

# SHARROUF IN HELL, BUT WE'VE STILL A LONG WAY TO GO

*Dry eyes everywhere as Australians play a role in this Islamist savage's end*

GRAHAM RICHARDSON



It is a rare occurrence that a person's death is celebrated. We have just witnessed the life of Australia's Golden Girl, Betty Cuthbert, being celebrated following her death at the age of 79.

This week, at the opposite end of the spectrum, saw the death of Australia's most infamous jihadi, Khaled Sharrouf. There were no tears for this low-grade thug. During his time in this country, he and his mate Mohamed Elomar, who reportedly was killed fighting for Islamic State in 2015, were paid muscle. They bashed people for a living while benefiting from our country's at times ridiculously generous welfare system.

They have no friends in the

Muslim community here and even their relatives want nothing to do with them. Sharrouf's demise left many a dry eye in the Australian Muslim community and the rest of the country could hear the popping of champagne corks as we uttered a collective sigh of relief and were of the unanimous view that the bastard got what he deserved.

The Sharrouf saga classically follows the fate of the evil group he served. When Islamic State declared the caliphate in 2014, it consisted of considerable tracts of land in Syria and half of Iraq. The confident boasts of Sharrouf and his ilk about the caliphate's future, its longevity and its ever-expanding territory now look like not much more than a sick joke. After a long and bloody series of battles, they

were booted out of Iraq and they hang on grimly to an ever decreasing number of towns and hamlets in Syria.

The grand vision of Islamic State from only three years ago lies in tatters. The jihadis no longer boast. Neil Prakash, the cocky Islamic State recruiter who mocked Australia while being the main hirer of new converts, languishes in a Turkish prison. This pathetic coward, who tried to sneak out of the conflict zone because he had no stomach for the actual fighting as defeat loomed large, now pleads for Australian consular assistance.

As coalition forces tighten the noose on Raqqa, Elomar lies in his grave and now will be joined by Sharrouf, who demonstrated in so many ways what a grub he really

was. Taking his five children to an active war zone was an act of baseness of the highest order. How many fathers could you imagine would stand by proudly watching his seven-year-old son hold the severed head of yet another victim of this crazy cult? Many Australians worried about what kind of citizens these poor children would make if ever they returned to Australia. Now the two boys who would have been in that category have been killed with their father, that concern is sadly reduced. How sad is it that the death of children causes such little sorrow?

The children's mother, Tara Nettleton, should not escape criticism either. She died some time back from an infection the rudimentary hospital facility of Islamic

State could not cure. After her husband had ensconced himself in Syria, she took the deliberate decision to drag her children with her to join him. An ordinary Aussie girl proved once again that the convert is often more zealous in the practice of the religion than those born to it. At one point her mother, the children's grandmother, flew to Turkey to try to get the children out of harm's way. Her efforts were doomed to failure because of her son-in-law's intransigence. It is doubtful these poor brainwashed kids wanted to come back anyway.

It is to be hoped that the vulnerable teens who are the targets of Islamic State recruiters are closely watching these events. There is nothing glamorous about a war zone. Blood and guts and violent

death are in no way romantic. The brutality of war is unlimited. Limbs being blown off and death lurking behind every door is not pretty. Jihadis are always looking upward for the planes or drones about to unleash hell on them. The caliphate is as dead as Elomar and Sharrouf. They were only on the lowest rung of the military hierarchy of Islamic State. They were not very bright and had to bear arms in the frontlines. Their leaders are rarely seen. They would prefer to use the fools such as these two dopes than put their own necks on the line.

Islamic State operates at home and abroad are under siege. Apparently information as to the whereabouts of Sharrouf was provided by Australian intelligence. The terrorists may run but they

cannot hide. At home our security forces seem to pick up plots before they take on killing form.

Nothing I have written should be taken as meaning that the Islamic State threat is over. More innocent men, women and children will die at their hands, but what I am seeing is a pattern that means there eventually will come a time when this mob just won't matter any more.

I will mourn the death of the Sharrouf children, in particular the death of innocence that is the right of all children. We should all devote ourselves to doing whatever we can to make sure no other kids suffer the same fate. Like the rest of Australia, I am relaxed and comfortable about the death of thugs and thuggery.

## EVIL HID BEHIND HANDY SEAL OF CONFESSION

*Vile priests raped children and forgave themselves*

CHRISSIE FOSTER

This week saw the publication of the Criminal Justice report by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. It calls for sweeping change to the Catholic Church's seal of confession.

The confessional seal can be hideous: it has been proven to be so in the case of former Catholic priest Michael McArdle and shows emphatically why change is needed.

This case is not from some far-away Third World country; it is from here in Australia, in Queensland. It is an expose of blatant criminal behaviour that can be hidden by the confessional seal—a noxious secret between a priest and a pedophile colleague that facilitates and enables heinous crimes to continue and be swept under the carpet at the expense of children, their lives and their well-being, all of which neither sinner nor holy forger give a damn about.

It is rare to obtain powerful insight into a pedophile's private, secret confessions because the "good" priest will not tell and neither will the criminal priest ... usually. That's what makes the McArdle case gold; this one example we have needs careful examination because it exposes what happens behind the private and closed seal of the confessional for criminal child clergy rapists.

McArdle, after pleading guilty in a Queensland court to sexually abusing children, made an affidavit in 2004 stating that he had confessed 1500 times to molesting children to 30 priests across 25 years.

After being forgiven 1500 times for his regular criminal offending in face-to-face confessions with his fellow 30 priests, he was told to "go home and pray".

Apart from the utter disgrace of this behaviour, we need to analyse this rare look into a pedophile priest's confession.

In his affidavit McArdle stated this about his crimes: "I was devastated after the assaults, every one of them. So distressed would I become that I would attend confessions weekly." After each confession, he said, "it was like a magic wand had been waved over me". The confessional forgiveness gave him a clean slate that allowed him, within the week, to reoffend—a cycle that lasted for several decades.

The problem was not just the offender but the priests supporting a system that was profoundly



flawed and catered to and protected priests who should have been reported to the police, not forgiven and just sent home.

In McArdle's 1500 face-to-face confessions the identity of the offender priest is revealed—and we have 30 "good" priests who heard that these sins and crimes were happening week after week, month after month, year after year for many years. What did they do? En masse they forgave him and, as if of one mind, they told him to "go home and pray".

During my 32 years of confession I was never once told to go home and pray. Is this something priests are taught at the seminary to say to fellow priests under such circumstances? How else could they all say the same quite curious thing?

Why did not one of those non-offending "good" priests protect the children? When they saw McArdle's face yet again, why didn't they say, "Before I can forgive you, you must get help" or "You have to stop this" or "I cannot forgive you", instead of enabling him to go off and reoffend

for decade after decade? Did not one of those ordained and ontologically changed men, those good and godly priests, feel anything for the children who were being endlessly assaulted and tortured?

**McArdle's weekly cycle of confession and forgiveness aided and abetted him in his crimes**

In 2011, when senator Nick Xenophon released a press statement headlined "Confession of Child Abuse Must be Reported to Police", one priest defended the confessional seal saying: "The proposed change could scare offenders away from confession, which otherwise could be a first step towards seeking treatment or surrendering to police".

Where is the evidence of such noble intent in the 30 priests? Where is the encouragement for

the pedophile priest McArdle from his fellow 30 priests to surrender to the police? It wasn't there. All 30 said "go home and pray". And that is all.

If McArdle had not been forgiven perhaps his guilt would have compelled him to get help or surrender himself to authorities. McArdle's weekly cycle of confession and forgiveness aided and abetted him in his crimes.

Mandatory reporting would have stopped him 25 years earlier at his first confession. The subsequent effect would have been generations of children saved from the lifelong affliction of childhood sexual assault.

Instead, we have heartbreaking lives of pain and suicide.

McArdle received a six-year jail sentence for his uncountable crimes against innocent children. Perhaps the 30 priests he made his confession to should have volunteered to accompany him to jail.

The church and the 30 "good" priests did nothing to help the children. The children had to grow into adults and become brave enough to speak of their

trauma. The children speaking out have lessened the carnage when the priests and their hierarchy chose to do nothing but protect each other and church assets.

The royal commission is right to call for the removal of the seal of confession for priests in instances of child sexual assault because we know what members of the priesthood have done with the trust bestowed upon them by society. And it has to stop.

If the confessional seal prevails over the demand for child protection by civil authorities, what precedent is being set when mandatory reporting of child sex crimes cannot be enforced because of a foreign sovereign state's (the Vatican) religious law?

The government must be brave and follow the royal commission's informed recommendations.

The Catholic Church priesthood says confession is sacrosanct. I say the bodies of children are sacrosanct

Chrissie Foster is co-author with Paul Kennedy of *Hell on the Way to Heaven*.

## WHY SHOULD REFORMERS BE MADE TO FUND BEGGAR STATES?

*Berejiklian's brave call for a revolution in our federation deserves to be heard*

MAURICE NEWMAN



NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian's call to the commonwealth to "step back" and enter into a bilateral arrangement with high-performing states such as NSW is historic. For the first time in 84 years, a leader has had the courage to signal "game over" for the present sclerotic system of co-operative federalism.

Her observation that it has "run its course" is spot-on. If she succeeds in replacing it with a competitive model, she will be responsible for one of the most far-reaching economic and social reforms since Federation.

Horizontal fiscal equalisation is an arcane subject. It is extraordinarily complex and lacks transparency. It was originally introduced by prime minister Joseph Lyons, a one-time Labor premier of Tasmania. He established the Commonwealth Grants Commission to ensure, under an arrangement of financial-assistance grants, the standard of government services across the nation would not differ appreciably. Well-intentioned perhaps? In step with 1933 thinking, possibly. But he institutionalised a welfare mentality where perverse outcomes and a lack of accountability would be commonplace.

As the NSW Premier explains, because population and economic resilience differ vastly across the continent, the consensus-driven Council of Australian Governments system often acts as "a handbrake on reform". She believes a better approach is a system of "earned autonomy", where the states that take the lead on reform are rewarded, not punished.

Last year, when treasurer, Berejiklian protested that the nation's strongest economy, NSW, was facing a historic collapse in commonwealth GST payments, equating to \$10.8 billion in lost revenue by 2019-20.

She advocated shifting to a per capita model of GST distribution that would return \$13bn to NSW across four years. This still would result in more than \$4bn handed over to other states across the forward estimates, but it would "tilt the balance towards rewarding good outcomes for reforming

states". She anticipated it would "give us further options to reduce the tax burden on our citizens".

This is rational. Why should the people of NSW be held hostage to a lowest common denominator approach that privileges the parochial interests of small populations?

As the Premier says, "Too often I have witnessed in frustration ministerial council meetings where the ACT, with a population of 400,000, not much more than the population of Blacktown council in western Sydney, has an equal voice with a state of 7.7 million".

In pushing for a "massive overhaul" and the modernisation of "this vital relationship" between the states and the commonwealth, Berejiklian has embarked on an ambitious journey.

She wants "fewer agreements,

**The mining boom seems to have turned Australian minds inward to wealth redistribution**

fewer points of contact between the two levels of government, less red tape, less prescriptive agreements, less overlap and more trust". This will be hard to sell.

First, as Premier of Australia's most successful state, Berejiklian will be seen as self-interested. More fundamentally, the prospect of independence never appeals to mendicants who are very comfortable with the notion of welfare, nor shy when asking for more. Labor states and the federal opposition will strongly resist.

The federal government will have both eyes fixed on the polls. A negative campaign mounted by poorly governed or financially stretched states will be hard to counter. It is easier to oppose possible reductions in commonwealth grants than to promote abstract benefits of growth through more competitive and efficient arrangements. Greater state independence also means less power for Canberra.

Still, after acknowledging Western Australia's GST share is a lowly 34 per cent, Malcolm Turnbull has called for a "fairer distribution of the GST and one that's recognised as fair across the country". He has asked the Pro-

ductivity Commission to examine the formula.

But this is just superficial tinkering. Berejiklian is right. It is the system and the thinking behind it that are outdated and limiting Australia's potential. Changing the GST mix between states, or increasing the rate, is not the answer.

No amount of bureaucratic jiggery can "fairly" balance commodity price volatility, the higher cost of living in NSW and Victoria, or the economically damaging consequences of blind ideology.

For example, while Tasmania is richly endowed with nature's gifts, commercial exploitation consistently has been rejected by Green ideologues. These anti-business decisions have contributed to per capita gross product being 17 per cent, and household income 32 per cent, below the national average. But the Grants Commission rewards Tasmania's self-inflicted poverty with an 80 per cent GST return above its contribution. No wonder 70 per cent of Tasmanians look to the government and the mainland for a living. That's their prerogative, but it's not a reason for mainlanders to subsidise the nonconformist lifestyle Tasmanians have chosen.

The same goes for South Australia. As compensation for its policy madness, Adelaide receives 44 per cent more from the GST pot than it contributes as well as a \$50bn pork-barrel federal contract to build submarines.

Instead of fiddling with the formula, the Prime Minister should join Berejiklian in a push to modernise a system that, instead of rewarding success, rewards states for electing Mad Hatter governments.

New Zealanders don't have the luxury of an indulgent relative in Canberra, yet they outperform most states on growth, employment and fiscal prudence. They may lack the mineral wealth of their trans-Tasman cousins but they have learned to adjust to the cold winds of a competitive world. They have developed a resilient, outward-looking, self-reliant culture that, while conscious of equity, puts emphasis on ingenuity, innovation and growth.

Meanwhile, the mining boom seems to have turned Australian minds inward to wealth redistribution. Co-operative federalism is its embodiment. Rather than confront the real world, parochial mendicant states push for hand-outs in the name of equality and fairness.

They represent the biggest threats to Berejiklian's nation-building reforms and will test Australia's commitment to fulfil its potential. An ineffective compromise will say a lot.

## POOR ACTING, DULL SCRIPTS AND A SORROWFUL STORY THAT NEVER CHANGES

*Years wasted as ideas stagnate in a parliament charmed by insignificance*

DAVID CROWE

POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT



Australians do not need to be told how much time their parliament wastes. The problem was plain to see this week when Malcolm Turnbull claimed a "conspiracy" by Bill Shorten that consumed question time with an argument that meant nothing to voters.

It was a horror week for the government—one of its worst. It was forced to admit that Barnaby

Joyce was a New Zealand citizen, then bungled the politics of explaining why he should stay in cabinet while being referred to the High Court.

The government's most senior tacticians had to decide how to defend the Deputy Prime Minister. They could have accused the Opposition Leader of using "dodgy deals" in New Zealand to ask questions in a foreign parliament that caused trouble for Joyce at home. Instead, they turned up the volume on the conspiracy, dragged New Zealand leaders into the row and drowned out anything else they were trying to say. It was overkill. Remember the clumsy

schoolteacher who would switch on the loudspeaker with a screech of feedback, then wonder why everyone was laughing? That was the government this week.

It was a wasted week in a political world that bickers over the small decisions and dithers over the big ones. The Prime Minister would have been better off talking about power bills than foreign powers.

At least it was only a week. Consider the time wasted on one of the most important bills before parliament yesterday: media laws that have been talked about for years. Australians will not care much about the media rules, but they are another reminder that parliament will always shelve a problem rather than make a decision.

One of the changes, to allow the commercial television networks to broadcast to all Australians, repeals a "reach rule" that dates back to 1987 and prevents any single company broadcasting

to more than 75 per cent of the population. The current law tilts the playing field in favour of the ABC and SBS (which are free to reach everyone), holds back regional TV networks and prevents any operator being truly national.

Labor suggested repealing the rule in early 2010 and again in 2013 but could never do it. A leadership crisis got in the way each time.

That is seven years wasted. Another change would repeal a "two out of three" rule that prevents any company owning more than two of the three old media platforms—print, radio and TV—in a single market. This dates back to Paul Keating's 1986 declaration that media magnates could be "queens of the screen or princes of print" but not both.

It is an archaic rule, drafted before the internet changed everything, and it punishes companies that are in a struggle for survival against Google and Facebook. John Howard's government

tried to repeal the Keating rules in 2006 but his communications minister, Helen Coonan, had to overcome fears about media power as old media was losing its power.

Parliament acted with hindsight rather than foresight and the results were on show recently when Fairfax was left vulnerable to overseas private equity funds and a potential breakup of the company because it could not turn to other media firms for a merger.

That is 11 years wasted. The "two out of three" rule exists only because Peter Costello stood in the Coalition partyroom in October 2006 to suggest a compromise that would get through the Senate. Malcolm Turnbull has to untangle the mess but it is too polite to name the senators who caused the problem.

One was Joyce, then a new and rebellious Queensland Nationals senator. Another was Fiona Nash, now deputy leader of the Nation-

als. Back then, they shared the balance of power in the upper house. Now they are part of a cabinet decision to undo their own work.

Turnbull and his Communications Minister, Mitch Fifield, have a commonsense policy. Critics worry about more media mergers but the sad fact is that the "two out of three" rule has not prevented years of journalist redundancies. Shorten has urged crossbenchers to block reform to make sure the Ten Network does not end up in the hands of Sky News and News Corp Australia, the publisher of *The Australian*. Ten's receiver is due to decide next week on bids for the network being lodged today. Every delay to the media bill puts private equity bidders further ahead of any competing bid from Lachlan Murdoch, the co-chairman of News Corp.

The Labor approach hobbles media companies over time. Ten is in a financial crisis, Fairfax has been besieged and broadcasters

are seeing old revenues collapse. What will it take for parliament to admit the old rules no longer work? Media policy needs upgrading from the MS-DOS era to the age of the iPhone.

The shock yesterday was that the government could not reach an agreement with Nick Xenophon to secure the wider reform. Cabinet ministers balked at Xenophon's idea of giving tax breaks to media companies with up to \$30 million in revenue. The Coalition's fear is that this will only help players who barrack for Labor, even though there are small conservative outfits such as *Quadrant* just as much as progressive ones such as *The Monthly*.

Industry executives say Xenophon worked harder than any crossbencher to find common ground on media reform and was treated shabbily by the government. The delay of the bill is just what Shorten wanted.

Nationals senator Bridget Mc-

Kenzie has a good proposal to encourage the ABC to report on regional Australia but, Pauline Hanson's plan for the ABC is nothing more than inflicting revenge for critical media coverage by disclosing the salaries of journalists. The Greens admit the problems with the old rules but have every reason to attack the Liberals, champion the ABC and make sure Labor cannot use the issue to poach their voters.

One way forward is a revised agreement with Xenophon next month, but a likelier option is another decade of deadlock. That seems to be what the Australian parliament prefers. Laurie Oakes, who was felled from the parliamentary press gallery on Wednesday, once wrote that too many MPs were "bludgers" who spent too much time at the bar. Australians may wonder if anything has changed. Like others before it, this parliament knows how to waste time.