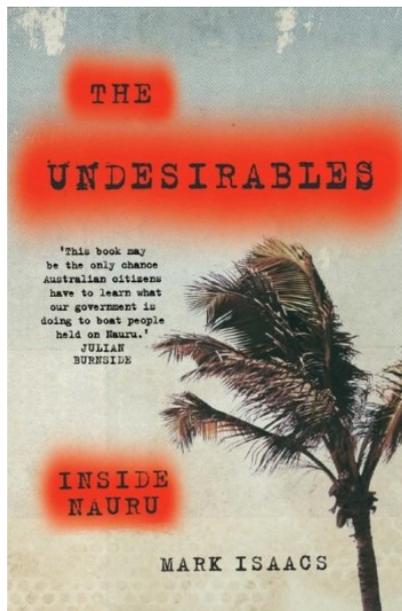


UNDESIRABLES - IT MATTERS HOW WE NAME THOSE SEEKING ASYLUM IN AUSTRALIA

Thu 10 July 2014



“The Undesirables” is a term used by staff of the former Minister for Immigration to describe asylum seekers. “The Undesirables” is also the title of a book by Mark Isaacs which was launched on 8 July 2014. Perhaps the current Minister does not use the term “The Undesirables” but I have no doubt that the sentiment would be the same in his office.



Mark Isaacs was employed by the Salvation Army in the Nauru detention centre to watch over the physical and mental wellbeing of asylum seekers before the current government terminated the Salvation Army’s contract. He was horrified at what he saw and experienced in Nauru.

Here are a couple of quotes from his book.

He states that Australia’s policy on refugees (and he is referring to both the Government and the Opposition) “was a cruel and unjust policy that punished innocent people based on an unfounded fear that they were a threat to our way of life. Everything I’d ever been taught by my parents, at school, about the Australian values of equality and justice, were the opposite of what I witnessed in Nauru. Worse, it appeared that the Australian people were in favour of these policies.”

When he arrived in Nauru he was told to expect two suicide attempts each day in the camp. He writes: "We were working in death factories. The camp was built around destroying men, breaking them down so far that they would take their own lives. Grind them into the dust and force their hands to pull the nooses and knives on themselves. I rode a wave of anger, frustration, grief, guilt and hate."

He was even reprimanded for referring to asylum seekers by name. He was told that they were only to be referred to by their numbers.

Australia's policy towards asylum seekers seems to have two main elements. The first is to make conditions so horrendous for those who are already in Australia that no-one else will attempt to come here (at least by sea). The second is to punish those who are already here to such an extent that they decide to go back to where they came from, even if they face persecution or death there.

So what does God have to say about this?

In Leviticus chapter 19 we read: "When the alien (or stranger in some translations) resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as a citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself."

1 John 3:17 says: "How does God's love abide in anyone who has this world's goods, sees a brother or sister in need, and yet refuses help?"

There are many references in the Bible assuring that God knows us by name. If we deny people a name, are we denying them the love of God?

And Jesus himself told us the parable of the Good Samaritan in which we are urged to care for people who are suffering.

Our present policies remind me more of Pontius Pilate than of Jesus. We force refugees to go back to where they came from and then we wash our hands of all responsibility.

Our government will not tell us what is happening in Nauru and other detention centres. I urge every Australian to buy a copy of "The Undesirables" to find out what is being done in our name to the aliens who are seeking refuge in our land. I defy anyone to read it without being brought to tears – tears for the asylum seekers and tears for our nation.

I'll leave the last word to the Rev. Tim Costello in the latest issue of *Eternity* newspaper: "May our hearts be broken by the things that break the heart of God."

By **Charles Body**