

25 dead in train disaster

Mail Foreign Service

AT LEAST 25 people have died after two Italian commuter trains collided head-on in the southern region of Puglia, officials said.

Scores more were injured and at least two passengers were pulled alive from the crumpled wreckage as the rescue operation ground on in scorching heat yesterday.

Railway police commander Giancarlo Conticchio said the number of dead was 25 with dozens more injured, adding that the final toll could still be higher.

'Surely one of the two trains shouldn't have been there. And surely there was an error. We need to determine the cause of the error,' Mr Conticchio said.

Another official stressed the final toll would not be known until the train cars had been pulled apart. A giant crane arrived at the scene yesterday to remove the mangled debris.



Shocking: Aftermath of yesterday's rail crash in southern Italy

News reports said rescue workers pulled a child alive from the rubble. The two trains, each with four cars, had collided head-on in an olive grove between the towns of Andria and Corato on a line with just a single track.

The accident occurred at around 11.30am local time yesterday, some 50km northwest of the Puglia regional capital, Bari.

Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi pledged a thorough investigation and returned to Rome

from Milan to monitor the situation. His transport minister, Graziano Delrio, was at the scene along with local prosecutors.

'We must begin to understand the causes of this tragedy that has saddened the whole country,' Mr Delrio said at the site, announcing a commission of inquiry. 'The crash was certainly violent. Extremely violent.'

The trains were operated by Ferrottramviaria, a private, Bari-based rail company.

Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

True beauty does not fade as time passes

THE world is starving for beauty. That might sound strange to a culture saturated with 'beautiful' images. Indeed, our ideal of perfection is the 'body beautiful' that smiles from every screen.

That ideal is brought to fruition by athletes and actors, by popular singers and by those who make a living from the 'beauty industry'. It is, however, an ideal that refuses to admit ageing, sickness or frailty. It is one well suited to our narcissistic society, but one that is ruthless in discriminating against those who fail to make the grade. The truth is that beauty – real beauty – is incompatible with narcissism. To be self-obsessed is to see no further than the mirror. It is to make vanity the highest virtue.

The 'beauty industry' thrives on our relentless vanity, on our insatiable desire to realise 'body beautiful'. In itself, there is nothing wrong with wishing to appear beautiful to the world. It shows you care about how you are perceived by others, and that you have made an effort to fit in.

There is, however, a difference between elegance and the type of manufactured beauty which has become the norm. Elegance does not discriminate on the basis of age. Think of Queen Elizabeth, a woman of 90 who epitomises elegance at its very best.

Despite our best efforts to defeat ageing, we all know that the body will eventually grow old. We all know there is nothing to be gained by desperately clinging to a vanishing youth. Eventually, the years catch up and nature has its way. Does beauty die when age takes hold? 'Body beautiful' certainly does, but genuine beauty shines ever more brilliantly. Grace, elegance and dignity are the enduring traits of beauty that cannot die.

Think of the difference between real and pretend art. We have all had the experience of encountering a piece of modern art and, after a period of utter bewilderment, walking away none the wiser. It may be visually spectacular, and yet, because it is so self-involved, no-one knows what it means.

Then, however, you walk into the next room and see a Monet or a Caravaggio. It is old and depicts something from another age, but there is no need to ask what it is about because the meaning hits you like a ray of light. You are, as they say, 'blown away' by its beauty and your only response is to sit in awe. There is no pretension, no visual tricks – just a beautiful image that enraptures the soul and leaves a lifelong impression.

Anyone who has the good fortune to gaze at such masterpieces can automatically distinguish between real and bogus beauty. Likewise, anyone who understands the true meaning of elegance will see why it should be the real standard of what counts as beautiful. Elegance and grace are not, of course, superficial qualities. Elegance

is something integral to a person, just as meaning is integral to an artistic masterpiece. It reveals itself in good manners, politeness, gentleness and personal warmth.

An elegant person is one whose beauty shines from within – from their movements, manner of speech and general appearance. Thankfully, elegance is still very much a feature of my parents' generation. I say that because, more than ever before, children need role models that epitomise much more than the latest variation of 'body beautiful'.

Can parents really feel content knowing their children are modelling themselves on celebrities? Can any of us rest easy in the knowledge that so much unnecessary pressure is piled on our young to emulate the latest idols of our sexualised culture? When body image has become an obsession for so many primary school children, surely we must realise that we have a serious problem on our hands?

Our children's grandparents are a last reminder of the true meaning of human beauty. They come from an age when people were living artworks. It was an age in which I grew up, and I often recall responding to those who embodied elegance and virtue by saying: 'I want to be like that.'

Today, people still try to make themselves into works of art. They engrave images on their bodies and seek to sculpt them in the image of Roman gods. However, this is beauty that is only skin deep and that cannot survive the passage of time.

From an early age, children need to see real beauty. They need to look upon their elders with awe and say: 'I want to be like that.' However, if we don't provide them with that ideal, if we fail to give them an alternative to their celebrity idols, we have only ourselves to blame when they become body-fixated.

IT is never too late to set an example. Children instinctively know the difference between a plastic parody and genuine art. That's why they love being with their grandparents, for in them they see an elegant alternative to the tawdry exhibitionism of the present age.

In the end, the real test of whether or not something is truly beautiful is the extent to which its beauty lasts. When something grows old and its beauty fades, it cannot be declared genuinely beautiful. Think, however, of an old person, cottage, painting, book or bottle of wine. In each case, the years only add to its beauty, elegance and attractiveness.

Real beauty blossoms with age, so let it shine and sparkle so that children may see how to lead a truly beautiful life. Rescue them from the hall of mirrors in which they are trapped and show them what true art is made of. Let them see that ageing is not an affliction, but rather the beginning of that phase in life when they will never appear more attractive.

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