those who see you will gaze at you, *And* consider you, *saying*: 'Is this the man who made the earth tremble, Who shook kingdoms,

Isa 14:17 Who made the world as a wilderness And destroyed its cities, **Who did not open the house of his prisoners?'**

It is a lesson the whole world ought to take note of, for humanity is fast being taken over by this fiend of humanity.

In the end time, just prior to the return of Jesus Christ, instead of rejoicing that their Savior is coming, the Devil entices the whole world, through his false preachers, to revolt against Christ.

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.

In the end, we will all give account of how we have used the time God has allocated us in this world. Since my encounter with that evangelist, a number of Church leaders have expressed the desire to 'make unity in the Church' or affiliate with us. A particular one, who wrote to us just a few months ago, said that he had read our writings, agreed with us, and wanted to affiliate his Church with us. I had a strong feeling he was lying, nevertheless I said OK. But knowing that he was a disciple of Herbert W Armstrong, who strongly preached what the Scriptures call 'doctrines of demons', I asked him whether he is still preaching those things. To which he quickly replied, "You are judging me!"

Do you get the point? They want to affiliate with our Foundation, but don't want us to know what they preach in their Churches. And why would they do that? Because after deceiving their followers for so long, they cannot tell them the truth now without having a revolt on their hands. They want to tell their followers that they are affiliated with us, leading them to believe that what they preach is all right and approved by us.

Now is there a difference between these deceivers and the Pharisees of Jesus' time? They all offended the Holy Spirit while claiming to serve God. Jesus Christ warned the Pharisees that they were committing an unpardonable blasphemy, but they did not relent. When they could not prevail against Him by other ways, they killed Him.

That could not possibly happen to us, could it? We shall see!

Our nemeses want absolution of their sin by affiliating with us. But humans can forgive some sins but not every sin. We forgive everyone who has sinned against us, indeed we are under command to do so, but we cannot forgive blasphemies against God. That is for God to deal with.

Jesus Christ said that, "Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come." A legitimate question would be why is sin against the Holy Spirit more grievous than sin against Jesus Christ?

Because the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, therefore sin against the Holy Spirit is sin against the Father. And how can one commit blasphemy against God the Father? By breaking any of

the first five Commandments, like worshipping strange gods, taking His name in vain, worshipping images, breaking the Sabbath, and dishonoring ones' parents!

Jesus Christ placed the Holy Spirit above Him, just as He placed the Father above Him.

Joh 14:28 You have heard Me say to you, 'I am going away and coming *back* to you.' If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, 'I am going to the Father,' for **My Father is greater than I.**

Now it was all right to sin against the Son of Man as long as He was in this world and people did not quite know who He was, but not after He was confirmed as the Son of God through resurrection from the dead and His rising up to heaven. Now He sits at the right hand of God, waiting to inherit His eternal Kingdom. Those who sin against Him now have little chance of making it into His Kingdom. This is why people ought to be very careful what they say about God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, for any loose talk on this subject could land them on a collision course with God.

Remember what God said about the fourth Commandment? Here is part of it again.

Exo 20:8 "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Exo 20:11 For *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

A clear statement that God created the heavens, the earth, the sea and everything in them, including human beings! Then He hallowed the Sabbath and made it an eternal sign between Him and His people.

Exo 31:12 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

Exo 31:13 "Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: 'Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that *you* may know that I *am* the LORD who sanctifies you.

Exo 31:14 You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for *it is* holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does *any* work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people.

Exo 31:15 Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh *is* the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD.

Whoever does *any* work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death.

Exo 31:16 Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations *as* a perpetual covenant.

Exo 31:17 It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.' "

Exo 31:18 And when He had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.

Now is this sign valid in the New Testament? Absolutely! For if God expected the Israelites, who did not have the Holy Spirit, to keep the Sabbath holy, how much more is He expecting it of those who have the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit became available to the general public only in the New Testament, after Jesus Christ came to this earth and overcame the Devil. And what did He say about the Sabbath?

Mat 24:20 Pray that your flight [*from the Great Tribulation*] may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.

When He returns to this earth, He expects to find His followers observing the Sabbath and praying that their flight may not be on that day. Now what do you think would happen if they observe another day and pray that their flight may not be on the Day of the Sun for example? Would He be pleased with them and grant them a place in His Kingdom? How could He when they despise the very sign that would make them people of God?

Now consider carefully what God said in the rest of that Commandment: "for *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day".

When did God create these things? When was the beginning of this world? Millions and billions of years ago as the evolutionists, and not a few preachers, would have us believe? No, this is when.

Mat 19:3 And the Pharisees came to Him, tempting Him and saying to Him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?

Mat 19:4 And He answered and said to them, Have you not read that He who made *them* at the beginning "made them male and female",

The beginning of this world occurred when God created Adam and Eve. SO SAID JESUS CHRIST, AND SO IT WAS!

Now according to biblical chronology, the Genesis creation took place about six thousand years ago. What do you think God will do to those who dishonor Him by claiming that the world created itself out of nothing and for no reason at all through a Big Bang some fifteen billion years ago, and that human beings created themselves through evolution over millions of years?

The tragedy of it all is that countless preachers, who claim to serve God and Jesus Christ, preach this fallacy too, especially those who come from the stable of Herbert W. Armstrong, only with some slight differences. Their sin is amplified by the fact that they claim their authority on account of the Philadelphia Church of the book of Revelation. Since the book of Revelation was given to us directly by Jesus Christ from heaven, it means that they attribute their preaching to Jesus Christ. If they do not believe that this is the worst kind of blasphemy now they will believe it when they face Jesus Christ.

If these people are right, our work and our beliefs are in vain, and none of the prophecies we have talked about will come to pass. But the most important prophecy about our time, the one about the Great Tribulation, is already unraveling before our eyes. What is happening in the Middle East, in Syria, and in much of the world, are merely initial stages of that prophecy.

Now if the world followed an evolutionary course, none of these things would be true; humanity will recover from the current worldwide malaise and life on this planet would continue ad infinitum, or at least until this universe burns itself out. But the world does not follow an evolutionary course but a biblical timeline, and according to that this world is on its last legs.

This brings us to the fifth Commandment, the last one which can produce blasphemy against God.

Exo 20:12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

Bear in mind that this Commandment operates on two levels. At the spiritual level it establishes our relationship with our heavenly Father, as we are His spiritual children, and at the physical level it regulates the relationship between human parents and their children.

Now this is what the New Testament says about that.

Mar 7:9 And He said to them, Do you do well to set aside the commandment of God, so that you may keep your own tradition?

Mar 7:10 For Moses said, "Honor your father and your mother." And, "Whoever curses father or mother, let him die the death."

Mar 7:11 But you say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, Corban! (that is, A gift to God, whatever you may profit by me)

Mar 7:12 and you no longer allow him to do anything toward *his* father or mother,

Mar 7:13 making the Word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have delivered. And you do many such things.

Eph 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

Eph 6:2 Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise),

Eph 6:3 so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth.

Eph 6:4 And fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Col 3:20 Children, obey *your* parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.

Col 3:21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they be discouraged.

And here are a few more statements from the Old Testament.

Exo 21:15 "And he who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death."

Exo 21:17 "And he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death."

Lev 20:8 And you shall keep My statutes, and perform them: I *am* the LORD who sanctifies you.

Lev 20:9 'For everyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. He has cursed his father or his mother. His blood *shall be* upon him.

Deu 27:16 'Cursed is the one who treats his father or his mother with contempt.' "And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'

Pro 20:20 Whoever curses his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in deep darkness.

Pro 28:24 Whoever robs his father or his mother, And says, "It is no transgression," The same is companion to a destroyer.

No other Commandment, beside the first, has been reinforced as strongly in the Bible as this one.

And yet, there is another example that connects it with nothing less than the very survival of 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, 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.

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 a curse.

The word 'curse' should more correctly have been translated 'utter destruction'. This is exactly where this world is heading, unless parents and children turn their hearts to each other. But how can they do that when they no longer speak the same language?

In the name of progress, parents had been hamstrung by the 'wise' of this world, and been transformed into nothing more than passive spectators and providers of food, clothes and other necessities to children whom they can no longer control or discipline, lest, they are being told, they affect their physical and emotional wellbeing. They have been forced to ignore God's will and go against Him in relations with their own children. This is what God says on this matter.

Pro 19:18 Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction.

Pro 13:24 He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly.

And so, today's youths are running amuck, beyond the control of parents, police, teachers, and social workers. In New South Wales alone, hundreds of teachers request police protection against unruly students every school term, and against parents who abuse them for not giving their uncontrollable progeny higher marks.

The extraordinary fact is that this malaise has gripped the entire Western world. Now they want to export their values to the rest of the world in the name of globalization. And why do they do that? Because the aim of world revolution is still very much in the hearts of unreconstructed left wing luminaries, who have largely taken control of our education and the media. By creating chaos in Western societies they hope that the masses will demand strong leadership, and they are only too happy to 'sacrifice' themselves to that cause. But then, don't we all know what left wing demagogues do to the notion of democracy when they grab the levers of power.

These days they no longer call themselves revolutionaries but greenies, having metamorphosed themselves into Green Parties. Their policies have little to do with the environment and more to do with world politics. You know them by the fact that they like to internationalize every little conflict, elevating beyond reason the plight of foreigners while diminishing the plight of their own nationals.

Their weapon is always the defense of the so-called human rights; human rights for homosexuals, for pedophiles, for lesbians, for illegal migrants, and for all sorts of sinners and lawbreakers. And our activist judges have kindly obliged to their requests, to the chagrin and bewilderment of the general population.

It is to their shame that spiritual leaders have been seduced by this charade too, having failed to impress upon their people that human rights must never take precedence over God's rights. In truth, what they call human rights is nothing of a kind but Satan's rights. For as the Scriptures say, what is not from God is from the Devil (Mat 5:37; 6:24).

This world has chosen the wrong side and the wrong path, and now it faces catastrophic consequences.

Telling the world what it does not want to hear

In the first decade of our work, we relied primarily on the printed media to pass on our messages to the world. We used to spend months, even years, searching the Bible and the world media for relevant information about the deteriorating condition of the world, and inform world leaders on the meaning of it. We saw the need for this kind of work, and after much prayer and meditation God impressed upon us that we must do something about it.

When no Churches wanted to help, we decided to go about it alone. And so, in 1990, the first edition of *The Christian Herald* made its appearance. However, no sooner did we send our magazine to the world that we encountered the first of many major trials: the sons of Dracula violated and murdered my mother and sent word of what to expect if I continue with this work.

Did the Devil know something about this work that we did not know? He had knowledge of God's prophecies that we did not have at that time, and knew that his time was up. We did not expect that kind of reaction from anyone, certainly not after just one edition. It is no wonder that ever since that time, the world's slide towards a catastrophic end has been gaining speed.

Dracula's servants must have thought that they killed this 'baby' in its infancy, but after our initial shock we came back a year later with renewed vigor and more determined than ever to continue with this work regardless of what may come our way.

In those early years, we used our office equipment to print a few hundred *Christian Heralds* and mail them to world leaders and to as many people as would receive them. As one might have expected, our progress was slow. That continued for a whole decade, until the internet became widely available and we put ourselves on the worldwide web. That changed everything. Not only did that make our job easier, but we could reach infinitely more people by the simple clicking of a few computer buttons. Our readers could reach us just as easily, and many did.

Computer statistics gave us valuable information about which topics were of more interest to our readers, how many people visited our web site, and which countries they came from. We deliberately chose not to know people's individual email addresses, except if they contacted us first. And even then, after replying to their inquiries, we never put pressure on anyone. Certainly, we never requested donations from anyone, as we are being flooded with these days from all over the world. Not that we did not need any help, but if God has not moved anyone's heart to contribute, we had to continue with our limited resources as best we could.

If God wanted to make a point to the world that one did not need riches, or impose phony tithing doctrines on their followers to do His work, we have been only too happy to comply. What angers us though is that although we have made it clear a number of times that this prophetic work is meant to be done by two people, no one seems to believe or accept this fact. They seem to think that because we are a Christian Foundation, we reek with money. Well, we don't. For twenty years now no one has contributed a single cent to this work. No one seems to like what we are doing, even though thousands come to our web site every month.

We just pray to the Almighty to restrain the Satanists of the Worldwide Church of God and its remnant Churches from harassing us any further and cause us any more troubles. They have been competing with the sons of Dracula over who can do us more damage. The sons of Dracula have attacked us physically, while the Satanists of the WCG have done so mostly spiritually. A typical example is their teaching on the Holy Spirit, an unpardonable blasphemy (*See TCH 5*). Both have been a thorn on our side from the very beginning. It must rancor them enormously that in spite of their efforts this work has been going from strength to strength.

Regarding our statistics, *The Christian Herald No 9* had been our best performer for many years, followed by numbers 5, 6, 4 and 1. Anecdotal evidence told us that numbers 9 and 6 were of particular interest to academia, whereas the others were of more interest to church goers.

In the last couple of years, however, some major changes occurred. Our statistics went through the roof, and the order of popularity changed dramatically. The most popular editions became numbers 17, 21, and 14, followed by 5, 6, and 9. All of them, plus a few late editions, now alternate at the top of the ladder. The good news from our point of view is that all editions had good numbers in our statistics, and there is none of which we could say that it was a failure.

In regard to countries, the USA is leading the way by some distance. We are not going to give out too many details here, for we learned a bitter lesson with Russia. When we pointed out that Russia was overtaking the USA, something drastic happened. Within two months, Russia went from number one to out of our statistics. Putin's 'democracy' taught us that we must not trust everything governments say, and that democracy means different things to different people. We apologize to our Russian friends, and pray that they are safe. Keep up the faith and the good works friends, for better times are coming.

In Europe, the best performing country is Germany. France is now in third place, and Great Britain in fourth. No further comment here, except to say that nations and peoples shape up their own destinies and Britain is in for some exceedingly traumatic developments. And so are Greece, Spain, Portugal, and Italy, the four countries that have been in the news for the wrong reasons lately. These only occasionally show up in our statistics and hardly more than in single figures.

They should remember that the people who have no time for God, God has no time for them; and without God no nation can survive for long in the context of the end time Great Tribulation.

My own country Romania has been overtaken by all its neighbours. In our last statistics, Bulgaria, less than half its size, had twice as many readers, Hungary three times, and Ukraine forty times.

Romania's masters are good at persecuting God's people but not so good at making peace with God. Instead, they are so enamored with the cult of Dracula that they are now preparing food and drinks out of blood for tourists who like that kind of cuisine. That's the kind of tourists they want to attract to the country. I wonder where they think they will find them. They think that the whole world is like Romania. I hope they are wrong. But, then, we live in the end times.

Looking at this world in its current condition, it would be hard to find someone who did not wish that a strong hand arrived from somewhere to put some order in it and lessen the sufferings, hunger and terror that have gripped this planet as of late. Well, we are the messengers of good news, for that is exactly what is going to happen shortly; but before Jesus Christ returns to set up His Kingdom, this world needs a thorough cleansing, and that is the role of the Great Tribulation, now in its early stages.

There has never been a more important time for people to turn to God than now. That can be done only through familiarization with the living Word of God – the Bible. We know of no one who has done more to explain the Bible to the world, and reveal more biblical mysteries, than we have done through *The Christian Herald's*. One day, this world might appreciate the significance of this work.

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.**

Rev 10:5 The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised up his hand to
Rev 10:6 heaven and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it, that there should be delay no longer,

Rev 10:7 but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, **the mystery of God would be finished**, as He declared to His servants the prophets.

People should never forget what Jesus Christ told His disciples either.

Mat 13:10 And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"

Mat 13:11 He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

Mat 13:12 For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.

Mat 13:13 Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

Mat 13:14 And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive;

Mat 13:15 for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.'

Mat 13:16 But blessed *are* your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear;

Mat 13:17 for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous *men* desired to see what you see, and did not see *it*, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear *it*.

Some people's eyes and ears are blocked from seeing and hearing the truth of God, lest they "should be converted" and healed. In other words, God does not want the people who do not want Him. So when you hear people, such as the 'wise of this world', saying that there is no God, you can tell them that they are right – for them there is no God, only the Devil, whose slaves they had become.

The Devil, demons, witchcraft, and the like feature prominently in today's literature, films, games, and people's discussions, but mention the word God and they run away from you. Also, there are hardly any games for young people that do not include violence, demons, monsters, and perversions, but we are yet to see one that extols the virtues of God and His people.

The 'enlightened age' has been both a boon and a bane for this world. While giving us extraordinary advances and benefits in science and technology, it has also brought humanity to its darkest spiritual age.

The revolution in information technology meant that anyone could become an instant publisher, whether he had something worthwhile to say or not. The traditional checks on quality, relevance and presentation went out the window; language became mangled, spelling and grammar atrocious (even with the help of computer programs), and fly-by-nighters cropped up everywhere.

In the midst of this cavalcade of information, nothing became more important than the ability to sift out the good from the bad, the relevant from the trivial, and the worthwhile from the ephemeral. This is where *The Christian Herald* made its impact. After a long, slow, and tortuous road, this is now being read regularly by people from upwards of eighty countries. Our only concern is that no one seems to have the courage to respond to God's call. Have no seeds of God fallen into any good ground?

Mat 13:19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand *it*, then the wicked *one* comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside.

Mat 13:20 But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy;

Mat 13:21 yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.

Mat 13:22 Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.

Mat 13:23 But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands *it*, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

The alternative explanation is unbearable to contemplate. It is in the end time that the Word of God has no effect anymore, and the Gospel is being preached merely as a witness to an unbelieving world rather than a means of conversion and salvation. And what do the Scriptures say about that?

Rev 22:10 "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand.

Rev 22:11 He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still."

Rev 22:12 "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work.

Rev 22:13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.*"

Yes, the Alpha and the Omega has been speaking to this world, but the world did not want to hear. And so, the unjust remains unjust, the filthy remains filthy, the righteous is still righteous, and the holy still holy. Amen!

Sign of the time: Parliamentary doleful circus

Have you seen the extraordinary spectacle in the Australian Parliament? Occasionally we see altercations and unusual developments in other Parliaments – South Korea, Russia, Japan, to mention just a few – so we assume that what is happening in the Australian Parliament is also seen overseas.

In June 2012, the Australian television offered us a Parliamentary spectacle that looked more like a wake than a session of Parliament. As our magazine is read by people from over eighty countries, who may not know what a wake is, here is a definition from Macquarie dictionary.

Archaic: to keep watch or vigil . . . a doleful occasion, for some solemn or ceremonial purpose . . . near the body of a dead person before burial, often accompanied by drinking and feasting.

The nation was stunned by an extremely undignified spectacle: a host of weeping and sobbing politicians in the bear pit of the Australian Parliament, particularly the hypocrites of the left and far left of the political spectrum. Why were they weeping? Because some people drowned more than seven thousand kilometres away while attempting to reach Australia in an unseaworthy ship!

Why do we berate the politicians who weep for the people who jump the queue of refugees and drawn while attempting to reach Australia illegally? Because we have never seen those same politicians weep for the Australians who have perished in the floods, droughts and fires that have become part of everyday life in Australia now.

Are the lives of foreigners more valuable than the lives of Australians? All lives are valuable, and no life should perish unnecessarily, but one cannot legislate against people's folly. It is a godly principle that one takes care of his own people first before taking care of those who place little value on their own life.

It is a sign of the time and the worldwide trend which makes evil look good, and good look evil.



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

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Newsletter 24 (04/12)

Friends and Leaders Around the World:

The respite from Europe’s and the world’s debt problems did not last long. Things only got worse. The perennial conflict between Israel and the Palestinians has been joined by the Arab rising nightmares. Global warming and climate change are marching on relentlessly. Widespread famines in Africa and elsewhere, and water shortages in much of the world, are now a fact of life; and this at a time when much of the world is experiencing devastating floods.

International relations are on a knife edge, unmistakably heading towards a major conflict.

Unemployment, social unrest, crime, terrorism, and a decline in moral and spiritual standards have become permanent features of this world.

Life is becoming more untenable by the day, and yet, the wise of this world – atheistic scientists of the like of Stephan Hawking and Richard Dawkins – are relentlessly blaring at us from our television screens, telling us that, “Humanity is on the brink of a brave new world”, and “Scientists are creating a brave new world for all of us”.

Well, someone has to tell the truth, and the truth is that far from being on the brink of a brave new world, humanity is on the brink of catastrophe, and terminal catastrophe at that.

Humanity is already in the early stages of what the Scriptures call the Great Tribulation, or the Great Day of the Lord, or the Day of the Lord’s Vengeance.

The world has forgotten that it has a Creator God, and abandoned itself to an orgy of immorality and wanton debasing of human life unprecedented in human history.

Younger generations no longer know right from wrong, true or false, or holy and unholy, terms which many may have never heard.

This does not mean that God does not know what is going on in the world.

2Ch 16:9 For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of *those* whose heart is loyal to Him. In this you have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have wars."

Ecc 8:11 Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

Psa 37:17 For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, But the LORD upholds the righteous.

Psa 37:18 The LORD knows the days of the upright, And their inheritance shall be forever.

Psa 37:19 They shall not be ashamed in the evil time, And in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.

Psa 37:20 But the wicked shall perish; And the enemies of the LORD, like the splendor of the meadows, shall vanish. Into smoke they shall vanish away.

Amo 3:6 If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid? If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done *it*?

Now if the LORD takes responsibility for the calamities that have struck this world and become part of everyday life, should not our leaders ask themselves why He has done it, and take God's case to their people, rather than close their eyes to them or blame the Islamists for many of this world's evils?

Is it not rather obvious that God is using them as a rod for the wayward Judeo-Christian world which has become the bearer of atheism, immorality, homosexuality, unfaithfulness, and just about every sin and blasphemy under the sun?

For two decades we have warned the world that this is where it was heading. Now that it has come to pass, what follows is truly horrendous for the world.

We have expanded upon the reasons why the world is in such a mess in *The Christian Herald No 25*, now online at this web site: www.thechristianherald.info. You would not want to miss it. It deals with matters of life and death, vital for you and your people.

In the service of Jesus Christ,

Grigore Sbarcea
Coordinator A.O.C.F.

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State of the World

Society and Culture

We interrupt this program for an important message on relating

"The television can not be a proper conversation piece since it leaves talk stilted and half-heard"

Aliens slyly observing Australia might be baffled by our dinners. Not the stir-fried or the lasagne but the not-so-silent partner at most Australians' meals: the television. About three-quarters of Australian families eat dinner together five or six times a week, but 60 per cent "always or often" eat in front of the television, according to research by Rebecca Huntley of Ipsos Mackay. The alien might wonder why families need the screen as they munch and slurp. It cannot purely be for information, as this is generally available nowadays at any hour: the headlines or weather need not wait for six o'clock as they did when I was a kid.

The television cannot be a proper conversation piece since it leaves talk stilted and half-heard.

The alien might cautiously conclude that Australian families simply don't like one another. They need the pulsing pixels to distract them from the banality or misery of family dining. Maybe the alien's hypothesis is not as absurd as it seems. Television is often a concession to physical or mental exhaustion at the end of a working day. It is almost the least we can do while still being awake. But while the brain's visual areas are busy parsing and piecing together the bright lights, its higher functions often grow dim. Studies suggest that excessive television watching leaves viewers lethargic, unmotivated and unimaginative. As a result, it can leave us more knackered or foggy - "spaced out", as one researcher put it - than if we hadn't slumped in front of it. Clearly Australians' nightly idiot box dinners are not drugging families into a stupor. But perhaps we often prefer this hazy consciousness to conversation with our loved ones. It is calming, numbing.

A sceptic might reply: simply because the television is on does not mean anyone's watching it. True. But if so, why is it on at all? Partly for company in some households where the TV provides background noise all day, from morning chat shows to the late movie, or flicked between cable channels. It takes the edge off sharp loneliness or gives an ordinary lounge the hint of "happenings".

But dinner with one's spouse or family is hardly a desert island in need of electronic company. Instead, television, like portable music and mobile games, can also be a device for avoiding the draining or painful facts of familial life. There is nothing shocking or immoral about this. The human condition, if not brutish, nasty and short, is certainly fragile and bewildering. The issue for Australians taking communion at the wide-screen altar is simply whether or not it makes life better. Does the short-term break from discomfort or discontent have nasty long-term consequences? One possibility was reported by the English organisation Relate. Its study *The Way We Are Now* found that British families are having trouble maintaining strong relationships, which are vital for negotiating the stresses of career, parenthood, marriage - and new telecommunications and media technology are a big part of this problem because they fracture focus and dilute concentration.

Taken at the end of a long day, they could also be a serious obstacle for Australian relationships. For most couples with children, the working day is usually spent apart, after which come school pick-ups, sport drop-offs, domestic chores. Meanwhile, smartphones and computers bring the stresses and distractions of work into the home, and out of office hours. They also encourage habituation: checking and browsing for a "hit", not because the job requires it. As a result, there are very few minutes left to speak to one another without interruption or diversion. Relationships fray for lack of intimacy. The dinner table, for all its archaism, is one of the last asylums for regular communication; to share impressions, air complaints, squabble and laugh. This sounds trivial but for busy couples and families it is increasingly rare. Problems go unsolved, successes unnoticed, discoveries uncelebrated. We can become familiar strangers: sharing money and rooms but not the tangle and tumble of life.

Television is no science-fiction villain. This is a human problem, with human solutions, and the TV is simply one more player in the daily competition for attention. But the stakes of this contest are high: greater intimacy, and the contentment, health and resilience it can afford. Along with computers and smartphones, the idiot box has the upper hand. Which is fine if we're happy to be the aliens at the table: to one another. (Damon Young, *National Times*, April 17, 2012)

It's the age of vulgarity all around us. I SPENT a lot of time over the holidays watching music videos _ a long-time passion of mine. It seems old hat to point out how low-rent and sexist a lot are.

I've heard conscientious mothers complain of the negative influence of music videos for decades. There is so much, you become oblivious - (Christina Aguilera in leather chaps, The Pussy Cat Dolls pole dancing, lascivious half-dressed girls gyrating on top of some male rappers). Then I caught the new Rihanna video for *You Da One* and did a double take. I don't consider myself a prude, but her X-rated cavorting is crass and ugly. I do not have daughters, so I don't know how you protect them from that vulgarity as YouTube will deliver it to them anyway.

I then watched a documentary about the making of the Pirelli calendar and listened with my jaw on the floor to a bunch of models explaining what a privilege it was to be chosen to mud-wrestle nude and narrowly escape being gored by wild elephants. To produce a girlie calendar? I caught an episode of *Jersey Shore* where one of the cast peed in a sink at a crowded nightclub with absolutely no shame, because she was too drunk to get to the toilets. And I saw an excerpt of the Victoria's Secret runway show where a woman tried to walk with some shred of dignity down a catwalk wearing a G-string and huge metal wings that were clanking around her hips like a medieval instrument of torture, and I thought, "OK, enough. Miss Universe competitions seem intellectual in comparison." We shouldn't let this slide. Let's make having some class an aspiration. But where can young women go to get fashion pointers that do not leave them looking like hookers?

At school formals, boys arrived freshly scrubbed in suits and white shirts and girls arrived in micro dresses so short they can't sit down without flashing their knickers. They are so pretty, I want to scrape off all the make-up and spritz their hair so they get the natural curl back. And add a few inches to the dresses. A few years ago we published issues of *Vogue Girl*, where we presented fashionable, pretty, age-appropriate choices for young girls, and we were inundated with letters from appreciative mothers. I saw a little girl, maybe 10 years old, with her mother on the weekend. The girl wore blue jeans, a grey cardigan and a striped T-shirt, her hair cut short like a boy's. Hallelujah. No cut-off shorts, no glitter, no nail polish, no tiaras. She looked like Scout from *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Now, there's a good role model. (Kirstie Clements, *The Sunday Telegraph*, January 15, 2012).

Prisoners will be banned from smoking inside Lithgow jail in a trial

PRISONERS will be banned from smoking inside Lithgow jail from today in a radical trial which could be rolled out across all prisons. Nicotine patches will be handed out to help ward off cravings, smoking will only be permitted in designated outdoor areas at the maximum security prison and inmates will no longer be allowed to smoke in their cells or in any of the jail's buildings. Corrective Services Commissioner Ron Woodham said staff exposure to tobacco was unacceptably high and way above the national average. Figures show 75 per cent of male inmates and 81 per cent of female prisoners smoke. There are more than 300 prisoners at Lithgow jail. "Smoking rates among inmates is unacceptable, so we need to look at the impact of that on staff and other prisoners," Mr Woodham said. "There are smoking bans already in place in most jurisdictions around the world due to the well-documented hazards of being exposed to second hand smoke." Mr Woodham said Lithgow was chosen for the pilot program after serious concerns raised by staff at the facility. Staff will also be banned from smoking inside the building. "We are taking all the necessary steps to help smokers cope with the change but we cannot continue to expect people to live and work in smoke-filled prisons," Mr Woodham said.

Prisoners' rights activist Brett Collins from Justice Action said the trial was "an outrage" and predicted the move would heighten tensions between prisoners and staff. "Smoking is the one single pleasure prisoners have control of. To take it away is an outrage and a provocation," Mr Collins said. He said there were solutions which could have been implemented, such as smoke-free wings. But with restrictions on smoking, Mr Collins said prisoners would be anxious and it would cause tensions in a culture which was already a "tinderbox". "This will cause a disturbance for prison guards. It will make the place a lot more dangerous, prisoners will be fidgety and angry, and all of this could have been easily avoided," Mr Collins said. A Corrective Services spokeswoman said the trial would be monitored and assessed before any decision was made whether to roll out the smoking ban across all NSW prison facilities. Smoking is already banned in jails in Victoria and Western Australia and Queensland will enforce the ban from 2015. (Clementine Cuneo, *thetelegraph.com.au*, May 28, 2012)

Children consumed by unreal world of continual visions

Australians have adopted smartphones and tablet computers as the standard operating platform for their lives - at work, at home and at play. But it is not just adults who are on the way to permanent connection. As parents readily testify, many children don't just use the new devices, they are consumed by them. "These devices have an almost obsessive pull toward them," says Larry Rosen, professor of psychology at California State University and author of *iDisorder: Understanding Our Obsession With Technology and Overcoming its Hold On Us*. "How can you expect the world to compete with something like an iPad 3 with a high definition screen, clear video and lots of interactivity: how can anything compete with that?"

Once upon a time it was just television use that parents worried about. Now screen use by school students may begin at home in the morning with television, continue with interactive whiteboards, laptops and computers in class, smartphones at lunch and on the bus and then continue long into the evening with some combination of TV, computer, phone and tablet.

According to Wayne Warburton, a psychologist at Macquarie University, US studies show that, beyond the school gates, teenagers are using screens or listening to music for more than 7½ hours a day; in Australia it is more than five hours and rising. Authoritative standards on appropriate use levels are limited. The American Academy of Pediatrics has recommended parents discourage television for children under two and to limit screen time for older children to less than two hours a day of quality programming. The guidelines, says Professor Rosen, are "ludicrous". He said parents should have weekly meetings with their children from the time they pick up their first device "listening for signs of kids showing obsession, addiction and lack of attention".

Dr Warburton, author of a new book on media use, *Growing Up Fast and Furious*, says evidence is emerging to link screen use with disrupted sleep patterns and growing attention deficit problems. "Parents say to me they would love to put some limits on their kids' media use but that it is so much a part of their identity - playing the same games as their friends, being involved with the same media - that they feel they would be losing friends, losing identity and having problems if they didn't have access."

Dr Warburton says parents really struggle to cut the access back. And, increasingly, so do children. Among video game players aged 8-18, research shows that typically "8 per cent find it is impacting negatively on their life", he said. Gemma Ackroyd, the principal at Lane Cove Public school, is also concerned about the "amount of visual stimulus" children are receiving and worries they increasingly require it to engage in learning. "I'm worried about a loss of time spent thinking creatively and thinking imaginatively, because all the time there has to be visual stimulus otherwise [they say] 'I'm bored'," she said." (Andrew Stevenson, *The Canberra Times*, May 29, 2012)

Teachers need to learn how they can get paid big money

IF YOU had to rank the most important professions, teaching would be right up the top of the list. There is something noble about entering a profession which offers comparatively low rates for so vital a service as preparing children for a productive working life and a rounded social and intellectual life. The teachers who most impress me are those who choose to work in the toughest public schools, where the idealised view of teaching spelled out above jars with the reality that "teaching" probably feels more like child-minding, with dysfunctional parenting and the absence of male role models in the family home leaving classrooms looking more like creches for young adults who still act like little kids. I was talking to a mate this week who also attended a fairly standard public school. She was saying that she can't remember too many bad teachers from her school days, but will always remember the many excellent teachers she had. It's an assessment which gels with my experience at a state school, where so many teachers went the extra yard, often outside of school hours, not just for kids who wanted to learn but also for those who did not.

The question then is if teachers are doing such important work, and so often doing it so well, why don't they get paid more money? Those who disparage the profession would say that the amount of holidays teachers enjoy should preclude them from any significant salary increases. The holidays they enjoy by necessity, on account of the school calendar in no way justify the pittance they are paid. The strange thing about teaching as a profession in this country is that, historically, one of the chief obstacles to increasing teachers' pay has been the teachers' unions. That's not quite correct, the unions have often argued for across-the-board pay increases. But when it comes to adopting the same industrial practices which exist in every other workplace, whereby individuals have their performance reviewed annually, and enjoy salary hikes and one-off bonuses for demonstrated excellence, the teachers' unions have vehemently resisted what is now the standard everywhere else.

Their obstinance on the issue has reflected the old-school Marxist heritage of these unions, where the united we stand maxim has manifested itself in a one-in, all-in view on pay. I would suspect that there are hundreds of hard-working teachers out there who privately love the idea of performance pay, knowing they are good enough to qualify for it but would never say so for fear of violating the industrial culture of their union and upsetting the order of things in the staff room.

It's been a protection racket for the mediocre. It has ensured that people are remunerated and promoted on the basis of longevity, not talent. It has held back the best teachers and discouraged people who would make brilliant teachers from entering the profession at all. For the first time I can recall in Australia, there have been some positive signs from the Australian Education Union about the excellent and long overdue proposals from School Education Minister Peter Garrett for annual performance reviews for every government teacher and bonuses of \$7500 for highly accomplished teachers and \$10,000 for so-called "lead" teachers. Reading the Garrett plan, it seems strange that in 2012 a discussion is even taking place about the introduction of these measures, whereby teacher performance is tied to literacy and numeracy results at schools, with the appropriate weightings to ensure that teachers at poor schools don't miss out. In any other workplace, from a low-skilled call centre to the highest-paid white collar job, the link between performance and payment has been routine for decades.

The comments from the head of the AEU, Angelos Gavrielatos, suggest that even the peak teachers' union now recognises this. The union has shown more preparedness than it has in the past to sit down at least and discuss the issue with government. Gavrielatos said last week in response to Peter Garrett's plan that every teacher should be entitled to ongoing professional development to make sure their performance targets can be met.

Anything less than the flat rejection of the plan is a marked shift in the union's previous rhetoric on this issue, and a sign perhaps that the AEU is finally heeding public opinion.

If the unions genuinely believe in public education they would be well advised to back the plan. Perversely, their historic commitment to the existing industrial arrangements have served as a massive free advertisement for the private system, with independent schools putting their teachers through their paces every year and paying the best ones a comparative motza. Surely every teacher who is worth his or her salt should be eligible for that. (David Penberthy, *The Sunday Telegraph*, April 29, 2012)

Written in the scars

Tattoos used to signify youthful rebellion. Now they stand for middle-aged foolishness

What do you do if you want to upset your parents these days? Properly rebel, I mean. You certainly don't get a tattoo. Tattoos won't bother anybody — they've become a fashion accessory, adopted as widely as bangles and bracelets. Shrewd money is investing in the sector, because it's going through a growth spurt: tattoo parlours are up 5.6 per cent since 2008.

But this isn't merely a fad: it reflects a deep underlying secular obsession with living for ever and, especially, staying permanently young. Young women are driving the boom in fashionable tattooing. My friend Alice, for instance, is 23, super-cool, and works in high fashion. She has several tattoos, including a shooting star on the delicate underside of her wrist. It's not a tiny, embarrassed thing — it's a good two inches long. She got it when she was 18. Alice is booked in for another on Saturday, a quotation this time. But it's not only the young: older folk are desperately getting in on the act. Fern Britton, the 53-year-old television presenter, has just had a couple of butterflies inked into her abdomen. She was influenced by Felicity Kendal, 64, who has a star tattoo on her foot and a moon and two feathers further up one leg. The eagerness with which women like these two are rushing to the tattoo parlour indicates a desire to hold desperately on to youth. Not worrying about tomorrow is the defining characteristic of youth, because young people do not think they are going to die. Who cares if the tattoo will still be there in 20 years' time? Young people can barely see beyond the next weekend. Older women want to co-opt some of this sense of recklessness. As Fern Britton says, it's part of her 'disgraceful middle age'. Tattoos, like smoking cigarettes, are a defiant rejection of getting old. There is a paradox to this: people do it to be fashionable, which is a temporary, fleeting state, yet the result is indelibly branded into the epidermis. And this permanence is the reason it's fashionable. It says: it's cool not to care.

As a social trend, tattooing has accelerated since the turn of the last century. Twenty years ago, a minority of well-brought-up youngsters restricted themselves to small and innocuous designs. Teenage girls might have returned from their year off having acquired an easily concealable yin-yang symbol, or a Tweety Pie cartoon figure on a hip bone, or, like Samantha Cameron, a little dolphin so low down on the ankle that a shoe would cover it. This very small act of self-assertion meant: I'm cooler than my square friends but I'm still sensible deep down. It represented safe flirting with a fringe identity and, crucially, it signified the passing from adolescence into adulthood — because only an adult can make such an irrevocable decision. Now older women are using tattoos to signify how juvenile they are, or, rather, how in touch with the spirit of youth. Felicity Kendal is of pensionable age, but she is, in this sense, regressing. The sexual element can't be ignored, either: tattoos are often in a place normally only seen by a lover. Traditionally, of course, we associate 'tats' with male tribes — with ex-cons, sailors, the heavy-leather motorcycling fraternity. They are groups on the margins. The prisoner with a spider's web design spreading up his neck is ruling himself out of an office job. (Not that body art is exclusively a working class fad: Edward VII had quite a few tattoos, many of them done by Sutherland Macdonald, a legendary tattoo artist with a shop above the Turkish baths at 76 Jermyn Street.)

Today, customers want their tattoos to be more sophisticated affairs than the quaint and stylised images of old. The draughtsmanship is of better quality than it used to be. Irony is deployed in the designs, and pretentious spirituality. Women, and a few hyper-fashionable males modelling themselves on David Beckham, choose symbols, words and phrases as well, often in learned languages. Popular places for tattoos on women are underneath arms and wrists and behind the ears — always places where hair, clothing or posture can easily cover up if needed. It still tends to be men who tattoo the exterior surfaces of the body, as you see with Beckham and his 'sleeve tattoos'. These are images and words that envelop his forearms. Actually, Beckham's case illustrates both how habit-forming body art can be, and, I would argue, the effect of ageing and a decline in career. As the great footballer approaches middle age and, at the same time, his professional eminence wanes, so his tattoos have become more extensive and more obvious. Don't forget, he started off back in 1999 with a fairly modest 'Brooklyn' (his eldest son's name) in the small of his back. Tattoos are more-ish. Keep in mind also that, while tattoos may be nearly as common as bracelets, they still represent a much more extreme intervention. In the cause of 'style', you are damaging yourself. This is not quite the same as self-harming: for one thing, self-harmers are ashamed of their injuries, whereas tattoo-wearers are proud. Still, you are piercing the body's integument, which is designed to protect us from infection and disease. The usual procedure involves pricking the surface of the skin with needles and injecting pigment into the layer of tissue underneath. Scarring and 'granulation' occur, and that creates your tattoo. And it's painful, too, so middle-aged people who undergo this process are fairly shaking their fists at the Grim Reaper. What lengths will they go to next, you may wonder? Mind you, none of this worries young Alice. 'It's just like decoration,' she says. 'It's, like, accessorising.' She doesn't care that her tattoos are permanent. She's happy to turn her skin into a fashion item. For now. (Andrew M. Brown, *The Spectator*, 16 July 2011)

Facebook's new baby is picture perfect

The company makes no profits. It has little revenue. It has just 13 employees and they have not yet worked out how to make money from their product, which they give away. But this company, Instagram, has just been sold for \$US1 billion. Its founder, Kevin Systrom, will receive about \$400 million for a company he started two years ago when he was 24. If ever there was a moment that defined the shift in the balance of power to mobile phones, this is it. The exploding popularity of Instagram offers more proof that a picture is worth a thousand words.

Instagram, a free app on smartphones, now has a higher market value than *The New York Times*. One thing Systrom has worked out is how to connect with people. Instagram makes it easy for people to share photos on mobile phones, and does it so well it has quickly acquired 30 million subscribers. Something happened during the past week. A year ago, Instagram raised venture funding, which valued the company at \$25 million. Ten days ago, Instagram was given a market value by its venture capitalists of \$500 million. A week later, it was worth \$1 billion. Why? Because Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, saw this nascent company as an opportunity and a threat. This transaction did not take place in the

real world of listed public companies. It took place in the alternative reality of Facebook, which has a dominant and voyeuristic presence in social media but has yet to convert that dominance into profits in the way Apple and Google have done. Even so, Facebook has a nominal market value of \$US100 billion and has billions of dollars in venture capital to invest. Even though photo sharing is what turned Facebook into a behemoth, it was never able to translate the superiority of its product on computers into a similar superiority on mobile phones, where its process is clunky, especially when compared with Instagram. The explosion in both the number of users and enthusiasm for Instagram's product thus represented a threat to Facebook because it could cannibalise the amount of time spent on Facebook and offer a superior community experience in photo-sharing. It was becoming the next big thing in Facebook's domain. This was equally obvious to Google, which has failed in numerous attempts to convert its dominance as a search engine into a major position in social media. What appears obvious is that Instagram went from being, at best, a \$500 million company to a billion-dollar company in a few days because of an off-stage contest between Google and Facebook. Zuckerberg was willing to pay whatever it took to keep Google from getting the opportunity Instagram represented.

If he could spend 1 per cent of Facebook's projected \$100 billion market value denying Google a strategic foothold in mobile phones and photo-sharing, and solve Facebook's own problem with mobile phones at the same time, it did not matter whether Instagram had any profits or any revenue. It had 30 million users, high growth velocity, and panache. It also had Kevin Systrom.

This was a strategic play, not a commercial one. It made no commercial sense but great tactical sense.

Zuckerberg hinted at this long game when he commented on his Facebook page after the deal: "This is an important milestone for Facebook because it's the first time we've ever acquired a product and company with so many users. But providing the best photo-sharing experience is one reason why so many people love Facebook and we knew it would be worth bringing these two companies together. We don't plan on doing many more of these [acquisitions], if any at all." It was fascinating that on the day Facebook announced this acquisition, another big media group, Time, released the results of a study it had commissioned into how people use media. It found that young people with access to multiple media platforms - internet, TV, magazines, tablets, smartphones and internet television - switched between mediums 27 times an hour.

The scholar who analysed the project for Time concluded: "This study strongly suggests a transformation in the time spent, patterns of visual attention and emotional consequences of modern media consumption that is rewiring the brains of a generation of Americans like never before." In plain language, the media is increasingly dealing with consumers who have the attention span of a gnat. (Paul Sheehan, *SMH*, April 12, 2012)

Confessions of a tweeter What happens when pithy, witty missives about your life take over your life?

Larry Carlat details his obsession. It started on June 25, 2008: "testing, testing. Is this thing on?" My first tweet. I began by trying to make a few friends laugh. I had no idea how quickly tweeting would consume me. Before long I was posting 20 to 30 times a day, seven days a week. Some of my posts were funny, some sad, some vaguely existential - "Living happily ever after is killing me" - some flirty, some filthy. I posted daily for three years with only one exception - the day my father-in-law died. Eventually, I attracted about 25,000 followers. Not bad for a non-celebrity. Soon my entire life revolved around tweeting. I stopped reading, rarely listened to music or watched TV. When I was out with friends, I would duck into the bathroom with my iPhone. I tweeted while driving, between sets of tennis, even at the movies ("I love holding your hand in the dark"). When I wasn't on Twitter, I would compose faux aphorisms that I might use later. I began to talk that way, too. I sounded like a cross between a Barbara Kruger installation and a fortune cookie. I posted every hour on the hour, day and night, using a website that enabled me to tweet while asleep. It was an obsession. And like most obsessions, no good came of it.

Eight months after I began tweeting, I was laid off from a job in the music business. Looking for work in such a bad economy was brutal. Almost a year went by before I finally landed a job at a men's magazine. Just before I started, I removed my name from my Twitter feed and replaced it with my initials, L.C. One morning, a few months later, my boss came into my office. "We need to talk about your Twitter," he said. "Sure," I said. "What about it?" He told me that someone in HR had stumbled on my tweets and was stunned. (Apparently, the ability to craft crude anatomical jokes isn't what the corporate world looks for in new employees.) My tweets were a clear violation of the company's social-media policy. I had a choice: to delete the account or face termination. Sensing my days were numbered, and being ambivalent about the job anyway, I chose to fall on my sword. Being unemployed was even harder the second time around. On the other hand, I had more time to tweet. What did I get out of it? Certainly not fortune or fame - on Twitter I was, for the most part, anonymous. But for me, every tweet was a performance. As John Updike wrote, "No act is so private it does not seek applause."

About a month after I left the job, I separated from my wife, and I moved out of our house and into an apartment. One morning, in a fit of pique, I wrote something like, "I would've taken a bullet for my wife, but now I'd rather be the one pulling the trigger." To me, it was just a joke. To my son, it was a disturbing remark about someone we both love. He threatened to stop following me on Twitter. I deleted the tweet immediately.

Around this time, perhaps not coincidentally, my habit started to feel less like a rush and more like a burden. Instead of tweeting to reflect on my life, tweeting had become my life. I began to think seriously about giving it up. I re-tweeted some of my older posts, telling myself that they would seem new to my now much larger audience. The truth was that the self-imposed pressure to post constantly - and for the post to contain at least a kernel of wit or real feeling - had sapped me. I was burnt out.

Finally I committed "Twittercide". Some of my followers begged me to reconsider, and the flood of affection and good wishes felt a little like the end of *It's a Wonderful Life*. But I knew it was time to return to mine. Do I still have the occasional urge to tweet? Do I continue to compose tweets in my head? Do I miss my Twitter friends? Sure. But the immense weight of compulsion has been lifted. Now, before I go to sleep, I turn off my iPhone before I turn out the lights. When I wake up in the morning, my first thought is of making coffee, not of typing, "Someone spiked my coffee with optimism this morning and I spat it right out." In my next-to-last tweet, I encouraged everyone to follow my son. With luck, he will also know when to stop. He is pretty funny. He will be even funnier when he gets older and sadder. (Larry Carlat, *Sun-Herald*, April 21, 2012)

Joe Hockey hits nerve with talk of chop to welfare

JOE HOCKEY has caused a storm of criticism by advocating more cuts to welfare and saying Australia needs to better align its system to those of its Asian neighbours, which have lower taxes but far less generous welfare benefits. As debate raged, Patrick McClure, the architect of the Howard government welfare reforms now advising the federal opposition, said "we've pretty much got the mix right" but there was always room for reform.

In a speech overnight in London and an interview on the ABC's *Lateline*, Mr Hockey, the shadow treasurer, railed against the entitlement mentality in Western democracies. The criticisms were aimed primarily at European governments with their generous welfare systems but he said Australia, too, needed to "reduce the size of the state".

"We need to be ever-vigilant. We need to compare ourselves with our Asian neighbours where the entitlements programs of the state are far less than they are in Australia," he said. Mr Hockey would not nominate specific programs the Coalition would target but said countries needed to live within their means and welfare had become an "enormous cost burden" that "corrodes the very heart of free enterprise, which drives our economy". "The more time you spend working for the government, that is, paying tax, the less time you work for yourself and your family," he said. The government claimed the Coalition would slash welfare benefits and accused it of hypocrisy given it had fought Labor's attempts to pare back middle-class welfare and resisted increases to compulsory superannuation designed to take pressure off the age pension.

"What that speech means is Mr Hockey is talking about cuts to things like family payments to help people with the costs of raising the kids, things like pensions that older Australians rely on, all of the benefits and services that help families along like relief on childcare fees. Let alone the great benefits like Medicare and free public hospitals," the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, said. The Opposition Leader, Tony Abbott, said Mr Hockey was just pointing out a government needed to live within its means.

A frontbench colleague said of Mr Hockey: "I don't know what he thought he was doing. Maybe it was jetlag."

Mr McClure advised the Howard government last decade as it overhauled the welfare sector, introducing mutual obligation and tightening up eligibility criteria for the disability support pension, including the requirement for some recipients to work. His biggest recommendation - not adopted - was to replace various welfare payments with a single payment accompanied by rewards and penalties. This would bring together the payment levels of pensions and allowances, reducing complexity and a disincentive to work.

Mr McClure said yesterday he would revisit this suggestion and others in the policy paper he was preparing for the Menzies Research Centre the think-tank developing Coalition policy. (Phillip Coorey, *SMH*, April 20, 2012)

Letters to *SMH* (April 20, 2012) "By all means tighten belt, Joe, but start at the top. Most of us have our "snouts in the government trough" to some degree – the poor through welfare payments and the rich with tax advantages on health, super, housing, etc. I'd be more sympathetic to Joe Hockey's calls for reform if he started at the top. Firm, comprehensive commitments to the Henry tax and Gonski education reforms would be good starts but opposition to a reduction in the health rebate suggests Hockey and the [Conservative National-Liberal] Coalition remain very protective of the interests of their traditional [wealthy] constituents. Richard Lynch, Waterloo, NSW

Joe Hockey has given a reminder of what we can expect from a Coalition government. In his comparison of the Western system of looking after the less fortunate and the ageing of our societies with the "filial piety" as practiced in Asian countries, Hockey conveniently overlooks the huge discrepancies in the tax collection [about 15 per cent, and generally no capital gains or other wealthy taxes] and distribution in the differing cultures. Couple this with the way we perceive ourselves as a Christian country and a different, more complex picture starts to emerge. In Asia the baksheesh reigns supreme, not a desirable option for us. I am yet to hear Hockey rail against the generous subsidies we pay to international mining companies or the overly generous entitlements of corpulent felines [single mothers, etc]. Let's be charitable and say he just forgot. A. Sarkadi, Double Bay, NSW

Letters to *The Australian* (April 20, 2012) LET me get this straight: Joe Hockey is against a mining tax – a tax on wealthy miners – but he is in favour of reducing the income for those at the bottom of the rung of the economic ladder, those who can least afford to lose their financial resources. C. Ljubic, Bethania, Qld.

NOW we know what to expect with an Abbot government in power – lower or no social welfare spending. A few weeks ago we had Tony Abbott [*the Liberal Leader*], wanting people who employed nannies to get a tax break, now we have Joe Hockey saying we should consider adopting an Asian model where entitlements are a fraction of Australian welfare spending. What does that mean? No unemployment benefits and pensions? Does Hockey want us to be on the same footing as Vietnam, India or Cambodia? Robert Pallister, Punchbowl, NSW

JOE Hockey suggests slashing government spending by using payments made by Asian governments as a reference basis to review payments made by the Australian government.

In his pursuit of this, it might be useful for him to consider that the most junior federal politician on about \$180,000 a year is paid more than the President of Indonesia, the President of South Korea and the Prime Minister of India. And the Australian Prime Minister receives about \$200,000 a year more than the Prime Minister of Japan. Robert Ginn, Mermaid Beach, Qld

All pay price for homeless

More than 100 000 Australians are homeless every night, with new research finding it costs the taxpayer more to leave someone homeless than to help them. Mission Australia will present the findings today showing access to health, education and social support for homeless men saves taxpayers money. It comes as Housing Minister Brendan O'Connor declared the federal government was still committed to halving homelessness by 2030. A City of Sydney report this week found each homeless person cost health and social services up to \$28 000 a year. (*The Telegraph.com.au*, September 7, 2012)

Welfare rage threatens staff The frontline staff who deal with the desperation of people living on welfare say they are facing a rising tide of hostility and aggression from their clients. And their union says staff cuts are exacerbating the problem, blowing out waiting times for customers, creating backlogs of work and slowing decision-making. More than two-thirds of the 940 staff surveyed last month by the Community and Public Sector Union said hostility from customers had risen in the past six months, and more than half said they had borne the brunt of more aggression.

The worst rates of customer aggression were for staff working in the emotionally charged areas of child support, rehabilitation services, and at Centrelink - dealing with people on welfare payments. Staff working in Medicare and customs agencies also reported high levels of threats from the public. Much of the abuse was over the telephone, but 40 per cent said they had been the target of face-to-face aggression. One of the staff surveyed told the union: "I had a customer tell me that he has been in prison for murder, and that when I least expect it, he will get me." Others reported their office having to hire a security guard for the first time; one told of an angry customer shattering a door and another said waiting times had blown out from two minutes to 30 minutes. "Over the last few years I have only ever had five abuse/aggressive phone calls.

"This year alone I have had twice that number including a threat to punch my lights out and someone wishing that I died," another said. The Community and Public Sector Union blames staff cuts imposed by government in its quest to find budget savings for compounding the problem. The union said staff numbers at the Department of Human Services had dropped from 42,000 in 2010 to 40,000 this year. They are forecast to drop to 38,000 in 2012-13. The union's national secretary, Nadine Flood, said the survey revealed that staff safety was "at a tipping point".

But the growing anxiety for those on welfare may also be a factor, with a growing chorus of charitable groups and conservative economists warning that the refusal to increase the dole to keep pace with wages and pensions was forcing people into desperate situations. In the past six months, conservatives including former Fair Pay commissioners Ian Harper and Judith Sloan and former mining chief executive Hugh Morgan have condemned the level of the dole, which is \$245 a week. The Australian Council of Social Service has been pressing for an increase of \$50 a week. (Misha Schubert, *SMH*, April 8, 2012)

When sex is on the job in more ways than one

A COURT decision to approve workers' compensation for a woman who happened to be having sex while staying at a motel while working away from home will inspire much public debate - but for the wrong reasons.

The mass appeal of this story is undoubtedly because she was having sex when injured. But there are wider issues at play. Did she deserve the compensation? Yes. Absolutely. And this is why. The woman was injured (while having sex) when a glass light fitting above her bed was pulled from its mount and fell on her, causing injuries to her nose and mouth. She was in a motel booked by her employer while away for work purposes. However the real question was whether the worker suffered an injury in the course of employment and therefore was entitled to compensation. Many workers may not realise this, but you do not have to be injured at or during work to be entitled to workers' compensation. The legal test is this: Did the injury arise out of, or in the course of, your employment. If it did, subject to some exceptions, you will be entitled to no-fault compensation.

With so many people now working from home it's important that we understand under what circumstances people are covered for a workplace injury. The injury does not need to occur during employment. If it occurred during an interval within an overall period of work, and the injury is sustained while the worker is at a particular place or engaging in an activity that was expressly or impliedly induced or encouraged by the employer, the injury will be compensable. In one case a man had left home to live and work at a mine. The case centred around whether he was covered by the compensation scheme after he was injured in a car accident that occurred on a non-work day but during a sightseeing trip arranged for him by his boss - and he was in a company car. In that case the High Court found that the worker was entitled to compensation as the employer had encouraged the worker to spend the day at a particular place or in a particular way.

In another case, a worker who slipped in the shower of a hotel room while she was staying there for a work conference was found to be entitled to compensation. These are ordinary activities one would expect to see in a motel room. But is having sex the same as having a shower, sleeping or eating? Yes. The fact that it was sexual activity, rather than some other lawful activity, made no difference to the overall result. And that is how it should be. The worker was right to pursue her claim. She was sent away from home by her employer and was injured while in her hotel room. She wasn't doing anything illegal when the injury occurred. Jokes aside, this case confirms the longstanding principle that workers are entitled to compensation for work injuries - and they should not be afraid to lodge a claim. (Liberty Sanger, *TheTelegraph.com.au*, April 27, 2012)

Cheap shots after Breivik massacre

This week, the confessed mass murderer Anders Breivik told a court his aim on Utoya Island last July was to "kill everybody". And by everybody, he meant the children and young adults who were staying on the island for a Norwegian Young Labour camp. He told prosecutors that by killing young political activists who he considered to be "traitors" he was killing future Labour leaders. "There were no better political targets" than those he killed, he said. He was talking about his country's young people, young people who cared enough about the future of their country that they became politically active at a young age.

I was watching a harrowing report of the massacre on Four Corners a few nights ago, and, in a moment of profound sadness for the dreadful loss of young lives, some not much older than my eldest son, I tweeted that "thinking back to Young Labor camps my wife, friends & I used to go to and how easily something like this could happen here". As usual, Twitter and conservative bloggers didn't disappoint. One bloke, Daily Telegraph blogger Tim Blair, wrote that I should "keep my pretty head low", and that I should "stay brave". As if this were a laughing matter. As if it were something to poke fun about or make veiled threats about.

Never mind the fact that I didn't say how lucky I was that such a thing hadn't happened in my day, but rather, was expressing concern that something like Utoya could happen here in Australia. I didn't say, for example, "How easily something like that could have happened then." I was, pretty obviously, expressing concern for the future, not gratitude that I had "survived". The truth is that it's something political parties - of all persuasions - are going to have to think about.

Keeping our young activists safe is an extremely important consideration, now that one maniac has had the idea and carried it out. Breivik targeted children to cause maximum damage to the Norwegian Labour party, and in doing so, he engaged in a terrorist act. But worse than his own not-very-funny (and ill-timed) post, Blair allowed threats against me to be published on his "blog". One sick individual posted: "Careful what you wish for Mr Howes." And over on Twitter, in response to my tweet, a bloke who calls himself "Ross at home" posted that it was a "great shame" that a similar episode hadn't occurred in Australia.

So it seems we must be very careful. Because there are people in Australia who wish for such evil acts to be committed here against our own children. These people even post their wishes publicly. In light of all this, would I allow my children to attend political camps now? Probably not, and my wife absolutely will not. It's pretty clear to me that the nature of public discourse - the "tone" if you will - is pretty diabolical at the moment. People are angry. And in some cases, rightly so. Politics in this country now seems so grubby. The Health Services Union debacle is an embarrassment to all Labor people, and all unionists - almost to the point of despair. Which is why I was so relieved when Bill Shorten moved in court to place the HSU East Branch into administration. Members deserve better than the pathetic sideshow their union has become. As some of Australia's lowest-paid workers, they deserve a union that's on their side.

As a labour movement, we have to do better. The HSU East is, clearly, a rogue union. But we need to demonstrate to the Australian people that no other union is run like someone's private business. Giving my members this assurance is a very big part of my day-to-day work. But the media also must play a role in keeping debate sensible. People like Blair should know better. It's so easy to take cheap shots and criticise, and so much harder to admit when you are wrong.

Blair clearly misread my tweet and hasn't had the guts to admit it. If anything, I feel sorry for him. I mean, what sort of a person makes fun of the murder of children? Then again, people like Blair aren't serious people. They're not running anything and they don't have responsibility for anybody else's children. You can't reason with people like that. And you can't engage them in sensible, thoughtful debate. They are ideologues. All you can do is be very thankful they are in the minority - and that most Australians don't think dead children are a laughing matter. (Paul Howes, *The Sunday Telegraph*, April 29, 2012)

Planning Minister wants terraces, not big blocks of land

FORGET the great Australian dream of having a big backyard with room for a swimming pool, NSW Planning Minister Brad Hazzard says Sydneysiders "want" to live in tiny terraces. Outlining his vision for the city's future, Mr Hazzard said Sydney had it right 100 years ago when most of the population lived in terrace houses and that today's cash-strapped and time-poor homeowners were driving a modern-day resurgence in their popularity. He said there was a growing demand for a return to the pint-sized properties with developers finding that lots as small as 150sqm were being snapped up faster than anything else on the market -- even on the city's ever expanding suburban fringe. The average block size in areas such as Penrith, Leppington and Box Hill is currently about 500sqm, but Mr Hazzard said it would probably fall to about 125sqm within the next decade as terraces and semi-detached homes took root. "In Sydney the 21st century will see a return to the semi or terrace style of housing," he told *The Sunday Telegraph*. "If you have a busy lifestyle and you are close to public transport, who wants to mow the lawn all day?"

"You want a bit of sunshine, a bit of a place you can hang with your mates and have a barbecue, but you don't want to be bothered. You also want something you can afford and won't be a financial anchor dragging you to the bottom of the financial depths for the rest of your life." Mr Hazzard said the move away from big blocks to terraces was because people have "woken up" to the cost and waste associated with them. Terraces were far more environmentally efficient than quarter-acre lots or apartment blocks and offered cross ventilation for natural cooling, and you could hang the washing in the back yard "rather than sticking it in the machine all the time", he said. Terrace living also provided "communities with heart" rather than the isolation of not knowing your neighbour if you lived on a big block with a huge fence or in a unit. "You're more likely to get a sense of community because you are chatting to your neighbour over the fence when you are hanging up your washing," he said. Mr Hazzard said smaller lot sizes would also see more land released for the community to build football fields and other recreational areas. Robert Sullivan, from property developer Landcom, confirmed that small blocks within walking distance of the public transport were now most popular option for the homeowners, particularly the young buyers. Mr Hazzard is due to hand down his review of the state's planning act by the end of June. He said the review would be "very radical" and he expected it to prompt significant debate within the community". (Barclay Crawford, *The Sunday Telegraph*, June 03, 2012)

Is poor grammar affecting your career?

Some businesses are introducing language and grammar lessons for their employees. Poor spelling and grammar can affect (not effect) your career, your business and how you're perceived as a professional. The lack of basic literacy skills among some younger employees and recent graduates has become such a problem for businesses that some are introducing language and grammar lessons. Anna Underhill, a consultant at HR firm Maxumise, said poor spelling and grammar use by employees had become a serious issue for employers. Ms Underhill said organisations spend large sums of money on corporate branding in logos and marketing only to have the good work undone by sloppy correspondence from employees.

"If that message isn't coming across in all correspondence then that's wasted," she said.

"A lot of the abbreviated wording is done in social media but you can't assume the person receiving it in a business sense knows what you're talking about." Experts say grammar gaffes and poor spelling reflect badly not just on employers but also on employees. Public Relations Institute of Australia head of marketing Kate Johns said many university graduates had a fundamental lack of understanding of basic grammar principles.

"It's not their fault but that fundamental foundation is missing," she said. "I think it has become one of these things; it's considered attention to detail where it should be part of the fundamental process."

Ms Underhill said email correspondence was particularly a problem for many employers because it sets the tone for the culture of the company. But while employees were often given extensive inductions into company processes, basic grammar and spelling were ignored. "Receptionists get inductions telling them 'This is how you answer phones' but if it's not monitored in emails that can totally destroy it," she said. Ms Johns agreed saying email was often the only form of communication employees had with clients and therefore it was important to make a good impression. "You can be really

well articulated offline, but if you can't translate that online then there's a gap," Ms Johns said. "If things are sloppy from that email correspondence that's the impression they're going to get." Marcus Ludriks, a manager at Essential Energy, recently organised language, spelling and grammar courses for 25 of the company's engineers.

"The issue is we have a number of land owner consultations by phone, letter or email and every one of those needs to be documented and be able to be relied upon in a court of law," Mr Ludriks said. "We want our people to have better written skills and grammar so any communication with our customers is clear - there shouldn't be any ambiguity."

Mr Ludriks said the main issue was that his employees assumed readers would understand complicated statements. "When you're writing a letter to an organisation or a customer, language needs to be a lot more formal and easily understood," he said. Spelling and grammar coach Mary Morel said people understood grammar intuitively from listening and reading, but often didn't know the "nuts and bolts".

"People are more forgiving of typos in emails," said Ms Morel, founder of onlinegrammar.com.au.

"We all make mistakes, but when [emails] become laden with mistakes it's bad."

Most common errors: mixing up "it's" and "its"; mixing up "effects" and "affects"; misuse of "which" and "that";

Putting apostrophes in the plurals of acronyms, for example "KPI's" instead of "KPIs"

Switching between singular and plural when referring to company names, for example "Westpac are" instead of "Westpac is" (Sarah Michael, *The Telegraph*, Sept. 6, 2011)

Rugby league is not a sport, it's an atrocity

HEAR that? It's called silence. It's the absence of the rugby league season.

Is it not glorious? To be free of the stifling tedium of blanket coverage, the grinding banality of match commentary, the sub-trivial parish pump gossip and news of yet another player's off-field atrocity. The silence of January is golden. The featureless white noise of the mate-against-mate, meathead-against-meathead cavalcade is comfortably distant; just a grim prospect. Like root canal treatment.

Please don't misunderstand me - I don't dislike rugby league. That requires too much of the effort which is better directed toward the herculean task of ignoring it.

It would also mean trying to take it seriously and rugby league already takes itself far too seriously.

For all the reverberating, unintentionally self-parodying hyperbole, rugby league remains, as ever it will, the blustering short man of sport. Beyond our eastern cities and one in New Zealand, some grimy towns in England's north and a few rustic French villages, rugby league does not exist. This code is a loud provincial oaf let loose upon the big city - obnoxious, flatulent and prone to publicly displaying its genitals. Please - I implore you - don't use rugby league in the same sentence as "World Cup" unless you wish to be battered by force 10 gales of laughter. Aside from its global dwarfism, its case is hindered by shoddy pretence. By all means recruit to your side a boofhead who once missed his flight and had to spend the night in Honolulu. Stick him in a kitsch kit and call him a Tomahawk, but do at least smirk knowingly when you pretend he represents the United States.

Rugby league is a platform for flogging industrial beer. It's a hot air container that temporarily inflates the flaccid careers of club circuit entertainers and their forgotten anthems. Try time? No. Try hard time.

Then there is the spectacle itself - 26 post-adolescents with hideously engorged musculature dressed each week in different livery, yet each of which somehow resembles a beverage can. These run in strict linear patterns until a mistake is made and one lot falls over the other's line. For this points are awarded. Rugby league is painfully contrived. It is prima facie absurd. Knock a fellow down then permit him up to play the ball. Repeat several times until ball is kicked away. No sight in competitive sport is more abject than the flagrant non-aggression pact that is a rugby league scrum.

No, I don't dislike rugby league, though if I cared to I could manage to find offensive the fetish made of the game's (selective) history. How did the Johnny Come Comparatively Lately code wrest popularity from its parent? By inherent superiority? Crowd-pleasingly open play? Or the fact that for five seasons it was the only game in town?

The NSW and Queensland rugby unions suspended senior competition during World War I. Rugby league did not. When Balmain played Glebe in the 1915 grand final, young men were being sacrificed at Gallipoli. The Queensland Rugby Union was unable to reform until 1929. By no means do I impugn those who played on or to suggest that many thousands have not worn both khaki and club colours. But it does strike me as a slightly anomalous note when the code wraps itself in the flag and has the Last Post played at its Anzac Day Test. Merely ridiculous is the gladiatorial imagery with which rugby league is inevitably promoted. The big hits, the on-field biff that officials piously condemn, but actually exult in. Again the short man aspect is the fore. If, like me, you like to watch mixed martial arts - which is hysterically condemned despite strictly enforced rules of engagement - the spectacle of artless behemoths running into each other is depressing in the extreme.

Perhaps I do dislike rugby league, but I don't begrudge its right to exist, which is more than can be said of its attitude toward everyone else. There are still in rugby league not a few resentful rednecks who see an Australian failure in rugby or soccer as "good for our game" and the encroachment of Australian rules on its traditional turf as a crisis surpassing that of refugee boats.

Less really can be more. In rugby league's case, much less. (Paul Pottinger, *The Daily Telegraph*, Jan. 5, 2012. Paul Pottinger is Deputy Editor of *Carsguide*. His heretical views in no way reflect those of *The Daily Telegraph*, which knows that rugby league is the greatest game in the world.) [Yep! Ed]

Example of Fair Play that is nicer than Cristian Ronaldo's dribbling

Football has become an industry ruled by money, and the notion of fair play in sport has become lost along the way. "We must do everything to win" is the holy mantra that guides our leaders and coaches. For most players, fooling the referee for a goal or a penalty is no shame but an art. In this morass, occasionally, we see gestures that remind us that there are more important things than a victory, a goal or three points.

The last game of the Iranian championship, between Sepahan - Fajr Sepasi, produced a play that could become the Fair Play of the year, according to FIFA.

What happened?

In the 30th minute, when the score was nil all, the forward guest player Nazari, alone with the goalkeeper, instead of scoring kicked the ball outside when he saw that his direct opponent Farshid Talebi collapsed and was inert on the ground, thus giving the medical team the chance to intervene and take care of him.

So instead of being 1-0 for Fajr, the game ended 1-0 for Sepaham, the goal being scored in the 86th minute.

The guest team lost the points, but won the respect and admiration of football fans all over the world.

Fair Play, a priority in Iran.

It is not the first time that Iranian championship offers such incidents. A couple of seasons ago, in a game between Moghavemat and Steel Axin, when the score was 1-0 for the hosts, forward Amin Motevaselzadeh was in a perfect position to double the advantage for his team, but refused to score when he saw the goalkeeper collapsed on the turf. (Amir Kiarash, *Adevarul* (Bucharest), August 31, 2012)

Motown's road to ruin

DETROIT used to be the industrial heart of America and home to opportunity. Now it is one of the most violent cities in the world. In the devastated inner city, the 85 per cent black population either preys on each other or prays the country's first black president can save them. Because hope is all they have left.

Hope is why Earline Mason, who lives in one of the worst gang and violence-plagued areas of eastside Detroit, carefully maintains her small front lawn with a whipper-snipper. Amid the chaos of her existence, where half of the houses are now abandoned, burnt-out or bulldozed, and where the street signs are routinely removed to confuse the cops - should they ever bother turning up - Earline still believes. Half of the working-class population has fled to newer, safer townships at Detroit's outer edges, leaving the inner city to the gangs and those who are too poor to get out.

Earline's house, worth \$85,000 eight years ago, is now valued at \$10,000. But she will not give up. She has a sign on her lawn backing Obama in the 2012 presidential race, believing he will come through.

Even though Obama has never directly addressed his country's black population, fearing it would alienate white voters, she believes he is worried about her as an older black woman trying to maintain dignity in a dangerous slum.

"Yes, of course he thinks of me," says Earline. "They want to blame everything on Obama, but this was all happening before he got in there. It's not his fault." Everywhere is ghetto. You know it not just by the firebombed houses and collapsed porches and boarded-up ruins, but by what hangs on in the rubble.

Jerome Almon, 45, who runs a stable of lesser-known rappers and a fledgling music label called Murdercap (which stands for "murder capital"), believes Earline is deluded. He does not think hope is coming.

"You know you're in a ghetto when there's no proper stores but on every corner there's a church and across the street is a liquor store and across from that is a fast-food place and a nail salon and a funeral home because of all the shootings," he says. Almon, who served with the XVIII Airborne Corps in 1991's Operation Desert Storm, welcomed Obama in 2008, believing it would be a turning point for the ghetto in which he was raised. Four years on, he says things have gotten worse. He does not blame Obama directly but says that blacks (the term African-American is now rarely used) sat back thinking his victory would automatically transform their lives. It hasn't worked out that way.

Blacks own nothing in these parts except for crack houses and churches, says Almon, as we cruise the unbelievably devastated city. The Lebanese own all the fuel stations, the Iraqis have all the small stores. The small fast-food joints, called Coney Islands, that sell the fried chicken and melted cheese steaks and fries, are run by Albanians.

"It's some of the most fattening, unhealthy food on the planet," Almon says. "The Albanians won't eat it. But they know if it's unhealthy, we will. "The (Iraqi Christian) Chaldeans have four churches in Detroit and thousands of stores. We blacks have got thousands of churches and four stores. Who's smarter?"

At an intersection, foot soldiers from Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam work the pausing cars. They wear bow ties and sharp white shirts, selling the organisation's newspaper, *The Final Call*, and small bags of fruit. The idea is to inject some ideology, and health, into the streets, to bring about what Farrakhan calls the "resurrection of the black man and woman of America". But the organisation's demand for strict self-discipline has little appeal in the ghetto, where drugs and sex are the currency. The priorities are back to front. Incredibly, it is common to drive past what appears to be uninhabitable shacks, where children are living, and see late-model Cadillacs parked outside, with after-market \$5000 rims.

"The kids think all this is normal," Almon says. "They rarely leave their neighbourhood and they certainly don't go to other states or other countries. Everyone thinks it's normal. That's why nothing's done."

If Harvard produces academics, no one should be too surprised that the ghetto produces gunslingers, crack dealers and "baby mamas". "For a girl, her prospects are to have a baby or two by the time she's 18, low self-esteem, growing messed up because there are no real men in the ghetto," Almon says.

"And everyone's looking at her like a piece of meat. If she lived in the (outer) suburbs, she might be a doctor or an engineer. Here, she'll be a ho, a drug addict or a baby mamma.

"As for boys, you might as well tattoo a prison number right on their chest at birth. They are going to prison.

"You've got young, dumb, ignorant young guys raised by young women, with no men around. I cannot think of a worse scenario. They have the mentality of a child, the emotions of a woman and the destructive power of a grown man. "Put a gun in their hands, you know what happens. What's the chance of some white guy shooting Kid Rock or Justin Timberlake? It ain't gonna happen. But black rappers Tupac and Biggie (Smalls, aka the Notorious B.I.G.), they're dead." Almon, like many blacks, wishes Obama would - just once - speak directly to them. "I want him to come out and say: 'Stop embarrassing me. Stop killing each other,'" says Almon. "It's always been bad in America but it's far worse now. There are more guns, there is more poverty, the police are more vicious because they're scared, too, and the economy has gone to hell. "This city is Planet of the Apes and it's every gorilla for himself."

The Detroit murder rate in 2011 was 346 deaths, compared to 714 in 1974. But since that time, the city's population has dwindled from 1.5 million to 800,000. The murder rate has not dropped at all and Detroit is routinely named among America's five most violent cities. Until the early 1980s, Detroit had the highest-earning black population in the world. An unskilled labourer could earn more than \$100,000 in the city's car plants. The wages have since plummeted and car companies are demanding employees have two years of college education.

Motor City, as Detroit is known, is coming back after massive federal bailouts, but young ghetto men cannot get the jobs or do not want them. The crime lifestyle is perpetuated. Almon is angry with his own people, believing the high levels of

black criminality reflect on him personally. "You feel like you've got a bullseye on your back and a price on your head," he says. The case of black kid Trayvon Martin, shot dead in Florida in February by self-appointed street guardian George Zimmerman, sent a needless reminder to black America that they are always being profiled or watched with suspicion. "I always need to adjust my behaviour," Almon says. "If I'm not in a black neighbourhood, I dress not to scare people. Because if they see a black guy coming, they're scared. "I don't like it, but the truth of the matter is I understand it. It used to be that black people were scared of white people in America. "Now it's whites scared of blacks and it's because of the crime."

Obama has pragmatic reasons for not appearing to be a "black" president. Black leadership falls to old stagers like the Rev Al Sharpton and the Rev Jesse Jackson, who always turn up when there's a high-profile killing or a perceived injustice. In Almon's view, these men are not leaders but "race hustlers" who place responsibility anywhere but black society, which sends the wrong message to the ghettos. "Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson blame white people," Almon says. "Every time they get their name in the paper, they're just selling their products. They ain't no different to the black people who sold their people into slavery for bags of salt and beads. "Black people, we got to grow up. It's very difficult to believe that 50 years ago you had Dr King lead his movement against the mightiest government on Earth, and his followers, regular people, had such dignity, so well dressed, such respect. "Look at us now. No dignity, no pride, or respect. We are far, far less educated. How is that possible?" Almon's views do not have wide appeal in the ghetto. For Gwendolyn Chapman and her daughter Ebony, who live in a tough, drug-riddled eastside area, it's the city's services - police patrols, streetlights and rubbish collection - that have failed. But having a black president means all is not lost.

"Yes. I still have hope," she says. "I think he's a good president. He made things happen." She cites his recent court victory on health care, but you won't need health care if you're dead. Gwendolyn mentions that a body was pulled out of here the day before, one street away. "I want Obama and that's all I got to say," she says. Late last week, Republican candidate Mitt Romney spoke to the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, saying: "If you want a president who will make things better in the African-American community, you're looking at him." He was jeered.

Willie Bryant, 54, fixing up his uncle's house behind Hitsville, home of the Motown museum, says Detroit is becoming a ghost town. "Unemployment is at all-time high and the city has lost 50 per cent of its population," he says. "I don't know whether it's because of the city, the state or federal government. Something's got to be done. It's a Third World city now. I'll vote for (Obama) again because of who he's running against," he says.

"I still have hope. I live off hope." (Paul Toohey, *The Sunday Telegraph*, July 15, 2012)

Science and the environment

Laws of physics different in cosmos If John Webb, of the University of NSW, and his team, which won the Eureka Prize for Scientific Research, are correct, they will have shaken the foundations of physics. By analysing observations of more than 300 distant galaxies, they have found that one of the fundamental constants of nature is not a constant. This fine-structure constant, alpha - a measure of the strength of electromagnetism - seems to vary across the universe, getting weaker in one direction and stronger in the other. "The results astonished us," Professor Webb said last year. If confirmed, it means the laws of physics could be different elsewhere in the cosmos. ([Deborah Smith](#), Science Editor, *SMH*, Aug.29, 2012)

[It also means that the long ages of 'evolution' are nothing but trash, and that even on this earth the laws of physics that operated before the Flood of Noah were different from the ones that operate now, as the Bible says, and as true scientists stipulate. Ed.]

CAN'T KILL THE INTERNET

THE inventor of the World Wide Web has denied there is an "off-switch" which could turn off the internet across the globe. Tim Berners-Lee, who launched the web on Christmas Day 1990, said the internet was unstoppable. His comments come after moves by the Egyptian government to suppress the web led to speculation the regime had found a kill switch.

Arctic ice disappearing faster than previous estimates

Climate Central's chief climatologist Heidi Cullen joins Lateline to discuss the worrying new data about the extent of this summer's arctic sea-ice melt.

Transcript

TONY JONES, PRESENTER: A few weeks ago, NASA climate scientist James Hansen and two of his colleagues published a new study in PNAS, the official journal of the US Academy of Science, which Hansen says contains proof that extreme weather events in the last 10 years, including the European heatwave of 2003, the Russian heatwave of 2010 and last year's terrible droughts in Texas and Oklahoma were directly linked to global warming. proof if you like that climate change is actually happening now.

Now comes worrying new data about the extent of this summer's Arctic Sea ice melt and scientific fears that the ice cover could be broken up and gone by 2015. Well Heidi Cullen is the chief climatologist and a vice president of Climate Central, a media and research organisation focusing on climate change and she joins us live from Princeton, New Jersey.

Heidi Cullen, thanks for being there. And can I start with this: how significant is this latest scientific data on this year's Arctic Sea ice melt?

HEIDI CULLEN: Tony, I think it's very significant and it comes after a summer here in the US that's been incredibly extreme and it just shows further proof that we are seeing signs of warming across all regions. And what was interesting about this NSIDC study was that it showed that we've broken the 2007 record and we've still got two weeks left to go in the melt season.

TONY JONES: Yeah, revealing this new data, one US scientist put it this way: he said, "The architect ice cover used to be like a great big ice block or a block of ice and now it's like crushed ice," in fact he said it's like a giant slushie that's easy for storms to break up. It's a pretty colourful way of putting it, but is he right?

HEIDI CULLEN: He's absolutely right. And I think it really shows us that the Arctic is becoming more and more vulnerable and we know that what happens in the Arctic doesn't stay in the Arctic and in fact it has ramifications globally.

TONY JONES: Yeah, the big melt in 2007 was not attributed to a global warming but to a series of very big storms. There has been at least one big storm this season. I mean, is it possible that we're seeing simply the results of that rather than a global warming event?

HEIDI CULLEN: Well it's a combination of the two and I think what was really significant about the PNAS study and the recent report by NSIDC was that the Arctic Sea ice melt that we've seen both in terms of extent and volume, estimates are that 70 to 95 per cent of that melt can be attributed to us, it can be attributed to human activity. So, Mother Nature is playing a role, these storms that we've seen are playing a role, but we are the far bigger player in the signal that we've observed.

TONY JONES: Yeah, now, when the ice is fragile like this, when it is like slush or crushed ice, is it more vulnerable to the kind of storms you're talking about? Because some scientists are particularly worried when you get large areas of sea, you get bigger waves and the ice may break up very quickly.

HEIDI CULLEN: Yeah, that's exactly the case. And I think what also happens is that it just begins to set up this feedback pattern where as the ice gets smaller and more vulnerable, it exposes more and more of the dark ocean surface which just is more prone to heating and the warming increases, so it's kind of a vicious cycle.

TONY JONES: Yeah, can you explain the physics of that for us? I mean, are you simply saying if the ice cover is there, it sort of reflects the heat back up into space rather than being absorbed into the atmosphere?

HEIDI CULLEN: Yeah. I mean, just think of it as a white sheet, very reflective, a dark ocean surface, dark, very absorbing. As that ice melts, that reflective blanket begins to go away and this air-conditioner, if you will, this air-conditioner that the Arctic becomes weaker and weaker and darker and darker and more prone to warming and we're seeing it both in the Arctic as well as in the Antarctic.

TONY JONES: So, is it possible - stick with the Arctic for a moment. Is it possible to gauge what effects that will have on weather patterns and extreme climate events potentially in the Northern Hemisphere?

HEIDI CULLEN: Really, really big research question right now. And I think what we do understand is that the Arctic warming definitely has an impact on winters in the Northern Hemisphere. And again, it's connected to this feedback where in the fall and in the winter, as we have less and less sea ice, more ocean surface is exposed; that means more water and more moisture can go into the atmosphere, more fuel for storms. And basically we know that Arctic Sea ice plays a role in our Northern Hemisphere weather pattern specifically when it comes to winter weather and snow storms. And right now the science suggests that it influences the waviness of the jet stream and also its tendency to kind of get stuck in a pattern. So what it does is it influences the likelihood of **either an extremely snowy winter, which we've seen here in the US as well as in Europe, or a mild winter, so it kind of pushes us into one extreme or the other.**

[Emphasis ours. Note for the Catholic Church and its spokesman Cardinal Pel: stop picking up on variations in the climate to prove that Global Warming is just a normal cycle, like many in the history of this world. Global Warming is real and prophecied to occur at this exact time in world history. Ed.]

TONY JONES: Let me ask you - it's a pretty obvious question, really. If it were to completely melt away or largely melt away, the sea ice in the Arctic in summer, would it actually come back in winter?

HEIDI CULLEN: Well, as you get warmer and warmer, it gets tougher and tougher to grow back your ice sheets. So, right now scientists say that in the coming decades, possibly as soon as 2030, we could see a summer ice-free Arctic and that is absolutely going to make it tougher and tougher to have extensive ice sheet growth. So it's going to have impacts, absolutely.

TONY JONES: Now, one thing we should be quite clear about here: the melting sea ice is not going to raise sea levels, but the big fear is what happens if the great Greenland ice sheet begins to melt? Now what is the scientific evidence about what's happening to that ice sheet? Because if that does melt that would certainly raise sea levels.

HEIDI CULLEN: Right. So right now we know that the poles are warming faster than other parts of the planet just by the virtue of the fact that they're at the extremes. So, as the Arctic and the Antarctic continues to warm, these land ice sheets become more and more vulnerable as we see the warming increase. Greenland has upwards of 25 feet of ice stored in it, 25 feet of water stored in it and we don't expect to see that melt anytime soon completely. Projections say that by the end of the century we could see a metre of sea level rise increase, and basically, as the Arctic warms up, the Greenland ice sheet itself becomes more and more vulnerable, both at the surface and then underneath from melting below the surface.

TONY JONES: And do we have any evidence of what's happening actually in Antarctica in that regard? Because we seem to get conflicting stories from different scientists about this from time to time.

HEIDI CULLEN: Yeah, I think the recent Nature study that was published by folks at the British Antarctic Survey was a really beautiful study 'cause what they did was they took an ice core that took us back 50,000 years in Antarctica's history. And one of the tricky aspects of studying Antarctica is that we have very little data. Our data basically goes back to 1957 or so, but we know that specifically the Antarctic Peninsula has been warming upwards of three degrees Celsius over the past 50 years ago or so. We know there's been a lot of warming also on the West Antarctic Ice Sheet. We don't have a lot of data. But this ice core study really showed that the rate of change that we've witnessed over the past century has been really, really rapid. And the tricky part is with respect to attribution, so what caused this rapid warming? And I think the survey was very conservative. They didn't attempt to really do an attribution study, but they more or less said there's no way that we don't have an influence, that the human fingerprint isn't present, but interestingly enough, the Ozone Hole, stratospheric ozone loss could also be playing a role in the warming that we're seeing in the Antarctic in addition to greenhouse gas pollution. So it's a combination of several factors, but definitely we're playing a role as well.

TONY JONES: OK. Let's go to another study which certainly is an attribution study. A few weeks ago NASA's James Hansen published a new study in the official journal of the US Academy of Science. I mentioned that at the beginning of the interview. He says it actually proves that a whole series of extreme weather events throughout the Northern Hemisphere in the past 10 years can be linked directly now to global warming, and put bluntly, he says this is proof of climate change. He's jumped a long way from the sort of caution that climate scientists normally have. How's this study being received by other scientists?

HEIDI CULLEN: Well, you know, I think that Dr Hansen has been very outspoken and he - his work really, I think, it builds upon a body of evidence that really does show us that as the planet warms up, we're going to see more and more

extreme events and there have been really quite substantial attribution studies prior to Dr Hansen's that really shows that there is a human fingerprint in extreme weather events that we're seeing right here and right now. And I do think that the big takeaway from this whole field of science - call it attribution science or essentially doing weather autopsies - shows us that the extreme weather events that we're seeing really are being pushed by greenhouse gas pollution, essentially, that there is a human fingerprint in extreme weather events that we're seeing right here and right now.

TONY JONES: Yeah, Hansen's going more than a fingerprint though; he's saying the entire cause is now clear and he cited, as I said, a whole series of major weather events. Is it a controversial study? Are there scientists who are questioning this data?

HEIDI CULLEN: I think that there's more work to be done, but I think that it is fairly well established that when you warm up the planet, you increase extremes, and really, the likelihood of these events is going to become more and more frequent. And we know that the planet has warmed significantly over the past century, so all weather events are now born into a warmer climate. And it is just very rational to make this connection and to help people understand that the weather that we're observing today is not natural. It's partially a result of what we're doing to the planet.

TONY JONES: Yeah, when you say it's not natural, do you think the general public in the United States is actually getting this? I mean, can you imagine, for example, a time when Oprah Winfrey would put James Hansen on her couch and talk to him about climate science? Would an American audience be prepared to listen?

HEIDI CULLEN: You know, I do think that the past two years here in the US have really begun to change people's minds. After 2011, which here in the United States broke the record for the most billion-dollar weather disasters -we saw 14 billion-dollar weather disasters, totalling more than \$50 billion. We literally, on the seventh anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, are seeing the landfall of another hurricane here in the US, Isaac. We're seeing another year of increasingly extreme weather. We had wildfires in Colorado, the drought across the United States, which continues and is already affecting crops like corn and soy beans. So, the public has been very exposed to extreme weather over the past two years and it is absolutely impacting the way they perceive the weather and people are making the connection between extreme weather events and climate change more and more. And I think across-the-board we're seeing folks in the US really feel that there is a need to begin to address this problem. So we're seeing - I think we're seeing some positive change.

TONY JONES: It'll be interesting to see if that's reflected in politics because incidentally, James Hansen's policy solution to all of this is for the US to institute a carbon tax as Australia has actually done to make fossil fuels more expensive and clean energy solutions more economical. Can you imagine any US government in the future, in the near future at least, even considering such a thing?

HEIDI CULLEN: You know, right now, it really does appear that jobs and the economy are the major focus of our ongoing campaigns right now. The Republican National Convention is taking place right now in Tampa. I don't think you're going to hear much discussion of climate change. But interestingly enough, surveys suggest that the American public really does support moving away from fossil fuels and taking steps to prepare for climate change. They're making this connection between climate change and extreme weather and I think there's support, there's unfortunately just not a lot of leadership on the issue right now.

TONY JONES: Heidi Cullen, we're about to go to that question of US leadership shortly, on the Republican side anyway. We thank you very much for take the time to talk to us tonight.

HEIDI CULLEN: Thank you.

The end by 2030? Gland, Switzerland. Tropics in decline as natural resources exhausted at alarming rate – WWF 2010 Living Planet report. New analysis shows populations of tropical species are plummeting and humanity's demands on natural resources are sky-rocketing to 50 per cent more than the earth can sustain, reveals the 2010 edition of WWF's Living Planet Report – the leading survey of the planet's health. The biennial report, produced in collaboration with the Zoological Society of London and the Global Footprint Network, uses the global Living Planet Index as a measure of the health of almost 8,000 populations of more than 2,500 species. The global Index shows a decrease by 30 per cent since 1970, with the tropics hardest hit showing a 60 per cent decline in less than 40 years.

"There is an alarming rate of biodiversity loss in low-income, often tropical countries while the developed world is living in a false paradise, fuelled by excessive consumption and high carbon emissions," said Jim Leape, Director General of WWF International. While the report shows some promising recovery by species' populations in temperate areas, thanks in part to greater conservation efforts and improvements in pollution and waste control, tracked populations of freshwater tropical species have fallen by nearly 70 per cent – greater than any species' decline measured on land or in our oceans.

"Species are the foundation of ecosystems," said Jonathan Baillie, Conservation Programme Director with the Zoological Society of London. "Healthy ecosystems form the basis of all we have – lose them and we destroy our life support system." The Ecological Footprint, one of the indicators used in the report, shows that our demand on natural resources has doubled since 1966 and we're using the equivalent of 1.5 planets to support our activities. If we continue living beyond the Earth's limits, by 2030 we'll need the equivalent of two planets' productive capacity to meet our annual demands.

"The report shows that continuing of the current consumption trends would lead us to the point of no return," added Leape. "4.5 Earths would be required to support a global population living like an average resident of the of the US." Carbon is a major culprit in driving the planet to ecological overdraft. An alarming 11-fold increase in our carbon footprint over the last five decades means carbon now accounts for more than half the global Ecological Footprint. The top 10 countries with the biggest Ecological Footprint per person are the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Denmark, Belgium, United States, Estonia, Canada, Australia, Kuwait and Ireland. The 31 OECD countries, which include the world's richest economies, account for nearly 40 per cent of the global footprint. While there are twice as many people living in BRIC countries – Brazil, Russia, India and China – as there are in OECD countries, the report shows the current rate of per-person footprint of the BRIC countries puts them on a trajectory to overtake the OECD bloc if they follow same development path.

"Countries that maintain high levels of resource dependence are putting their own economies at risk," said Mathis Wackernagel, President of the Global Footprint Network. "Those countries that are able to provide the highest quality of life on the lowest amount of ecological demand will not only serve the global interest, they will be the leaders in a resource-constrained world." New analysis in the report also shows that the steepest decline in biodiversity falls in low-income countries, with a nearly 60 per cent decline in less than 40 years. The biggest footprint is found in high-income countries, on

average five times that of low-income countries, which suggests unsustainable consumption in wealthier nations rests largely on depleting the natural resources of poorer, often still resource rich tropical countries. The Living Planet Report also shows that a high footprint and high level of consumption, which often comes at the cost of others, is not reflected in a higher level of development. The UN Human Development Index, which looks at life expectancy, income and educational attainment, can be high in countries with moderate footprint. The Report outlines solutions needed to ensure the Earth can sustain a global population projected to pass nine billion in 2050, and points to choices in diet and energy consumption as critical to reducing footprint, as well as improved efforts to value and invest in our natural capital. "The challenge posed by the Living Planet Report is clear," said Leape. "Somehow we need to find a way to meet the needs of a growing and increasingly prosperous population within the resources of this one planet. All of us have to find a way to make better choices in what we consume and how we produce and use energy." WWF, 2010 *Living Planet Report*, October 13, 2010)

Icy silence greets new Antarctic climate findings There's been a curious silence this week on the climate-denier blogs, concerning a story which was one of the most clicked stories of the week on the national news site news.com.au. As news.com.au and virtually every media outlet in the country reported, an Australian scientist drilling into Antarctic ice cores found that 8000 years worth of natural CO2 increases have occurred in just 200 years since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. Joel Pedro, the glaciologist behind the study, said: "Just as the steady increase in CO2 helped to melt the ice caps and warm the earth out of the ice age, its rapid increase now is also driving up temperatures, only at a much faster rate." In other words, he came up with almost incontrovertible evidence that humans are driving global warming.

Another story floating around this week, which was also absent from several prominent denier blogs, showed that ice in Greenland has been shown to be melting over a larger area than ever previously detected in 30 years of satellite observations. Those were two big stories, yet there was silence from the deniers. Could it be that the best way to refute the strong evidence was to ignore it? While many deniers argue warming isn't happening, others admit it is, but say humans aren't to blame. Both groups have been completely silent all week. Elsewhere in this week's media, there was a minor blow-up about the vaccination issue, centered on the prominent anti-vax campaigner Meryl Dorey.

The vaccination issue provides an interesting comparison with climate change, as a vast majority of sensible people accept the science that vaccination is very effective in disease prevention. The people who oppose vaccination are mostly rogue crusaders with their own agenda to peddle. But as they do not threaten any industry or livelihoods there is no broad movement promoting their so-called facts as half of a genuine "debate".

Climate change is different. Climate change denial is a thriving industry. Unlike the anti-vaxers, there are many who stand to benefit by denying the science. Just as Australian mining industry figure and anti-warming author Ian Plimer. Nore, I'm not one of those believers in anthropogenic global warming vehemently opposed to coal, cattle farts or carbon dioxide. I believe that polluting industries should be phased out over generations, not months, so I am lukewarm at best about the usefulness of the carbon tax. The carbon tax will not save the world, but the world still needs saving. Climate change is here and already affecting everything from insurance premiums to food production and the health of the Barrier Reef. That's what the deniers really deny – our right to protect all of these things for our children. Are deniers starting to realize this? Or did they just forget to pick up the papers this week? (Anthony Sharwood, news.com.au, July 27, 2012)

Alarm about shortage of phosphorus, a nutrient essential for food production

A SCIENTIST known as Dr Rip, who has helped save lives in the surf; researchers who may have solved the mystery of why we exist in this particular part of the universe; and a team that has raised the alarm about a future shortage of phosphorus, a nutrient essential for food production.

These Sydney scientists were among researchers who won Australian Museum Eureka Prizes at a gala ceremony in Moore Park last night. Nineteen prizes worth \$180,000 were handed out for science teaching, mentoring, innovation, journalism and photography, as well as for many research disciplines. . . Research on phosphorus by Dana Cordell and Stuart White, of the University of Technology, Sydney, winners of the Eureka Prize for Environmental Research, have sparked international concern about how long the main source of this element - phosphate rock - will last.

There is no substitute for phosphorus in crop growth and its scarcity threatens the world's food production unless the resource is managed sustainably, Dr Cordell and Professor White have argued.

Vegetarian diet may be solution to impending water crisis, say scientists

LEADING water scientists have issued one of the sternest warnings yet about global food supplies, saying the world's population may have to switch almost completely to a vegetarian diet over the next 40 years to avoid catastrophic shortages. Humans derive about 20 per cent of their protein from animal-based products now, but this may need to drop to just 5 per cent to feed the extra 2 billion people expected by 2050, according to research by leading water scientists.

"There will not be enough water available on current croplands to produce food for the expected 9 billion population in 2050 if we follow current trends and changes towards diets common in Western nations," the report by Malin Falkenmark and colleagues at the Stockholm International Water Institute said.

"There will be just enough water if the proportion of animal-based foods is limited to 5 per cent of total calories and considerable regional water deficits can be met by a ... reliable system of food trade."

Dire warnings of water scarcity limiting food production come as Oxfam and the UN prepare for a possible second global food crisis in five years. Prices for staples such as corn and wheat have risen nearly 50 per cent on international markets since June, triggered by droughts in the US and Russia, and weak monsoon rain in Asia.

Oxfam has forecast the price spike will have a devastating impact in developing nations that rely heavily on food imports. Adopting a vegetarian diet is one option to increase the amount of water available to grow more food in a climate-erratic world, the scientists said. Animal protein-rich food consumes five to 10 times more water than a vegetarian diet. One-third of the world's arable land is used to grow crops to feed animals. Other options include eliminating waste and boosting trade between countries with surpluses and deficits.

"Nine hundred million people already go hungry and 2 billion people are malnourished in spite of the fact that per capita food production continues to increase," they said. "With 70 per cent of all available water being in agriculture, growing more food to feed an additional 2 billion people by 2050 will place greater pressure on available water and land."

The report's release coincides with the start of the annual world water conference in Stockholm where 2500 politicians, UN bodies, non-governmental groups and researchers from 120 countries meet to tackle supply problems. Competition for water between food production and other uses will intensify pressure on essential resources, the scientists said. "The UN predicts that we must increase food production by 70 per cent by mid-century," the report said. "This will place additional pressure on our already stressed water resources." A report from the International Water Management Institute said the best way to protect farmers from food insecurity in sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia was to help them invest in small pumps and simple technology. (John Vidal, *Guardian News & Media*, August 28, 2012)

Worst drought since 1956 threatens world food crisis

America's worst drought in more than half a century is threatening the world with a fresh food crisis. Corn crops have been severely damaged by the drought. A month of scorching temperatures across the country's mid west has sent corn and soybean prices to record highs, while wheat prices have reached levels not seen since the last food crisis in 2008.

The severest drought since 1956 in America's agricultural heartland has dashed the hopes that were alive just a couple of months ago of a bumper harvest. Traders and economists warned that the effect will ripple out from the US because it is the world's biggest producer of corn and a major supplier of soybeans and wheat.

"This year we have a rally in prices that is driven by the fundamentals," said Shawn McCambridge, an analyst at Jefferies Bache. "I really do anticipate these prices staying strong and producers will have to try to pass the cost onto consumers." The dizzying gain in prices has shocked many in the industry. Corn prices have surged 51pc over the last month, wheat is up 40pc and soybeans have gained almost 20pc. The prospect of another bout of food inflation will alarm governments in developing countries where the run-up in prices in 2008 caused widespread hunger and revolts. It also presents a new headwind for western countries trying to kickstart economic recoveries. . .

The drought forced the US government last week to cut its forecast for corn production this year to 12.9bn bushels from a prediction of 14.8bn it made last month. "I get on my knees every day and I'm saying an extra prayer right now," Tom Vilsack, the US agricultural secretary, said today. "If I had a rain prayer or a rain dance I could do, I would do it."

Dan Basse, president of AgResources in Chicago, said that the government's prediction will prove too optimistic if the dry weather persists. "We've been traipsing through the fields of southern Illinois and it is worse than the government says."

A sharp difference with 2008 is that speculative money is playing a far smaller role this time, said Mr McCambridge. Although rapid, analysts say the sharp increases over the last month are an appropriate response to the pullback in production and uncertainty over the eventual size of the corn, wheat and soybean crops. Corn futures hit a record \$8.16 a bushel on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange today, while soybeans touched \$17.49 a bushel. If there is some good news, it is that rice - a staple for many of the world's poorest - has escaped the increases. (Richard Blackden, *The Telegraph*, 19 Jul 2012)

Extreme heat, floods likely as weather evolves

EXTREME weather events in 2009 and March this year provided the people of NSW with an indication of what the state is increasingly likely to face as the climate changes, a report by the federal government's Climate Commission says.

The year 2009 was the hottest year on record in NSW and a rise in the number of similar heatwave events is predicted. The number of days reaching more than 35 degrees in Sydney is expected to triple by 2070.

Climate change "cannot be ruled out" as a factor in recent heavy rainfalls, such as the flash flooding in Sydney on March 8, the wettest March day for more than 25 years, the report says.

The state, on average, is expected to become drier, increasing the risk of longer, harsher droughts and of bushfires, but the intensity of downpours could also increase in a hotter climate, due to warmer ocean temperatures.

The report, ***The Critical Decade, NSW Climate Impacts and Opportunities***, is released today. At a public forum at Parramatta Town Hall tomorrow night the public can question members of the commission, which is an independent panel of climate scientists and policy and business leaders. The chief commissioner, Tim Flannery, said NSW was highly vulnerable to climate change. "Changes in Sydney's climate will have far-reaching implications for health, agriculture, tourism, water security and biodiversity," said Professor Flannery, who will attend the forum.

But the state also had the opportunity to benefit from a boom in clean energy, he said.

NSW is a world leader in research on solar photovoltaics and has produced the heads of four of the six top global manufacturers of this technology, including Shi Zhengrong, the chief executive of the world's largest solar company, Suntech. The report says an estimated \$20 billion would be invested in solar power in Australia by 2020 and NSW was "well placed" to capitalise on this. "Even if solar panels are imported from overseas, around 30 to 40 per cent of panel installation costs will go to local installers," it says. The climate commissioners Will Steffen and Lesley Hughes, who will also attend the forum, said a shift to cleaner energy sources was needed to help minimise climate change risks.

"This is the critical decade for action. The longer we wait, the more difficult and costly it will be," Professor Steffen, of the Australian National University, and Professor Hughes, of Macquarie University, conclude in their report summary. They say the coastal areas of NSW face significant risks from sea level rises. "A 1.1-metre rise by the end of the century could put between 40,000 to 60,000 houses, 1200 commercial buildings and 250 kilometres of highway in NSW at risk of inundation." With a sea level rise of 0.5 metres, storm surge flooding in Sydney that is now considered a one-in-100-year event could occur every few months. (Deborah Smith, *SMH*, May 14, 2012)

Climate Commission: The Status of the Global Climate 2011

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) has released a statement on the status of the global climate in 2011. The WMO is an agency of the United Nations that provides authoritative information on the state and interactions of the atmosphere and oceans and their effect on the climate and water resources.

The WMO found that in 2011 the global mean surface temperature was the highest recorded in a La Nina year. At 0.4°C above the long term average, this represents the eleventh warmest year on record. Globally the amount of rain and snow

falling in 2011 was the second highest on record over land. However, there was a marked difference between wet and dry regions, with some areas of intense flooding and some areas of intense drought.

Australia saw its second wettest year on record, with 52% higher rainfall than normal. Cyclone Yasi was the globe's most intense landfall cyclone in 2011 and Australia's most intense landfall cyclone since 1918. The Perth region experienced destructive fires in February and November, with the former causing the worst property damage in WA since 1961. While Australia was wet, other parts of the world experienced extreme heat and drought:

- The mean annual temperatures were up to 5°C above normal in parts of the Arctic coast, and Arctic sea ice cover was well below average in 2011, with the second lowest seasonal minimum.
- The United States broke a number of heatwave records, including the highest mean summer temperature recorded and records for the number of days above 37.8°C.
- France, Spain, Switzerland, Brussels and Luxembourg reported their warmest years on record.
- East Africa saw a severe drought that began in late 2010 and continued through most of 2011, which caused a humanitarian disaster. Significant famine and population displacement meant that approximately 13 million people required relief assistance.

Skating on a thin crust

The idea that a changing climate can persuade the ground to shake, volcanoes to rumble and tsunamis to crash on to unsuspecting coastlines seems, at first, to be bordering on the insane. How can what happens in the thin envelope of gas that shrouds and protects our world possibly influence the potentially earth-shattering processes that operate deep beneath the surface? The fact that it does reflects a failure of our imagination and a limited understanding of the manner in which the different physical components of our planet - the atmosphere, the oceans and the solid earth, or geosphere - intertwine and interact. If we think about climate change at all, most of us do so in a very simplistic way: so, the weather might get a bit warmer; floods and droughts may become more of a problem and sea levels will slowly creep upwards. Evidence reveals, however, that our is an almost unimaginably complicated beast, which reacts to a dramatically changing climate in all manner of different ways; a few - like the aforementioned - straightforward and predictable; some surprising and others downright implausible. Into the latter category fall the manifold responses of the geosphere.

The world we inhabit has an outer ring that is extraordinarily sensitive to change. While the earth's crust may seem safe and secure, the geological calamities that happen with alarming regularity confirm that this is not the case. In April 2010 Eyjafjallajökull, an ice-covered Icelandic volcano, brought European air traffic to a grinding halt. And a year ago, our planet's ability to shock and awe headed the news once again as the east coast of Japan was bludgeoned to a cataclysmic combination of megaquake and tsunami, resulting - at a quarter of a trillion dollars or so - in the biggest natural-catastrophe bill ever. In the light of such events, it somehow seems appropriate to imagine the earth beneath our feet as a slumbering giant that tosses and turns periodically in response to various pokes and prods. Mostly, these are supplied by the stresses and strains associated with the eternal dance of a dozen or so rocky tectonic plates across the face of our world; a sedate waltz that proceeds at about the speed of fingernails grow. But changes in the environment also have a key role to play in waking the giant, as growing numbers of geological studies targeting our post-ice age world have disclosed.

Between about 20,000 and 5000 years ago, our planet underwent an astonishing climatic transformation. Over the course of this period, it flipped from the frigid wasteland of deepest and darkest ice age to the - broadly speaking - balmy, temperate world upon which our civilization has developed and thrived. During this extraordinarily dynamic episode, as the immense ice sheets melted and colossal volumes of water were decanted back into the oceans, the pressures acting on the solid earth also underwent massive change. In response, the crust bounced and bent, rocking our planet with a resurgence in volcanic activity, a proliferation of seismic shocks and burgeoning giant landslides. . . . The breathtaking response of the geosphere as the great ice sheets crumbled might be considered as providing little more than an intriguing insight into the prehistoric working of our world, were it not for the fact that our planet is once again in the throes an extraordinary climatic transformation - this time brought about by human activities.

Clearly, the Earth of the early 21st century bears little resemblance to the frozen world of 20,000 years ago. Today, there are no great continental ice sheets to dispose of, while the ocean basins are already pretty much topped up. On the other hand, climate change projections repeatedly support the thesis that global average temperatures could rise at least as rapidly in the course of the next century or so during postglacial times, reaching levels at high latitudes capable of driving catastrophic breakup of polar ice sheets as thick as those that once covered much of Europe and North America. Could it be, then, that if we continue greenhouse gas emissions to rise unchecked and fuel serious warming, our planet's crust will begin to toss and turn once again? The signs are that this is already happening. In Alaska, where temperatures have risen by more than three degrees in the past half century, the glaciers are melting at a staggering rate, some losing up to one kilometre in thickness in the past 100 years. The reduction in weight on the crust beneath is allowing faults contained therein to slide more easily, promoting increased earthquake activity in recent decades. The permafrost that helps hold the state's mountain peaks together is also thawing rapidly, leading to a rise in the number of giant rock and ice avalanches. In fact, in mountainous areas around the world, landslide activity is on the up; a reaction both to a general rise in global temperatures and to the increasingly frequent summer heat waves. Whether or not Alaska proves to be the "canary in the cage" - the geological shenanigans there heralding much worse to come - depends largely on the degree to which we are successful in reducing the ballooning greenhouse gas burden arising from our civilisation's increasingly polluting activities, thereby keeping rising global temperatures to a couple of degrees at most. So far, it has to be said, there is little cause for optimism, emissions rising by almost 6 per cent in 2010 when the world economy continued to bump along the bottom. Furthermore, the failure to make any real progress on emissions control at December's Durban climate conference ensures that the outlook is bleak. Our response to accelerating climate change continues to be consistently asymmetric, in the sense that it is far below the level the science says is needed if we are to have any chance of avoiding devastating consequences.

So what - geologically speaking - can we look forward to if we continue to pump out greenhouse gases at the present hell-for-leather rate? With resulting global average temperatures likely to be several degrees higher by this century's end, we could almost certainly say an eventual goodbye to the Greenland ice sheet, and probably the covering West Antarctica too, committing us - ultimately - to a 10-metre or more rise sea levels. GPS measurements reveal that the crust beneath the

Greenland ice sheet is already rebounding in response to rapid melting, providing the potential – according to researchers – for future earthquakes, as faults beneath the ice are relieved of their confining land. The possibility exists that these could trigger submarine landslides spawning tsunamis capable of threatening North Atlantic coastlines. Eastern Iceland is bouncing back too as its Vanajokull ice cap fades away. When and if it vanishes entirely, new research predicts a lively response from the volcanoes residing beneath. A dramatic elevation in landslide activity would be inevitable in the Andes, Himalayas, European Alps and elsewhere. Across the world, as sea levels climb remorselessly, the load-related bending of the crust around the margins of the ocean basins might in time act to sufficiently “unclamp” coastal faults such as California’s San Andreas, allowing them to move more easily; at the same time acting to squeeze magma out of susceptible volcanoes that are primed and ready to blow.

The bottom line is that through our climate-changing activities, we are loading the dice in favour of escalating geological havoc at a time when we can most do without it. Unless there is a dramatic and completely unexpected turnaround in the way in which the human race manages itself and the planet, long term prospects for our civilization look increasingly grim. At a time when energy, water and food resources are coming under ever growing pressure, and when the debilitating effects of anthropogenic climate change are insinuating themselves increasingly into every nook and cranny of our world and lives, the last thing we need is for dozing subterranean giant to awaken. (Bill McGuire, *SMH/Guardian News & Media*, Mar 22, 2012).

Did Noah's Flood spark global warming? New documentary says temperature rising for last 5,000 years. Yes, global temperatures are rising, says a new video documentary, but it's not because of manmade carbon dioxide gases as former Vice President Al Gore insists. It's because Earth has been warming slowly but surely ever since Noah's Flood 5,000 years ago, says a retired geophysicist and climate researcher in the video.

In "*Miraculous Messages: From Noah's Flood to the End Times*," the latest release from Grizzly Adams Productions, John Baumgardner, who spent 12 years working on a Global Ocean Model at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico and was directly involved with climate research, does not dispute the Earth's experience of increasingly warmer temperatures. But he contends the primary cause is not related to man's burning of coal and oil. Baumgardner notes that the Earth has experienced warming and cooling cycles several times since Noah's Flood approximately 5,000 years ago. One such period was from AD 900 to AD 1300. "During that time the Vikings colonized Greenland, and abundant farming, grasslands, herds, and even vineyards were present in Greenland," he says. The "Little Ice Age" followed this warm period. In AD 1600, during this period, the Thames River in London froze. With unmistakable evidence of significant variations in global temperature over the past 2,000 years, the current warming is "not out of range," Baumgardner explains. "Current warming actually started in 1800 and accelerated during the 20th century, so now we're about a degree warmer than we were 100 years ago." "*Miraculous Messages*" looks at additional factors that affect climate cycles. According to Baumgardner, recent research indicates a connection between the amount of solar (magnetic) activity on the sun and the average temperature of the Earth's surface. "Currently solar activity is high," he says. "There are fewer cosmic rays reaching into the atmosphere and, as a result, less clouds and higher temperatures."

Walt Brown, a retired U.S. Air Force colonel, a mechanical engineer from MIT, and the former chief of science and technology studies at the Air War College, is another scientist featured in "*Miraculous Messages*." According to Brown, it is inevitable that man contributes to some global warming, "but the amount is probably not large and no one really knows the extent." The documentary explores how Noah built his massive Ark, the number of animals aboard, and where the Ark landed, based on research from scientists in various fields. In addition, "*Miraculous Messages*" explains in depth how a catastrophic worldwide flood could have happened and the current evidences left behind from this event – 25 mysterious anomalies found on Earth. (*WorldNetDaily.com*, September 22, 2007)

National

The real crime in Kings Cross is police inaction

WHEN the most senior police officer in central Sydney, an assistant commissioner no less, declares a section of the city a no-go zone after midnight you know you've lost the battle against crime. "Those who stay out after midnight are either going to become one of two things: they are going to be a victim or an offender, the way things are going," assistant commissioner Mark Murdoch said last week, responding to the outcry over the fatal assault on 18-year-old Thomas Kelly in Kings Cross.

Why the defeatist attitude? Isn't there another option apart from "victim" or "offender"? It's called law-abiding citizens out and about in their own city without fear of violent crime. Or are we supposed to cower at home behind twitching curtains while thugs and bullies rule the streets. Th

at's no way to run a city. You only have to look at the renaissance of New York's Times Square to see what is possible with proactive policing and determined political leadership. When my family lived in Manhattan in the 1980s, sections of the city were dangerous no-go zones. Times Square, at the centre of the island, was the seedy province of pimps, prostitutes and crack dealers. But fast forward to today and the city is unrecognisable. Between 1990 and 2011, the homicide rate fell by 80 per cent, the robbery rate by 83 per cent and the burglary rate by 86 per cent. Times Square is now a bustling entertainment precinct where you feel completely safe walking with children at 1am.

The agent of this turnaround was tough former prosecutor Rudy Giuliani, who became mayor of New York in 1993, on a platform of cleaning up the city. His handpicked police chief Bill Bratton, instituted a statistics-driven, zero tolerance approach to crime which was inspired by the work of sociologist James Q. Wilson, who died in March, aged 80. Wilson's "Broken Windows" theory meant focusing on small crimes, such as littering, and keeping neighbourhoods free of signs of disorder, such as broken windows. The idea is that if it looks like someone cares, it is more likely order will prevail. It turned out that zero tolerance for anti-social behaviour, and targeting petty crime, prevented serious crime from occurring, as did jailing repeat offenders. The result, wrote Giuliani in a tribute to Wilson this year, was "a resurgent city and thousands of New Yorkers who are alive today because of his radical solution to a tidal wave of crime." In his book, *Turnaround*, Bratton

writes that before he arrived, years of corruption scandals had left the police force "seemingly without the will to fight crime. The cops on the beat wanted to do their jobs, but the brass didn't trust them to do it."

Sound familiar? "The NYPD had been content to focus on reacting to crime while accepting no responsibility for reducing, let alone preventing it. Crime, the theory went, was caused by societal problems that were impervious to police intervention. "(But) I believed that police could, in fact, be counted upon to have a significant effect on crime. "With effective leadership and management we could control behaviour in the street, and by controlling behaviour we could change behaviour. If we could change behaviour we could control crime." Plenty of anti-law enforcement academics have tried to deny the New York success story. But the facts are the facts. Policing made a difference.

What a contrast to Sydney, where police provide the cop-out excuse that poor Thomas Kelly was in the "wrong place at the wrong time." How? It was 10.05pm on a Saturday. He was talking on his mobile phone and walking hand in hand with his girlfriend down Victoria St, a tree-lined residential street 200m from an apartment block where I used to live, in the most densely populated place in Australia. Victoria St has a Holiday Inn, cafes, an upscale restaurant, backpacker joints and the back entrance to Kings Cross train station. It's not exactly the Bronx, circa 1987. "You could have had 1000 police at Kings Cross on Saturday night. It would not have prevented this incident from occurring," said assistant commissioner Murdoch.

Really? But police believe the man who smashed Thomas Kelly in the face last Saturday night had also king-hit another young man at the same location just five minutes earlier. If police had been around to see that first assault they could have arrested the perpetrator and Thomas would be safely home with his family.

In the past week, we have a lot of talk around the margins, about CCTV cameras, more regulation of pubs and clubs, more public transport, prepaid taxis. But surveillance cameras won't prevent an aggressor fuelled by crystal meth and alcohol killing another innocent. Former Detective Sergeant Tim Priest, who blew the whistle on an earlier era of police inaction in Australia's former heroin capital Cabramatta, knows what needs to be done.

"Kings Cross is dangerous, seedy and dirty, It's an embarrassment. There has to be a line drawn."

He says NSW police should follow the Bratton model, and establish "special crime areas" in Kings Cross and other crime hotspots, from Parramatta to the CBD. "Put a cop on every street corner. It's not rocket science."

Plain clothes detectives, like the old 21 Division, would arrest troublemakers and anyone on the street who looks intoxicated or under the influence of drugs. "No tickets, no warnings, no move-on notices. You are taken off the streets," he said. "People soon know if they play up they'll spend the night in a cell." The place would be cleaned up in weeks. But Priest doesn't detect any will for action from Premier O'Farrell, whose great law and order gesture last week was to close Grafton jail, another sign that this risk-averse government is going soft on crime. Without political leadership, we can hardly blame police for avoiding trouble. By the time Giuliani came along, New Yorkers were fed up with crime, and ready for the remedy.

For Sydneysiders, Thomas Kelly's death was a turning point. But we will have to wait for our Rudy Giuliani. (Miranda Devine, *The Sunday Telegraph*, July 15, 2012)

Lunatics are running the asylum TWO boatloads of asylum seekers this week show how hard it is to speak frankly about what's really happening with our Swiss cheese borders. For a start, I am forced to say "asylum seekers", even when these two boats suggest we're being used. Boat one is of 10 Chinese "asylum seekers" who've docked in Darwin for repairs and food. These Falun Gong practitioners were planning to go to New Zealand, but were given four days to consider staying in Australia instead. The sticking point: they'd have to undergo mandatory detention here, when they wouldn't in New Zealand. So here are people who have passed through Indonesia, and rejected it, and now wonder if Australia is good enough. As one passenger, Hao Xiu Xia, put it: "If the Australian government could give us a guarantee we would only be in detention for two or three months, if they gave us a time limit we would consider staying." We've got to make them an offer? These are people no longer fleeing danger, but shopping for a good deal.

Incidentally, the Gillard government has been quite prepared to help send their yacht on to New Zealand, but has damned the opposition as "reckless" for suggesting such boats could just be turned back to Indonesia instead. What a joke. Oh, and notice how well-informed these 10 Chinese are on the border laws of Australia and New Zealand? More evidence that the changes we make to laws here are noted by boat people and people smugglers overseas and factored into their decisions. Remember how this government once insisted its weakening of the boat people laws in 2008 couldn't have caused the huge rise in boat arrivals? That only "push factors" were to blame?

They really did think that lie would work ... Boat two is the one with 120 asylum-seekers - all men from Iran and Afghanistan - who were rescued by a tanker while sailing to Australia, only to be returned to Indonesia.

At first they refused to get off the tanker, demanding the same kind of resettlement deal the Rudd government offered in 2009 to lure Sri Lankan asylum-seekers off our Oceanic Viking. Once again, how well informed these latest boat people are about how soft we can be. I suspect they also know all about our laws, since so many claim to be from Iran, one of the less likely sources of refugees. You see, Iran refuses to take back any Iranian who asks us for asylum if that person does not want to go back, which means once an "Iranian asylum seeker" touches our shores, they're home. But note, again, how these Iranian and Afghans were already safe in Indonesia, which has the added convenience for them of being Muslim. Yet this week they were demanding something more from Australia.

Another thing: does the oppression these 120 men are allegedly fleeing only affect fit, young men? Is Iran not dangerous for women, children and the old? Or are these men so selfish as to save only themselves? Actually, there is another possibility - and it's one that these two boats so powerfully suggest. It is that what we call "asylum seekers" are more often than not seeking something other than the asylum we'd gladly offer people in genuine fear of their lives. They could be after an economic opportunity. A welfare state. An immigration spot that they would not get if they asked for it by legal means, using identity papers we could check. In other words, we are seeing more people that ... well, that we're still obliged as journalists to call "asylum seekers" - because the Press Council insists we should, and the Gillard government is only too anxious for an excuse to muzzle us if we don't submit. As the council has decreed: "Great care must be taken to avoid describing people who arrived by boat without a visa in terms that are likely to be inaccurate or unfair in relation to at least some of them ...

"Depending on the specific context, therefore, terms such as "illegal immigrants" or "illegals" may constitute a breach of the council's standards of practice on these grounds. The risk of breach can usually be avoided by using a term such as 'asylum seekers' ... " So a debate on one more battleground of the left is made too dangerous for us to speak frankly. But

then you see these boats, plus another two on Tuesday carrying 250 people, and I suspect the truth cannot be denied, whatever the latest words used to hide it. (Andrew Bolt, *The Sun Herald*, April 12, 2012)

How Health Services Union betrayed all workers

Craig Thomson is at the centre of allegations, which he denies, that have stained the unions. Source: The Daily Telegraph

IT hasn't been a great week to be a union official. Once again the ongoing stories of alleged corruption and unethical behaviour at the Health Services Union (HSU) have dominated the headlines. The actions of a few in a union of 77,000 members have tarnished the reputation of the entire union movement which represents two million Australians.

So far I haven't spoken publicly about the issues surrounding the HSU and I have (like most other union leaders in the country) lived in hope that the leadership of the union would get their show into order and get back on with the job of fighting for the rights of low-paid health workers. And while it is clear that many branches of the HSU have made necessary changes, it seems that other parts of the union have failed to resolve the significant questions that remain unanswered about the corporate governance of the organisation. That is why on Thursday the Executive of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) took the unprecedented action of voting to suspend the HSU from the ACTU. It was not a decision that was taken lightly and it was a decision that weighed heavily on the shoulders of all members of the ACTU Executive. But the fact that there were 1797 votes cast in favour of the suspension and 103 against shows how strongly the vast bulk of the union movement feels about the current state of play inside the HSU.

It is important that the rest of the labour movement send a clear and unambiguous message to the leadership of the HSU. A message that representing workers is an honour that should never be abused and that if we are to take on powerful employers and governments to fight for what's fair and decent in our society we have to ensure that our own house is in order.

Unfortunately for the rest of the labour movement, the alleged actions of a small minority in a relatively small sector have stained the reputations of the majority. Every day across this country 4000 officials work for unions of all persuasions in very adverse conditions to ensure Australia remains the home of the fair go, and the voiceless in our society are heard. The two million workers who make up the labour movement are police, nurses, teachers and doctors. They drive our buses, fight fires, manufacture products and sell them to us in shops. They clean our streets, collect our garbage, serve us in banks and provide vital services to our nation. They are good and decent Australians and, as Jimmy Barnes said, they're just working hard to make a living. And these working men and women made a conscious decision that they needed a voice in their workplace which is why they are part of their union. Many of them made that decision despite their employer trying to dissuade them from doing so and despite decades of demonisation of unions by the Liberal Party. Those of us who have been fortunate enough to be elected to represent those two million workers have a serious responsibility. We have an obligation to manage the funds that those workers pledge to their union and we have a responsibility to always act in a manner which puts the interests of our members first. And those of us who manage the unions have an added responsibility to not betray those 4000 officials who work each day fighting for the rights of our members. Indeed, when I reflect on the current debacle inside the HSU it's the more junior officials of the union that I feel most sorry for, apart from the membership of course. These officials are decent people, working long hours in adverse circumstances for not a lot of money, and now they have had much of their hard work thrown out the window due to allegations of selfish action by a few despicable individuals.

All officials across all unions have the right to be angry. They have done nothing wrong. They too work extremely hard for very little reward and do the right thing by their fellow unionists, but because of this HSU debacle the public reputation of union officials has been destroyed. Many in the conservative press and on the Liberal side of politics have taken great joy out of this situation. They've always been hostile to organisations which empower working people -- unions do that so they'll jump at any opportunity to weaken the movement's credibility. Unfortunately, with a small minority in our movement giving our enemies free kicks things have become that much harder for the rest of our members. But at the end of the day what we seek to achieve for working people is the right thing. Providing strength and unity for workers is still necessary in our society. That's why taking action against the enemy within was the right thing to do for the labour movement -- and will be the right thing to do in the times to come. (Paul Howes, *The Sunday Telegraph*, April 8, 2012)

Tax challengers take a swing, but legislation is unlikely to buckle

The Gillard government's carbon and mining taxes are set to be tested in the High Court. These constitutional assaults will be launched by two of Australia's mining billionaires. At this stage, it is far from clear that they have even the beginnings of a winnable case. The attack on the carbon tax is led by the Queensland mining magnate Clive Palmer. He revealed on ABC's 7:30 that he had received legal advice that "the carbon tax in its current form is unconstitutional", but refused to set out why.

Palmer has left constitutional experts scratching their heads. It is not clear whether he has a genuine argument that the carbon tax is invalid or whether his statement should be given the same weight as his charge that the Greens are guilty of treason because they are being funded by the CIA to destroy Australia's coal industry.

Palmer's claim can be assessed only when he releases the basis of his challenge. That said, it will be very difficult for him to mount a case. The constitution grants the Federal Parliament a broad power of taxation. It is also clear the tax has been drafted carefully with a view to withstanding constitutional challenge. It relies upon a range of federal powers, and comes with a number of clauses designed to head off constitutional attack. It may be that a careful, forensic analysis by Palmer's lawyers of the many hundreds of pages of carbon tax legislation has thrown up a technical flaw or novel High Court argument. This is unlikely but the possibility cannot be discounted. We will have to wait to see whether his announcement was hot air.

In contrast, the likely basis of attack on the minerals resource rent tax by the West Australian mining billionaire Andrew Forrest is well known. It has been suggested this tax breaches the requirement in section 114 of the constitution that the Commonwealth not "impose any tax on property of any kind belonging to a state".

It is hard to see how this argument can succeed. The mining tax is not, in any direct sense, a tax on state property. Instead, it is calculated as a percentage of the profits made by large mining companies from the extraction of coal and iron ore. This is consistent with an earlier High Court decision that found section 114 was not infringed by a tax on income

produced by state property. This is a risky line of attack for the states. It proceeds on the assumption coal and iron ore are state property. Such minerals are indeed owned by the Crown, but the concept of the Crown is divided between the Commonwealth and the states. The High Court might find that the minerals are, in fact, owned partly by the Commonwealth.

It has also been suggested the mining tax is invalid because it breaches the requirement in section 51(2) of the constitution that federal taxes not "discriminate between states or parts of states". This protection is complemented by section 99, which says the Commonwealth must not, by any law or regulation of trade, commerce, or revenue, give "preference" to one state over another. The mining tax would certainly fall foul of these provisions if it imposed a higher rate of tax in one state than in another. But it does not. The tax is the same throughout Australia in being set at an effective rate of 22.5 per cent.

The impact of the tax will certainly be felt more keenly in states with large mining industries, especially Western Australia. However, the High Court has said that this does not amount to discrimination. It is always the case that federal taxes operate differentially across the country, depending on levels of industry and income generation. It is not possible to say conclusively whether the constitutional attacks on the carbon and mining taxes will succeed. This will depend on the fine detail of the arguments and which specific aspects of the legislation are challenged - both of which have yet to be released. Nevertheless, both schemes appear to be robust examples of federal tax legislation. It would be very surprising indeed to see either struck down by the High Court. If the carbon tax and mining tax are to be removed from the statute book, this will almost certainly need to be achieved through the political process. (George Williams, Sydney Morning Herald, March 27, 2012)

Advising a governor-general

Sir John Kerr's dismissal of the Whitlam government in 1975 is still a subject of heated debate.

There's more to the issue than some Whitlam government partisans are willing to admit, J. R. Nethercote writes

There is a danger that the furore surrounding Sir Anthony Mason's activity in events leading up to Sir John Kerr's decision to remove the Whitlam government on Remembrance Day 1975 will obscure some important matters concerning the manner in which governors-general fulfil their responsibilities.

There has been a concerted but ill-informed effort to suggest that a governor-general can only act upon the advice of his or her official advisers, ministers of the Crown appointed under section 64 of the Constitution, and that only ministers can tender advice to a governor-general. These views encapsulate the normal situation in ordinary day-to-day conduct of the vice-regal role. But they are far from the full story. It is crucial to recall, first of all, that "advice" in this context - what might be called "advice" with a capital "A" - is of a particular kind.

"Advice" tendered by a minister to a vice-regal office-holder is not, like advice in colloquial usage, optional. Subject to some well-known qualifications such as the right to counsel and to warn, to seek clarification or more information, "Advice" in this sense is obligatory. The Governor-General does not have a choice about accepting it. It thus differs from the advice an official gives to a minister. Advice in that relationship can be adopted, amended, qualified, laid aside, or rejected, amongst other possible responses. And there is no question these days that a minister is free to look elsewhere if that suits the occasion. In the case of 1975, many, including former ministers from the Whitlam government, have rushed in to express shock, horror and disbelief that a governor-general should look for advice from anyone other than a minister or some other office-holder, such as the solicitor-general, designated by a minister.

While such a view obviously has rhetorical force in debates about removal of the Whitlam government, especially among the faithful, most people should have been more circumspect. In particular, they should simply have cast their minds back two years to the situation which arose following the 2010 election, when neither side of politics secured a majority in the House of Representatives. In the event, after protracted negotiation, the parliamentarians sorted the situation out among themselves. Thus, any need for special vice-regal activity was averted. But it need not have been so. Without the various alliances, the Governor-General could have had to decide whether to allow the Gillard government to test its position in the House of Representatives (on the Address-in-Reply, for instance), even if it did not appear to have majority support; or the Governor-General might have insisted, in such circumstances, that the government surrender the seals of office.

The question of having a fresh election for the House could have arisen. These and related issues were active in the fortnight or so following the 2010 election and they had likewise been present in 1961 for some time until it became clear that the Menzies government, by the slimmest margin, had retained office.

In 1989, the governor of Tasmania, Sir Phillip Bennett, found himself in just such a predicament. The premier, Robin Gray, armed with a formidable array of opinions about the law from such luminaries as Sir Maurice Byers, Robert Ellicott, Tom Hughes, Professor R. D. Lumb and Professor Pat Lane sought, in view of the close result in which neither side had a majority, a fresh election. When the House of Assembly met, the Liberal government was defeated in a confidence vote.

In addressing the situation the governor had available to him opinions from another group of jurists, among them the recently retired chief justice of the High Court, Sir Harry Gibbs. The governor spoke to the leader of the Labor opposition, Michael Field, and interviewed the independents. Satisfied that a viable government could be formed, he informed the premier who thereupon resigned and advised that the leader of the opposition be sent for.

In the crisis of October-November 1975, the prime minister took the view that the governor-general was not entitled to seek outside advice; as Sir John Kerr put it, "I could only get advice through him." The Whitlam proposition holds so far as advice with a capital "A" is concerned. It carries less weight when it is matter where the governor-general has some discretion; incapacity to secure passage of budget legislation in Australia is just such a circumstance.

Many apologists for the Whitlam government, following Whitlam himself, seek to buttress its position in the dispute by writing and speaking as if Australia had a British constitution as it emerged following the Parliament Act 1911. The real position is that the Australian Parliament, under the Australian Constitution, is fully bicameral.

Even budget legislation needs the consent of both Houses; attempts to argue otherwise are simply deceptive sophistry. In the case of 1975, the need to look elsewhere apart from ministers partly arose because the governor-general had hardly been well-served by those claiming to be his exclusive advisers. The famous Enderby-Byers opinion intended to nullify an earlier unsolicited opinion of the shadow attorney-general, Robert Ellicott, never got past a draft and was reportedly never signed by the attorney-general himself. Even if the governor-general is a mere "appointed official," as Gough Whitlam's latest biographer seeks to portray him, he would in this position be entitled to ponder remedial action.

It is, anyway, an absurdity to imagine, even in the world of 1975, a vice-regal officer could be quarantined from other information and opinions aside from that which his official advisers deigned to pass on.

In 1975 there were unsolicited opinions. Then, as now, there was plenty of material in the news and opinion pages of newspapers and much of this could be sharply at variance with whatever the official advisers may be submitting. Kerr, himself, was well-armed with relevant influential books, the most significant being Dr H. V. Evatt's *The King and His Dominion Governors*. That the governor-general had grounds for looking elsewhere is clear enough. He received views from fellow vice-regal incumbents in NSW and Victoria (both spurned by Whitlam in the search for a successor to Sir Paul Hasluck). Whether the High Court of Australia was the appropriate place to look is, as a matter of fact, much debated; and simply because the governor-general solicited the aid of some of its members did not mean they had to comply. Moreover, addressing this question entails a good deal more than whether the dispute might in some form or other have come before the Court - the justiciability issue. Nevertheless, it should be underlined that whatever views were put to him by state governors or members of the High Court, or anyone else for that matter, were nothing more than opinions he was free to adopt or reject. However eminent, people so consulted were not in the relevant sense advisers to the governor-general. (J R Nethercote, *Canberra Times*, September 6, 2012. J. R. Nethercote is Adjunct Professor at the Public Policy Institute, Australian Catholic University).

International

NATO Official Rules Out Military Intervention in Syria NATO does not believe that military intervention in Syria would bring any improvement in the security situation there, a senior alliance official said Friday, according to *AFP*. Germany's Manfred Lange, Chief of Staff of Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), said the military was telling leaders that there was no good case for military action and the political process had to be pursued. "The military advice is (that) there are not sufficient visible signs at the moment that a military intervention could lead to an improvement of the security situation," Lange was quoted as having said. "The political process has to be pushed forward, sanctions need to take effect. At the moment, this situation cannot be solved by the military in a responsible way," he told a briefing. He added that with little prospect of action at the United Nations "it is clear that the Alliance doesn't have any military plans on Syria." NATO concluded a seven-month air campaign in Libya last year which helped rebels oust former leader Muammar Qaddafi and there has been speculation such an operation could be repeated in Syria if UN approval was obtained. Permanent UN Security Council members Russia and China oppose any such intervention, even as the death toll mounts steadily in Syria where rebels are trying to topple President Bashar al-Assad. Russia and China have used their veto power three times to block UN Security Council resolutions targeting the Syrian regime. (Elad Benari, *IsraelNationalNews.com*, Sept. 21, 2012)

OPEC's challenge is to free up economic paralysis As Pacific-Rim leaders gather for a summit in the Russian city of Vladivostok, one thing seems painfully clear: It will end in disappointment. This isn't a matter of cynicism, but frustration at the paucity of accomplishments by the 21-member Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation group over the last two decades. It has proved to be too disparate economically, geographically and ideologically to get big things done. If its summits are memorable at all, it is because of the wacky outfits leaders are obliged to wear for the customary class photo. Furry hats, anyone?

That's a shame given the magnitude of the region's challenges: slowing growth, territorial disputes and over-reliance on exports to countries that can't consume as they once did. More troubling is the leadership void as APEC prepares for its confab this weekend. Still, here are four things I would love to see APEC tackle this weekend.

First, attack the bubble in inequality. If anything is clear about the last decade, it's that the rich are getting richer at the expense of the poor. Other than a Pacific shoreline, the one thing countries such as Brunei, Chile, Russia, the United States and Vietnam genuinely have in common is a widening income gap. This socially corrosive development does no one any good aside from those at the top. Working jointly to eradicate corruption and build better safety nets would broaden the benefits of growth. So would an APEC-wide free-trade zone. World leaders and trade ministers talk a good game about reducing tariffs and sign off on sweeping communiques to that effect. We need less gabbing and more action to stop trade deals from becoming bilateral and narrowly focused. The problem in today's world isn't too much globalisation, but not enough for those who need it most. Reinvigorating an area that accounts for roughly 55 per cent of global output through lower barriers on goods, services and people would create a new economic engine in a world that needs one.

Two, address climate change. APEC should join hands to promote energy conservation. Its members burn through more than their fair share of oil, gas, coal and trees. That reliance on dirty energy fouls Hong Kong's skies, causes deadly floods in Thailand and the Philippines, adds to the price of Chinese goods, raises costs for American motorists and forces Indonesia to offer budget-crippling fuel subsidies. This problem also burdens Japan at a time when the majority of its nuclear reactors are offline, hurting manufacturers beset by a rising yen. It feeds hostility between China and its neighbours and distorts Australia's resource-dependent economy. Cutting use of fossil fuels would lower tensions in the South China Sea and increase incentives for alternative green-energy sources. That might help reduce the need for massive public-infrastructure expenditure, cut poverty, tame inflation, increase manufacturing productivity and slash healthcare costs.

Three, overhaul territorial laws driving Asia toward armed conflict. APEC should help devise a code of conduct for the disagreements among China, Japan and South Korea. The leaders of three of Asia's biggest economies can't even get into a room together and chat. That is an impediment to lowering trade barriers, linking bond and stock markets and figuring out what to do with the trillions of dollars of currency reserves Asia has amassed over the last 15 years. At the very least, APEC should include the issue in its formal communique in ways that the 10-member Association of South-East Asian Nations hasn't. The benefits of pragmatism and free trade outweigh nationalistic tendencies. If Asia doesn't put these issues on the discussion table now, the result could be clashes that imperil trade, credit ratings and markets.

Four, devise a common response to North Korea. APEC members include five of the six parties trying to rein in that country's ambitions to build an arsenal of nuclear weapons. It is perhaps the only forum in which China's financial support of the Kim Dynasty could conceivably come in for criticism. The United Nations, where China has a permanent Security Council

seat and veto privileges, sure hasn't done the job. The recent power transfer from the late Kim Jong-il to his son, Kim Jong-un, is an opportunity for the Asia-Pacific region to tackle one of the biggest threats to peace and stability. All APEC leaders need to do is take it. One idea: Hold up Burma's sudden opening, and the world's rapid embrace of its efforts, as a blueprint for the good that may come from change in North Korea. There are many other things on which APEC should take the lead - water and food security, human trafficking, a global approach to financial regulation, increasing literacy, seeing to it that girls are educated as well as boys. The trouble is, the group's performance since its first summit in 1989 is so spotty. APEC has to improve its record. Humanity needs more from Vladivostok than photos of people in furry hats. (William Pesek, *Canberra Times*, Sept. 6, 2012).

Hizbullah Claims Rockets Can Reach All of Israel

The Hizbullah terror leadership claimed Monday that its missiles can now reach all of Israeli territory.

Speaking at a ceremony in southern Lebanon, Nabil Ka'uk announced from the podium that "Hizbullah rockets can reach all Israeli settlements," referring to Israeli towns and cities. The reference by Ka'uk, who is deputy director for Hizbullah's terror activities, included all territory, including that liberated in the 1967 Six Day War, and those that preceded it. Ka'uk's leader, Hizbullah chief Hassan Nasrallah, also continues to threaten Israel with annihilation, but does so only from the safety of a hideout whose location is known to very few of his closest advisers. Last month Nasrallah addressed massive halls of supporters, separated by gender, who listened as he spoke to the families of those who were killed during the 2006 Second Lebanon War with Israel. His address was heard, as usual, via a video link, in the "Shahid" Hall in Haret Hreik, Beirut. IDF military intelligence experts have estimated that Hizbullah has stockpiled tens of thousands of missiles in varying ranges, all of which are pointed at various locations within the Jewish State.

This week the Home Front Command is testing Israel's new nationwide text message alert system, designed to warn citizens about an impending missile attack. Each day, residents living in various cities within a new area of the country receive a text message alerting them that Home Front Command is testing the new system, together with a numeric code. The messages are sent between 8:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m., and are transmitted in Hebrew, English, Arabic and Russian. (Chana Ya'ar, *IsraelNationalNews.com*, Aug. 13, 2012)

IDF Intel Chief: 200,000 Missiles Aimed at Israel

There are some 200,000 missiles and rockets aimed at Israel, a top IDF official said Thursday - and no part of the country is "safe" anymore. IDF Intelligence head Aviv Kochavi gave a chilling presentation Thursday morning at the Herzliya Conference on Israeli policy, telling listeners that Israel's enemies had 200,000 rockets and missiles pointed at the country, and could reach all parts of Israel - even the ostensibly safe "center" of Tel Aviv and its suburbs.

Most of the missiles have a range of about 40 kilometers - the range of Qassam and most Katyusha rockets - but thousands of missiles have ranges of hundreds of kilometers, making every location in Israel within their reach. Not only that - but the missiles are more lethal now than ever before. "The warheads on these missiles contain hundreds of kilograms of explosives, not dozens, as in the past. And their firing precision and ability to hit specific targets is also greater," Kochavi said. The rockets are largely located in Lebanon and Syria, with a smaller amount in Gaza - and in Iran, as well, which has thousands of missiles that could reach Israel. "Every tenth house in Lebanon is now a weapons depot," Kochavi said. Besides conventional weapons, Israel is also facing a nuclear threat. According to Kochavi, Israel has lost the battle to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons; Tehran already has enough uranium for four atomic bombs, with over 100 kilos enriched to a level of 20% - more than enough for the one bomb Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has said he would need to "rid the world of the Zionist entity."

Whether or not Iran actually builds these bombs is not a question of technical capability, Kochavi said, but a question of political will. The ability to build the bombs is there, and whether or not they will actually be assembled is a decision that top Iranian officials, especially Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, has yet to make. "From the moment the order is given, it will take about a year to assemble the bombs," Kochavi said. "Developing them into warheads will take a little longer." He added that the sanctions against Iran have not yet persuaded Tehran to change its nuclear development policy one way or the other, but that could change if the government feels it is losing control. Still, sanctions are preferable to the other alternatives, at least at this time, he said. "Only concerted international effort can persuade Tehran to halt their pursuit of the project," he added. Despite the fact that so far it appears that Islamists have been the big winners of the "Arab Spring," it is not they that led the revolutions in Arab world, but the desperation of youths and young adults who face a future of unemployment and hopelessness. If the new regimes do not work quickly to raise hope for the masses, he said, the current unrest could continue for many years.

However, one aspect of the weakening of traditional Arab dictatorships in the region has negatively affected Israel; with less authority has come more porous borders, and Iran has been taking advantage of this fact to move more weapons into neighboring Arab countries. As a result, more terror attacks with Iran's backing can be expected. Kochavi said that the attack last August on the southern Negev was orchestrated by Iran, and thanks to the large amount of weapons in the region - with the Middle East now "the world's largest weapons warehouse" - similar attacks in the future are all but inevitable. (David Lev, *Israel National News*, Feb. 2, 2012)

Ahmadinejad: World forces must annihilate Israel

In Ramadan speech to Islamic country ambassadors, Iranian president says liberation of Palestine will solve all world problems. In a speech published on his website Thursday, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said the ultimate goal of world forces must be the annihilation of Israel. Speaking to ambassadors from Islamic countries ahead of 'Qods Day' ('Jerusalem Day'), an annual Iranian anti-Zionist event established in 1979 by Ayatollah Khomeini and which falls this year on August 17, Ahmadinejad said that a "horrible Zionist current" had been managing world affairs for "about 400 years."

Repeating traditional anti-Semitic slurs, the Iranian president accused "Zionists" of controlling the world's media and financial systems. It was Zionists, he said, who were "behind the scene of the world's main powers, media, monetary and banking centers." "They are the decision makers, to the extent that the presidential election hopefuls [of the USA] must go and kiss the feet of the Zionists to ensure their election victory," he added.

Ahmadinejad added that "liberating Palestine" would solve all the world's problems, although he did not elaborate on exactly how that might work. "Qods Day is not merely a strategic solution for the Palestinian problem, as it is to be viewed as a key for solving the world problems," he said. He added: "Anyone who loves freedom and justice must strive for the annihilation of the Zionist regime in order to pave the way for world justice and freedom." The Iranian president said that Israel reinforced "the dominance of arrogant powers in the region and across the globe" and that Arab countries in particular - he cited Bahrain, Yemen, Libya, Syria and Turkey - were affected by Israel's "plots." Ahmadinejad, who has called the Holocaust a myth, has previously called for Israel's annihilation, in a 2005 speech in which he used a Persian phrase that translates literally as "wiped off the page of time." (Joanna Paraszczuk, *Jerusalem Post*, August 8, 2012)

IRAN WARNS WORLD OF COMING GREAT EVENT

Says 'evil hegemony' soon will be defeated by power of Allah. Amid crippling sanctions over its nuclear weapons program, Iran is continuing to prepare itself for war against the West, and now is warning of a coming great event. "In light of the realization of the divine promise by almighty God, the Zionists and the Great Satan (America) will soon be defeated," Ayatollah Khamenei, the Iranian supreme leader, is warning.

Khamenei, speaking to hundreds of youths from more than 70 countries attending a world conference on the Arab Spring just days ago, told a cheering crowd in Tehran that "Allah's promises will be delivered and Islam will be victorious." The countries represented included Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Palestine and Tunisia, all of which have been involved in the Arab Spring. In his remarks, Khamenei advised the youths to remain vigilant, stating that the Islamic awakening in the region has delivered several blows to the enemies of Islam and that all Muslims, despite their own historical and social differences, remain united in opposing the "evil hegemony of the Zionists and the Americans."

Khamenei then claimed the current century as the century of Islam and promised that human history is on the verge of a great event and that soon the world will realize the power of Allah. Many clerics in Iran have stated that Khamenei is the deputy of the last Islamic messiah on earth and that obedience to him is necessary for the final glorification of Islam. Khamenei has been heard to say that the coming of the last Islamic Messiah, the Shiites' 12th Imam Mahdi, is near and that specific actions need to be taken to protect the Islamic regime for upcoming events.

Mahdi, according to Shiite belief, will reappear at the time of Armageddon. Selected forces within the Revolutionary Guards and Basij reportedly have been trained under a task force called "Soldiers of Imam Mahdi" and they will bear the responsibility of security and protecting the regime against uprisings. Many in the Guards and Basij have been told that the 12th Imam is on earth, facilitated the victory of Hezbollah over Israel in the 2006 war and soon will announce publicly his presence after the needed environment is created. Sources within Vali'eh Amr, the revolutionary forces in charge of the supreme leader's protection, also recently revealed an assassination attempt on Khamenei that was thwarted just in time.

SepahOnline reports that last year during Khamenei's visit to the port of Asalouyeh in southern Iran, Revolutionary Guards found pistols and hand grenades hidden by one individual dressed as a janitor in a barracks that Khamenei was set to attend. The supreme leader was then returned to Tehran immediately. Other sources within the Guards report that following Barack Obama's letter to the Iranian leader last month requesting negotiations, Khamenei ordered Iranian officials to speak positively about holding nuclear talks and giving hope to Obama and other Western leaders that a negotiated solution is possible. This was apparent after a trip of U.N. nuclear inspectors to Iran this week, who called the talks positive. At the same time, his directive to the Guards ordered a speedy completion of the Iranian nuclear bomb program in which Guards' missiles can be armed with nuclear warheads. Khamenei believes once that's achieved, Iran can test a nuclear bomb, letting the world know that Iran has joined the nuclear-armed club and that any confrontation will result in destruction of much of the Western world.

The Revolutionary Guards not only can hit all U.S. bases in the Middle East with their ballistic missiles but also reach most capital cities in Western Europe. The Guards, with the help of China and North Korea, are working on intercontinental ballistic missiles. But more dangerous to America, as reported last July, is the Guards action in arming their vessels with long-range ballistic missiles and their expansion of their mission into the Atlantic Ocean, right into the Gulf of Mexico. Any Iranian military or commercial vessel easily could get right outside the U.S. coastline and in less than 60 seconds fire a ballistic missile armed with a nuclear payload and detonate it over U.S. skies in an electromagnetic attack that would plunge America back into the 18th century. Studies show within just one year after such an attack, two-thirds of Americans would cease to exist and the rest would live under dire conditions. The radicals ruling Iran not only have prepared for mass suppression of their own people as they get close to their confrontation with the West, but also have prepared to fuel unrest through their proxies in the Middle East and elsewhere. SepahOnline, with sources within the Guards, reports that Afghanistan will soon witness an increase in terrorist activities against U.S. forces. The Guards not only are training Taliban fighters in Iran close to the Afghan border, but are shipping armaments to forces in Afghanistan with an order to create instability by harming U.S. forces and destabilizing the Afghan government. Guards agents have also been ordered to do the same in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf counties. The Guards also announced the imminent formation of a defensive unit to deal with possible radioactive contamination. Although they did not say why, they could be preparing for a nuclear exchange with the West once Iran becomes nuclear-armed.

WND previously has reported that the chieftains in Iran also are preparing to execute their own internal critics and opponents at the right time. This was similar to action taken by the founder of the Islamic regime in 1988, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. In the book, "A Time to Betray," it is documented when Khomeini announced the campaign, he said, "If the person at any stage or at any time maintains his (or her) support for the opposing groups, the sentence is execution. Annihilate the enemies of Islam immediately" (Reza Kahlili, *WorldNetDaily*, Feb. 4, 2012)

Iran: We can destroy US bases 'minutes after attack'

DUBAI - Iran has threatened to destroy US military bases across the Middle East and target Israel within minutes of being attacked, Iranian media reported on Wednesday, as Revolutionary Guards extended test-firing of ballistic missiles into a third day. Israel has hinted it may attack Iran if diplomacy fails to secure a halt to its disputed nuclear energy program. The United States also has mooted military action as a last-resort option but has frequently nudged the Israelis to give time for intensified economic sanctions to work against Iran.

"These bases are all in range of our missiles, and the occupied lands (Israel) are also good targets for us," Amir Ali Haji Zadeh, commander of the Revolutionary Guards aerospace division, was quoted by Fars news agency as saying. Haji Zadeh said 35 US bases were within reach of Iran's ballistic missiles, the most advanced of which commanders have said could hit targets 2,000 km (1,300 miles) away. "We have thought of measures to set up bases and deploy missiles to destroy all these bases in the early minutes after an attack," he added. It was not clear where Haji Zadeh got his figures on US bases in the region. US military facilities in the Middle East are located in Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Turkey, and it has around 10 bases further afield in Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan.

China: We will defend Iran even if it means Third World War

The enemies of Iran are also enemies of China according to Zhang Zhaozhong, an important Chinese general. He said that China will defend Iran even if this means the Third World War. His statement comes after Beijing estimated that the West's sanctions against Iran will complicate, aggravate and heighten tensions over Teheran's nuclear program.

"China was always against unilateral sanctions against Iran", said Liu Weimin, the spokesman of the External Affairs Minister, after the USA, Britain and Canada imposed new sanctions against Iran. The sanctions were announced after the International Agency for Nuclear Energy (AIEA) reported that there is a possible military dimension to Iran's nuclear program. China, which buys large quantities of petrol from Iran, has become Iran's most important commercial partner, with bilateral exchanged valued at 30 billion dollars, compared with 400 millions fifteen years ago.

Russia, an ally of Iran, whose position is similar to that of China, qualified the new sanctions as "unacceptable".

In his turn, the Iranian President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, said that Iran will not back down over its nuclear program in spite of the West's sanctions. (Valentin Vioreanu, AFP/CAPITAL (Bucharest), Dec 2, 2011)

NSA identifies 20 Chinese attack groups behind cyber thefts in U.S.

Chinese military groups and universities have been linked to pervasive Chinese cyber espionage and technology acquisition efforts, according to U.S. intelligence officials.

The Obama administration is preparing to confront China more directly on the cyber attacks, the Wall Street Journal reported Dec. 13. Two weeks ago, U.S. officials warned their counterparts in China about the diplomatic consequences of economic spying, according to a person familiar with the meeting. U.S. intelligence has linked Chinese cyber spying campaigns to a dozen groups linked to the People's Liberation Army and half-dozen nonmilitary groups connected to organizations such as universities. (*WorldTribune.com*, Dec. 29th, 2011).

Putin Arrives in China for Regional Summit

BEIJING — Russian President Vladimir V. Putin arrived in China on Tuesday, a visit that contrasted with his shunning of a summit of world leaders hosted by President Obama last month and was intended to drive home the existence of an alternative group, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which excludes the United States.

Admired by the Chinese for his staying power as leader of Russia for 12 years, Mr. Putin and President Hu Jintao will discuss their approaches to Syria, Iran and their efforts to squeeze the United States out of Central Asia, Chinese and American analysts said. Both countries are also opposed to an American plan for a missile- defense system in Poland and other parts of Eastern Europe that is designed as protection against Iran.

In what appears to be a show of solidarity, the Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, will attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organization meeting as an observer, and the Kremlin announced that Mr. Putin would meet with him. Russia is scheduled to host a next round of talks later this month among world powers on the Iranian nuclear program. In the face of the commonality of interests, however, the relationship between China and Russia is seeded with historic rivalries from the cold war, and the realization in Moscow of a sudden change in the power equation: that China is now far richer than Russia. Overlaying these factors is the inability of the two countries to come to an agreement on gas that Russia, the world's biggest producer, owns and China, the biggest consumer, wants. At first, China had expected Mr. Putin would make Beijing his first overseas trip after his inauguration as president in early May. But Europe is Russia's biggest energy customer, and Mr. Putin visited Germany and France last Friday, and dropped by Belarus and Uzbekistan in the past week. Still, the visit, followed by the two-day Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit meeting, is fraught with the symbolism of two major powers interested in further developing a multilateral organization in which the United States is not present and Iran plays a role, if only as observer. "Iran, too, is very keen on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," said Vali Nasr, an Iran expert and former State Department official in the Obama administration. "That it is happening in China reflects China's increasing interest in Central Asia and also its desire to lead international and regional alliances without the U.S."

The six member countries of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization are China, Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic. Afghanistan will attend the meeting in Beijing as an observer, a sign of China's interests there after the 2014 withdrawal by the United States. Despite what would seem to be a confluence of interest on energy, there was little chance that Russia and China would resolve the outstanding differences over delivery of gas to China in time for an agreement between the two leaders, Arkady V. Dvorkovich, a vice prime minister, said on the eve of the visit.

The sticking point after two decades of talks remained price, with Russia wanting to sell its gas at \$350 to \$400 per 1,000 cubic meters, and China prepared to pay \$200 to \$250, according to Chinese press reports. Indeed, the English language newspaper China Daily recently reported that China, frustrated by the stalemate on gas price in price between China National Petroleum Corporation and Gazprom, increased its supplies from Turkmenistan, a sign of how Beijing's economic strength allows it to play the market. Even so, the atmospheric on energy had improved and there was now an "opportunity for both sides to unfold a new age of energy cooperation," said Xu Xiaojie, a former director of investment of overseas investment for the China National Petroleum Corporation. How much time Mr. Putin and Mr. Hu would devote to Syria was not known. The two countries "cover each other's back in the United Nations Security Council" on Syria, and both remained in favor of keeping the government of President Bashar al-Assad in place, a senior American official said. Both leaders seemed unconvinced that Mr. Assad was losing his grip on power, though if the Syrian leader alienated 70 percent of the population it was conceivable that Russia would cut its losses and become part of a solution, with China following suit, the official said. China reiterated the joint approach on Syria at the daily press briefing at the Foreign Ministry on Tuesday, hours after Mr. Putin's arrival.

“Both sides oppose external intervention in Syria and oppose regime change by force,” Liu Weimin, the spokesman said. Russia is opposed to the Obama administration’s plans for missile-defense sites in Poland and Eastern Europe that are designed as protection against Iran, and China also has problems with American missile defense, said Lora Saalman, a nuclear expert at the Carnegie-Tsinghua Center for Global Policy in Beijing. China supports Russian concerns, but has its own set of worries when it comes to American missile defense, namely in the Asia-Pacific region, Ms. Saalman said. Within the realm of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Afghan leader, President Hamid Karzai, is likely to be accorded special attention. China’s Vice Foreign Minister, Cheng Guoping, said that Afghanistan had been given observer status for the first time at the summit where the post-2014 scenario in Afghanistan was likely to be discussed.

China, in particular, had started talking to elements of the Taliban to try and ensure protection of its iron ore, steel and other mineral interests in Afghanistan after the American withdrawal, said Sajjan Gohel, international security director of the Asia-Pacific Foundation, based in London, who visited Beijing recently. ([Janet Perlez](#), NYTimes.com, June 5, 2012)

Insults add to sense Putin’s time is up The President has put noses out of joint. Vladimir Putin’s fondness for expensive Swiss watches is well known, but it seems, by all accounts they help to cure his tardy timekeeping. The Russian President arrived four hours late to a summit meeting with President Victor Yanukovich in Ukraine at the Black Sea resort of Yalta last week. The reason? He decided to stop off along the way to visit the leader of a motorbike gang called the Night Wolves. While he kept Ukraine’s President waiting, Putin embraced the Night Wolves leader, Alexander Zaldostanov, known to his buddies as The Surgeon, and hang out at their summer camp near Sevastopol. He and The Surgeon are old friends, and Putin embellished his macho credentials last year by riding with the bikers at their gathering in Novorossiysk.

Putin posed for photos with the bikers, was given a Night Wolves jacket, and noticed that there were more women at this year’s camp, telling Zaldostanov: “The last time I was here, I liked how you, big and strong means you all are, treated the girls . . . with great care and respect.” His hosts were not amused when Putin finally arrived at the summit. Ukraine’s Emergency Situations Minister, Viktor Baloga, wrote scornfully on his Facebook page: “president Putin exceeded the limits of lateness. He travelled to bikers and their war brides, this was his priority.” Putin won no marks for charm during the talks either. Baloga accused him of rudeness for speaking during Yanukovich’s address to the summit, which was intended to build closer ties between Moscow and its former Soviet neighbour. ‘It’s discourteous to interrupt when the host of the meeting is speaking,’ Baloga said. ‘It’s clear that Putin doesn’t know this rule.’

The Kremlin leader tried to play down the row by insisting Putin had visited the Night Wolves for only a short time and that the meeting had been “of an exclusively work-related nature”. Critics wondered what sort of important business the President of the Russian Federation could have with the leather-clad leader of a motorcycle gang. Putin has long had a habit of being late to business meetings, as if keeping people waiting were a demonstration of his own greater importance. Now, it is simply causing offence. Putin kept a hall full of business leaders waiting for 40 minutes before he spoke at last month’s St Petersburg International Economic Forum, which is intended to showcase Russia’s appeal as a centre for global investment. Things got worse for an even higher-powered group of foreign chief executives invited to have a meeting with Putin at the forum. They were kept waiting for three hours in a narrow hallway, prompting one oil chief to say: “People are feeling insulted.” Five years ago, guests would simply have gritted their teeth and smiled, grateful for an audience with a busy president. Nobody is walking out, but the President’s tardiness now adds to an impression that he has overstayed his time in office. Formally, he may be at the beginning of a second 12-year period in power. Practically, the clock is ticking on Putin. (Tony Halpin, *The Times*, July 23, 2012)

Banned Film sets new generation of Russians talking

Role of the FSB security service is put under the spotlight, Helen Womack writes in Moscow. Russians are discovering a documentary film on the internet whose explosive subject has been a taboo in their country for more than a decade. The film itself is not new but the fact that a new generation of Russians - the glasnost generation, as former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev calls them - are downloading, sharing and discussing *Assassination of Russia* is a significant development.

As Vladimir Putin enters the final stretch in the race to become president for a third time, this is probably not a discussion he wants to hear. When the former KGB agent first appeared on the political stage in the late 1990s, the question everyone asked was: who is Mr Putin? After 12 years of his rule, two four-year terms as president and most recently a term as influential prime minister, the same question still begs an answer.

There is much we do not know - who murdered his critics; who planted a series of bombs in high-rise apartment blocks in 1999 that provided the casus belli for the second Chechen war and propelled Mr Putin to power.

The film is about these apartment block bombs, which were officially blamed on the Chechens. But another school of thought suggests that the FSB security service might have been behind the bombing of their own people for political ends. There has never been an official inquiry into the bombings and many of those who have tried to investigate them are now dead. If it were ever proved that the FSB and not the Chechens blew up nearly 300 Russian civilians as they slept in their beds, the legitimacy of the present regime would be shattered. It’s a big “if”.

Assassination of Russia was made in 2001 by French producers Jean-Charles Deniau and Charles Gazelle. It was based on the book *Blowing Up Russia* by the US-based Russian historian Yuri Felshinsky and the former FSB agent Alexander Litvinenko, who died of polonium poisoning in 2006. The film opens with scenes of bodies being pulled out of the rubble of four apartment blocks in Moscow and the southern cities of Buinaksk and Volgogradsk. Sacks of explosives had been planted in the cellars of the buildings. The death toll from the bombings was 292.

The film shows Mr Putin, then president Boris Yeltsin’s chosen successor, reacting to the terrorist outrage with his now-famous words: “We will follow the terrorists wherever they go. If they are at the airport, we will be there. Excuse me, but if they are in the toilets, we will go in there and blow them away. That’s all there is to it; the problem is solved.” What raised suspicion about the official version of events was an incident in the city of Ryazan, 210 kilometres south-east of Moscow, on September 23, 1999. Another tower block was apparently about to be blown up but residents spotted the perpetrators and called the police. Although the local FSB confirmed explosives had been found at 16/14 Novosyolov Street, the FSB at national level came out 24 hours later with the explanation that it had been a “training exercise” and the sacks contained sugar. The film shows angry residents from Ryazan, and FSB officers awkwardly trying to explain themselves in footage

from a talk show on the once-independent NTV channel before it was taken over by the state in 2001. *Assassination of Russia* has been seen in the Baltic states but is banned from Russian television, which remains the main source of information for most of the public.

Not everyone who has seen the film online approves of questions being raised to rock Mr Putin's boat of national stability. "Jewish propaganda," wrote one person commenting in Russian under the nickname of theyugunter. But freelistener wrote: "Wake up Russia! Don't let them rule for another 12 years." Boris Makarov, a teacher, said he was left with a "pile of questions" after watching the film. "We still don't know who carried out the attacks or who ordered them. Why hasn't this film been shown on TV? Why has the whole subject been swept under the carpet? It only raises more suspicions. If Putin is innocent, why does he ban information?" Back in 1999, this reporter interviewed the residents of the tower block in Ryazan for the British paper *The Independent*. The main witnesses were the Kartofelnikov family at flat 19.

Yulia Kartofelnikova, a young doctor, said: "It was about nine in the evening. Dad had just come back from the garage [he was a bus driver]. He spotted a white car backed up to our building. A piece of paper with the number 62 [code for Ryazan] was pasted over the number plate. He thought it was odd. Most people wouldn't notice such a thing but he is a driver, so details catch his eye. "I saw the car, too. I was looking down from the balcony. Dad came up and rang the police. The phone was engaged, engaged, but he persisted and got through. I was walking Malish [their dog] when three policemen arrived. I showed them the way to the basement. The police were not keen to go down there but one young officer did and he came rushing back up again, shouting 'bomb'." Another witness, radio engineer Vladimir Vasiliev, said he had seen the occupants of the white car - two men and a woman - and they looked Russian, not Chechen. The building was evacuated and the residents spent the night in the local cinema. Lieutenant-Colonel Sergei Kabashov of the Ryazan police said: "Our preliminary tests showed the presence of explosives. We were not told it was a test. As far as we were concerned, the danger was real." The residents received a discount on a new metal door they installed for extra security.

Ms Kartofelnikova said: "Some of us wanted to take the matter to court but Alexander Sergeev [of the local FSB] paid us a visit. He said he understood our feelings but we should think of the situation in the country and be loyal." (Helen Womack, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Weekend Edition*, Feb. 25-26, 2012)

Happy New Mini-USSR Russia Is Recreating the Soviet Union, One Little Step at a Time

With anger still simmering over Russia's fraud-tainted December elections, many Russians are unlikely to notice that their country has been ushered into a new economic space starting January 1. On New Year's Day, the Single Economic Space (SES) between Kazakhstan, Russia and Belarus formally came into effect. The SES is expected to facilitate the free movement of goods, labor and capital within member-states, according to proponents of the project. There will be new deal for foreign investors too, as three member-states of the SES boast a combined population of 170 million and account for over 80 percent of the former Soviet Union's economic potential. Their combined gross domestic product is estimated at \$2 trillion, while the value of interstate commerce has gone up to \$900 billion in recent years, making the economic space a formidable regional economic organization. The presidents of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan put a final seal on the integration project during a December 9 meeting. The SES builds on a new single Customs Code, which has been in force for Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia since July 6, 2010. But the SES is also expected to be a precursor of a grander, supranational Eurasian Economic Commission modeled on the European Commission, which could start its work in 2015. Proponents of tighter integration have claimed that the Customs Union, which kicked off in January 2010, was a huge success. Transport and customs control has already moved from national borders to the Customs Union borders. According to official reports, Kazakhstan's export to Russia increased by 38 percent and its export to Belarus more than doubled. Russia's exports to Kazakhstan spiraled up 25 percent and foreign trade turnover between Belarus and Russia increased by 50 percent at the end of 2010. Such successes have prompted Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to tout the SES as Russia's way of "reaching out with a hand of cooperation to our closest neighbors, to our friends, thereby creating conditions for economic modernization and improvement in people's lives."

"We have been working in the Customs Union for two years [and] the benefits are obvious," Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev told a meeting of the Eurasian Economic Council and EurAsEC Interstate Council in late December. "There has been significant growth in bilateral trade: with Russia, we are approaching \$20 billion, the current increase is 40 percent, and trade with Belarus is also increasing." Buoyed by such success, president Nazarbayev said the Customs Union could gain "prominent positions in the global energy and grain markets, with the three countries together holding 90 billion barrels of oil reserves and accounting for 17 percent of global wheat exports." This is no mean achievement for the Kremlin-led Customs Union, economists say. But those expecting immediate and dramatic transformation in the economies of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia over the next year are in for a long wait. Because of uneven economic development in the member states, the transition period in some areas extended to the 2017 to 2020 period. "The real economic effect will be felt only after three or four years," said Natalya Orlova, the chief economist at Alfa Bank. "From a consumer perspective, the creation of the SES offers many benefits, but in terms of employment there are drawbacks because non-competitive companies in member-states will eventually be forced to leave the market."

Even though the creation of SES will greatly simplify trade procedures, reduce tariffs and remove barriers between countries, there are also negative implications for member countries, especially Russia, where the investment climate has been worsening, said Alexei Devyatov, the chief economist at UralSib Capital. "Some businesses are likely to move to the neighboring states, like Kazakhstan, where the investment climate is more favorable," Devyatov said. "But we are not likely to witness an exodus." The SES member states will also need to resolve systemic issues such as tax risks of doing business and foreign exchange interactions in member-state banks, said Konstantin Grechukhin, an analyst with a Russian audit firm MEF-Audit. "In a common economic space, sharing knowledge and new technologies is the only way to go," Grechukhin said. And while Russia and Kazakhstan may have benefited from establishing the Customs Union, this is not necessarily true of the other members. Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has been alternating between showering praise on the integration project and heaping complaints on its implementation. During a recent press conference for Russian journalists, he blamed the global economic crisis, high Russian energy prices and the Customs Union for the severe currency crisis in Belarus. In particular, Lukashenko recalled the prohibitive duties imposed on imported cars last summer, which benefited the Russian car industry but prompted Belarusians to rush to buy used cars imported from the EU early in the year. As a result, he said, Belarus lost \$3 billion. The conditions under which Customs Union members operate have been unequal,

Lukashenko said. Other economists, including New Economic School researcher Natalya Volchkova, have dismissed the SES as a "political project." Russia has little to gain in terms of economic benefits because the economies of member states are too small, and Russia already has a strong foothold in them, Volchkova said. The integration is also unlikely to lead to mutual growth of direct investment among member countries. "Russia should not expect to gain new technologies from member states as a result of integration," Volchkova said. Moreover, in order to lure countries like Belarus to the SES, Moscow has agreed to unprecedented concessions, such as supplying oil to the country without levying a duty in exchange for Minsk's revenues from export duties on oil products, a move experts say could cost the Russian budget up to \$2 billion a year. "In order to further its regional ambition, the Russian leadership has had to pay the high price of economic concessions to member countries," Volchkova said. (Tai Adelaja, *Russia Profile.org* Jan. 4, 2012)

Ex-Soviet states take first step to Putin 'Eurasian Union'

MOSCOW - Three ex-Soviet states were Friday to agree the first steps towards creating a Eurasian economic union, a project backed by Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin to bind closer the former USSR.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and his Kazakhstan and Belarus counterparts Nursultan Nazarbayev and Alexander Lukashenko were to sign a declaration on further economic integration at a summit in Moscow, the Kremlin said in a statement. "The declaration will set out the ultimate aim (of economic integration) as the creation of a Eurasian economic union," it said. Putin first evoked the idea of creating a Eurasian Union in a newspaper article published shortly after the announcement that he would seek to return to the Kremlin as president in 2012 polls. The three countries already have a customs union but the creation of the Eurasian Union -- which would have its own executive body and oversee a single economic space -- would mark a huge step further. The single economic space is due to come into force in 2012 alongside a Eurasian Economic Commission, a body that would apparently be run on lines similar to its Brussels-based EU equivalent. "The commission -- the first such in post-Soviet history -- will be neutral in relation the countries involved and will gradually take on national powers," the Kremlin added. The Kremlin did not give a date for the creation of the Eurasian Union itself but the Vedomosti daily quoted sources as saying that 2015 would be given as the target date. The initial members would be Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia but any ex-Soviet state would be welcome to join, it added. Putin in his article said the union would build on the experience of the European Union and would be a "historic breakthrough" for ex-Soviet states. The prime minister, an ex-KGB officer who once described the Soviet collapse as the greatest geo-political tragedy of the 20th century, denied he simply wanted to recreate the USSR under another guise. It remains unclear what impact the project could have on Russia's entry to the World Trade Organisation, which is finally expected to be agreed by the end of this year after 18 years of negotiations. (*Hurriet Daily News*, Nov. 18, 2011)

Kremlin ousts critic of Putin

A former KGB colonel turned opposition lawmaker who has angered the Kremlin with his scathing criticism of Russian President Vladimir Putin was stripped of his parliamentary seat on Friday. Gennady Guddkov's removal from the lower house paves the way for similar action against other opposition lawmakers, sending a clear message to members. He denounced the move as "political revenge". (*sundaytelegraph.com.au*, Sept. 16, 2012)

Poland leads a wave of exploration of communism's 'dark heritage'

WARSAW: For all that Poland has accomplished since the fall of the Iron Curtain, it has long resisted fully coming to terms with its communist past - the oppression, the spying, the massacres. Poles preferred to forget, to move on. So it may come as a surprise that Poland and many of its neighbours in central and eastern Europe have decided the time is right to deal with the unfinished business. Suddenly there is a wave of accounting in the form of government actions and cultural explorations, some seeking closure, others payback.

A court in Poland last month found that the communist leaders behind the imposition of martial law in December 1981 were part of a "criminal group"; Bulgaria's president is trying to purge ambassadors who served as security agents; the Macedonian government is busy hunting for collaborators; Hungary's new constitution allows legal action against former Communists; and even in Albania, one of the poorest nations in Europe, the national museum opened a new pavilion on Monday focusing on the abuses of communism under the dictator Enver Hoxha. Last Sunday in Germany, the Chancellor, Angela Merkel, nominated as the next president a former pastor and East German activist, Joachim Gauck, who turned the files of the Ministry for State Security - better known as the Stasi - into a permanent archive. Across eastern Europe, a consensus of silence appears to have ended, one that never muted all criticism and discussion but did muffle voices crying out for a long-awaited reckoning. The sudden turn to the past in Europe is not just in the realm of politics and justice. There have been trials and verdicts, but also dramas and documentaries, thrillers and histories, all seeking closure to a past that refuses to be forgotten. In Poland, nearly 1 million people have filled theatres to watch Antoni Krauze's *Black Thursday*, a film exploring an episode in 1970 when government troops gunned down dozens of protesters in Gdynia and other cities on Poland's Baltic coast. It took Krauze four decades to make the film. First he was wary of communist censors and then stymied by public apathy. The movie was a hit last year precisely because of the unsettling subject matter: unarmed protesters and innocent bystanders are shot in the streets or sadistically beaten in police stations.

"In the beginning of the '90s, people thought it wasn't right to go back to those times," Krauze, 72, said recently.

The resurfacing a generation later of these issues is not entirely without controversy, often driven by hard-line governments and prompting accusations of score-settling and political opportunism.

In Poland the return of the post-communists - with the Democratic Left Alliance winning in 1993 - reinforced cleavages in Polish society between those ready to move on and those who could not. "I expected some kind of Nuremberg for communism," said Tadeusz Pluzanski, whose father was tortured by the communist secret police. "There was no revolution," he said, "just this transformation process." Pluzanski published a book in October about the experiences of his father and others with the provocative title *Beasts*, the cover marked by red splashes like bloodstains. To his surprise, the first two printings of 6000 copies quickly sold out and a third printing is on its way to bookstores. "With dictatorship comes a dark heritage and after the dictatorship is gone at first no one wants to deal with it," said Antoni Dudek, a member of the board at the Institute of National Remembrance in Poland. "Usually it comes with the new generation that is ready to ask inconvenient questions." (Nicholas Kulich, *The Washington Post*, Feb. 25, 2012)

Morsi Tells Iran Peace Treaty with Israel to be 'Reconsidered'

Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood president-elect Mohammed Morsi told Iran he will "reconsider the Camp David Accord" with Israel and that he wants closer ties with Tehran to create a "balance" in the Middle East. He made the comments in an interview with the government-controlled *Fars News Agency* before he was announced as the winner of the presidential elections. After he was declared the victor Sunday afternoon, Morsi vowed he will "preserve international agreements," without mentioning Israel by name. Morsi told *Fars* a mouthpiece for the regime, that closer relations with Iran "will create a balance of pressure in the region, and this is part of my program." Iran's government-controlled media promoted the Muslim Brotherhood candidate during the election campaign, and the Iranian foreign ministry quickly congratulated the "Egyptian people and government on election of Mohammed Morsi as the country's new president," *Fars* reported Monday morning. Tens of thousands of Egyptians gathered in Cairo and across the country to celebrate the victory of Morsi, chanting slogans in praise of Allah. The Muslim Brotherhood's signal for closer ties with Iran comes as no surprise, but Morsi's statement underlines the threat of Israel's being under the potential stranglehold of an Iranian-Hizbullah-Hamas-Egyptian axis. (IsraelNationalNews.com, June 25, 2012)

Treachery made Bin Laden's lair a hellish harem

No wonder Osama Bin Laden looked so ancient and enfeebled in his last days in Abbottabad. Just 54 at the time of his death, he had been trapped for six years in a house with multiple bickering wives who made his life hell, according to a new book by a retired Pakistani general. The world's most wanted man, a mass murderer feared by millions, was a henpecked husband, harried into submission, with three wives, eight children, and five grand children crammed into the one house in Pakistan for six years. The glimpse into the terrorist leader's last days before he was killed by US Navy Seals last year has a certain black humour, as told by Brigadier Shaukat Qadir. The revelations came last week as Pakistani authorities filed charges against the three widows, who are under house arrest in Islamabad.

Bin Laden had been married six times, according to his Islamic faith. But when he was killed he had reportedly retreated to the top floor of the three-story house, and lived in one room with just one wife – the youngest and his favourite. Another wife lived across the corridor. But his oldest wife ruled the roost. She had moved downstairs and was reported to be "deeply jealous" and constantly fighting with the younger women. When Bin Laden was told that she planned to betray him to the Americans, he was so dispirited that he just stared "blankly into space". "So be it," he said, according to London's Daily Telegraph. And sure enough, the jealous oldest wife is now accused of having sold out Bin Laden in the ultimate act of spite. The poisonous atmosphere between the wives is said to have contributed to Bin Laden's frail health and the onset of dementia. It's as good and argument as any against polygamy. (Miranda Devine, *The Sunday Telegraph*, March 3, 2011)

Op-Ed: The Global Counterterrorism Forum: No Room for Israel

After the terror bombing of Israelis in Bulgaria, Hillary Clinton's new forum whose purpose is assisting countries whose populace is endangered by terror, but which excludes Israel, becomes a bad joke. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton initiated a Global Counterterrorism Forum for 29 Middle Eastern and European countries affected by and supportive of terrorism, the purpose of which is given as dealing with terrorism, assisting the countries whose populace is endangered, and effectively eliminating the sources of funding. Israel, a victim of constant Hamas and Hizbullah terrorism, was blatantly excepted. Despite Clinton's explanation that they were seeking a way to involve Israel, this exclusion was clearly an acquiescence to the will of the Islamic leaders. Senators Joe Lieberman (I-CT) and Mark Kirk (R-IL) stated, "few countries in the world ...have suffered more from terrorism than Israel," and Israel would have contributed greatly to the forum and perhaps benefitted from it. By discriminating against Israel, the United States government has once again emboldened the Islamic countries responsible for worldwide terrorism and diminished its position as Leader of the Free World. Israel remains the closest ally of the United States so that the US has become its own enemy. We American citizens must denounce the activities of our nation against the democracy Israel and, by extension, ourselves, as they are attempting to forge bonds with our adversaries. No matter how we strive to comply with Islamic directives of intentionally rejecting Israel, these countries have made it perfectly clear, through the Muslim Brotherhood, their Koran, and the terrorist or stealth agents they send to invade the globe, that they will conquer and Islamize, enslave or kill. I denounce Mrs. Clinton and the United States administration for allowing these countries to establish the rules of engagement. (Tabitha Korol, IsraelNationalNews.com, July 18, 2012)

Summer of hate The Arab Spring has left Tunisia a poorer and far less liberal place. For the past half a century, the Tunisian film director Nadia El Fani would have had no problem showing her new documentary, *Neither God Nor Master*, which explores her atheism and disdain for radical Islam. But before the Jasmine Revolution, Tunisia was the most socially liberal country in the Muslim world. Its Islamist extremists were where they belonged: in prison. A few weeks ago, however, during the film's premiere, hundreds of bearded zealots smashed through the glass doors of the capital's CinemAfricArt cinema, attacked the audience, and threatened 'a massacre' if the screening continued.

Six months after the overthrow of the Tunisian strongman Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, an avowed secularist and hardly the tyrant he is portrayed as having been, such incidents have become frequent. In May, Nouri Bouzid, another Tunisian director and critic of Islamist extremism, was stabbed in the head. Hundreds of hardline Islamists now prowl the streets of Tunis seeking converts. Radicals have firebombed the city's legalised red-light district, demonstrated outside the local synagogue, killed a Catholic priest, hounded a teacher out of his job for saying something deemed insulting to the Prophet Mohammed, forced the interim regime to block all internet pornography and caused widespread chaos by rioting to demand that the veil, previously banned, be made compulsory. The intellectual elite threw their support behind the revolution, in which only a tiny percentage of the population participated. Now they complain of a lack of police protection. But the laconic policeman in charge at a local station, in response to a plea for help from a member of the CinemAfricArt audience, rather hit the nail on the head. 'Ben Ali was protecting you, and you kicked him out,' he reportedly said, and shrugged.

In April, Islamist volunteers took control of Ettadhamen, the working-class suburb of Tunis that was the centre of the revolution. It now looks like a microcosm of what lies in store for the whole country. These days, only the Islamists are happy. Tunisians belonging to the country's once vast middle class, who shunned the uprising, have sunk into a collective depression. Many are openly stating what recently was considered sacrilege: the revolution was a terrible mistake.

Tourism revenue, once the primary pillar of the economy, is down by more than half. The second pillar of the economy, foreign investment, has also crumbled. The entire south of the country was dependent on trade with Libya, and now sits idle. The poverty rate was 4 per cent before the revolution, but has increased to 40 per cent. The crime rate in this once remarkably crime-free country has skyrocketed. Few venture out after dark. In May, I was caught up in one of the capital's periodic riots, and saw a young man beaten to death. It came as no surprise that the foreign media, for whom Tunisia is once again an irrelevance, did not report the incident; but even the local media ignored it. Editors who once sprouted pro-Ben Ali propaganda have thrown their weight behind the interim regime, a watered-down version of what existed before the uprising.

Tunisia's political outlook is as dismal as its economic performance. The main Islamist political party, Ennahda (Awakening), looks certain to triumph in forthcoming elections. Lesser-known liberal parties have formed a coalition and are holding the odd demonstration, but they don't stand a chance in the face of the well-organised and funded Islamist onslaught. Ennahda has, of course, distanced itself from the street violence. There have been some attempts by apologists for radical Islam in the West to compare the party and other 'moderate' Islamist groups with the Christian Democrats of Europe. In truth, the closest parallel to the party's odd combination of highly organised structure and denial of responsibility is the European far right. Both are crypto-fascist in nature, both have viable views on day-to-day policy, and both rely on a grassroots network of thugs of whose activities they can publicly wash their hands. Jean-Marie Le Pen of France never once admitted any connection with the skinheads who did his dirty work beating up immigrants in the banlieues, yet such politicians are quietly understood by the grass roots to represent them. Ennahda, too, faces the complication that there exists in Tunisia a movement of even harder-line Salafists: angry young men who want an Islamic state right here, right now. It cannot afford to alienate what will be a sizeable chunk of its electoral support. That helps explain the mystery of the party's lack of a political manifesto. Ennahda relies on a kind of double consciousness, whereby nobody knows, yet everybody knows, what it is and where it wants to take Tunisia: away from Paris and towards Mecca. When it comes to eradicating Tunisia's liberalism, while the political Islamists and street thugs may disagree on tactics, they ultimately see eye to eye. 'Some of the oldest democracies, such as Britain and France, had ministries for the colonies,' Ennahda's leader, Rachid Ghannouchi, has written. 'The same democracies, in which homosexuality, fornication, gambling, abortion and birth control have been legalised, impose unfair conditions on weaker nations.' Britain, it should be pointed out in fairness, is also a country that readily offered this man a refuge from persecution for two decades.

The fact is that moderate Islamism is a myth. There are, to be sure, more than a billion moderate Muslims — people who pray five times a day or not, fast during Ramadan or not, perhaps entertain superstitions about pork, the devil, or the conduct of the birds vis-à-vis the Kaaba, or indeed seek by painstaking study of the Koran and the Hadith to reconcile the basic values of their religion with modern life and the discoveries of science. But Islamism is a political ideology that takes a literal, fundamentalist interpretation of the Koran as a master plan for society: Islamic law. You are either an Islamist or you are not, in the same way that you cannot be a little bit pregnant. For all who understand this, the sad reality has now dawned: Tunisia's uniquely secular inheritance went up in smoke with the Jamsine Revolution — perhaps the dumbest and most self-defeating uprising in history. (John R. Bradley, *The Spectator*, 16 July 2011)

Taliban accused of using children to spy BOYS as young as 12 are being used by the Taliban as spies and suicide bombers as part of a campaign against the Kabul government, with two young Afghans picked up by an Oruzgan police command in recent days. The two boys were arrested by the Afghan National Police (ANP) commander in charge of the Mirabad Valley, an area previously known as a Taliban stronghold. The *Herald* was present at a security shura at the village of Sorkh Lez when one of the boys was brought out and paraded in front of about 30 elders as an admonition against aiding the Taliban. The other boy, who is believed to be as young as 12, has been taken to the provincial capital, Tarin Kowt. The ANP commander, Shah Mohammad, says the pair were sent by the Taliban to kill him.

"The mullahs in Pakistan brainwash him and then send him here to kill people," Shah Mohammad told the elders, according to a man who translated. The *Herald* cannot verify his claims. However, similar claims have been made recently by other elements of Oruzgan's security forces, particularly that boys are being recruited to target prominent Afghans working with the Karzai government. The *Herald* accompanied local Australian commander, Major Leigh Partridge, local Afghan National Army commander, Lieutenant Colonel Abdul Ghafoor, and a section of Australian troops to the shura.

Without any warning - even Major Partridge and his soldiers were unaware of the boys' capture - Shah Mohammad directed one of his police officers to open a shipping container, and a slight boy was ushered out.

He shuffled across the dirt compound to stand in front of village elders, before glancing across in fear or surprise at the Australians. "I'm from Peshawar," he said when directed to by Shah Mohammad, referring to the Pakistani border city known for its radical madrassas. He was then taken back to his makeshift holding cell. "I've also captured another one," Shah Mohammad told the elders. "He was younger than this one, he was a little boy." The Afghan security forces based in the Mirabad Valley are increasingly taking security control from an Australian team commanded by Major Partridge and based at Patrol Base Wali. Oruzgan is widely expected to be included among a group of provinces to be handed over to Afghan control over 12 to 18 months from late May. That would see Australian troops finishing their mentoring and security role in Oruzgan by mid 2013. In the past, the Mirabad Valley was considered a Taliban stronghold and was unreachable by the government. However, after an operation last year, the area has seen a drop in Taliban attacks.

During the shura, Shah Mohammad called on villagers - some of whom are suspected of giving safe harbour to insurgents - to work with the government. (Dylan Welch, *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 27, 2012)

North Korea doing as it pleases – with a twist

It's a bracing moment to discover, as we did on Saturday, a nuclear-armed rogue state is trying to perfect its intercontinental missiles by aiming them towards Australia. It's only a test; it's not carrying a warhead; it's not aimed at Australia, but only in its direction; it probably doesn't have the range to reach northern Australia in any case. Julia Gillard was right yesterday to say there was "the lowest potential risk". It is not the test we should worry about; it's why North Korea is testing and what capability it is trying to develop. Rival football teams watch each others' training sessions not because they are threatened by the training but because they want to assess their competitors' capability. There are two reasons why it's troubling. The purpose of the test is explained by an eminent physicist, one whom the North Koreans in 2010 trusted

enough to actually invite into their nuclear facilities, Siegfried Hecker, former director of the US Los Alamos nuclear laboratory. Hecker said that while North Korea possesses enough material for six to eight nuclear warheads, it's frustrated by its inability actually to deliver a warhead to a target: "They have the bomb but not much of a delivery system. That's why these tests are so important."

Second, North Korea's earlier tests have aimed east, over Japan. This one is aiming south, for the first time. If it proceeds, it will show it is unconcerned by the prospect of angering a whole new region.

The test is a wake-up call to Australia. We are not isolated. "The concern is that their technology is improving," says Alan Dupont, the Michael Hintze professor of international security at Sydney University. "Based on their previous test, they would only be able to reach just south of Singapore. But it's conceivable that this time or in the next five years Australia could be reached directly by North Korean missiles." North Korea's intent to improve its intercontinental missile capability, combined with its nuclear capability and history of deceptive and aggressive conduct, moved the Foreign Affairs Minister, Bob Carr, to tell the *Herald*: "The North Korean nuclear and long-range missile plans represent a real and credible threat to the security of the region and to Australia." It was the US that brought the news to Australia. It was delivered to Carr in person by the US assistant secretary for East Asia and the Pacific, Kurt Campbell, last Friday. As reported on Saturday, Campbell told the *Herald*: "If the missile test proceeds as North Korea has indicated, our judgment is that it will impact in an area roughly between Australia, Indonesia and the Philippines. We have never seen this trajectory before. We have weighed into each of these countries and asked them to make clear that such a test is provocative and that this plan should be discontinued."

Sceptics will ask whether this is the same US intelligence that gave us the invasion of Iraq. Fair question. That war, a travesty based on a fiction, has damaged US credibility. But we'll very soon know. The North Koreans have said they will launch between April 12 and 16, apparently to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the birth of the country's founder, Kim Il-sung. It appears to be part of a series of events designed to entrench the new leader, Kim Jong-un, in power. The North Koreans argue that they have a right to peaceful access to space, and that it's only a satellite, not a weapon. The UN Security Council, however, has judged that North Korea has forfeited that right with its years of delinquent aggression. A satellite launch involves ballistic technology - it's a distinction without a difference in this case. So the UN Security Council has forbidden North Korea either. Not only that. Pyongyang agreed anew, only last month, to a new deal with the US. In return for food aid, North Korea promised not to test missiles or launch satellites. North Korea shrugged off this agreement in less than three weeks. With typical rejection of responsibility, Pyongyang has said that any country that challenges its right to launch will be guilty of an act of hostility. This helps explain why Pyongyang's neighbours and interlocutors are so angry and exasperated. Japan has promised to shoot down any North Korean missile if it ventures near its airspace; South Korea is seeking to renegotiate with the US an alliance agreement to restrict its own missile range to 300 kilometres; and now Barack Obama is threatening fresh sanctions against a country already in a perpetual state of self-inflicted famine.

Why would North Korea do such a thing? It is not a normal nation state but more a nation-scale exercise in organised crime. Rather than allow a legitimate economy, it earns foreign exchange by rackets - it exports illicit drugs, counterfeits US currency, sells fake Viagra in industrial quantities, and extorts aid and demands attention by threats of violence. Even if Pyongyang does one day develop missiles capable of reaching Australia, and manages the technology to mount them with nuclear warheads, do we have anything to fear?

The risk would be minimal yet Dupont argues it's one Australia needs to consider: "North Korea knows we're an ally of the US and Japan so if they wanted to send a message, prove a capability, without actually attacking the US or Japan, perhaps demonstrate that they could strike a US territory - say Guam or Hawaii, then Australia might be a possible target. "It sounds far-fetched but the scenarios, you have to go through [them]." The bad news is that Australia currently has no defence against an incoming ballistic missile. The good news is that it's in planning. The air warfare destroyers under construction in Australian shipyards are behind schedule but ultimately supposed to be equipped with SM-3 anti-missile systems. And then there is always the great and powerful friend. As the defence analyst Professor Hugh White puts it: "The US extended nuclear deterrence includes Australia. North Korea knows that if it launched a nuclear attack on Australia, it would face full US retaliation and it would be the end of their country." North Korea's regime may be crazy, but it's not insane. (Peter Hartcher, *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 27, 2012)

“Sarkozy’s Lavish lifestyle exposed” “PARIS: France might be on the edge of a financial meltdown but no one appears to have told President Nicolas Sarkozy. He’s actually splashing out \$15,000 a day on food and keeps 121 cars under the Elysee Palace, according to a new book. Socialist MP Rene Dosiere, in his book *Money From the State*, sets out what he sees as extraordinary excesses by the French President. Mr Sarkozy, whose palace budget exceeds that of the Queen, has stated that there will be a “rupture” with his money splurging ways and more transparency.

He has cancelled the annual \$750,000 palace garden party but just last week he sent a medical team to the Ukraine on board a state-owned private jet to attend to one of his sons, Pierre, and fly him back to Paris to the tune of \$33,000. His fleet of cars costs \$150,000 a year to insure and a whopping \$800,000 to fuel. He also uses an Airbus A330 that cost \$350 million to kit out, claims Mr Dosiere.” (*thetelegraph.com.au*, Feb. 7, 2012)

[*The monarchy cost the French too much. They beheaded their king and got themselves a president. I wonder whether their guillotine is still functional.*]

The Vatican - PLO Pact Designs on Jerusalem are on the Vatican's agenda, now that the city is in Jewish hands. The writer, an Italian journalist with *Il Foglio*, writes a weekly column for Arutz Sheva. He is the author of the book "A New Shoah", that researched the personal stories of Israel's terror victims, published by Encounter. His writing has appeared in publications, such as the *Wall Street Journal*, *Frontpage* and *Commentary*.

Several days ago, Israel gave up to the Vatican some sovereignty over the “Hall of the Last Supper” on Mount Zion in Jerusalem, the complex of buildings where David, Solomon, and Jewish kings of Judea, are said to be buried, although that is contested. Vatican officials then met with representatives of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Ramallah. The talks were co-chaired by Mgr. Ettore Balestrero, the Holy See’s Under-Secretary for Relations with States, and by Palestinian minister, Ziad Al-Bandak. The basis for the new Vatican-PLO agreement is a memorandum signed by Palestinian and Vatican officials in 2000 and which repeated the Vatican’s call for an international mandate to preserve “the proper identity

and sacred character” of Jerusalem. The Catholic Church wants Israel relinquishing sovereignty at the Western Wall and the Temple Mount. This is the “Holy Basin” formula, which refers to the area of the “Nobel Sanctuary”, the Mount of Olives, Mount Zion and a variety of Christian holy sites which the administration of former U.S. President Bill Clinton already began recommending be administered under a “special regime”. The Obama plan also calls for designating the Old City of Jerusalem as an “international zone”. Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, head of the Vatican’s Council for Interreligious Dialogue, recently asked to place holy places under Vatican authority or “international custody” saying: “The Holy See has always accepted which was set by Resolution 181 on 29 November 1947 - which declared that Jerusalem must be the object of special regime under the auspices of the international community”. In 1964, when Pope Paul VI made the first papal visit to Jerusalem, the city was divided by barbed-wire and snipers crouched on the roofs. Jews and Christians with Israeli passports were barred from entering the Old City, in violation of Article 8 of the 1949 Armistice Agreement. At that time, the Vatican ambassador’s residence, at the foot of the Mount of Olives, provided a close look at the razing of over 40,000 Jewish graves in Judaism’s oldest cemetery and where, according to tradition, the resurrection of the dead on the Day of Judgment will happen.

The Vatican never raised its voice to protest against the apartheid imposed by the Jordanians. Israeli leaders asked the Vatican to use its “good offices” to intervene in order to stop the desecration, but during this dark period, the rape of Jewish Jerusalem did not lead to any expression of concern from Vatican diplomats. The Catholic Church, which has now discovered “rights” in Jerusalem, was totally silent from 1948-1967, when its representatives witnessed the systematic pillaging of the Jewish synagogues. Once Israel reunited the city, followers of all three monotheistic faiths have been able to worship without restrictions, with the only apartheid the restrictions imposed on Jews on Judaism’s holiest site, the Temple Mount, which though under Israeli sovereignty, is controlled by the Moslem Wakf.

Would a Palestinian flag over Temple Mount in the heart of ancient Jerusalem promote tolerance, or would it have the opposite effect? If this area came under the control of the Palestinian “security” forces or was put in international custody, how long would it take before the Jews praying there would be pelted with rocks and garbage as occurred in October 1990? No Israeli government must tolerate any policy of division, “shared control” or “internationalization” that opens the door to a return to the Arab apartheid of Jordanian occupation between 1948 and 1967. The Vatican never raised a cry for internationalization during that time. The pact between the Vatican and the Palestinians includes a condemnation of “unilateral decisions and actions altering the specific character and status of Jerusalem”. Yet the most blatant unilateral act in recent years has been the illegal construction project on the Temple Mount conducted by the Wakf, the Islamic religious trust. Instead of making blatantly political agreements with the Arabs, Catholic leaders should cooperate with the Jews and recognize that the only way to guarantee religious freedom is by maintaining the unity of Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty.

There is a deep reason for Vatican opposition to Israel’s possessing the Old City. The Roman Catholic Church believes Israel’s right to be the Kingdom of God ended forever with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Roman Legion in 70 CE. Israel’s rebirth challenged Catholicism’s “Kingdom of God” when Jerusalem “the eternal” became the capital of Israel in 1967. The world must ensure that Har Habayit, the Temple Mount, where humanity received the gift of one God, King David raised a sanctuary for the Ark of the Covenant and King Solomon and Herod built the Temples, does not fall into the hands of genocidaires and looters. (Giulio Meotti, Thursday, February 09, 2012)

Hello? Is anyone noticing that the world's leaders are behaving irrationally?

Could more conspiratorial environmentalistas’ interpretations of our times be correct, that is, someone has been putting something in the water and we are all being lobotomized, even without major brain surgery? You could make the case this week. Much of the world’s leadership, even though presumably suckling their bottled water, exhibits all the manifestations of imbibing something adversely affecting the normal cognitive processes:

President Barack Obama gets on television to boost his proposal for creating jobs by massive government expenditures and tax increases at a time when most Americans think the main problem – after disappeared jobs – is a runaway federal deficit. Never mind he sent a \$447 billion spend and tax bill up to the Congress without a co-sponsor in either of the houses, that his own Party’s Senate leadership initially refused to look at it, then introduced something radically different as a Millionaires’ Tax. All that even though the President has repeatedly endorsed his Republican opposition’s claim any tax increase during a recession is job-killer. Of course, neither bill has a – woops! we can’t say that any more – chance of getting through the Republican-dominated House or the splintered Democratic Senate. Hello?

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin [soon scheduled to slip back into the presidency in Moscow’s musical chairs] has dreamed up a restoration of Stalin’s old USSR as a “Eurasian Union”, a regional agglomerative dictatorship. Putin’s vision is a world of such regional blocs, graciously allocating the U.S. the Western Hemisphere. Unable to accomplish fundamental post-Soviet reforms, he has put together helter-skelter economic collaboration with neighbors [including pumping their gas and oil] with Belorussia, Kazakhstan and a loose customs union [Common Economic Space]. He now aims bringing in the current pro-Moscow Ukraine leadership. But his present arrangements already cost Moscow \$1.7 billion in tariff sharing revenues last year. Meanwhile, prospective investors in this harebrain scenario are trading every ruble to dollar they can get their hands on and tossing them out of the country – more than a record \$49 billion so far this year. Hello?

Luxembourg Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker, chairing the Eurogroup finance ministers, says “[E]verything will be done”. He means in an effort to avoid Greek default and without Athens opting out of the 17-member single currency. But the rating agencies just whacked Italy’s credit rating, Spain’s soaring borrowing rate fell only because the already strapped European Central Bank bought its increasingly high risk bonds, and debt-ridden Portugal is failing to meet targets. The decision whether Greece will get the next tranche of its bailout was delayed until mid-November so the European Union, the European Central Bank and the IMF can pull themselves together to decide whether Athens has met conditions for receiving help. Latest official figures say not: the Greek budget deficit will hit 8.5 percent of GDP in 2011 instead of the 7.6 percent it promised creditors. Greek officials now pledge the 2012 deficit will be slashed 6.8 percent of GDP instead of the promised 6.5 percent if a €6.6 billion [\$8.83 billion] worth of supplementary austerity and reform measures package is forthcoming by 2013 Without the “current” €8 billion [\$10.71 billion] tranche, Athens would bankrupt by this November with major repercussions for Europe and the world. Hello?

Syrian Dictator Bashar al-Assad allegedly told visiting Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu Damascus would strike Israel with missiles if NATO helps his country’s rebels during his rapidly escalating civil war. “If a crazy measure is taken against Damascus, I will need not more than six hours to transfer hundreds of rockets and missiles to the Golan

Heights to fire them at Tel Aviv," Assad warned after Turkish foreign minister conveyed a United States' polite request to clear out. Assad continued: "All these events will happen in three hours, but in the second three hours, Iran will attack the US warships in the Persian Gulf and the US and European interests will be targeted simultaneously" True, Assad is rumored to have chemical and bacterial warfare stocks. But the Israelis sit on the Golan Heights less than 75 miles, downhill to Damascus. After Assad's father tangled with the Israelis in 1982 — the largest air-to-air combat of the jet age and one of the shortest — Syria lost 85 Soviet MiGs. Hello? Yep, must be something in the water, the wine, the arak or wherever. (Sol W. Sanders, *WorldTribune.com*, October 12, 2011)

Health

Prolonged cannabis use leads to drop in IQ, study shows

AUSTRALIAN doctors and health researchers have called for an anti-tobacco smoking-style campaign on the dangers of cannabis after a study found a link between long-term use of the drug and a significant, and possibly irreversible, drop in intelligence. The landmark study, the first to compare the IQ of users before they began smoking the drug and after prolonged intake, found cognitive decline was most pronounced in people who started using as teenagers.

A senior lecturer at the University of NSW's psychiatry department, Matthew Large, said the findings were particularly relevant to Australia, which had one of the highest rates of cannabis use in the world.

"Can we, as a country, afford to have a significant proportion of people becoming less intelligent?" said Dr Large, who was not involved in the study. The British research was based on data from a longitudinal New Zealand study, which has tracked the health of more than 1000 individuals born in the 1970s in Dunedin. Participants had their IQ tested four times before age 14, and again at 38 in 2010-11, and were asked detailed questions about their cannabis use throughout adolescence and young adulthood.

The researchers found participants who smoked cannabis regularly, four days per week or more, for a year before at least three testing phases had the greatest decline in intelligence, a drop of six points on the IQ scale. Those people who had never used the drug during the 20-year study had a slight increase in intelligence when tested as adults. The neurological effect of cannabis, which could not be explained by recent cannabis use, addiction to tobacco, alcohol or other hard drugs and schizophrenia, were most noticeable in users who began smoking as teens. Many of these participants who began smoking as teens failed to regain their lost brain functions up to a year after they stopped taking the drug.

The authors, whose findings were published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* journal, said: "One hypothesis is that cannabis use in adolescence causes brain changes that result in neuropsychological impairment." In all drug users, an intelligence drop could not be attributed to dropping out of school, as the effects were found in users who completed high school. The director of the National Cannabis Prevention and Information Centre, Jan Copeland, said the study findings were as "close as you can get" to showing cannabis use caused deficits in intelligence.

"[The researchers] knew exactly what [the subjects'] cognitive functioning was before they used cannabis, they knew everything about their social, cultural and personal circumstances, then mapped the cognitive decline against their cannabis use over time," she said. The deputy director of policy at the University of Queensland Centre for Clinical Research, Wayne Hall, said the findings added to the case for preventive public health education to reduce adolescent initiation and use.

Dr Large, whose research has found a link between cannabis use and early onset schizophrenia, said the dangers of cannabis use needed to be communicated to young teens. "Most people when they first start smoking cannabis are handed their first joint by their best friend's older brother when they are 13 or 14 with no knowledge of its risks or benefits," he said.

Professor Copeland said the age of first use among the general Australian population was 18.5 years but agreed that continuing public health campaigns were needed. (Nicky Phillip, *SMH*, August 28, 2012)

New Reasons to Drink More Tea The top researchers in the tea-health field (yes, it's a field -- a glorious one) propose tea as part of the approach to weight loss, heart health, and bone/muscle strength.

"It's really important to remember that tea is a plant," Jeffrey Blumberg told me at the 5th International Scientific Symposium on Tea and Human Health, located at the D.C. headquarters of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. We don't typically think of tea as the type of green, leafy vegetable typically promoted by the USDA, but Blumberg, the meeting chair and a professor at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science at Tufts University, pointed out that the flavonoids extracted from tea leaves are similar to the beneficial phytochemicals found in fruits and vegetables. If we can't get Americans to eat the recommended daily amounts of fruits and vegetables, he suggests, why not let tea count as one or two servings? The benefits may go beyond those gained from adding more plant food to your diet. The research presented at the symposium covered the gamut of health benefits attributed to tea -- from reduced risks of gastrointestinal cancers to improved mental acuity in older adults. And new studies suggest that tea could play an important role in three major public health issues:

Weight Loss In green tea, the combination of caffeine and catechins -- the stuff that gives it its bitterness and astringency -- may promote weight loss. Dr. Rick Hursel of Maastricht University in the Netherlands explained that in a meta-analysis of experimental trials, drinking green tea was associated with an increase in energy expenditure equivalent to burning about 100 extra calories in a 24-hour period. This, combined with an increase in blood fat oxidation, might explain why subjects in a related review lost an average of 2.9 pounds over a 12 week period.

These effects were slightly more prominent in subjects who weren't habitual caffeine users, and Asian subjects lost twice as much weight as Caucasian participants, suggesting that both lifestyle and genetic factors play a role in green tea's effects. Hursel recommends 2-3 cups of green tea a day in those looking for weight loss benefits. Meanwhile, [fried green tea ice cream](#) remains best avoided.

Heart Health If you can't stay away from fatty foods, Dr. Claudio Ferri of the University L'Aquila in Italy suggests following up your Big Mac with a cup of black tea. After observing tea's potent ability to dilate the arteries of lab rats, thus reducing their blood pressure, Ferri tested its effects in hypertensive human subjects. He found, somewhat incredibly, that tea consumption counteracted the meal's negative effects on blood pressure and arterial blood flow. Blumberg jumped in to clarify that the symposium was endorsing tea as part of a *healthy* diet. But as Ferri pointed out, it can be difficult to get patients to give up their eating habits and switch over to his preferred [Mediterranean diet](#). These results led him to conclude that preventing cardiovascular disease doesn't only have to be about sacrifice. And in a meta-analysis of over half a million

normal individuals, drinking one cup of tea per day for a year was associated with a reduction in blood pressure equivalent to a 8-10 percent reduction in stroke risk.

Bone and Muscle Strength From the Texas Tech University Health Science Center came a take on traditional Chinese medicine. Postmenopausal women -- who are at an extreme risk of osteoporosis -- were prescribed regimens of green tea and Tai Chi. Six months later, and with a high compliance rate, those who had consumed 4 to 6 cups of green tea daily, with or without the Tai Chi, had "improved markers for bone formation, reduced markers of inflammation, and increased muscle strength." Dr. Leslie Chen explained that while osteoporosis is incurable, the flavonoids and antioxidants found in green tea may work to mitigate its effects and reduce the risk for fractures. And even though it took a lot of tea, no adverse side effects were measured. Further study is probably warranted in all of these areas. "But the bottom line is tea contains zero calories," said Blumberg. "And when you translate all of this data, a little increase in bone strength, a decrease in blood pressure, across a whole population, little changes make a big difference." (Lindsay Abrams, *The Atlantic*, Sep 20 2012)

Herbal tea: the key to better health. The humble cuppa can boost your wellbeing in many ways, says nutritionist Teresa Boyce. Tea has been used for centuries, not only for drinking pleasure but also in the treatment of many health complaints. Herbal tea is not only made from the leaves of plant but may also include the seeds, flowers or roots. Any of these components may be steeped in hot water and consumed. Herbal tea is caffeine-free and has many health benefits. If you have wandered down the tea aisle of your local supermarket or health-food shop you would know the selection of herbal tea is huge – which can be overwhelming if you don't know what you are looking for.

Herbal teas to try

+ **Peppermint:** Commonly used to enhance digestion and soothe an upset stomach. Peppermint is often made from tea bags, however you can make it yourself quite easily. Snip a few leaves from a mint plant, place in a cup, then add boiling water. Let it steep for a few minutes.

+ **Lemon balm:** Perfect for those suffering from anxiety. It is useful for treating stress, depression and sleeplessness. It may also relieve digestive tract spasms and abdominal cramps.

+ **Dandelion:** The ideal liver cleanser and detoxifier. It is also a diuretic and helps with fluid retention. Dandelion tea has a mild flavour and is a green color. Dandelion root can also be consumed as a warm drink. It has a stronger flavour and is dark brown. Dandelion root is often used as a coffee substitute.

+ **Nettle:** Useful for easing intestinal disorders, high blood pressure, arthritis and gout. Nettle tea may increase milk production in nursing mothers and can help prevent prostate problems in men. If you haven't drunk nettle tea before, start with one cup a day for a week, then increase to two or three cups a day.

+ **Rosemary:** A garden herb that acts as a circulatory stimulant and has a calming effect on digestion, benefiting intestinal cramps and colic. Rosemary tea is made by adding one teaspoon of dried leaves to one cup of boiled water. Steep for ten minutes and strain.

+ **Chamomile:** An easy-to-drink tea that may soothe a child's stomach aches and pains. For adults, chamomile can help with insomnia, acting as a mild sedative. It may also relieve menstrual cramps.

+ **Rose hip:** The tea is derived from the edible fruits of rose plants. It is reddish-orange in colour and high in antioxidants including vitamin C. It is a good sugar-free substitute for orange juice.

+ **Licorice:** A sweet-tasting tea that has been used for centuries for a variety of health applications. Its soothing and expectorant properties make it suitable for lung and bronchial complaints or coughs and mucous congestion. Drinking it hot has the added benefits associated with inhaling steam and further soothes respiratory congestion.

+ **Cinamon:** Great for regulating blood-sugar levels and managing sugar cravings. Cinamon's effect on blood-sugar makes it the perfect tea for diabetics or those trying to lose weight. Cinamon tea is available in tea bags or you can make it yourself with cinnamon sticks and boiling water.

+ **Fennel:** Has a flavour similar to licorice and is good for calming an upset stomach and indigestion. It can be used as a slimming aid as it may suppress the appetite and reduce hunger. Crushed fennel seeds are most commonly used to make this tea.

+ **Green and black tea:** Scientific research shows there are plenty of benefits to drinking tea and the most research has been into the green and black varieties. Green and black tea contain varying amounts of caffeine, depending on the variety. They come from the leaves of the same plant, *Camelia senensis*, but undergo different manufacturing processes. Studies have shown positive association with tea consumption and protection against heart disease, cancer, stroke and infections. These protective factors are mainly due to the antioxidants and flavonoids found in both green and black tea. (B+S, Aug, 19, 2012)

Grapes protect heart health. Eating grapes can help reduce the risk of heart diseases in men with metabolic syndrome, according to a recent study published in the *Journal of Nutrition*. Metabolic syndrome, which is a group of risk factors including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, insulin resistance and abdominal obesity, increases the likelihood of cardiovascular disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes. Those in the study who consumed a freeze-dried powder had significantly lower blood pressure, improved blood flow and lower inflammation. Grapes are rich in polyphenols, a type of antioxidant that helps fight free-radical damage and is thought to exert this positive effect on the heart. Snack on a bunch of grapes or add them to a salad. (*bodyandsoul.com.au*, Oct 7, 2012)

Bake but don't fry to reduce risk of prostate cancer. Cooking red meat at high temperatures, especially pan-frying, forms potent carcinogenic chemicals that can increase the risk of men developing prostate cancer by a whopping 40 per cent, according to a recent research by the University of Southern California. In the study, men who ate 1.5 servings of pan-fried red meat each week increased their risk of advanced prostate cancer by 30 per cent, and those who ate 2.5 servings increased their risk by 40 per cent. Baking red meat as well as poultry and fish is a much healthier option and is associated with a lower risk of developing this deadly disease. (*bodyandsoul.com.au*, Oct. 7, 2012)

Too much salt Sodium leaches the body's calcium. A high-sodium diet has been linked to a greater risk of osteoporosis and kidney disease, but scientists hadn't been able to explain why until now. Researchers at the University of

Alberta in the US have found that when we consume high levels of sodium, our body eliminates excess amounts via the urine, but it takes calcium with it. This depletes our calcium stores, which are vital for bone health and nervous system function, and increases the risk of osteoporosis and kidney stones. This shows the importance of lowering your daily sodium intake by limiting your intake of processed foods. (*bodyandsoul.com.au*, Aug. 19, 2012)

Sugar's effect on the brain. The bad news continues for those with high blood sugar levels. A study from the Australian National University has found that those with high blood sugar levels are not only at higher risk of diabetes and heart disease, but are more likely to experience brain shrinkage, a common finding in people with dementia. Even more alarming is that those affected had blood sugar readings that are regarded as normal, but were at the higher end of the range. The first steps to lowering blood sugar levels are to eat protein with each meal, stick to wholegrain foods and take nutrients that help stabilise blood sugar, such as chromium, magnesium, B vitamins, zinc and manganese. (*bodyandsoul.com.au*, Oct. 7, 2012)

Is sugar as toxic as alcohol? A group of scientists are claiming that added sugar (as opposed to natural sugar found in fruit and milk) is as toxic to our health as alcohol, and it's got the health industry buzzing. *bodyandsoul* asked our health experts to give us their verdict . . .

• **General practitioner Dr Cindy Pan says: NO.** "Having limited amounts of sugar is okay so long as your overall diet is balanced and nutritious. Alcohol, on the other hand, has acute and chronic effects. Even a moderate intake has been found to be associated with increased risk of cancers."

• **Naturopath Mim Bein says: YES.** Sugar is more insidious than alcohol. It's added to everything from breakfast cereals to sushi rice. WE didn't evolve with this much refined sugar in our diet, and it's wreaking havoc with our bodies. As soon as I take it out of a client's diet, their health improves. There's no acceptable amount of it in our daily diet.

• **Nutritionist Lisa Guy says: NO.** "Too much alcohol is worse than too much sugar due to the damage it causes to liver and brain cells. You don't have to be concerned with fruit, but keep your intake of added sugars to 10g to 15g a day. One teaspoon of sugar weighs 4g." (*bodyandsoul.com.au*, Feb 26, 2012)

Desk workers and hunter gatherers burn equal calories

Sounds unlikely, right? But a team of scientists measured the energy expenditure of the Harza, a population of hunter-gatherers in Africa, and found it no different to the average expenditure of adults in the US and Europe. The scientists say their study debunks the theory that sedentary lives are to blame for the rise in obesity. (*bodyandsoul.com.au*, Aug. 19, 2012)

Reasons to try raw cacao

- 1 It has 10 or more times the antioxidants of well-known sources green tea, and red wine and blueberries, and much higher levels of the antioxidants resveratrol and polyphenols, as well as vitamin C, than cooked chocolate.
 - 2 Polyphenols can prevent "bad" LDL cholesterol from clogging up arteries, lower cholesterol and reduce blood pressure.
 - 3 Raw cacao can keep blood-sugar levels balanced as it is one of the richest sources of magnesium and chromium.
 - 4 It is easily added to meals. Try raw cacao nibs in muesli or trail mix, or cacao powder in smoothies.
- (*bodyandsoul.com.au*, Aug. 19, 2012)

Honesty helps health

While a little white lie may seem harmless, being dishonest can damage your physical and mental health, according to a recent study. Researchers found people who told the truth and fewer sore throats and headaches and better relationships than fibbers. (*bodyandsoul.com.au*, August 26, 2012)

Grieving hearts can be deadly, says study Heartaches ... there's a biological reason why old married couples sometimes die within a few days of each other. IT REALLY is possible to die of a "broken heart", according to research that has revealed how bereavement can weaken the body's ability to fight infections. Scientists found the emotional stress of losing a loved one could lead to parts of the immune system being suppressed, leaving grieving relatives more vulnerable to infections from bacteria. The findings could help explain cases of widows and widowers who die soon after their spouse.

Lord Callaghan, the former British prime minister, died of pneumonia aged 92 in 2005, just 11 days after Audrey, his wife of 67 years. Johnny Cash died of complications related to diabetes while in hospital in 2003 at the age of 71. It was said at the time that he had been left weakened by the grief of losing his wife June, 73, three months earlier. Immunologists at the University of Birmingham found increased stress levels and depression brought on by grief could interfere with the function of a type of white blood cell known as neutrophils, which are responsible for fighting bacterial infections such as pneumonia.

The impact became more profound in older adults because they had lost the ability to produce a hormone to counteract this dampening affect, meaning even healthy elderly people could fall victim to disease.

Janet Lord, who led the research, said: "There are a lot of anecdotes about couples who were married for 40 years when one of them passes away and then the other dies a few days later. It seems there is a biological basis for this. Rather than dying of a broken heart, however, they are dying of a broken immune system. They usually get infections."

The researchers studied the immune systems and hormone levels of 48 healthy adults aged 65 and over. Half of the group had suffered a major bereavement in the past year. They found the antibacterial action of neutrophils in grieving participants was significantly reduced compared with those who had not suffered a bereavement. The bereaved also had raised levels of the stress hormone cortisol. The researchers also found that suffering a hip fracture could lead to the same hormone imbalance. This could explain why about a quarter of people over 80 die within a year of suffering a hip fracture. (Richard Gray, *The Telegraph*, London, March 26, 2012)

Is your health now at stake Steak lovers beware. Scientists say that the cancer risk of well-cooked meat may be more than twice as high as first thought. Previous studies found frying or grilling food can cause carcinogenic food “mutagens” on the surface but scientists have since found humans have certain enzymes called sulfotransferases (sult) in many parts of their bodies, whereas mice only have them in their livers. These can transform harmless substances into carcinogenic ones according to the European Institute of Public Health. (*Sunday Telegraph*, June 11, 2011)

Did you know? Taking pain killers at least every other day can actually make the brain more sensitive to pain, according to a UK health advisory body. (*bodyandsoul.com.au*, Oct. 7, 2012)

Proof that good cholesterol can fight coronary disease and save lives

ONE patient persuaded John Kastelein to explore the radical idea that would anchor his future career. The cardiologist was at work in an Amsterdam hospital when a 36-year-old was brought into emergency. Tall and lean, non-smoking and physically fit, the man had collapsed with a heart attack. "All his coronary arteries were terribly obstructed and he got operated on right away," said Professor Kastelein, now chairman of the genetics of cardiovascular disease at the University of Amsterdam. The damage was so severe that seven of his arteries had to be bypassed. "In young people, surgeons often use the mammary artery that runs parallel to the breastbone on both sides, to patch into the heart," he said. "That artery never has atherosclerosis [blockages] so the surgeon was totally amazed to find both mammary artery walls had become diseased."

Investigations revealed the patient, Piet Snoek, had a gene mutation that blocked all production of high density lipoprotein (HDL) - the "good cholesterol". His case "completely convinced" Professor Kastelein that the protective effects of HDL were as significant a part of the heart disease story as the well-known damage wrought by low density lipoprotein "bad" cholesterol. He set out to demonstrate a heresy: that raising cholesterol could help the heart, provided the cholesterol in question was HDL. "Every manipulation that raises HDL in a mouse or a rabbit is beneficial," said Professor Kastelein, who will deliver a plenary address in Sydney today at the International Symposium on Atherosclerosis. Fifteen years later, Mr Snoek is still alive. Professor Kastelein and colleagues have used drugs to completely eliminate LDL from his body, compensating for the absence of HDL. "Heart disease is the result of the balance of these two," he said. Several drug companies have begun synthesising HDL - which attaches to cells that mop up LDL, steering them into the circulation - following a heart attack.

"We have shown we can mobilise cholesterol from the arterial wall. We can move amounts of cholesterol that in my mind are very clinically significant," Professor Kastelein said. The next step is to use heart scans to evaluate whether this reverses artery damage. Philip Barter, of the Heart Research Institute in Sydney, said raising HDL had "the potential to be as important on top of [cholesterol-lowering] statins as statins were on nothing". (Julie Robotham, *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 26, 2012)

Dental X-rays tumour link PEOPLE who get regular dental X-rays are more likely to suffer a common type of brain tumour, researchers say. The study in the US journal *Cancer* showed people diagnosed with meningioma who reported having a yearly bitewing exam were 1.4 times to 1.9 times as likely as a healthy control group to have developed such tumours.

People who reported getting a yearly panorex exam – an X-ray outside the mouth – were 2.7 to three times more likely to develop cancer, the study said. (*Newcastle Herald*, April 11, 2012)

W.H.O. Declares Diesel Fumes Cause Lung Cancer Diesel fumes cause lung cancer, the World Health Organization declared Tuesday, and experts said they were more carcinogenic than secondhand cigarette smoke. The W.H.O. decision, the first to elevate diesel to the “known carcinogen” level, may eventually affect some American workers who are heavily exposed to exhaust. It is particularly relevant to poor countries, where trucks, generators, and farm and factory machinery routinely belch clouds of sooty smoke and fill the air with sulfurous particulates.

The United States and other wealthy nations have less of a problem because they require modern diesel engines to burn much cleaner than they did even a decade ago. Most industries, like mining, already have limits on the amount of diesel fumes to which workers may be exposed. The medical director of the American Cancer Society praised the ruling by the W.H.O.'s International Agency for Research on Cancer, saying his group “has for a long time had concerns about diesel.” The cancer society is likely to come to the same conclusion the next time its scientific committee meets, said the director, Dr. Otis W. Brawley. “I don’t think it’s bad to have a diesel car,” Dr. Brawley added. “I don’t think it’s good to breathe its exhaust. I’m not concerned about people who walk past a diesel vehicle, I’m a little concerned about people like toll collectors, and I’m very concerned about people like miners, who work where exhaust is concentrated.”

Debra T. Silverman, a cancer researcher for the United States government who headed an influential study published in March that led to Tuesday’s decision, said she was “totally in support” of the W.H.O. ruling and expected that the government would soon follow suit in declaring diesel exhaust a carcinogen.

Three separate federal agencies already classify diesel exhaust as a “likely carcinogen,” a “potential occupational carcinogen” or “reasonably anticipated to be a human carcinogen.” Dr. Silverman, chief of environmental epidemiology for the National Cancer Institute, said her study of 50 years of exposure to diesel fumes by 12,000 miners showed that nonsmoking miners who were heavily exposed to diesel fumes for years had seven times the normal lung cancer risk of nonsmokers. The W.H.O. decision was announced Tuesday in Lyon, France, after a weeklong scientific meeting. It also said diesel exhaust was a possible cause of bladder cancer. Diesel exhaust now shares the W.H.O.’s Group 1 carcinogen status with smoking, asbestos, ultraviolet radiation, alcohol and other elements that pose cancer risks. Dr. Silverman said her research indicated that occupational diesel exposure was a far greater lung cancer risk than passive cigarette smoking, but a much smaller risk than smoking two packs a day. For years, the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, and the National Toxicology Program of the National Institutes of Health have rated diesel as a potential, not proven, carcinogen. The Diesel Technology Forum, which represents car and truck companies and others that make diesel engines, reacted cautiously to the W.H.O. ruling, noting that modern diesel engines used in the United States and other wealthy countries burn low sulfur fuel, so new trucks and buses emit 98 percent less particulates than old ones did and 99 percent less nitrogen oxide, which adds to ozone buildup. Allen Schaeffer, the forum’s executive director,

said the studies considered by the W.H.O. “gave more weight to studies of exposure from technology from the 1950s, when there was no regulation.” Ultra-low-sulfur fuel was introduced in 2000 and became mandatory in 2006, he said, and about a quarter of the American truck fleet was built after that mandate was passed. The government estimates that the entire truck fleet is replaced every 12 to 15 years, he added. Many studies have suggested links between diesel and lung cancer, but Dr. Silverman said hers was the first to measure with precision how much diesel exhaust each group of mineworkers was exposed to. Her study clearly established that the more a miner was exposed to diesel, the greater his cancer risk, she said. “Now we need to focus on managing exposures to diesel exhaust,” Dr. Brawley said. (Donald G. McNeil Jr., *New York Times*, June 2, 2012)

A glass of wine good for bones Good news for older women who enjoy the odd glass of wine: you’re doing your bones a favour. New research from Oregon State University in the US has found that in post-menopausal women, a moderate amount of alcohol helps the bone-turnover process. This is when our bones break down old sections and build up new ones, strengthening their overall density. Researchers found that when moderate drinkers cease drinking for two weeks, their bone turnover falls out of balance, but goes back to normal when they resume drinking. The study defined moderate drinking as having half to two standard drinks a day (bodyandsoul.com.au, August 5, 2012).

Want to be healthier? Feeling overwhelmed by everything you have to do to be healthier? Star by just watching less TV and eating more fruit and veggies and the rest will follow, say researchers at Northwestern University’s Feinberg School of Medicine in the US. They asked four groups of people to try different combinations of diet and activity changes, and found the group asked to reduce their TV time and eat more fruit and veggies experienced the biggest “ripple effect” on their health. That group also reduced their saturated fat without trying and were more confident they could make further lifestyle changes. The study found it also helps to have a short-term financial incentive: all participants were paid money if they stuck to their plan for three weeks.

Go with the grain for your daily chromium Choosing wholegrains over refined grains will provide you with a good daily dose of chromium. This trace mineral is only required by the body in small amounts but plays an important role in keeping our blood-sugar and insulin levels stable. Eating chromium-rich foods also helps curb sugar cravings and reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes.

Germs highest in office kitchens Next time you rinse your teacup in the office kitchen, you may want to wash your hands as well. The kitchen tap is the top germ hot spot at work, with three-quarters of them deemed highly contaminated, according to a US study conducted by Kimberly-Clark Professional. The study tested 5000 work surfaces for the molecule adenosine triphosphate (ATP), which indicates bacteria and viruses. ATP levels of more than 300 show a surface is highly contaminated and capable of spreading illness. Highly contaminated work surfaces:

75 % of kitchen sink handles; 48 % of microwave door handles; 27 % of keyboards; 26 % of fridge door handles; 23 % of water fountain buttons; 21 % of vending machine buttons.

Ages have an aroma There really is an old-person smell, but it’s not as bad as a middle-aged or a young-person smell, according to research published in the journal *PLUS ONE*. The study found that people can identify three age types based on underarm odour. The odour of older people was deemed least offensive.

Fat fighter Mango skin may help ward off obesity. It’s the part of the mango we discard and don’t give much thought to, but it turns out the peel of certain types of this fruit contains a powerful fat fighter. Scientists from the University of Queensland have found the peel of two common types of mango, the Irwin and the nam doc mai, inhabits the generation of fat cells and tissue. The findings mean mango peel is a potential “nutraceutical” (A food that also has medical benefits), and extracts from the peel may be used in obesity-fighting drugs down the track.

Why we overeat when depressed There is a science to this irrational behavior, say researchers from the University of Montreal in Canada: high-fat foods give us an emotional high, but it eventually leads to feelings of depression, so we eat again to go back to feeling good. The team studied the effects of a high-fat diet on mice and found it increased anxiety and depression in the animals and created a cycle of addiction. How to break the overeating habit: b+s nutritionist Lisa Guy recommends cleaning the house of junk food and eating protein and fibre with each meal to stay full. (bodyandsoul.com.au, June 17, 2012).

Weird but True: Black pepper fights weight gain. As well as giving your dinner a tasty kick, black pepper has the potential to fend off weight gain, according to new research published in the *Journal Of Agricultural And Food Chemistry*. Scientists have found that the chemical piperine in black pepper can block the formation of new cells. At the moment it has only been achieved in the lab using animal cells, but the scientists think this discovery may lead to piperine’s use in fighting human obesity. (bodyandsoul.com.au, June 3, 2012).

Kilo weight loss halves breast cancer risk. Losing just three kilos could dramatically lower a woman’s chances of developing breast cancer, according to new research from the US. Researchers say if an overweight woman loses just five per cent of her body weight she is up to 50 per cent less likely to develop the most common form of breast cancer. Researchers studied 439 women aged between 50 and 75 and split them into four groups. One group dieted, another exercised, the third did both and the fourth made no changes. The women on the diet and exercise program had the best results, losing 10 per cent of their body weight.

Caffeine eases dry eyes.

Caffeine could be the answer for sufferers of dry eye syndrome. According to a recent study in the *Journal Ophthalmology*, caffeine consumption can significantly improve dry eye syndrome by stimulating the tear ducts to increase tear production, just like caffeine increases other secretions such as digestive juices and saliva.

Older mums have healthier, smarter kids. Children born to mums over 40 are healthier and brighter than those born to younger mums, according to a new UK study. Researchers also found that children of older mums were less likely to have accidents or need hospital care – possibly because older mothers are more risk-averse. Study author Dr Alastair Sutcliffe says the results are reassuring for women starting families later in life.

Pistachios boost gut health. Eating pistachios may possibly change the amount of beneficial bacteria thriving in your gut, according to a US study. Scientists say pistachios act as prebiotics, which means they contain non-digestible components such as dietary fibre that acts like a food for bacteria in the digestive tract. A 28-gram serve of pistachios also contains three grams of dietary fibre, which is more than in a piece of wholemeal bread. (*bodyandsoul.com.au*, June 10, 2012)

5 Reasons to try avocado oil

1. Avocado oil is rich in heart-healthy monounsaturated fats and low in saturated fats. It can help reduce “bad” LDL cholesterol levels and protect you from heart disease.
2. Cold-pressed avocado oil contains lutein, a carotenoid that helps protect against macular degeneration, cataracts and other eye diseases.
3. Avocado oil contains antioxidants that are absorbed into the mitochondria, where cells produce energy, and neutralise damaging free radicals. This can help protect from premature ageing and diseases such as cancer.
4. Avocado oil has a high smoking point of 271 degrees Celsius (when refined), which is higher than olive oil, making it a healthy oil to cook with at high temperatures.
5. Its mild, unique flavour means you can add it cold to salad dressing and dips. You can find avocado oil in the oils section of supermarkets and in health-food stores. (*bodyandsoul.com.au*, July 22, 2012)

Eat slowly to stay slim. Savouring every bite is not only the key to enjoying your food, it may also help keep your weight in check. Competitive eater Takeru Kobayashi broke a world record in 2011 by eating a staggering 69 hot dogs in 10 minutes. How many times have you wolfed down food without really tasting it? You probably ate more than you needed to because you didn't take the time to recognise that you were full. The hormones in your body that regulate appetite were sending signals that it was sated but you went full-speed ahead until the plate was empty.

Eating slower may be a simple but effective way to manage weight gain and even help us lose weight, according to research from the US. New studies by the University of Rhode Island have found heavier people eat faster than slimmer people. A laboratory study found people who eat faster polish off about 88 grams of food per minute. Slow eaters consume 57 grams of food per minute – more than a third less. Researchers also found people with a high body mass index (BMI) eat faster than people with a low BMI. "It takes time for your body to process fullness signals, so slower eating may allow time for fullness to register in the brain before you've eaten too much," says Kathleen Melanson, associate professor of nutrition at the University of Rhode Island. Her previous research found eating slowly reduces the amount of food we ingest. Women who were told to eat quickly consumed 646 calories in nine minutes. When the same women were told to pause between each bite and to chew food 15 to 20 times before swallowing, they consumed only 579 calories over a 29-minute period. Similarly, research at Osaka University in Japan studied the eating habits of 3000 people and found men who ate fast were 84 per cent more likely to be overweight. Fast-eating women were twice as likely to be overweight compared with women who ate slowly.

Fast living, fast food

"In Australia we seem to have a culture where people eat quickly and don't actually taste their food," says Melanie McGrice, a spokeswoman for the Dietitians Association of Australia. Rushed eating means we often reach for convenience foods that can be devoured on the go rather than sitting at the dinner table, eating with cutlery and taking things slowly.

The University of Rhode Island research found when people ate wholegrain foods instead of highly processed items, they ate more slowly because the foods contain more fibre and need more chewing. "Leave the skin on fruits and vegies to boost the fibre content so you have to eat them slowly," McGrice says. "If you have a piece of fruit, cut it into small pieces to eat rather than taking large bites quickly." Skipping meals during a busy day also leads to fast overeating. "It's common for people to rush around and skip meals and then be overly hungry, so when they do see food they eat fast," McGrice says. "Hormones are produced by your body four to five hours after your last meal to stimulate your appetite so you eat again. If you override that, when you do eat, you'll eat quickly to compensate for your hunger. That's why it's important to eat regularly."

Lap band lessons

Professor Paul O'Brien, from the Centre for Obesity Research & Education at Monash University, says people who have a lapband procedure have to eat slowly so food can be squeezed through the band into the stomach. "The oesophagus squeezes food four or five times to get just one bite down to the band and then squeezed past it into the stomach. That can take up to a minute," he says. "Patients have to allow that mouthful of food to pass through this process before they have another mouthful.

We give patients a timer that runs for a minute to emphasise they have to wait a minute before swallowing again." This also allows time for messages from the stomach to reach the brain and signal you are full. This process takes about 20 minutes. "That's why it's so important to eat a little and then wait for a while to see if you feel full. If you continue to eat without actually being hungry, you could overeat and that can lead to weight gain," O'Brien says.

"Focus on enjoying smaller portions of food and focus on quality, not quantity."

Slowing things down

- Focus on the flavour and texture of each mouthful.
- Have teaspoon-sized mouthfuls of food.
- Chew each mouthful 15 to 20 times.
- Put your knife and fork down between mouthfuls.
- "Mentally envisage doing a lap of the room before you take the next mouthful," McGrice says.
- Aim to only have a few bites of food a minute.

- If you are starting to feel full, stop eating. Wait for 10 to 15 minutes and if you still feel full, stop eating.
- Include wholegrain foods in your meal. Don't skip meals. (Sarah Marinos, bodyandsoul.com.au).

Brush better to reduce cancer risk Bad brushers, this is your wake-up call. Swedish researchers have found people with high amounts of bacteria on their teeth have an increased risk of dying of cancer. The researchers followed 1390 adults in Sweden over 24 years and found those with the highest plaque index have an up to 80 per cent greater risk of dying of cancer. On average, during the study, there were two deaths per thousand people a year from cancer, but that goes up to three deaths per thousand for people with a lot of plaque.

The study does not prove a definitive link between plaque and cancer, as dental health may indicate other factors linked with the disease. (bodyandsoul.com.au, July 1, 2012)

Eating fruit & vegetables helps smokers to quit. Smokers who consume more fruit and vegies have a better chance of quitting and are more likely to stay tobacco-free for longer, according to a new study from the University of Buffalo in the USA. It also found smokers with higher fruit and vegie intakes smoked fewer cigarettes each day. Possible reasons for this include a phenomenon where smokers often confuse hunger with wanting a cigarette, but eating plenty of fibre-rich fruit and vegetables gives a better sense of satiety. Fruit and vegetables can also make cigarettes taste worse.

Older dads give kids better DNA. Older dads may find parenting tough on their own bodies, but genetically speaking it's great for their offspring. A study from Northwestern University in the US has found children whose fathers had them in their late thirties to early 50s have longer telomeres than children of younger fathers. Telomeres are found at the ends of our chromosomes and are linked to good health and longevity. Study author Dan Eisenberg says that as men age, the telomeres in their sperms get longer (even though the telomeres in the rest of their body get shorter), which affects the DNA of their children. The DNA benefits were also found in older dads' grand children. (bodyandsoul.com.au, July 1, 2012)

Smoking gun found in SIDS. Time to pack in the cigarettes as study finds smoking leads to massive increase in SIDS. The results showed nicotine, the main neurotoxin found in cigarette smoke, increased the risk of SIDS. Eliminating smoking at home reduces the risk of SIDS by 80 per cent. Research from the University of Sydney has proven a link between noxious fumes and sudden infant death syndrome, which claims the life of one baby a week in NSW. It found nicotine, the main neurotoxin found in cigarette smoke, increased the risk of SIDS by damaging brainstem cells receptive to the drug. The results, published in the journal of Toxicology and Applied Pharmacology, followed up on the research team's previous 2007 study of babies who died of SIDS that proved any smoke exposure contributed to brain cell death. Of the 67 babies who died of SIDS in the research group, 81 per cent were exposed to cigarette smoke. International studies have shown the babies of mothers who smoke during pregnancy have a five-fold increase in the risk of SIDS, while babies born into a home where there is a smoker have a three-fold risk. "We found any smoke exposure in the home resulted in a greater number of cells dying in the brain stem which controls heart rate, respiration and sleep and arousal," researcher Dr Rita Machaalani said.

"I don't know how tobacco companies sleep straight in bed," Ros Richardson, from SIDS and Kids NSW, said.

The incidence of sudden infant death syndrome has decreased by 85 per cent in the past 25 years due to safe sleep education programs that recommend babies be placed on their backs to sleep. An average of 50 babies die in NSW each year from SIDS. Almost one in five women still smoke in pregnancy, including 42 per cent of teenagers and 52 per cent of indigenous women. "The most outstanding risk factor is tobacco smoke and it's one of the hardest ones to shake," Ms Richardson said. "Smoking in pregnancy is also associated with a higher risk of stillbirth and pre-term birth and neonatal loss."

Hormone gives male libido a lift. Look out, Viagra, there could be another libido-boosting drug on the market, and it comes from an unlikely source. Oxytocin, the naturally occurring hormone that makes mums bond with their babies, has been found to have an impressive effect on the males sex drive. In a small study, US researchers found that a man who took twice daily doses of the hormone experienced a significant improvement in his libido, and arousal, on a par with what Viagra can achieve. The only side effect found was the desire to hug more often, which may not be such a bad thing. Research is still in preliminary stages but experts are already touting this as a major discovery.

Music lovers recover faster from strokes. Good news for music, art and theatre lovers: a new study has found that these pastimes help stroke victims recover better. Researchers from Italy looked at the interest of 192 stroke survivors. They found that the 105 who reported an appreciation for the arts had more energy, improved mobility and better health overall. They were also less anxious or depressed and had better memory and communication skills.

Go nuts for a low-Gi breakfast

Adding almonds to your breakfast lowers the glycemic index of the entire meal, which keeps your blood sugar levels balanced throughout the day and stops mid-morning hunger pangs, according to US research. Low-Gi foods like almonds are also high in fibre, which help keep you fuller for longer. Other fibre-rich, low Gi foods you can add to your breakfast include nuts, chia and flax seeds and other seeds, wholegrains, and legumes.

Protect your man's brain with berries

Men who eat berries at least once a week lower their risk of developing Parkinson's disease by 25 per cent, according to a study by British and US experts. The study looked at the diets of 130 000 men and women over 20 years. Researchers claim that flavonoids, a powerful antioxidant found in berries as well as other fruit, tea and red wine, protect the brain against the disease. While the study found a clear link for men, there was no lowered risk for women. (bodyandsoul.com.au, April 29, 2012)

Coffee = less skin cancer Grabbing a coffee after a workout gives you more than a happy buzz. Research on mice has found the combo of exercise and caffeine reduces the number of skin tumours in cancer-prone mice by 62 percent. Tumours also shrank by 85 per cent in treated animals. The researchers say the reason is the anti-inflammatory effect of the combination, and believe humans will experience the same skin benefits as mice.

Try a purple carrot You may have noticed purple-coloured carrots popping up in your supermarket or fruit and vegetable shop of late. Purple carrots are not new, though – they're actually one of the original varieties of carrots.

Why they're good for you: The purple pigment contains high levels of anthocyanins, powerful antioxidants that help fight free radical damage and reduce the risk of chronic diseases. Eating purple carrots can help lower the risk of developing heart disease and cancer and may slow down signs of aging. How to eat them: Purple carrots taste the same as orange carrots and can be cooked in the same way too. They also make a great addition to juices. (*bodyandsoul.com.au*, April 22, 2012)

Swap red meat to reduce stroke risk A major US study has found that the risk of stroke is reduced by eating less red meat and more nuts, chicken, fish and low-fat dairy. Swap a serve of red meat each day for . . .

- 30g of nuts and you'll reduce stroke risk by 17 per cent
- 240g low-fat dairy and you'll reduce stroke by 11 per cent
- 90g chicken and you'll reduce stroke risk by 27 per cent. (*bodyandsoul.com.au*, April 15, 2012)

Save \$\$ and be happy You may not be able to buy happiness, but putting some money in the piggy bank on a regular basis seems to help. Regular savers are significantly happier than non-savers, according to a recent survey of 2300 Australians by RoboDirect. The survey found that 60 per cent of regular savers defined themselves as completely happy, compared with 17 per cent of unrestrained spenders. Saving has health benefits, too: 57 per cent of regular savers said they were in excellent health, compared with 32 per cent of unrestrained spenders and 46 per cent of all the people surveyed.

Weird but true

Traffic noise ups the risk of heart attack, according to a Danish Cancer Society. Its study looked at the living conditions and health of more than 50,000 people and found that for every 10 decibels of traffic noise, there is a 12 per cent increase in heart attack risk. It is thought that traffic sleep and stress levels which in turn affect heart health.

Ward off flu with cranberry juice

Cranberry juice is well known for its effectiveness in improving urinary tract health, but new research shows it is also a great immunity booster. A study by the University of Florida found people who drank cranberry juice daily had fewer colds and flu and improved immune cell function. Gram for gram, cranberries are more abundant in polyphenolic antioxidants than any other fruit and these antioxidants help reduce inflammation in the body. (*bodyandsoul.com.au*, July 15, 2012)

Pop to it

Popcorn has twice as many antioxidants as fruit. The news on popcorn keeps getting better. US scientist Dr Joe Vinson has studied these little golden kernels and found that one serving of plain, air-popped popcorn (about three cups) has double the antioxidants of an average serve of fruit. He also found a serve will provide 70 per cent of your daily wholegrain needs and a good amount of fibre. While this does not mean popcorn should take the place of fruit or vegetables, Vinson says it does mean it deserves more respect. Hear, hear!

Are impulsive toddlers the gamblers of the future?

Preschoolers who are impulsive, restless and inattentive are twice as likely to have a gambling problem in adulthood, according to a new US study. However, researchers say that boosting the children's self-confidence and teaching patience and self-control could increase their chances of being happy and successful financially and academically (*bodyandsoul.com.au*, May 13, 2012).

Drink to your health More than one million people will be putting on the kettle for Australia's Biggest Morning Tea on May 24 this year to raise money for cancer research and support services. If you're serving up a cuppa, here are the five healthiest tea choices.

- + Resehip tea is rich in vitamin C and boosts immunity.
- + Green tea's antioxidants help reduce cancer risk.
- + Rooibos tea is a good source of antioxidants and minerals.
- + Chamomile tea is calming.
- + Ginger tea relieves nausea and helps digestive problems. (*bodyandsoul.com.au*, May 13, 2012)

Superfoods

While the sniffles may be a part of life, the good news is that there are some foods that boost your defence against seasonal sickness. The health heroes aren't hard to find – you can even grow them yourself. Here are some easy-to-grow, easy-to-find and easy-to-eat 'superfoods'.

+ **Broccoli**, is packed with nutrients, antioxidants and anti-carcinogenic properties. It's also very versatile to cook with and easy to add to existing meals for an added health kick.

+ **Garlic**, is known for being a cardiovascular booster and its antimicrobial properties make it nature's antibiotic.

+ **Green beans**, mineral rich, they are good for arthritis and kidney stones, so guard your body and stock up.

+ **Goji berries**, are the food of the moment. You can juice them, dry them or make tea out of them. These antioxidant-rich berries have been used in Chinese medicine for thousands of years to protect the liver, improve eyesight, help circulation and aid your immune system.

+ **Oregano**, helps prevent prostate cancer. Researchers from the US have found that a chemical in oregano called carvacrol could be a powerful weapon against prostate cancer. When added to prostate cancer cells in the lab, it actually triggered the cells to kill themselves. Scientists say that while more studies are needed, oregano presents a very promising therapy for patients with prostate cancer. (Energy Australia Newsletter, Issue 23).

Calorie counting doesn't make you slimmer New research shows people who are obsessed with reading labels and calorie counting tend to be heavier than those who don't bother. Scientists quizzed more than 300

French, Quebec and American consumers on their knowledge of dietary fats. The French couldn't answer 43 per cent of the questions, the Canadians couldn't answer 13 per cent of the questions and the Americans couldn't answer four per cent, yet France has an obesity rate of 12 per cent, three times lower than the US. It seems focusing on detailed nutritional information may not encourage healthy eating (bodyandsoul.com.au, May 13, 2012).

A Mathematical Challenge to Obesity Carson C. Chow deploys mathematics to solve the everyday problems of real life. As an investigator at the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, he tries to figure out why 1 in 3 Americans are obese. We spoke at the recent annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, where Dr. Chow, 49, gave a presentation on "Illuminating the Obesity Epidemic With Mathematics," and then later by telephone; a condensed and edited version of the interviews follows.

You are an M.I.T.-trained mathematician and physicist. How did you come to work on obesity?

In 2004, while on the faculty of the math department at the University of Pittsburgh, I married. My wife is a Johns Hopkins ophthalmologist, and she would not move. So I began looking for work in the Beltway area. Through the grapevine, I heard that the N.I.D.D.K., a branch of the National Institutes of Health, was building up its mathematics laboratory to study obesity. At the time, I knew almost nothing of obesity. I didn't even know what a calorie was. I quickly read every scientific paper I could get my hands on. I could see the facts on the epidemic were quite astounding. Between 1975 and 2005, the average weight of Americans had increased by about 20 pounds. Since the 1970s, the national obesity rate had jumped from around 20 percent to over 30 percent. The interesting question posed to me when I was hired was, "Why is this happening?"

Why would mathematics have the answer? Because to do this experimentally would take years. You could find out much more quickly if you did the math. Now, prior to my coming on staff, the institute had hired a mathematical physiologist, Kevin Hall. Kevin developed a model that could predict how your body composition changed in response to what you ate. He created a math model of a human being and then plugged in all the variables — height, weight, food intake, exercise. The model could predict what a person will weigh, given their body size and what they take in. However, the model was complicated: hundreds of equations. Kevin and I began working together to boil it down to one simple equation. That's what applied mathematicians do. We make things simple. Once we had it, the slimmed-down equation proved to be a useful platform for answering a host of questions.

What new information did your equation render? That the conventional wisdom of 3,500 calories less is what it takes to lose a pound of weight is wrong. The body changes as you lose. Interestingly, we also found that the fatter you get, the easier it is to gain weight. An extra 10 calories a day puts more weight onto an obese person than on a thinner one.

Also, there's a time constant that's an important factor in weight loss. That's because if you reduce your caloric intake, after a while, your body reaches equilibrium. It actually takes about three years for a dieter to reach their new "steady state." Our model predicts that if you eat 100 calories fewer a day, in three years you will, on average, lose 10 pounds — if you don't cheat.

Another finding: Huge variations in your daily food intake will not cause variations in weight, as long as your average food intake over a year is about the same. This is because a person's body will respond slowly to the food intake.

Did you ever solve the question posed to you when you were first hired — what caused the obesity epidemic? We think so. And it's something very simple, very obvious, something that few want to hear: The epidemic was caused by the overproduction of food in the United States. Beginning in the 1970s, there was a change in national agricultural policy. Instead of the government paying farmers not to engage in full production, as was the practice, they were encouraged to grow as much food as they could. At the same time, technological changes and the "green revolution" made our farms much more productive. The price of food plummeted, while the number of calories available to the average American grew by about 1,000 a day. Well, what do people do when there is extra food around? They eat it! This, of course, is a tremendously controversial idea. However, the model shows that increase in food more than explains the increase in weight.

In the 1950s, when I was growing up, people rarely ate out. Today, Americans dine out — with these large restaurant portions and oil-saturated foods — about five times a week.

Right. Society has changed a lot. With such a huge food supply, food marketing got better and restaurants got cheaper. The low cost of food fueled the growth of the fast-food industry. If food were expensive, you couldn't have fast food.

People think that the epidemic has to be caused by genetics or that physical activity has gone down. Yet levels of physical activity have not really changed in the past 30 years. As for the genetic argument, yes, there are people who are genetically disposed to obesity, but if they live in societies where there isn't a lot of food, they don't get obese. For them, and for us, it's supply that's the issue. Interestingly, we saw that Americans are wasting food at a progressively increasing rate. If Americans were to eat all the food that's available, we'd be even more obese.

Any practical advice from your number crunching? One of the things the numbers have shown us is that weight change, up or down, takes a very, very long time. All diets work. But the reaction time is really slow: on the order of a year.

People don't wait long enough to see what they are going to stabilize at. So if you drop weight and return to your old eating habits, the time it takes to crawl back to your old weight is something like three years. To help people understand this better, we've posted an interactive version of our model at bwsimulator.niddk.nih.gov. People can plug in their information and learn how much they'll need to reduce their intake and increase their activity to lose. It will also give them a rough sense of how much time it will take to reach the goal. Applied mathematics in action!

What can Americans do to stem the obesity epidemic? One thing I have concluded, and this is just a personal view, is that we should stop marketing food to children. I think childhood obesity is a major problem. And when you're obese, it's not like we can suddenly cut your food off and you'll go back to not being obese. You've been programmed to eat more. It's a hardship to eat less. Michelle Obama's initiative is helpful. And childhood obesity rates seem to be stabilizing in the developed world, at least. The obesity epidemic may have peaked because of the recession. It's made food more expensive.

You said earlier that nobody wants to hear your message. Why?

I think the food industry doesn't want to know it. And ordinary people don't particularly want to hear this, either. It's so easy for someone to go out and eat 6,000 calories a day. There's no magic bullet on this. You simply have to cut calories and be vigilant for the rest of your life. *This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:*

Correction: May 16, 2012 The "Conversation With" article on Tuesday, about Carson Chow, a mathematician who studies obesity, misstated a statistic around which his work revolves. One in 3 Americans are obese — not merely overweight, a description that applies to 2 in 3 Americans (Claudia Dreifus, Michael Temchine, *The New York Times*, May 14, 2012)

Religion

Prime Minister Dumps Christians

Julia Gillard's decision to pull out of a speaking engagement with the Australian Christian Lobby has been applauded by marriage equality advocates. Ms Gillard, an atheist, yesterday withdrew as the keynote speaker at an ACL conference in Canberra next month, citing "offensive" comments made by its leader Jim Wallace, who said smoking was healthier than same sex marriage. (TheTelegraph.com.au, September 7, 2012)

Mormon bishop's daughter spills Romney's 'secrets' ...

'Would you trust the judgment of a man if he truly believes he's gonna be a god?'

The daughter of a Mormon bishop who has abandoned her family's faith claims in a new book the election of Mitt Romney to the presidency would put the U.S. in danger due to what she calls the Republican's "outrageous," "horrific" and "mind-controlling" beliefs. "While he attempts to portray Mormonism as just another Christian religion, Mitt Romney counts on his skills to shift our attention away from what he truly believes," says Tricia Erickson, author of "Can Mitt Romney Serve Two Masters? The Mormon Church Versus the Office of the Presidency of the United States of America."

"If the American people knew what he truly believed, they would surely not place him in the highest office in the land." Yet others, such as professor Richard Bushman, a Mormon and previous missionary himself who has taught at Harvard, Columbia and Brown Universities, are defending the faith. He calls Erickson "disillusioned" and someone who "instead of walking away felt an obligation to discredit [her] former faith."

Find out what's really in the Bible and what's not, and learn your spectacular destiny that's rarely ever discussed in church in this autographed No. 1 best-seller!

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the official name for Mormonism, has rocketed into the national consciousness this month since Rev. Robert Jeffress, a Rick Perry supporter who pastors the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, said Romney was "not a Christian" and that Mormonism is a "cult."

"Part of a pastor's job is to warn his people and others about false religions," Jeffress said Sunday, standing by his controversial remarks. "Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Mormonism are all false religions."

In her book, Erickson paints an unflattering picture of the Mormon faith, which counts not only the former Massachusetts governor as a member, but also fellow GOP presidential contender Jon Huntsman, Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., radio talk-show host Glenn Beck, singer Gladys Knight, actresses Amy Adams and Katherine Heigl, "Napoleon Dynamite" actor Jon Heder, entertainers Donny and Marie Osmond, and sports stars including the NFL's Steve Young, Danny White and Merlin Olsen. Erickson says Romney believes:

- He will become a "god" in the afterlife and be given his own planet
- Satan is Jesus' literal brother
- Jesus was *not* born of a virgin birth
- He will be given his own afterlife kingdom where he will have sexual relations with his wife, Ann, to populate his kingdom with spirit children as God the Father Himself has a wife on His own planet.

"Mormonism teaches we pre-existed on God the Father's planet as spirit children before we were planted in our mother's wombs," Erickson told WND. "And the reason why we're here according to Mormonism, is so that we can work out our own progression to godhood and our own planets themselves."

The author, who herself was married in a Mormon temple at age 19 but now considers herself a non-denominational Christian, says there's a secret agenda Mormon officials don't like to talk about publicly.

"A complete takeover of the government," she said. "They have more people in the CIA, the FBI. They have an employment office for Mormons in D.C. to be able to infiltrate them into the government."

"They've been trying since the beginning to get someone in the presidency, because they believe they have to establish their authority so when Jesus comes to Earth, the Mormon Church will take control of the government and the Mormons will be the government of God on Earth," she continued.

Erickson says her main concern is that the leader of the free world have the ability to discern fact from fiction.

"It may be crucial to our survival," she said. "If his beliefs are distorted, which they unequivocally are, why would it not be critical to our existence to protect our country from being placed in the hands of such a person?"

When asked for specific rituals she considers bizarre, Erickson claims Romney and other Mormons take part in clandestine marriage ceremonies involving "outrageous" customs. Explaining her own Mormon wedding, she says she was forced to completely disrobe against her will. "It was horrific," she told WND. "There I was standing naked. They brought this bowl of water, and started washing my body down and whispering prayers over my body. They stopped over the right and left breast, the navel and knees and prayed specific prayers."

To help ensure the general public did not learn details of the rituals, she says believers took a symbolic knife to feign their own murder if members spilled the beans of what really goes on behind closed doors. "They actually had us slashing our guts open and our guts falling to the ground if we told people of the secret dogma of the ceremonies," Erickson said.

"Mitt is not a casual Mormon," she told online interviewer Thom Hartmann, noting Romney has reached the upper echelons of the faith. "There is no way that he will be able to not listen to the [Mormon] prophet. His eternal salvation depends on it. He has to put the church first over country." When pressed about what some may consider the strange beliefs

of other faiths, Erickson said of Romney, "I kind of believe, you know, that he should be completely sane and he should have discernment and good judgment. I mean if the man truly believes he's gonna become a god, would you trust the judgment of somebody like that?"

The Boston Globe reported in 2006 that Romney's political team quietly consulted with leaders of the Mormon Church to map out plans for a nationwide network of Mormon supporters to help Romney capture the presidency in 2008. Officials with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints told WND they're well aware of Erickson's book, but were reluctant to respond to Erickson's assertions. Spokeswoman Jessica Moody says she encourages everyone to read the church's core beliefs as well as articles of faith posted online.

Regarding the plan of salvation, the LDS church states, "The mortal existence is seen in the context of a great sweep of history, from a pre-Earth life where the spirits of all mankind lived with Heavenly Father to a future life in His presence where continued growth, learning and improving will take place." At the Values Voters Summit in the nation's capital over the weekend, Romney defended his beliefs, saying, "Almost all Americans live for a purpose greater than ourselves. Our heritage of religious faith and tolerance has importantly shaped who we have become as a people. We must continue to welcome faith into the public square and allow it to flourish. Our government should respect religious values, not silence them. We will always pledge our allegiance to a nation that is under God." Bushman, meanwhile, says people need to remember that many faiths have doctrines and customs that other people find hard to fathom. "To my way of thinking the idiosyncrasies of Mormon belief and practice are not the issue; Catholic belief in transubstantiation and Protestant belief in the resurrection [of Jesus] can be made to look silly, too," he told CNN in reaction to Erickson.

"The question is Mitt Romney's independence. Will he pursue the public good as he rationally understands it, or will he bow to the judgment of Church leaders? Does his religion force him to be a puppet? Here we can turn to history for an answer. Temple-attending, believing Mormons have held national office for over a century now. Is there a single instance where they have succumbed to church direction against their own consciences. I do not know of one myself." Earlier this week, WND posted a non-scientific, interactive poll in which readers were asked to sound off on Mormonism as a factor in the presidential race. With more than 1,200 participants, the top response with 25 percent of the votes was, "Because it denies divinity of Jesus and salvation by faith alone, it is a cult, and a Mormon candidate should never be elected president." (Joe Kovacs, *WorldNetDaily.com*, Oct. 14, 2011)

Katie Holmes has spoken out for the first time since her split from Tom Cruise

KATIE Holmes wants sole custody of her daughter because she fears being cut out of her life in what looks like a nasty divorce battle. KATIE Holmes talked about launching a "new phase" in her life weeks before her bombshell divorce from Tom Cruise. Holmes said she tries to do something every day "without being afraid to fail" because "who cares? At least you tried. It's usually the people who haven't tried who are the naysayers." The actress has just been named the first A-list celebrity face of cosmetics company Bobbi Brown, signing a contract reportedly worth up to \$3 million dollars. She has also been busy with New York fashion week, where she will debut her first collection on Sunday. Cruise, on the other hand, has had a horrible few days.

First he was hit with allegations that Holmes was one of at least 20 women auditioned by the Church of Scientology for the role of his wife. Then two former high-ranking Scientologists claimed the organisation turned his children with Nicole Kidman, Isabella and Connor, against their mother after their divorce - even waging a hate campaign against her.

And today, the US press reports that Scientology was behind Cruise's split from actress Penelope Cruz in 2004.

Cruise dated his Vanilla Sky co-star for three years, in between his second and third marriages to Kidman and Holmes. The Oscar winner reportedly began the process of taking Scientology courses and auditing sessions but was labelled a "dilettante" by church leader David Miscavige after she refused to abandon her Buddhist beliefs. (*The [Sydney] Telegraph*, September 07)

US Churches against the Jews: Heavenly Intifada

Hillary Clinton, John McCain and Rick Perry, just to name a few, are all Methodists. The Methodist Church is radically anti-Israel.

The United Methodist Church is the major mainline Protestant denomination in the United States. Hillary Clinton, John McCain and Rick Perry, to name just a few, are all Methodists. During its General Conference in late April in Tampa, Florida, the Church will discuss some divestment proposals targeting companies that profit from Israel's "occupation", such as Motorola, Caterpillar and Hewlett Packard. The Methodists boycott no other country. But they loudly proclaim a radical anti-Israel policy. The divestment campaign can have severe consequences for the companies targeted. For example, the United Methodist Church's pension agency reportedly has \$5 million in Caterpillar stock out of \$15 billion in assets.

Methodist bishops have already opposed U.S. arms sales to the Jewish State.

The Virginia and New England conferences of the Methodist Church just passed resolutions calling for divestment from Israel. The Methodist Church of Britain launched a boycott against goods emanating from Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria. Last October, the historic Dumbarton United Methodist Church in Washington, D.C., which features a pew where President Abraham Lincoln once sat, also backed an anti-Israel divestment proposal. In March, three resolutions taking anti-Israel positions were adopted by the Methodist Church's public policy arm, which voted in favor of resolutions seeking boycotts and divestment directed against companies regarded as "complicit in the Israeli presence in the West Bank". Equating Israel with apartheid South Africa is a recurring theme among pro-Palestinian Methodist groups. The Methodist Church is not alone in this anti-Israel wave. The wealthiest US Church, the Presbyterian, will also vote the divestment proposal during its General Assembly in Pittsburgh. The Church's Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment urged the General Assembly to fully embrace the boycott movement against some major companies which are based in Israel. Last November, the Presbyterian Church held a conference in Louisville and it embraced the "Kairos Document", which rejects the Jewish State and says that Israeli security policies are "a sin against God".

"Liberal" Church efforts to divest from companies doing business with Israel are part of a bigger trend which demonizes Judaism. At the recent Louisville symposium, Eugene March, professor emeritus of Old Testament at Presbyterian Seminary,

said the Jewish right to the land is “invalid”, while Gary Burge, professor of New Testament at Wheaton College, criticized “the territorial worldview of Judaism”.

Anti-Jewish eschatology is nothing new in the Presbyterian denomination. When the US Church voted to divest from Israel in 2004, its flagship intellectual journal, *Church and Society*, ran an essay by theologian Robert Hamerton-Kelly who argues that Judaism has always been “a blood-thirsty, primitive religion”. The well-known Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann, who is professor emeritus at Presbyterian Church affiliated Columbia Theological Seminary and one of America’s most influential left-leaning theologians, wonders if any idea of “chosen people” inevitably results in “absolutism” and the “seeds of violence”. This is a return to Martin Luther’s demonology, since the founder of Protestantism argued that the Jews were no longer the chosen people but instead “the Devil’s people”. Stephen Sizer, British theologian and leader in these mainline Churches, released a declaration to support the UN Palestinian bid: “The New Testament insists the promises God made to Avraham are fulfilled not in the Jewish people but in Jesus and those who acknowledge him”.

Historically these two Churches have occupied the corridors of power and wealth in America. So although liberal Christianity is now declining in the United States, it still is culturally and politically important. Methodists and Presbyterians are the most aggressively anti-Israel among Protestant denominations, but all five of the mainline denominations in the US – Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Lutheran and United Church of Christ – have debated and adopted policies intended to bring direct or indirect economic pressure on Israel. As William van der Hoeven, an Evangelical with extensive Mideast experience put it as early as the 1970s, “The PLO has hijacked the main churches”. It’s a new form of Intifada “from Heaven”. Giulio Meotti, *Israel National News*, February 03, 2012)

Vatican Backs 'Right of Return'

A senior Vatican cardinal said on yesterday that all Palestinian refugees had a right to return to their homeland. Cardinal Renato Martino, head of the Vatican department that formulates refugee policy, made the comment as US President George W. Bush was set to revive long-stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians. “Palestinian refugees, like all other refugees, have a right to return to their homeland,” Martino said in response to a question about the 44-nation conference in Annapolis on Tuesday. Martino did not make clear whether he meant refugees had a right to return to homes in what is now Israel or to an eventual Palestinian state. (*Lekarev Report*, Nov. 29, 2007)

Jew Haters in the Vatican

“The Vatican has taken off its gloves, and is welcoming the Society of St Pius. The writer, an Italian journalist with Il Foglio, writes a weekly column for Arutz Sheva. He is the author of the book “A New Shoah”, that researched the personal stories of Israel’s terror victims, published by Encounter. His writing has appeared in publications, such as the Wall Street Journal, Frontpage and Commentary. The controversy began on Jan. 21, 2009, when Pope Benedict revoked the excommunication of four bishops of the Society of Saint Pius X. “I think that 200,000 to 300,000 Jews perished in Nazi concentration camps but that none of them via gas chambers,” one of the Bishops, Richard Williamson, declared a few days later. Then Williamson raised his voice against the Jews: “The Catholic faith and Jewish power are like two weighing pans on a pair of scales: when the Catholic Faith goes up, Jewish power goes down and vice versa”. These past weeks the Vatican is working for communion with the Society of Saint Pius X. Cardinal William Levada, the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, presented “the path to full reconciliation with the Church” to Bishop Bernard Fellay, the superior general of the fraternity. European rabbis urged the Pope in vain to suspend talks with the society. The Vatican is now trying to minimize Williamson’s words against the Jews as a mere isolate case. But this *Arutz Sheva* expose clearly shows that hatred for Judaism permeates the entire Catholic Brotherhood.

Last month the Italian branch of the Society chose a new head after the retirement of Father Davide Pagliarini. The successor is Pierpaolo Petrucci, whose positions on the Jews are the exact copy of those of Williamson. Petrucci published an essay in the website of the Society stating: “About the Jews, Joseph Ratzinger calls them ‘Fathers in faith’. What does it mean? Supporting Israel’s policy despite the Palestinian question? Supporting the Jewish religion? If that’s the case, how can the Church approve a false religion which rejects Jesus Christ?”. Another priest, Don Mauro Tranquillo, calls the Jews “morally responsible for the deicide of Christ”. In 2009 Petrucci calls the Jews “rejecters of Christ”. A year later he stated that “the Church always condemned Judaism as a false religion, praying for the conversion (of the Jews), so that they will reach salvation, seriously compromised by their superstitions”. When Pope John Paul II made his first visit to Rome’s synagogue in 1986, the Society distributed a placard saying, “Pope, don’t go to Caiaphas,” a reference to the Jewish high priest who organized the plot to kill Jesus, according to the New Testament.

Franz Schmidberger, the right-hand man of Bishop Fellay, also asks for the Jews’ conversion: “St. Peter, the first pope, preached to the Jews and told them that ‘If you want to be saved you must do three things: You must regret your sins and convert, believe in our lord... and, thirdly, be baptized.’ We expect that every pope who claims to be the successor of St. Peter . . . should take the same stand.” A few days after Mr. Williamson’s tirade about the gas chambers, Mr. Schmidberger wrote to German bishops to remind them of the supposed Jewish original sin. “With the crucifixion of Christ, the curtain of the temple was torn and the old alliance destroyed. The Jews are complicit in deicide, as long as they do not distance themselves from the culpability of their forefathers by acknowledging the divinity of Christ and the baptism”.

Last autumn, Régis de Cacqueray, the head of the French chapter, also accused Jews of deicide: “How can one imagine that God is pleased with the prayers of the Jews, who are faithful to their fathers who crucified his son and deny the Trinitarian God?”. The society said the speech was published on its website with Fellay’s approval. According to *Ansa* news agency, in 1997 Ugo Carandino, the head of the Italian Society of Saint Pius X community, refused the Vatican’s request of forgiveness to the Jewish people: “It’s the Jews which should ask our pardon for their usury,” he said. Another of the bishops pardoned by Pope Benedict, Bernard Tissier de Mallerais, also said that “the Jews are the most active artisans for the coming of Antichrist”. The Pope’s unity with Lefebvre’s group is a renovation of the “Adversus Judeaos” teachings which spurred pogroms, burnings at the stake and the inquisition. If the Vatican welcomes back these anti-Semites, the Jewish leaders should immediately stop any dialogue with the Catholic authorities. Giulio Meotti, *Israel National News*, March 01, 2012)

Italian Daily: Holocaust "The Greatest Lie of Modern Times"

Robert Faurisson sparks an uproar with a blatantly anti-Semitic article in an Italian gov't funded newspaper.

"The Greatest Lie of Modern Times". This is how French scholar Robert Faurisson defined the Holocaust in an article published this week by the Italian daily *Rinascita*, a leftist national newspaper financed by Italy's government. Faurisson's essay sparked an uproar after Rome's Jewish community denounced the state-funded newspaper for denial of the gas chambers. "The general belief on the part of the Western world is that 'the Holocaust' has long been the sword and shield of Zionism", writes Faurisson. "But today Revisionism is putting this belief in peril", he concluded.

Faurisson first appeared on the scene in the 1970s and he is now known as "the dean of deniers". Arab and Iranian "experts" on the Holocaust frequently cite Mr. Faurisson's theories. He is quoted in the 1982 doctoral dissertation written by Mahmoud Abbas, the PA's President. When Iran's Ahmadinejad described the Holocaust as "a myth", Mr. Faurisson sent him a letter "expressing full support for his remarks". The letter was heralded in the Iranian press. Faurisson's latest essay raises the awareness of rampant anti-Semitism in Italy, where a jarring 44% of citizens are "prejudiced or hostile towards Jews", according to a research study released by the Italian Parliament just last autumn.

In November 2008 in Rome, a Holocaust-denying high school teacher was suspended. Several days ago, on the eve of the Remembrance Day events, an Italian judge condemned a journalist who denounced as anti-Semitic a cartoon, entitled "Fiamma Frankenstein", depicting Italian MP Fiamma Nirenstein, who is Jewish, with a hooked nose, the symbol of fascist Italy and the Star of David. Instead of being considered an illiterate, the cartoonist was celebrated as a champion of freedom of expression and the journalist condemned to pay. Italy's media has a long tradition of anti-Jewish prejudice. Sergio Romano, Italy's ex ambassador and editorial contributor to the most important Italian newspaper *Il Corriere Della Sera*, claimed that the memory of the Shoah has become an insurance policy and is used by Israel as a diplomatic weapon, while Israel itself is "a war-mongering, imperialist, arrogant nation" and "an unscrupulous liar".

Barbara Spinelli, the leading journalist for *La Repubblica* newspaper, wrote that "Israel constitutes a scandal...for the way in which Moses' religion inhabits our placet". She also attacks the "double and contradictory loyalty" of the Jews. Holocaust denial and anti-Jewish contempt have gone mainstream in Italy's dolce vita. By Giulio Meotti, *Israel National News*, Feb. 2, 2012)

Vatican post just a sinecure Rena Friswell (Letters, April 19) is correct. Vatican City, population about 800 in 44 hectares, is a theocracy and is a state in name only. Can non-Catholics be considered for the sinecure Australian ambassador? Do we appoint only Muslims to Islamic countries? Must the ambassador to Israel be a Jew?

The ink was hardly dry on arrogant Bob Carr's commission before he proposed a personal mate, John McCarthy, a friend of Sussex Street [Labour Headquarters], to our greatest diplomatic sinecure, ambassadorship to the Vatican. What a wonderful retirement present for McCarthy, courtesy of the Australian public. What an outrageous Labor rort. If we must have such an ambassador, attach it to another appointment such as Ireland, as used to be the case. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website reveals a large number of countries where our diplomatic representation is the Canadian embassy – why then do we need a full-time ambassador to the Vatican? (Keith Parsons, Newcastle, *SMH*, April 20, 2012)

One new babbling church every day in America

DENOMINATION STARTS A CHURCH A DAY IN U.S. 'It was exciting to see how God helped us meet and then exceed that goal' The Assemblies of God, one of the nation's largest Pentecostal denominations, opened more than a church a day last year. In all, 368 new churches opened in 2011, the denomination said. That total marks the second-highest number of church starts since it began keeping reliable statistics in 1965. Factoring in church closures, there are now 12,595 Assemblies of God congregations in the country, the highest ever recorded.

Comments

Jim Robertson I have run into situations lately where women are being encouraged to become Assemblies of God church Pastors. I love my Assembly of God brother and sisters, but the Bible teaches that, in regards to church government, women are not to be ruling over men. I realize it might become necessary in countries where persecution is killing off the men, but that is not the case yet in the USA.

Randy Windborne Jim, it's a little silly to turn Paul's advice to the early gentile churches into a law. After all, Paul wrote that we were free from the law of sin and death. If we turn his letters into commandments, all we get is another law to bind us.

Jim Robertson Good advice Randy. I meant no harm. I just think the admonition of Paul was good advice also and from the Holy Spirit.

Christopher Nelson

Bib la tilda elida shun tilba don!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Shondia bela shin bula hlndada rum fanga!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Biblical tongues ALWAYS happened for the purpose of getting lost sinners saved.

Biblical tongues were ALWAYS initiated by God and not men.

Biblical tongues ALWAYS involved known, earthly, established languages; and not the unknown jibber-jabber done today.

All Charismatics believe 3 major false doctrines:

They all teach that salvation can be lost.

They all practice demonic speaking-in-tongues.

They all partake of the demonic faith healing fraud.

Clifford McCaan Obviously, you don't speak in Biblical tongues, which is why you don't understand them or their true purpose. I have been praying for the sick in the name of Jesus and the Lord has been healing those that I have prayed for almost everyday for over 25 years, thousands of people including me. Many Christians have been taught to think as you do by people who don't know any better. Satan always tries to steal the power from God's people. Trust God. Believe the Bible as it is written. Is your God strong enough to have His Word written perfectly as He wanted in the Bible? God will move in your midst in miracles and manifestations of His Glory if you would but believe. If you read the book of Acts, you find that Jesus told his disciples that they would be His witnesses but first they were to wait in Jerusalem until they were

endued with Power, the Power of the Holy Spirit. In Acts Chapter 2, the Spirit was poured out upon them, including Mary, the mother of Jesus, and they all spoke in tongues. People who believe and are baptized in the Holy Spirit still speak in tongues, whenever they choose to today. They are a gift from God to build us up in our spiritual man, among other purposes. Tongues have not passed away, healing has not passed away, God's mercy is everlasting, God's love was poured out through His Son Jesus to save us from our sins but we must accept this gift and repent of our sins. God is all powerful and wants to bless us. Jesus paid for your sins and your sicknesses. You must receive that to be saved or healed. God is pouring out his blessings upon his people and the growth of this church shows God advancing His Kingdom in the world today. A church where His Spirit is welcome to manifest His Glory.

Randy Windborne But not all of them speak for the accuser. (*WorldNetDaily.com*, Jan 15, 2012)

Holding the fort: Benedict's lonely reign at the top When Pope Jean Paul II invited Bob Dylan to play for a Catholic Youth rally in Bologna in 1997, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was at his side. The late pope would quote the singer's lyrics in a subsequent sermon and on another occasion went so far as to try on Bono's sunglasses.

Cardinal Ratzinger (Benedict's name before he was Pope) shook his head sadly over such lapses. These "stars of the young", he later wrote, "had a message completely different from that to which the Pope was committed. There was reason to be sceptical - which I was, and in a certain sense still am - to doubt whether it was really right to involve 'prophets' of this type." Pop music, he said in 1986, was "a vehicle of anti-religion". Of course, it is normal for a pope to take the moral high ground: he may temper justice with mercy, but we expect him to lay down the law. Which is why the tide of sleaze engulfing the church over recent weeks, most of it related to accusations of priestly paedophilia, has Vatican-watchers worried.

When he became Pope nearly five years ago, Benedict promised to clean up the church. He would not be a showman pope like John Paul II; he would not flog himself around the world addressing huge stadiums. The church under his guidance might be a smaller, tighter institution but it would be clean, consistent, and true to its word. But events of recent weeks suggest that corruption is rooted close to its heart. A wealthy Italian industrialist called Angelo Balducci had been honoured by the Vatican as a *gentiluomo del Papa*, a "gentleman of the Pope", but then in charges that hit the headlines in Italy last month he was investigated for allegedly raking in money from sleazy building tenders. Separately, a member of the Vatican choir claims he was paid to find gay partners for Balducci. Despite the church's draconian stand on homosexuality, the Vatican has long been known as a gay hothouse, and insiders believe that Benedict's elevation changed nothing.

Meanwhile, scandals continue to rain down on the church from abroad. Shortly after Benedict condemned the "heinous acts" of paedophilia among priests in Ireland, accusations of similar acts surfaced in the famous choir of Regensburg, Bavaria, of which the Pope's brother, Georg, was director while Benedict was a professor at the university (Georg claims no knowledge of any such abuse during his time there). Still more lurid are the accusations levelled at Marciel Maciel, the Mexican founder of the Legionaries of Christ, who died in 2008 aged 87. Back in the 1990s when Maciel was accused by numerous young priests of abusing them sexually, Ratzinger, as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, had the charge of disciplining him.

Maciel resigned in 2005 and was required to live a life of prayer and penitence, but that was the extent of his punishment. In recent weeks, however, new accusations have been made: two of Maciel's illegitimate sons have claimed that their priestly father raped them repeatedly from the age of seven upwards; they have demanded \$US26 million (\$28.5 million) from the Order (which has not denied the charges) in compensation. This week, the Pope has been drawn into a scandal in the state of Milwaukee, after *The New York Times* produced documents showing the then cardinal was made aware of, but did not defrock, a priest accused of molesting up to 200 deaf boys despite warnings from American bishops that action was required. Some of these cases concern events that happened decades ago, but some involve the church today: nothing profound, it seems, has changed. And that is of grave importance to Benedict and his legacy.

Benedict's life falls neatly into two parts. In the first, he was a liberal reformer, committed to bringing the Catholic Church into the modern world. In the second, which began around 1968, he became a counter-revolutionary warrior, dedicated to liberating the church from trendy nonsense and restoring the purity that he saw the reform movement as having polluted. His ardour has never flagged. If his reign as Pope is to have any positive meaning, it will be because he leaves the church leaner, perhaps, less popular, less interested in capturing the world's imagination, but more sure of what it believes in, preaching the gospel clearly and with confidence. But how can that be with the sleaze lapping at the gates?

Benedict's election was a dispiriting result for millions of liberals in the church who had desperately hoped, after nearly three decades of conservatism, for a change of direction, for a return to the spirit of Vatican II.

"Electing Ratzinger after John Paul," an American Catholic said in St Peter's Square after Ratzinger came out on the balcony to greet the crowd, "is like electing Rumsfeld after George Bush."

And in the five years since then, Benedict XVI has run true to form.

There have been vague hints of a softening of the hard line, but they have proved ephemeral. What we have seen - and what no one would have predicted from this brilliant scholar and careful politician - is a long succession of pontifical gaffes. The most celebrated one came during the speech he gave in 2006 at his old university in Regensburg, a typically dense, closely argued lecture, in which he quoted a Byzantine emperor saying, "Show me what Muhammad brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman." The words provoked a wave of Muslim rage and, in the view of some Vatican-watchers, exploded decades of careful bridge-building by his predecessor. Many such blunders followed.

* He went to Africa and said that condoms were not the solution to the AIDS epidemic but could make matters worse.

* He refused to sign a United Nations declaration on the rights of homosexuals and the disabled.

* He went to Brazil and denied that the indigenous people had had the alien religion forced on them, but said rather that they had unconsciously desired it.

In contrast to the expansiveness of Vatican II and the willingness of John Paul II to share ideas with Buddhists, Benedict and the church have a paranoid vision in which they are victims of history and must be on their guard.

Being Pope is a lonely job. Pope Paul VI wrote in a private note: "I was solitary before, but now my solitariness becomes complete and awesome." Benedict must feel the same way. And in his raptures of lonely suffering, he has turned St Peter's into an enormous bunker. (Peter Popham, *The Independent*, March 27, 2010)

The butler did it? Fresh twist in Vatican whodunit A MYSTERIOUS source named Maria.

A room furnished with a single chair, where sensitive Vatican documents are turned over to an investigative journalist. The arrest of the Pope's butler. Perhaps the greatest breach in centuries in the wall of secrecy surrounding the Vatican. An on-again, off-again scandal the Italian press has called VatiLeaks burst into the open on Friday with the arrest by Vatican police of a man identified in news reports as Paolo Gabriele, the Pope's butler, who the Vatican said held confidential documents and was suspected of leaking private letters, some of which were addressed to Pope Benedict. The arrest came a day after the ouster of the president of the Vatican Bank, Ettore Gotti Tedeschi, amid conflicts over how to bring the secretive institution in line with international transparency standards, and days after the publication of a sensational book, *Your Holiness: The Secret Papers of Benedict XVI*, in which journalist Gianluigi Nuzzi, aided by "Maria", discloses a huge cache of private Vatican correspondence, many revealing clashes over management at the bank and allegations of corruption and cronyism.

The letters, which have made their way to the Italian media in recent months, draw a portrait of an ancient institution in chaotic disarray, where factions vie for power, influence and financial control. "Of course there are problems, big problems," said Andrea Tornielli, a Vatican expert for the Italian daily *La Stampa* and its website Vatican Insider. "What is happening now shows that there's a crisis." It was not clear whether the bank president's ouster and the arrest of the man found with confidential documents were directly related, although Nuzzi's book includes various memos from Mr Gotti Tedeschi about the Vatican Bank. The Vatican spokesman Federico Lombardi declined to identify the person who was arrested, saying only he was not a priest and he had been detained for further investigation. But Italian media reported he was Mr Gabriele, 40.

The twist that "the butler did it" was worthy of a whodunit that began earlier this year when documents began appearing in the Italian press. In one, a Sicilian cardinal said he had heard in China about a bizarre plot to kill the Pope. At the time, Father Lombardi called the accounts "delirious and incomprehensible". In another letter from 2011, Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, then the deputy governor of Vatican City, wrote to Pope Benedict saying transferring him to another post would impede his efforts to fight "corruption and abuse" in various Vatican offices.

The release of documents in which Vatican officials discuss one of the great unsolved mysteries in Italy, the 1983 disappearance of Emanuela Orlandi, the 15-year-old daughter of a Vatican employee, led to the reopening of a criminal investigation. The book also provides a window into the nexus between Italian banking and media power and the Vatican. In one letter from last Christmas, Bruno Vespa, Italy's most well-known television host, sent a cheque for \$US12,500 to the Pope's private secretary, Monsignor Georg Gaenswein, "a small sum at the disposal of the Pope's charity" and asked when he could have a private audience. Since so many documents have been leaked from the Vatican this year, some observers doubted the butler was the true - or only - source. "It doesn't seem likely that he is the only one responsible for VatiLeaks because many of the documents that came out didn't ever pass through the Pope's apartment where he works," said Paolo Rodari, a Vatican expert for the Italian daily *Il Foglio*. "His arrest seems more the Vatican's desire to find a scapegoat." (Rachel Donadio, *AP/The Canberra Times*, May 28, 2012)

Catholics' \$1bn buy-up of school land around Sydney THE Catholic Church will spend

more than \$1 billion over the next 20 years buying land and building classrooms across NSW to expand its network of schools. The Sydney Catholic Education Office intends to offer more places to non-Catholic families who have become increasingly dissatisfied with the performance of public schools. A budget of \$50 million every year for the next 20 years has been allocated to opening new schools and expanding the grounds of established schools across the inner west, south-west and eastern suburbs. Taxpayers will fund some of the new schools, with all Catholic schools eligible to apply for federal government building grants.

Dr Dan White, executive director for the Sydney archdiocese schools, said more than 2000 prospective students were turned away from schools in 2012 simply because there was no room for them. Bigger grounds were needed at most schools to accommodate extra classrooms for growing student numbers, Dr White said.

Cardinal George Pell described the proposed expansion of the Catholic education system as a healthy outcome for the Church and said much of the demand came from non-Catholic families. "It is a healthy outcome for us. The demand for places in Catholic schools is high. They are happy communities, in literacy and numeracy they are almost invariably above the national average," he said. "I think the biggest compliment is the number of non-Catholics who would like their children to attend a Catholic school. "We hope the Catholic school system will reinforce the faith and good work of the students. It certainly does make them socially aware, keen to contribute to society and strengthen their faith also."

Principals across Sydney Catholic schools have been directed to look for vacant land or houses for sale close to their schools. "Catholic education in Sydney is going through an unprecedented period of growth," Dr White said. "Our enrolments have grown by over 1000 children every year for the past three years. He said many parents were taking their children out of public schools because they believed Catholic schools provided a better quality education. "We find parents are looking for a school that has a spiritual base to it and provides a real values-for-life framework for their children," he said. Laura Speranza, *The Sunday Telegraph*, March 25, 2012)

Why being Christian gets you crucified. Melinda Tankard Reist's pro-women stance has been

lost in an explosion of online anger - because she admitted she believes in God as well.

The cyber bullies who piled onto anti-porn activist Melinda Tankard Reist last week are behaving like 17th century witch hunters, not the enlightened tolerance queens they claim to be. Tankard Reist's crime was to be profiled not unfavourably in a magazine which described her as "one of Australia's best-known feminist voices".

This infuriated the miserable orcs who lurk in the dark recesses of twitter and the blogosphere.

Up they sprang to pour calumny on Tankard Reist, a pro-life feminist and 48-year-old mother of four.

She was nothing but a "fundamentalist Christian" trying to hide her religious beliefs. Therefore, her views on the sexualisation of children, the objectification of women, the corrosive effect of internet pornography, were suspect. Oh, and one anonymous orc reckons she should be anally raped with a coffee cup. "This is the price I pay for getting a fair and decent run," she said ruefully last week from her Canberra home, after being "driven offline" by the vitriol and forced to seek legal advice. "If someone has a faith, even a struggling inadequate faith like mine, you are run out of the public square."

Tankard Reist is "of the religious right and a member of a church that preaches the second coming of Christ, the end time, and evangelism", declared her nemesis, obscure North Coast blogger Jennifer Wilson, who describes herself as a psychotherapist. "She's a Baptist, and attends Belconnen Baptist Church. She is anti-abortion. She is deceptive and duplicitous about her religious beliefs. What does she have to hide?" Well, unluckily for Wilson and her digital chums, Tankard Reist has nothing to hide. She is avowedly pro-life. She is not a Baptist, and does not attend any church. But, along with two thirds of Australians, Tankard Reist was brought up Christian, attending Uniting Church services as a child in Mildura. She says: "I have no denominational affiliation, but I have friends and supporters of every faith and background.

"I speak at a lot of different churches because this is a message that crosses the usual divide".

She has never tried to hide her faith and when asked, explains she is an imperfect Christian. But like most Australians, she prefers not to wear it on her sleeve. "I just want my work considered on its merits."

The abuse has escalated as her profile has expanded with the publication of her book *Big Porn Inc*, and the launch of Collective Shout, the organisation she founded to campaign against the objectification of women in the media. But last week she stopped turning the other cheek and decided it was time to hold the internet haters accountable. She engaged a defamation lawyer to ask Wilson for a retraction and apology. Wilson took to the web to claim Tankard Reist was suing her for all she was worth, though no one is suing anyone yet. Leslie Cannold, an ethicist, was among the more energetic defenders of Wilson, averaging two tweets every hour every day, indicating a somewhat unhealthy obsession with Tankard Reist. "She wouldn't be considered newsworthy if correctly described as fundie Christian. They're all anti-porn raunch & choice." There is more than a little envy among Christophobes at Tankard Reist's growing influence and good standing with young women. Reist is pro-life and a feminist, and anyone who believes the two positions are inconsistent must be living under a rock. In the US, where Reist studied journalism on a Rotary scholarship in 1987, it is an honourable intellectual movement, whose founding mothers included suffragette Susan B Anthony, who held that abortion exploited women and devalued motherhood. "My emphasis has always been on expanding real choice for women," says Tankard Reist, who founded a home for mothers and babies in Canberra, in 1997. "Pro-choice just means abortion."

In any case, you don't have to be religious to be anti-abortion. The atheist late author Christopher Hitchens, Reist says, was pro-life. Her 2006 book on abortion, *Defiant Birth: Women Who Resist Medical Eugenics* was launched in New York by Nat Hentoff, a pro-life Jewish atheist and libertarian.

When Cannold and other abortion enthusiasts warn darkly of Tankard Reist's dark "past", they are talking not just of imaginary membership of a Belconnen church, but of her 12 years working for Tasmanian independent Senator Brian Harradine. The Catholic senator held the balance of power for three years under the Howard government. To Christophobes, Tankard Reist's association with Australia's most influential anti-abortion politician marks her as suspect. For the record, I am Catholic and Tankard Reist is a friend. I admire her integrity, and her determination to make a difference for women. I believe the hostility to her is driven by spite, sanctimony and anti-Christian malice. This attempt to purge Christians from the marketplace of ideas is nothing less than 21st century McCarthyism. (Miranda Devine, *The Sunday Telegraph*, January 22, 2012)

Muslim youth leader Fadi Abdul-Rahman's \$1.5m cocaine charges

A PROMINENT Muslim youth leader, who preaches the perils of crime to his community, has been charged with possessing more than \$1.5 million worth of cocaine. Police allege 36-year-old Fadi Abdul-Rahman, who featured in Kevin Rudd's 2020 Summit in 2008 and has been a fighter for justice in western Sydney, was part of a commercial cocaine syndicate that was caught with 5kg of the drug hidden in a chess set. Abdul-Rahman appeared in the Downing Centre Local Court on Tuesday, facing two commercial drugs charges after he was arrested during a police sting at Punchbowl in March. Abdul-Rahman's lawyer Brett Galloway told *The Sunday Telegraph* he would defend the charges. "There are no facts which establish any of the offences. . . they are consistent with his innocence or that he was in the wrong place at a bad time," Mr Galloway said.

The courtroom was a world away from when Abdul-Rahman mixed with ex-PM Rudd in 2008 and was a member of the summit's Strengthening Communities, Supporting Families and Social Inclusion Committee.

He became a prominent public figure for his work in steering Lebanese youth away from a life of crime and his work was the subject of SBS and ABC TV documentaries. According to police documents tendered to court at a bail hearing in April, Abdul-Rahman was one of three men arrested on March 30 at an apartment on Dudley St, Punchbowl. Police allege Abdul-Rahman and another man were in the process of cracking open the chess set when they were arrested. Police had intercepted the cocaine, which had been smuggled from the US, and replaced it with an "inert substance", court documents said. Police also placed a listening device "in the vicinity of the consignment" which allegedly recorded Abdul-Rahman saying: "It's a f tracker." Abdul-Rahman was charged with attempting to possess a commercial quantity of cocaine and conspiring to import a commercial quantity of cocaine. Punchbowl man Ahmad Khodr, 23, was also arrested and charged with attempting to possess a commercial quantity of cocaine and conspiring to import a commercial quantity of cocaine. Ibrahim Hamra, 38, of Yagoona, was charged with importing a commercial quantity of cocaine and allegedly supplied the drugs to Abdul-Rahman and Khodr, court documents said. Abdul-Rahman, a father of four, was one of 1000 Australians chosen to participate in Mr Rudd's 2020 Summit. He shot to prominence following the 2005 Cronulla riots with his outspoken defence of Sydney's Muslim community. He also set up the Independent Centre of Research -- a Muslim youth centre in Lidcombe aimed at convincing youths to turn away from a life of crime. He will return to court on July 3. (Brenden Hills, *The Sunday Telegraph*, May 27, 2012)

Toulouse Terrorist Not Alone: Extreme Islam Threatens Europe

The terrorist who murdered 7 people in Toulouse may have been killed, but the phenomenon of extreme Islam in Europe did not die with him. Mohammad Merah, the terrorist who murdered seven people in Toulouse, France, including four Jews, was killed following a standoff on Thursday, but the phenomenon of extreme Islam in Europe did not die with him. In fact, terrorists who carry out attacks such as the ones Merah committed are by no means a surprise and are not something which is new for many Europeans in general and for France in particular.

On Thursday, a fan page for Merah was shut down by Facebook, but not before about 500 users had joined it, many of whom posted messages in support of the terrorist. Meanwhile, French President Nicolas Sarkozy announced a new

crackdown in France on the spread of terrorist-linked ideologies and activities. Anyone who regularly visits "websites which support terrorism or call for hate or violence will be punished by the law," Sarkozy said. He also promised a crackdown on anyone who goes abroad "for the purposes of indoctrination in terrorist ideology."

Sarkozy, as do leaders in England and Belgium, has had to deal with a phenomenon that has gained momentum in recent years whereby Islamic groups try to "conquer" European countries and force them to adhere to extreme Muslim Sharia laws. Many Muslims see Europe as a continent on which a war should be fought to turn it into a "House of Islam". These particular Muslims will not rest until they defeat the non-Muslims who are viewed as "infidels." In Belgium, for example, a video distributed on the internet in recent months depicts an extremist group who threatens to turn Belgium into a Muslim country. It was also recently revealed that Muslims constitute one-quarter of the population of Brussels and that the most popular name for newborn babies in the city in 2011 was Muhammad. It was also the most popular name for babies in Antwerp, where an estimated 40 percent of primary school children are Muslims. Sharia has also been implemented in several places in Britain to the dismay of local residents. According to reports last year, Islamists set up zones where the Muslim Sharia law would be enforced. Some communities were bombarded with bright yellow posters which read: 'You are entering a Sharia-controlled zone – Islamic rules enforced.' The messages were found on bus stops and street lamps and were seen across certain boroughs in London. They order that 'no gambling', 'no music or concerts', 'no drugs or smoking' and 'no alcohol' should be seen in the Sharia-controlled zone. European leaders are aware of the phenomenon and are trying to deal with it, yet at the same time fear that a direct confrontation with these groups will lead to terrorist attacks in these quiet countries. Perhaps the Toulouse terrorist will turn on that red light and will place a warning sign that will cause leaders to work to prevent the next attack. (*IsraelNationalNews.com*, March 23, 2012).

Faith in the infallibility of the mind is the atheist's delusion

Melbourne is gearing up to host the Global Atheist Convention, where for three days a coterie of the faithless will urge each other on in their collective scepticism. The most famous proponents of a godless universe will be there - Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and Daniel Dennett - but this time, sadly, the most engaging and entertaining of them, Christopher Hitchens, won't. The convention seeks to "Celebrate Reason", which seems, well, reasonable enough. We all need something substantial on which to make our judgments, and according to those attending, it's the clear thinkers, those unencumbered by superstition and religious nonsense, who are most likely to arrive at the truth. But while it's easy to mock those with religious beliefs, the atheist appeal to a thoroughly rational, objective position is not without its problems.

Daniel Kahneman, arguably the most influential psychologist alive today, is a Nobel prize winner in economics. He's also the author of *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, where he draws upon a lifetime of studying human behaviour that has shown him just how unreliable the human mind really is. Along with his late colleague Amos Tversky, Kahneman's at times bizarre experiments have helped provide a framework to understand why, for instance, applicants to medical school are less likely to be admitted if interviewed on a rainy day. And why judges, when asked to roll a pair of dice rigged to come up three or nine before the mock-sentencing of a shoplifter, decided to give the "offender" an average of eight months if they rolled nine and five months if they rolled three. But here's the thing. While Kahneman and Tversky reveal what appear to be permanent fallibilities in human reason, their rule of thumb was that they would study no specific example of human "idiocy or irrationality" unless they first detected it in themselves. In other words, even experts suffer the same quirks of human unreason as anyone else. This could, I suppose, be fuel for the religious sceptic's fire - suggesting that those who put their faith in things unseen are clearly deluding themselves. But it cuts both ways. The same thing applies to non-believers whose hopes and aspirations might cloud their judgment on the question of God's existence. And there remain formidable challenges for the enthusiasts of non-belief. Renowned American philosopher Alvin Plantinga's most famous, novel and ironic argument is that naturalism cannot rationally be believed. The argument is a bit complex but it goes something like this: if you're a naturalist (there's no God or gods), you'll also be a materialist (the only thing that exists, including consciousness, is physical matter). You'll think human beings are material objects, and that there isn't any immaterial soul, or self, or person. If you think this way, you will also necessarily think that any belief ("all religion is irrational", for instance) is something like a structure of neurons in the nervous system, or in the brain, which will have two kinds of properties: the belief will have neuro-physiological properties, but it will also have content properties, meaning there's a purely physical cause for something you believe.

Now, evolution couldn't give a toss about what you believe. It cares about rewarding adaptive behaviour and punishing maladaptive behaviour. So evolution will gradually modify those neuro-physiological properties in the direction of greater adaptiveness, but it doesn't follow that it modifies belief in the direction of truth. Evolution doesn't care about true belief. So, if you accept the combination of naturalism and materialism, says Plantinga, you'll have to accept that any particular belief you might hold could as likely be false as true. The probability that your beliefs are reliable will be low. If, however, you believe in God and don't accept naturalism and materialism, then that particular problem doesn't apply. You will assume there is a being who is separate from creation but speaks truth into the fibre of the universe. Sure, you'll have other challenges to your faith, but you'll have a reason to trust your faculties in a way that the naturalist does not. Believing in human rationality is quite rational within a theistic world view, but not so in an atheistic framework. Plantinga is quick to point out that none of this is intended to prove belief. There remain serious questions for those who believe in an all-powerful, good God who creates and sustains the universe, and believers need to face these. But Plantinga's thesis might prompt those in the "all religion is delusional" camp to approach vital questions of human existence with measured consideration of the alternatives - something beyond naked contempt. That, surely, is a reasonable request. (Simon Smart, *SMH*, April 12, 2012)

Delusions of despots go to Richard Dawkins' head in God debate

RICHARD Dawkins is the world's most famous professional atheist, so it's strange he's so wrong about Hitler. How could a great atheist not recognise another despiser of Christianity?

Dawkins, a British academic and author of *The God Delusion*, is here for the Global Atheist Convention. On ABC television on Monday he tried to debate Cardinal George Pell, the nation's highest-ranking Catholic.

Dawkins made a couple of howlers, but the worst came after Pell put what even I, as a non-Christian, know is one of the strongest cases for Christianity. As Pell suggested, Christianity stands against totalitarians by defending the value of every human life. It insists that no human whether weak, sick, in the womb or of another race is so insignificant that he or she can be sacrificed to some creed, whether communism, fascism or Gaia. Here's how Pell put it on Monday: "It's not Maggie Thatcher who was in the epitome or the personification of social Darwinism. It's Hitler and Stalin. "Because it is the struggle for survival, the strong take what they can and the weak give what they must and there is nothing to restrain them and we have seen that in the two great atheist movements of the last century." Dawkins reacted with the righteous anger of an autocrat: "Oh, now that's ridiculous. First, atheism had nothing to do with Hitler and Stalin. Stalin was an atheist and Hitler was not. "It doesn't matter what they were with respect to atheism, they did their horrible things for entirely different reasons."

First problem: Dawkins confuses restraint with motive. Pell's point wasn't that Hitler and Stalin were motivated by atheism, but that their atheism or anti-Christianity helps to explain why they so disastrously lacked restraint.

They did not mind sacrificing millions of lives to build their utopias. They were even open about it.

But, second, Hitler was indeed violently anti-Christian, if not atheist.

Check what he said in private conversations recorded at the time and later published in Hitler's Table Talk: 1941-1944. From July 1941: "National Socialism and religion cannot exist together. The heaviest blow that ever struck humanity was the coming of Christianity. Bolshevism is Christianity's illegitimate child. Both are inventions of the Jew." From October, 1941: "Christianity is a rebellion against natural law, a protest against nature. Taken to its logical extreme, Christianity would mean the systematic cultivation of the human failure".

True, Hitler told his intimates it was not "opportune" to "hurl ourselves now into a struggle with the churches": "The best thing is to let Christianity die a natural death". So in public he paid lip service to churches, although that didn't fool one famous atheist, who in 2006 grudgingly admitted: "It could be argued that, despite his own (public) words Hitler was not really religious but just cynically exploiting the religiosity of his audience." And which atheist said that? Why, Dawkins himself. How odd. (Andrew Bolt, *The Daily Telegraph*, April 12, 2012)

Cleric condemns homosexuality

An influential Iranian cleric, Ayatollah Abdollah Javadi-Amoli, who is entitled to issue rulings according to sharia, has condemned Western lawmakers involved in the decriminalization of homosexuality, saying those politicians are lower than animals. He said homosexuals are inferior to dogs and pigs, according to the news website Khabaronline. Homosexuality is punishable by death according to fatwas issued by almost all Iranian clerics.

Gay marriage: Turning the tide [in the USA]

This year's elections could mark a sea-change for gay rights. WHEN politicians in Washington state debated gay rights in the 1990s, recalls Ed Murray, a state senator, Republican legislators would ensure that teenagers on work-experience schemes were removed from the chamber for fear that their innocent minds would be corrupted. But earlier this year, he says, when the legislature passed a same-sex marriage bill, "every intern wanted their picture taken with me."

As Mr Murray's flirtation with celebrity suggests, America has come a long way. Six states (and Washington, DC) allow gays to marry. Yet Washington is not one of them, for, as Mr Murray and his allies had expected, soon after the marriage law was passed its opponents secured enough signatures to place a repeal measure on the November ballot. The law is on hold until then. If history is any guide, the odds should be stacked against advocates of same-sex marriage in Washington and the three other states (Maine, Maryland and Minnesota) that will vote on the issue in November. Thirty-four such votes have taken place since 1998; 33 of them have been won by those who believe marriage must be the preserve of heterosexual couples. (The exception, a vote in Arizona in 2006, was overturned by voters two years later). That losing streak may well come to an end on November 6th. This is partly because all four states holding same-sex marriage votes are, to varying degrees, fertile ground for gay-marriage campaigners. Washington, for example, has a tradition of hands-off libertarianism and a low churchgoing rate. But more important is the speed at which attitudes are changing. A growing number of polls reveal majorities of Americans for same-sex marriage. Just three years ago Gallup found opponents winning by a 17-point margin. Moreover, slice the data any way you like and you find the same result: men, women; whites, non-whites; Republicans, Democrats; Protestants, Catholics—all are moving in a liberal direction. (This is not the case for other "social issues" such as abortion or gun rights.) Perhaps most important, 63% of adults born after 1981 support gay marriage, up from 51% in 2009.

Opponents of same-sex marriage say that polls fluctuate, and that questions are badly worded. "I totally reject this myth of inevitability," says Brian Brown, president of the National Organisation for Marriage, a campaign group. Mr Brown's opponents are ahead in polls in three of the four states that vote in November (Minnesota is too close to call), but he points out, accurately, that polling usually overstates the other side's case. In the most hotly contested vote yet, in California in 2008, hardly any polls predicted that Proposition 8, which barred same-sex marriage, would be upheld at the ballot box. (It has since been declared unconstitutional in court; the case is likely to reach the Supreme Court.)

Might something similar happen this year? The anti-gay-marriage campaign will step up its efforts as election day approaches, with a blitz of advertising. One effective ad it ran in the California campaign featured a little girl happily telling her mother that she had learned in school that she was allowed to marry a princess.

Frank Schubert, who ran the California campaign and who is managing all four this year, says he is “cautiously optimistic” of winning them all, though he adds that with four simultaneous campaigns, the amount of national money that can be tapped for each is limited. He thinks the hardest state to win will be Maine, followed by Washington. Campaigners for same-sex marriage fear Mr Schubert. But since the California campaign, which they acknowledge was badly run, they have honed their tactics. At the bustling Seattle headquarters of Washington United for Marriage, which is organising the effort to preserve same-sex marriage, Zach Silk, the young campaign director, explains that the earnest young volunteers around him are trained to tell voters “powerful human stories about people’s desire to show commitment, to prove their love.” Previous campaigns often used the more abstract, and less persuasive, language of civil rights. The issue is moving national politics, too. In May, after a long evolution, Barack Obama declared his support for gay marriage. Democratic leaders have approved a gay-marriage measure for their party platform this year. Mr Brown thinks this decision will cost them at least one state in the presidential election, although polls suggest the issue is not a priority for voters. It is impossible to predict what blend of elections, legislation and judicial decisions will bring gay marriage to America. But the opinion trends are clear, and victories at the ballot box in November would tip the balance further. (*The Economist*, Sept. 15, 2012)

Gay marriage gone wrong

SHANGHAI: ZHEN AI used a conventional method to uncover the truth about her husband’s “business trips”. She logged on to his computer. But what Ms Zhen, who was three months pregnant at the time, found was beyond her imaginings. She saw photos of her husband in some of China’s most exotic settings—Tibet, Hangzhou and Yunnan province—with another man. The pictures of them together in bed were particularly devastating.

Ms Zhen, who is now 30 years old and prefers to use a pseudonym, is one of an estimated 16m straight women who are married to gay men in China. Zhang Beichuan, a scholar, estimates that more than 70% of gay men marry straight women. Using census data from 2011, Mr Zhang estimates that somewhere between 2-5% of Chinese men over the age of 15 are gay, or between 11m and 29m. The women who marry them are known as *tongqi*, which might be translated as “homo-wife”, using “homo-” for same. Tolerance is on the rise in major cities. Shanghai had its fourth Pride festival in June. Earlier this month the national ministry of health announced that lesbians will be permitted to donate blood.

Yet intolerance still prevails. Homosexuality was only removed from the health ministry’s list of mental illnesses in 2001. In rural regions, the belief that homosexuality is a treatable disease is still widespread.

It did not occur to Ms Zhen that her husband could be gay, though there were signs. She recalls inadvertently resting her hand on his arm during a movie date. “I felt him flinch, but he endured it”, she says. Though confused by his lack of intimacy, she found his considerate nature to be endearing. She hoped the passion would grow after he proposed. What followed instead was an icy marriage, frequent business trips and a perfunctory sex life. After finding the photos, Ms Zhen found temporary solace in an online *tongqi* support group. Luck again abandoned her. This month, her signature joins 50 others on an open letter accusing the website *tongqijiyuan.com* of scamming its members out of 90,000 yuan (\$14,000) in total. Ms Zhen lost 2,000 yuan. “We’ve realised [the site’s] owners were taking advantage of our fragile emotions and low social status,” the joint letter reads.

It is especially difficult for Chinese men to come out to their families. Traditional beliefs about the importance of maintaining bloodlines permeate society, which regards homosexuality as unfilial. Yang Shaogang, a Shanghai-based lawyer who specialises in *tongqi* cases, counselled five women last year after they contracted HIV from their husbands. The only way to prevent this sort of tragedy from befalling such women, he says, is calling for more tolerance so gay men won’t feel forced to enter marriage in the first place. In recent years some have found a solution, of sorts. *Chinagayles.com*, a website with some 153,000 members, helps gay men meet lesbian women for matrimonial purposes. Individuals upload personal details, such as monthly income, hobbies and Zodiac signs. Some seek cohabitation without sexual contact. Others want children.

Zhuang Xiang, a 30-year-old accountant from Shanghai, came to understand why he was drawn to boys when he was 17. On flicking through a gay comic book in a shop, he had his great “a-ha!” moment. He met his boyfriend in 2004. And then he married his lesbian wife in 2009. He and his wife don’t live together, but they visit each other’s parents once a week. Mr Zhuang even keeps some of her clothes on display at home, in case of unannounced visitors.

Mr Zhuang says he is lucky to live in a big city like Shanghai, where such a solution is possible. But he wants to live in a country where gay men are accepted. His parents have started to talk about a grandchild. Mr Zhuang and his lesbian wife will likely get a forged certificate of infertility. Keeping up the appearance of their marriage feels like a never-ending battle, he says. But sometimes lies are more sensible than the truth. (*The Economist*, Jul 17th 2012)

THE CHRISTIAN HOLY DAYS FOR THE YEARS 2012 - 2014

	2012	2013	2014
<p>The Passover (Pesach – Nissan 14) Unlike the Jews, who used to kill the Passover lamb “at the twilight” of Nissan 14 (meaning in the evening towards Nissan 15), we, Christians, observe the Passover when our “Lamb” – Jesus Christ – was sacrificed. That happened on the afternoon of Nissan 14, before the twilight of Nissan 14, meaning that we keep it a little earlier than the Jews. We commemorate His death, not His supper, which occurred the previous evening, as some churches do; the time when His body was broken, not when He broke the symbolic bread.</p>	6 April	25 March	14 April
<p>Days of Unleavened Bread (Nissan 15 – 21) On the first and seventh days there shall be holy convocations. No customary work shall be done on these days.</p>	7 April – 13 April	26 Mar. - 1 April	15 April - 21 April
<p>Pentecost (Shavuot – Sivan 6)</p>	27 May	15 May	4 June
<p>Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah – Tishri 1)</p>	17 Sept.	5 Sept.	25 Sept.
<p>Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur – Tishri 10)</p>	26 Sept.	14 Sept.	4 Oct
<p>Feast of Tabernacles (Succoth – Tishri 15 – 22) On the first and the eighth days there shall be holy convocations. No customary work shall be done on these days.</p>	1 Oct. – 8 Oct.	19 Oct. – 26 Oct.	9 Oct. - 16 Oct.