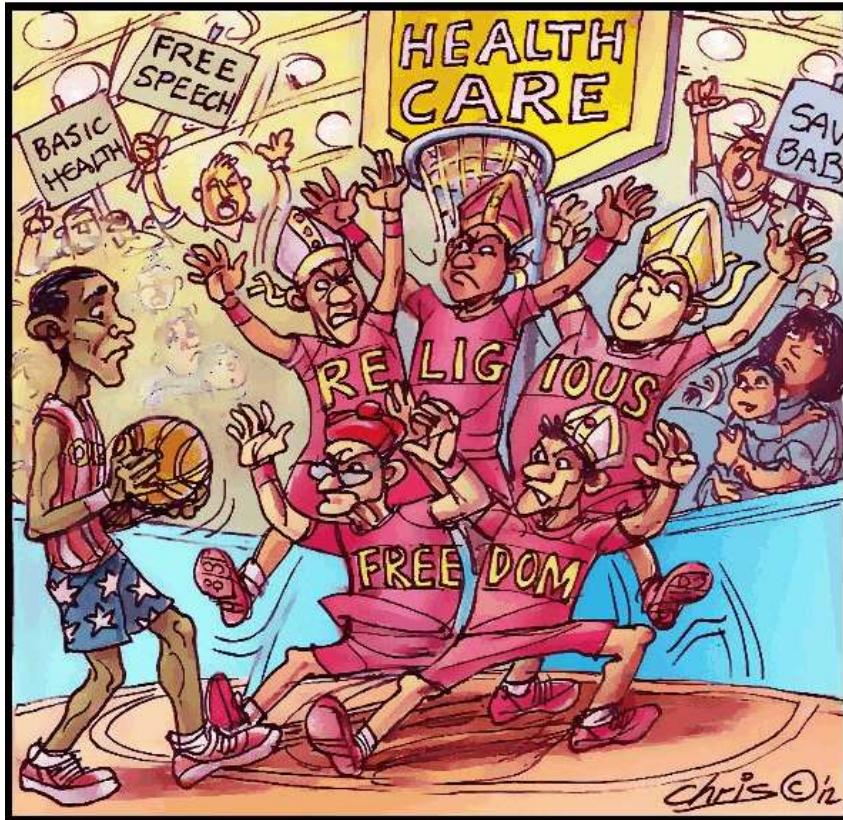


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Eureka Street is published fortnightly online, a minimum of 24 times per year by Eureka Street Magazine Pty Ltd

Requests for permission to reprint material from the website and this edition should be addressed to the Editor.

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Richmond
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Responsibility for editorial content is accepted by the publisher.

Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned.

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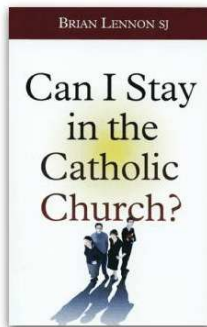
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Re-balancing authority in the abusive Church

RELIGION

Sean Lennon



Organisers had initially expected 200 to turn up at the Association of Catholic Priests (ACP) meeting in Dublin this month. In fact over 1000 showed up.

The size of the crowd in part was a response to the recent silencing of Irish priests.

One of those silenced, Fr Tony Flannery, was part of the leadership team of the ACP. A second, Fr Brian D'Arcy, was a weekly columnist in tabloid newspaper, *The Sunday World*. It turned out that someone in the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith had been trawling through decades of the paper to check D'Arcy's articles.

Two other stories provided a backdrop to the meeting. One was a TV program which revealed that in 1975 when he was a bishop's secretary, Cardinal Sean Brady, now Primate of Ireland, was given the names of some boys abused by Fr Brendan Smyth during a canonical investigation, and failed to report this either to the parents or to the police. Smyth, the abuser being investigated, continued to prey on children for a further 18 years.

In fact the Cardinal had passed all the information up to his bishop and was devastated when he learnt that Smyth had not been stopped. He rejected calls for his resignation. Several commentators pointed out that had he called for a discussion on women priests the Vatican would have promptly given him his marching orders, as Bishop Morris in Australia found to his cost.

A second story concerned Fr Kevin Reynolds. RTE, the national broadcaster, had accused him in a program of fathering a child by an underage woman in Africa. Reynolds denied the charge and offered to take a paternity test in advance of the program. This was refused. Eventually, RTE was forced to publish an abject apology, pay an undisclosed sum for libel, and was subjected to a withering public report. Several staff resigned.

There is a pattern in all this: the terrible suffering of children who have been abused, the humiliation they experience — which many describe as a second abuse — when they look for truth from the Church, some false accusations against priests, the Vatican seeking to impose uniformity of doctrine throughout the world, groups of priests and/or lay people organising to resist this, and conservative groups in turn opposing the reformers.

The ACP conference was a great day because it gave so many people hope, and hope is something we need.

In my own case I have been deeply disturbed by the abuse revelations and wondered how I could remain on in a church with so much corruption. This drove me to write a book on the issue, primarily for myself. But doing this gave me hope. It showed me that the way forward is through repentance. That means not only saying sorry and meaning it, but also changing what was wrong about our behaviour.

Catholic Church structures are riddled with patriarchy, clericalism and deference and these were at the very centre of the abuse problem itself. Repentance therefore means changing these.

The ACP, which wants Vatican II implemented, faces a major problem: we will not achieve this by conferences or articles. Walking away from the Church, or being silenced, will also achieve nothing: the powers that be seem content with a smaller church in their own image.

To be the Church of Christ, the Church has to be diverse. This means including people with opposing views. To do that we need dialogue. We also need a teaching authority because this is part of Catholic teaching. As well, we need a strong, central authority to oversee child protection in the Church throughout the world.

We cannot get any of this without a re-balancing of authority in the Church. The Body of Christ cannot have a voice if only the head speaks. It is akin, in human terms, to ignoring our physical or emotional reality. The outcome is a disaster.

The issue for the ACP, and for similar groups in Australia and elsewhere is: how can we make this happen? Perhaps lay people in particular, who are less subject to Vatican strictures, need to bring to the table their skills and knowledge of change in secular organisations.

Multiculturalism's answer to terrorism

VIDEO

Peter Kirkwood

The policy of multiculturalism is under severe strain in Western countries. The Rudd/Gillard Labor government has re-embraced the idea — but only in a lukewarm way — after John Howard and the previous Coalition government dropped the term from official documents and correspondence.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and British Prime Minister David Cameron went much further when, in the early months of 2011, they announced that multiculturalism had failed in their countries.

This was followed some months later, in July last year, by the bombing and shootings perpetrated by Anders Breivik in Norway that left 77 people dead, and hundreds more injured. Testimony in Breivik's trial, now under way in Oslo, has revealed the attacks were largely motivated by his abhorrence of multiculturalism in Norway.

The interviewee featured here is one of the leading proponents of Australian multiculturalism. [Desmond Cahill](#) sees the policy as an effective means of promoting community tolerance and harmony, and lessening the likelihood of terrorist acts like that of Breivik.

He spoke to Eureka Street TV at the [National Social Cohesion Conference](#) held at the University of Western Sydney at the end of last year where he delivered the keynote address entitled 'From 9/11 to Breivik: Responding nationally and internationally to the challenge of diversity and social cohesion'.

He argues for multiculturalism, but says it is poorly understood in the community, and there needs to be much more education about it. And he contends it needs to be tempered by a global view, and, for Australia, much more of a realisation of our place in Asia.

After theological studies to the Masters level at the Urban University in Rome, Desmond Cahill returned to Australia where he studied psychology and education at the University of Melbourne and Monash University. His doctorate was a study of family environment and the bilingual skills of Italo-Australian children.

He is now Professor of Intercultural Studies at RMIT University in Melbourne, and for more than 30 years has researched and taught in the fields of immigrant, cross-cultural and international studies. He has been an influential consultant to a number of government departments, carrying out policy and program evaluation in the areas of multicultural education and ethnic youth.

Since the tragic events of 9/11, Cahill has been a leading interfaith activist. He chairs the Australian chapter of [Religions for Peace International](#), one of the world's largest interfaith organisations. In 2006 he spearheaded Melbourne's bid to host the [Parliament of the World's Religions](#) which took place there in December 2009.

In 2010 he was honoured in the Queen's Birthday list with the Order of Australia medal for 'services to intercultural education and to the interfaith movement'. He is a prolific writer having penned scores of research papers, articles, essays and book chapters dealing with religion, globalisation, migration and multiculturalism.

East Timor's independence is from Australia

POLITICS

Michael Mullins

With East Timor marking ten years of independence on Sunday, it's relevant to ask which nation in particular they are celebrating independence from.

It could be the colonial master Portugal, as the UN did not accept the Indonesian invasion, and East Timor was officially Portuguese from 1702 until independence in 2002.

In the minds of many, it's obviously Indonesia, given the brutal repression of the period of Indonesian occupation between 1975 and 1999.

But there is also a sense in which East Timorese value independence because it's a reminder that they do not hold ties and obligations to Australia, which might have become their neo-colonial master.

After the widespread killing of its people and systematic destruction of East Timor's infrastructure when the Indonesians left in 1999, Australia came to help. It played a leading role in INTERFET, the UN-backed peacekeeping force commanded by General Peter Cosgrove.

Because nothing worked, Australia lent infrastructure to East Timor. For example Telstra's Australian mobile phone network was extended to include parts of East Timor.

Australia was on a path to cementing its ties with East Timor, which it hoped would be grateful and compliant. But it didn't turn out that way. Very soon it became clear that East Timorese did not want such a relationship with Australia, which history had taught them to regard with caution. The help received had been on Australia's terms, East Timor had many friends, and it was ready to move on.

Indeed it put obstacles in the way of further assistance from Australia, which may or may not have been intentional. Its interim leaders chose to adopt Portuguese and not the more pragmatic English as the language with which they would communicate with the outside world. Rather than the mooted Australian dollar, they took the US dollar as their unit of currency. They adopted a legal system based on that of the Portuguese.

The years after independence saw Australia become increasingly 'on the nose' for East Timorese. We used our muscle to try to dictate a share of oil revenue from the Timor Sea which they perceived as unfair. This was a reminder that Australian maneuvering to secure more oil went back to 1974, when Portugal lost its grip, and officials in Canberra were [arguing](#) that Australia would get a better deal if Indonesia controlled Timor.

East Timor believed Australia owed a debt of gratitude to it for the assistance rendered by its citizens to Australian guerrilla fighters attempting to hold back the Japanese during World War II. Author Paul Cleary has documented this in his [book](#) *The Men who Came Out of the Ground*.

At the time, Australia dropped leaflets over the countryside of East Timor, declaring: 'Your Friends Do Not Forget You'. But three decades later, the Whitlam Government betrayed the East Timorese when it sanctioned the Indonesian takeover in 1975.'

Moreover in 2010, then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd rebuffed a grassroots campaign led by



Josephite Sister Susan Connelly that called for formal recognition and compensation for the war-time assistance from East Timorese.

Australia's one good friend among those who call the shots in East Timor, President Jose Ramos Horta, was resoundingly defeated during the first round of the presidential elections in March, and leaves office tomorrow.

While magnanimous by nature, Ramos Horta has always championed ties with Australia in particular. He bonded with us immediately after he settled here as an exile following the Indonesian invasion. He owes his life to Australian surgeons who operated on him in Darwin after he was struck down by the assassination attempt.

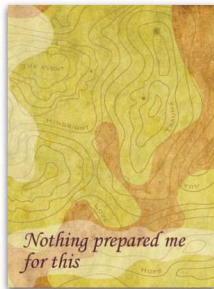
In 2010 he isolated himself from others in the Government of East Timor when he feigned openness to Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard's ill-conceived plans for an offshore immigration detention centre in East Timor. Last year he even [offered](#) an olive branch to Australian oil and gas company Woodside.

As Pat Walsh [observed](#) in *Eureka Street* after Ramos Horta's defeat, many Australians were shocked by the result. Our friendship with Ramos Horta is something of a metaphor for our relationship with East Timor. We were wrong in our estimation of the East Timorese people's perceived need for Ramos Horta as their president, and we are also wrong if we think that an independent East Timor needs us as a benevolent force in its life.

Suicide is the new leprosy

APPLICATION

Andrew Hamilton



Recently there have been many encouraging responses to suicide. The recent death of [Don Ritchie](#), the 'angel' of The Gap suicide spot in Sydney, reminded us of his faithfulness in talking so many people out of taking their lives. He simply invited them to a chat and a cup of tea.

Two recent films have treated the topic of depression and the spectre of suicide [thoughtfully](#). And *Nothing Prepared Me For This*, a moving collection of writing by relatives and friends of people who had taken their own lives, has also been [published](#).

A common public response to suicide is very similar to earlier attitudes to leprosy. The former makes silent people who need to speak. The latter makes invisible people who need to be seen.

I once visited a leper colony in Northern Thailand. Lepers and their families, traditionally excluded from villages, were here confined in a separate section of the camp for Hmong refugees. Many bore the deformities caused by injury and infection. The sisters who supported adult education in the camp had placed their computers and sewing machines in the lepers' section in order to encourage the other refugees to enter it.

In this place visibility dispelled fears and made for shared laughter.

In Western societies suicide has the same aura that leprosy once had. It also evokes the same fear, which in turn leads to exclusion and to silence. It is seen as the inexplicable rejection of the most fundamental human desire to live. This is the foundation stone of all attempts to find meaning and to shape a human society.

Perhaps this explains why in some cultures, which allowed human life to be taken with cavalier freedom judicially and militarily, the bodies of those who have taken their own lives were treated ignominiously. They were buried outside the common graveyards, and even subjected to ritual execution. It marks a fear that suicide may be contagious and corrode the fabric of society.

The families and friends of those who have taken their own lives suffer doubly from this exclusion. It is hard not to feel at times that people who have taken their own lives have rejected our love, and have chosen to exclude us from their lives. Because suicide is so inexplicable, relatives and friends also commonly feel excluded from conversation. They feel unable to speak about what matters to them.

In that respect they are like soldiers returning from war. A Vietnam war journalist described a sergeant's response to an importunate request to describe his experience. He told a hermetic story: 'Five men were sent on a mission behind enemy lines. Four never returned. The one who came back was badly wounded. He died before he could tell what happened.' The story was designed to exclude the hearer.

Those who know are condemned to silence. It is a dark silence, often with terrible effects on the soldiers themselves and on their families. The inexplicability and common fear of suicide make it difficult for friends and relatives to speak of it. They need a safe place, receptive listeners and encouragement to speak simple and honest words. Simple words come out of a luminous silence that recognises the mystery of each human being.

That is why Don Ritchie's simple offer of tea and conversation was significant beyond its important. So is the work of [Support after Suicide](#) which produced the collection of writing. It allows people to speak directly of the horror and denial of discovering that someone loved has taken their own life, the endless self-questioning about the kind word not said, the love, and the gradual moves towards acceptance and hope.

The contributors find simple words. A stanza of the title poem of 'Nothing prepared me for this' is exemplary.

and I never thought I'd feel like this
never knew how much I'd miss your kiss
it's true that ignorance is bliss
nothing prepared me for this.

The words are conventional. They belong to everyday conversation and not to sociological analysis or to horror movies. But they make palpable the hole left in the life of the person who is left alone. They also leave space for us to see the ordinary but unique humanity of the person who has died.

Speaking and seeing, not imposed invisibility and silence, are the gateways to life after suicide.

Rape ambiguity in India

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Trishna* (MA). Director: Michael Winterbottom. Starring: Freida Pinto, Riz Ahmed. 113 minutes**

Did he rape her or not? The first 'phase' of Thomas Hardy's 1891 novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* ends with a sexual encounter between the materially poor, doomed heroine Tess and her well-to-do, sleazy suitor Alec. The scene, veiled in euphemism, is ambiguous, though the sinister tone and Tess' subsequent psychological decline do support the accepted interpretation that the encounter was not consensual.

Prolific UK auteur [Michael Winterbottom](#)'s somewhat loose adaptation of *Tess* is even more obscure about the nature of this pivotal event. With *Trishna* he relocates the story to modern-day India and, intriguingly, snowballs the novel's two male leads (the villainous Alec and the somewhat more sympathetic Angel) into one: Jay (Ahmed), the English-raised son of a wealthy Indian hotel owner and businessman.

Jay is infatuated with Trishna ([Pinto](#)) from the first moment he sees her, working at a hotel he is visiting with his yobbish friends. He later goes to her house and observes her family's financial hardship (her father was recently incapacitated in a car accident). Playing saviour, he gets her a job at one of his father's hotels, and begins trying to woo her. He does all this with the dispassionate admiration of one seeking to purchase a new leather sofa.

They do have sex, but whether or not the encounter was consensual, Winterbottom is not inclined to tell us outright; the camera cuts away. Certainly the power imbalance in the relationship makes such an encounter ethically dubious even if it was not strictly rape. This could account for Trishna's traumatised escape for a time back to her family. In any case, the event has repercussions that unfold throughout the rest of the film.

In Hardy's novel, Tess is led from this point into tragedy, by desperation and by the weight of societal and parental expectations. Trishna experiences these things too, but by comparison she seems to have greater control of her destiny. The question of the rape, then, remains a problem, as it has some bearing on the degree of sympathy we ultimately feel for her. Was this a path she chose, or was it forced upon her?

Certainly if it was rape, it is inconceivable that she later becomes Jay's willing lover. He seduces her with a promise of a big-city life in Mumbai, and, incongruously, they appear to be happy for a while. Jay though is increasingly vapid and selfish, which makes his hold over Trishna even more of a mystery. It could be that his power and her powerlessness within this society are so innate that they are beyond the bounds of perception.

Winterbottom associates Jay's material amplitude with inactivity, which stands in stark contrast to Trishna's incessant busyness. While we frequently see her engaged in some form of physical labour, his responsibilities as a hotel manager seem to involve a lot of lying on a couch with a book. When he dabbles in film production, his role seems to entail lounging in a chair, observing lazily (a colleague quips that Jay's job is 'having a rich father').

Eventually Jay's lethargy assumes the proportions of an existential malaise. After another prolonged separation from Trishna, prompted by Jay's double standard about the nature of fidelity, he returns and asks her to be with him. The catch is that he is on his way to run one

of his father's hotels, where she would have to work for him as a maid and would once more be relegated from being his girlfriend to being his dirty little secret. She accepts.

Trisha hits a new stride at this point. Most of their trysts during the final harrowing act occur after Trishna, in uniform, has delivered lunch to Jay, her employer. This is an ingenious plot device, as it subtly links sex to service; Trishna's final transition from lover to unwitting prostitute is thus almost imperceptible. The tragic outcomes of this are grippingly, shockingly portrayed by the gutsy and emotionally authentic Pinto.

The many sins of Brian Doyle

NON-FICTION

Brian Doyle

I, Brian, a sinner, a most simple suburban, a generally decent sort but subject to fits of selfishness, do here wish to confess and be shriven, in such a manner that speaking of that which I have not done well will provoke me to do better; this slight daily improvement being exactly the work we are asked to do by the Shining One. So then:

I missed my cousin's funeral because I had weekend plans with a girlfriend that I was not man enough to break; and this beloved cousin was a nun, and to this day, nearly 30 years after I casually blew off her funeral, I am haunted by the story of my sister, also now a nun, leaving a small bowl of white flowers on the altar after the Mass, because she and our cousin loved small white flowers, which they felt were overlooked in the world, but which often arrived first and smelled best.

Obsecro ut mihi ignoscas, I beg to be forgiven.

Also I was for many years sneering and dismissive and vulgar and rude to my mother and father, never once seeing the pain I inflicted, never once thinking of them as human beings, never once thinking how they would feel to have raised and coddled a child with such a serpent's tongue; and not until I was 19 did I feel the lash of remorse, and pick up the telephone, and apologise profusely, and ask their forgiveness for years of surly lip.

Obsecro ut mihi ignoscas.

Also I did for years take my lovely bride for granted, more than a little; I did think that being married meant that she would never leave me and I could drift into a gentle selfishness that she would have to endure because she had sworn in a church before many witnesses to be true in good times and bad, in sickness and health, to love and honour you all the days of my life, I carry those words in my wallet; but I did not look at them enough and contemplate them and mull over them and take them deep into my salty heart and consider what they asked me to do and be, and there came dark years, and I was in no small part responsible for their bleakness and pain.

Obsecro ut mihi ignoscas.

Also I have roared at my children, and snarled at them, and insulted them, and made cutting remarks, and teased and razzed them past the point of gentle humour, and I have belittled their ideas and accomplishments, and failed to listen to what they were saying beneath the words they were using, and failed to contemplate their dreams, especially when their dreams were far from the dreams I had for them, and I set lofty expectations and standards and behavioural bars, all this having more to do with what I wanted than with what they wanted and who they wished to be, and a thousand thousand times I have spoken to them sternly of what they have not done rather than sweetly of what they have done, and left unsaid that which I feel most certainly in my heart, this being a love so oceanic and electric that I cannot find words for it, though I would happily die for them anytime anyhow anywhere, and if that is so, as I know it to be so, why can I not be more gentle to them, instead of snarling about the failed test?

Obsecro ut mihi ignoscas.

Also I have gossiped and committed calumny and made snide remarks about friends and acquaintances, and made snap judgments based on appearance, and held people to higher

standards than I could meet myself, and jumped to conclusions based on no evidence at all not even ephemeral and circumstantial; and offered scurrilous insults freely; and while hiding behind humour actually flicked words like whips and chains upon those who deserved nothing of the sort; and I have amused myself with dark remarks; and I have often amused myself at the expense of others, under the guise of laughter; and I have done this so very much, I realise, because it is so very uncomfortable to say this aloud here on the naked page.

Obsecro ut mihi ignoscas.

Also I have taken seats on the bus reserved for the elderly and weary when I was neither; and I have sat mute on the bus while old women stood awkwardly, their heavy bags battering their thin shoulders; and I have stolen shampoo and notepads and pens from hotels and motels; and I have even stolen a Gideon Bible from a motel; and I have stolen vast ranks of teas from conferences and seminars; and I have stolen towels from pools and gyms; and I have stolen much else under the aegis of borrowing, knowing full well that I would never return nor attempt to return the contraband; and I have even in this way stolen obscure paperback books from the shelves of friends; another confession that makes me so uncomfortable that it must be true.

Obsecro ut mihi ignoscas.

There are many more things under heaven that I could here confess, but I am going to use the lovely excuse that time grows short and the end of the page draws near, so I beseech the reader to ascribe many more sins large and small to me, and leave them nameless except to Him who knows every feather of every sparrow, and assume my guilt and shame and apologia, and join me as we say, in a small voice but with a wild heart,

Obsecro ut mihi ignoscas,

And then amen.

Reconciliation in the homes of war criminals

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan

On Saturday, I was travelling around the Catholic parish of Khompong Thom in Cambodia in company with the director of UCAN News, Australian Jesuit Fr Michael Kelly, and the parish priest, Thai Jesuit Fr Jub Phoktavi (pictured, second from left, with Fr Kelly, right, and Khompong Thom parishioners). As we drove through the village of Prek Sbeuv, Jub matter-of-factly pointed to Pol Pot's old house.



It is an unremarkable house, and if tourists happened to be this far off the beaten track they would have little idea that this was the residence of one of the world's greatest war criminals.

I thought back to 1987 when I met a Khmer leader in the Site Two refugee camp on the Thai Cambodian border. I asked him if he could ever imagine a return to government in Cambodia. He looked very sad as he told me how the Khmer Rouge had killed most of his immediate family. He could not trust the Khmer Rouge again.

I had the sense that he would find it hard to trust any of his fellow Cambodians ever again in rebuilding his nation from such ruins. Reconciliation was a fashionable textbook concept.

Twenty five years later, there is a certain routine to life in Cambodia, though poverty in the villages is widespread and government corruption legendary.

The previous evening I had been asked to address a multi-faith group of NGO and Church workers on faith, justice and public policy. What could I, a Catholic priest from Australia, say about such matters in a largely Buddhist country devastated by genocide?

Whether Christian, Buddhist, or Muslim, faith is about my having, owning and reflecting on a belief system which allows me to live fully with the paradoxes and conflicts of life and death, good and evil, beauty and suffering. It is only fundamentalists who are able to live as if these paradoxes are not real, as if they do not impinge on our sense of self and on our considered actions every day.

By embracing these paradoxes and confronting these conflicts, the person of faith, whether inspired by Jesus, Mohammed, or Buddha, is able to live an engaged life of faith. I am able to commit myself to others, in love and in justice. I am able to be open to reconciling, or at least being reconciled to, the previously irreconcilable.

I am able to accord dignity to all others in the human family, no matter what their distinguishing marks, and regardless of their competencies, achievements or potentialities. I am able to surrender myself to that which is beyond what I know through my senses. I am able to commit myself to the stewardship of all creation.

The atheist, the person with no faith except in man himself, may do all these things to varying degrees. Suffice it to say, I cannot imagine being committed to these tasks so comprehensively and so universally except with faith. Some atheists are among the finest, most generous humanitarians I know. But equally I know that my faith enhances my humanitarian instincts and achievements. I would be a lesser person without my religious faith.

For example I would find it difficult to accord full human dignity to persons at either end of the life cycle but for the abiding conviction that every person is uniquely created in the image and likeness of God. I would find reconciliation in post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia incomprehensible and impossible without some religious faith.



When we live in diverse, pluralist societies, it makes good sense for us to be able to translate our comprehensive world view in terms accessible to others if they do not subscribe to our way of thinking.

The challenge to a Christian living in a largely Buddhist society has some similarities to the challenge confronting a Christian living in a society where the public square is largely the preserve of those who argue and agitate with a secularist mindset. We have ideas not just about what is good for us as individuals but what is good for the society of which we are a part.

While it might be patronising and inappropriate for the religious person to tell others how to live their lives, there is nothing wrong with participating in the discussion about how society might be shaped for the good of everyone.

As state officials or as citizens, religious faith can help us and our neighbours. The religious person who espouses universal truths and the universal dignity of humanity might be more likely to stand up for the people on the margins — the land evictees, the stateless, and the trafficked of Cambodia.

The religious person is free, and perhaps duty bound, to speak up in the public square and vote accordingly. When appointed as a state official, that person is vested with a public trust and must discharge it faithfully. It would be wrong for a religious person to abuse that trust by imposing their religious views on others.

It is important to distinguish the citizen or public official with religious faith from the religious official or representative of the faith community. There are other prudential issues to consider when we come to define the role of religious leaders in the public square.

Buddhists in countries like Cambodia and Myanmar know that the monks can be very effective in making public protests. But the monks must not do it too often; otherwise they lose their exalted role. And if they never do it, they risk becoming irrelevant and withdrawn from their people. Think just of the time when the monks marched in the streets of Rangoon and gathered outside the house of Aung Sang Su Ki when she was under house arrest.

People of faith come into the public square as committed citizens. True to their religious tradition, they discharge the public trust vested in them and work to recognise the dignity and human rights of all persons, at all life stages, no matter what their competencies, potentialities, achievements or distinguishing marks.

People of faith work to establish the conditions for the common good, and to respect and enhance the culture and space for freedom of religion and conscience for all their fellow citizens. They find hope in the midst of despair and love in the midst of hatred, and persevere to educate and form citizens and to design structures appropriate to our history and culture, promoting the rule of law and due process for all.

I remain in awe of those Cambodians who have been able to be reconciled, committing themselves to the common good of their nation. Fr Jub drops in occasionally for a chat with Pol Pot's niece who still lives in the family home. May God continue to bless them both.

Tony Abbott's class war

POLITICS

Dean Ashenden

One way of conducting class warfare is to accuse your opponent of conducting class warfare. In his speech in reply to last week's Budget the Leader of the Opposition attacked the government for 'deliberately, coldly, calculatingly play[ing] the class war card', of portraying the political contest as 'billionaires versus battlers'.

There was a time when someone on the Government benches would have interjected to call Tony Abbott the billionaires' lacky, and pointed to some incriminating evidence in support: donations by the mining industry to his Coalition parties have soared over the past five years from a few hundred thousand dollars a year to \$3 million, during which time donations to the Labor Party have gone from hardly anything to a bit less than that.

If only life, and class relations, were so simple. But they are not. It is not long since a government of which Abbott was a senior member itself played 'the class war card', but for the other side, for 'Howard's battlers'. And for most of the intervening period Labor studiously avoided playing that same card, preferring to talk about 'Australian working families' rather than battlers — or billionaires.

The frisson of comment about the terms of Abbott's assault on the Budget reflects a national ambivalence, and confusion, about class. Talk about class has never been absent from our history, but we also like to think that since no-one tugs a forelock to anyone, we (unlike the poms) are classless.

Abbott appealed to just this logic before he attacked the Government for not using it. His was 'an Australian life', he averred, 'much like yours, with Margie, raising three daughters in suburban Sydney, paying a mortgage, worrying about bills, trying to be a good neighbour and a good citizen'.

The term 'class' can itself wear much of the blame for this national confusion. 'Class' conjures up a vision of vast battalions, homogenous, distinct, and immutable. What the concept tries to draw attention to is in fact more like one of those Bureau of Metrology videos on the net, images of endlessly-swirling forces of every colour, patterned certainly, but never neat and stationary.

One of those forces is the force of language, and there is probably no time in Australia's history when the term 'class' has been so on the nose. In some ways that is a good thing, reflecting the fact that we are now much more conscious of other kinds of social relations, between genders and cultures, for example, and reflecting also the fact that in a globalising economy on a struggling planet, we are in this together.

But 'class', with its appeals to equality and fraternity, still has a job to do that the currently-preferred language of 'the market' and its insatiable lust for liberty can't do. In fact there is more of a job to be done now than at many points in the past, as a recent OECD report points out.

'Income inequality among [Australian] working people', the report says, 'has been rising since 2000 and is today above the OECD average'. The average income of the top ten per cent of earners is now ten times that of the bottom ten per cent, up from 8:1 since the mid-1990s.

Since 1980 the richest one per cent of Australians have doubled their share of the

national income, from 4.8 per cent to 8.8 per cent, while the super-rich (billionaires?) have tripled their cut from one per cent to three.

It is surely not a coincidence that over the period when talking about class, however crudely or disingenuously, became the political equivalent of breaking wind, the actions and inaction of governments of both stripes have contributed to this galloping inequality.

'The growth in inequality since 2000 was driven by two forces in different periods,' the OECD says, by 'widening disparities of market incomes between 2000 and 2004, and weakening redistribution since 2004'. It points out that both 'progressivity and average tax rates have declined' since the mid-1980s, and that since the mid-1990s 'the overall redistributive effect also weakened'.

One of the things that makes class relations so complicated is that sometimes they are so simple.

Prayer is a walk in the park

POETRY

Aidan Coleman

To play

Catch a face before it slides
from the plate. Screw in
an unblinking eye. Into one
corner hammer a tent peg
so a smile flaps but
holds good. Now shrug on
an amorphous coat. Hurry.
No. Panic won't make for fast-
buttoning; think reattaching
lead to dog, lock-picking,
wire-cutting. The fork-hand
easy but the truculent right:
a fist, a nest of magnets from
which you pry the index out
and fit it the length of that
silver spine, while those
around you spill the loaded die.

Coffee

I make a point of coffee lately
to slip the house or break
the day.
At the counter my first word
is the wrong foot.
But I make myself understood
and pocket change,
straightforwardly, natural.
A thank-you comes from distance.
I have my book and my strategies
and time.

The park

When I feel the day is turning,
I go — without a dog or child —
to pray and walk
the corridors of light and shade.
Bees are bumping along the hedges
and birdsong clutters
the upper air. The scrunch
of gravel, distracts, places me — here.

Hockey and Thatcher's 'no entitlement' is bad economics

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

In Australia we've just had a Federal Budget that sought to produce a surplus at all costs. In Europe they're reacting to pressure to agree to crippling austerity measures.

Yet it's quite possible that both initiatives will fail because they rely on narrow measures of economic wellbeing. Hard-line doctrinaire strategies that include cuts to social welfare can hurt people in the short term *and* the long term.

The esteemed economist Joseph Stiglitz has blamed Europe's current predicament on political pressure to yield to what might be called fundamentalist economics.

In a recent interview with *The European*, he [talks about](#) 'overly simplified', 'distorted', and indeed 'faulty' pre-GFC models that 'encouraged policy-makers to believe that the markets would solve all the problems'. Yet, he says, the 'narrow-minded' free-market economists responsible for the global financial crisis 'have not revised their opinions'.

The economists in question argue that demographic change, and the end of the industrial age, have made the welfare state financially unsustainable. They say that cutting debt means reducing the cost of welfare payments. Stiglitz counters that the Scandinavian countries 'all have strong social protection and they are all growing'. He is particularly critical of the economists' fixation on GDP numbers.

'I don't want to talk about GDP anymore, I want to talk about what is happening to most citizens. Even the Right is beginning to agree that GDP is not a good measure of economic progress. The notion of the welfare of most citizens is almost a no-brainer.'

Stiglitz would strongly disagree with Joe Hockey's recent landmark 'End of the Age of Entitlement' [address](#) because of his belief there is a clear and important link between human wellbeing and economic prosperity.

Stiglitz is well known for his participation in the study commissioned by former French President Nicolas Sarkozy in 2008 to assess how well GDP is able to measure society's wellbeing. Its conclusion was that most people can be worse off even though average income is increasing.

Understandably Hockey provoked outrage with his suggestion that we should rely on families rather than the state for social welfare. History could well rank Hockey's 'there's no such thing as entitlement' alongside Thatcher's infamous 'there is no such thing as society'. Thatcher [declared](#) 'there is no such thing as an entitlement unless someone has first met an obligation'.

Hockey's premise that high social spending equals debt and decline reflects the GDP fetish that Stiglitz regrets in the fundamentalist economists. It is deaf to the cries of anguish of individuals such as Dimitris Christoulas, the 77-year-old retired Greek pharmacist who [took his own life](#) because he could no longer afford to feed himself.

Moreover it refuses to countenance the perfectly sound economic argument that expenditure on the welfare of those who are marginalised is an investment in the social wellbeing of all of us.

Diplomat priest built bridges to China

POLITICS

Camilla Russell

As the diplomatic crisis unfolded between the United States and China over the fate of blind Chinese dissident Chen Guangcheng, hard questions about Chinese politics, society and culture surfaced, and the West embarked on its familiar cycle of attempted comprehension on the one hand, and obstinate mystification on the other.



One figure in the history of Sino-Western relations that offers a tantalising alternative to this cycle is Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci, the 400th anniversary of whose death was celebrated from Beijing to Rome two years ago. As the revered leader of the first Jesuit mission in China, established in 1583, Ricci still commands widespread respect and admiration.

Viewed as a rare exception to the bellicose and bigoted European culture of the day, Ricci represents for many a beacon of early toleration. He openly admired the Chinese: 'though they have a well-equipped army and navy that could easily conquer the neighbouring nations, neither the King nor his people ever think of waging a war of aggression ... while the nations of the West seem to be entirely consumed with the idea of supreme domination'.

For modern observers, yearning to make sense of our rapidly globalising world, Ricci stands as an irresistibly compelling bridge between the East and West.

The reality was more complicated. Ricci was desperately homesick, missing his friends and teachers, and feeling on the fringes of the vast Jesuit enterprise, with its heart in the exciting Baroque Rome that he left behind. Far from demonstrating a comprehensive respect for Chinese culture, he vilified Confucianism in some of his letters.

Even the much-admired 'sweet method' of conversion pioneered by Ricci, involving the cultural accommodation of missionaries to local customs and mores, in many ways was a pragmatic response to the problem that Jesuits encountered in lands such as China and Japan. Missionaries were unsupported by the trappings of Empire and so were forced to accommodate themselves to the dominant culture in which they found themselves.

Ricci made relatively few converts too. The mandarin elites among whom he proselytised were reluctant to abandon the rituals provided by Confucianism and its rich spiritual, philosophical, social and cultural meaning.

Yet, he had a terrific impact on the many elites with whom he interacted, especially at the court of Beijing: he wrote many treatises in Chinese, not just on religious subjects, but also on much-valued philosophical, scientific and mathematical topics, including the first ever world map in Chinese.

His many literary and scholarly endeavours reflect a profound sensitivity and appreciation towards Chinese culture, which in turn earned him deep personal and intellectual respect that remains for many Chinese today.

Ricci, then, was both open and closed to China's deep and complex culture, admiring some aspects and despising others. His responses are not all that different from the types of attitudes we can still observe today. So what can Ricci's enterprise tell us about our own encounters with China?

Aside from some obvious limitations, the early Jesuit mission in China represents a remarkable example of early cultural tolerance in the long and often torturous history of Christian missions. It illuminates a side of European-Western culture that is capable of immense intellectual and cultural openness towards other cultures.

This side is often overshadowed by a dangerous and more familiar side of the European character: one that insists on superiority, a monopoly on cultural sophistication, and an expansionist, violent and militaristic approach to those who are different or vulnerable. While these sides regularly overlap, even during Ricci's lifetime, for the most part he stood on the side of openness.

Ricci was not operating in a vacuum, but drew on the rich and ancient Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions that constitute the intellectual heritage of Europe and the West. In the Renaissance culture of Italy in which Ricci was steeped, these traditions viewed the East with awe and respect.

At the same time, the cultural world of the Renaissance was beginning to question, innovate, explore, translate, and critique the very texts that made up the core of European identity, providing a dual process of tradition and innovation, knowledge and curiosity, all of which Ricci brought with him to China, and applied to his intellectual and scholarly endeavours, if not to his baser, cruder responses.

As successors of this European outlook, we would do well to recover the openness and curiosity that enabled Ricci to experience Chinese culture in an accommodating way. It can provide the ennobling tools we need to encounter other societies such as that of China, including its dissidents who sometimes call out for assistance.

Warm bums and nuclear activism in Tokyo

ENVIRONMENT

Ellena Savage

Last weekend, I took a walk around my new neighbourhood in Tokyo, and ended up near Tokyo Dome just as a baseball match had finished. Caught in the motion of a tight crowd, I drifted to where a wheelchair-bound woman sat, singing at the top of her lungs 'Genpatsu tome you!'; in English, 'Let's stop nuclear power', to the tune of 'We Shall Overcome'. She sang savagely, making those around her uncomfortable in the way that loud sincerity tends to.

Such protests have been a common sight in Tokyo of late. And the public's large-scale rejection of nuclear power has been heard. Last Saturday, Japan's last functioning nuclear reactor was switched off for good. It's the first time since 1970 that Japan has been nuclear power-free.

I arrived in Japan from Bougainville six weeks ago. In Bougainville, I had been living without white goods, and, for parts of the day, without electricity.

I adapted fairly easily to hand-washing and cleaning, to patiently waiting out the blackouts. At one hungry point of a blackout, I considered baking eggs under the glare of the equatorial sun. Instead, I ate a pineapple. I wasn't comfortable with someone else washing my dirty clothes, so a lot of the time I just dealt with the new and interesting odours my clothes conveyed. No one seemed to mind.

Living without convenience revealed the privilege of my upbringing. I adapted. We always adapt.

Tokyo, then, came as a shock. I arrived at Narita airport after dark, and let the flat escalator do the walking as I was zoomed through the gates, beneath a banner that repeated, 'Japan. Thank you. Japan. Thank you.'

I took the train into central Tokyo, my bum warmed by the heated seats. Each time we stopped at a station, the train's engine shut down briefly, and the bum heater switch off for a few seconds. Over the loudspeaker, I heard, 'Setsuden chu,' the catchphrase meaning, 'We're currently using less electricity,' which is posted all around the city, part of a [campaign](#) to emphasise corporate and community roles in reducing energy consumption.

During my first few days here, I was horrified by the dazzling lights and endless vending machines. It was grotesque. Having paid exorbitantly for power in Bougainville, I couldn't stop imagining how much it cost to run all of the electricity. An incalculable amount, and for what? A warm bum?

Needless to say, I adapted very quickly again to refrigeration and hot showers, and even the weird-tasting hot milk tea you can buy for a dollar at one of Tokyo's 100 million vending machines. Everything's so convenient in Japan, and convenience leaves one with more time to do things that don't revolve around survival.

The campaigns to consume less energy are powerful, and are changing attitudes about energy consumption. But there's an absurdity to this austere message coming from within a city whose main attractions are electronic conveniences: robots, heated toilet seats, hot meal vending machines.

From World War II until the 1990s, Japan's power usage doubled every five years.

The reality of a nuclear-free Japan is only that there'll be less to go wrong during the next major earthquake. But another major earthquake will, with or without a nuclear reactor, have devastating consequences.

Further, the move away from nuclear doesn't reduce the environmental and human impacts of fossil fuels, nor does it change the fact that we've become utterly dependant on such damaging energy sources. Despite our desire, our need, for truly green alternatives, nuclear energy remains the cleanest viable means of supporting our vast and growing energy needs, as evidenced by the comfort and convenience of the Tokyo lifestyle.

Although the Fukushima meltdown directly killed a handful of people, the majority were not caused by radiation poisoning. Some died of dehydration while awaiting rescue teams. One committed suicide instead of leaving her village; the great tragedy was the loss of homes and communities many people suffered, and continue to suffer.

But compare this with the 3000 Chinese coal miners who died mining for coal in 2008. Are Chinese workers worth less than Japanese consumers?

The effort against nuclear power feels misplaced. The problem with nuclear power is not nuclear weapons; they are a problem of the persistence of militarism in international relations. If radiation poisoning in the aftermath of a disaster is a concern, responsible governance is the answer. If there is a legitimate fear of sabotage, contact your city water authorities. If the environment or the safety of humans are at the heart of the matter, coal and oil are far more culpable.

The real problem preventing nuclear power from being safe is the inability of humans to manage it without killing each other; without developing weapons with it, or preventing preventable disasters and their aftermath.

And if we can't manage the cleanest (available) energy source that can actually sustain our convenient, comfortable lifestyles, then perhaps we don't deserve it.

Time to re-imagine the Australian flag

POLITICS

Philip Harvey



Being friends of the band, some of us used to go to hear Tootieville at inner-city hotels. They were an under-bubbling alternative band that brought out one record around the time of the Bicentennial. Today about the one thing I remember about Tootieville is the chorus to a song that went 'the only flag is your skin'.

You had to be there. It was hard to say what this line meant, whether a spoof on nationalism, some kind of erotic slogan, or just pretentious nonsense.

The proliferation since that time of tattooing as public expression brings the line back to my mind. When I see an attractive person covered in random images, my initial dismay is followed by the awareness we are seeing the insistent flag-waving of someone's inner frontiers.

But 'the only flag is your skin' tended to trigger a more general question: What is a flag? This was sometimes followed by the intermittently fluttering question: What is the meaning of the Australian flag?

There are national flags that make perfect sense. The tricolours of Europe express democratic republicanism. Old Glory is an emphatic display of American certainty, even if its cult inside the US is worrisome. Whenever I notice the flag of India I see the wheel of peace and Mahatma Gandhi. The Japanese flag hits you like a Zen koan.

But the same cannot be said of the Australian flag.

The problems begin with the fact that a quarter of it is taken up by another nation's flag. The presence of the Union Jack is a symbol of the slow separation of the Australian nation from its imperial connections. Satirists who replace the Union Jack with the 50 stars of the Union touch on our uncomfortable role as the best friend of superpowers past and present. Indeed, separation anxiety has come to be a meaning associated with the flag.

When Gough Whitlam helped raise the flag as a political issue he said the new one ought to have the Southern Cross. Whether this was Whitlam's preference, or he just wanted to spur discussion, is not clear.

Perhaps he harboured an historical affection for the Eureka Flag, with its dark blue field, bold cross and stars. Political affinities were there with the stockade on the Ballarat gold fields — an Australia independent of the Crown, an Australia able to assert its own rights.

But this was also a problem. Because the debate originated in the progressive side of politics it became partisan, so our leaders, parties, and grassroots have not been able to create impetus. Conservatives dug their heels in, or turned redneck. The advocates for change got bogged down in competitions, conferences and committees.

The debate over a new flag became associated with Paul Keating's proposal for a republic, but there is no reason why these two issues should be conflated. Keating's determined style was like a red rag to a bull and the bulls have never forgiven him, seeing anything that even hints at republicanism as a betrayal of the nation.

Most Commonwealth countries do not include the Union Jack on their flag and Australia will wake up sooner rather than later to the shift in our national allegiances that was already

happening when Robert Menzies did but see her passing by. Eliding the Union Jack at some time in the future will not be a travesty but a transformation, not a rejection of our heritage but an acceptance of transition. A new flag would tell other nations what they know already, that Australia exists without reliance on London.

One of the stunning visuals at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union was the appearance in Moscow streets of hundreds of white, blue and red Russian flags. These flags had not been hastily stitched together overnight like the Eureka Flag of 1854. The Russian flag, splendid in its simplicity, was well-known to the Russians.

I am hardly suggesting that revolution will break out in Canberra. But the readiness of Australians to design a new flag that is agreed to and honoured ought to be on the agenda of any forward-looking party. Either that, or a day will arise when a design will be foisted on us that no one likes and which has no distinctive meaning. One only has to listen to the national anthem to know how Australians are capable of embracing second best.

Revisiting entries to the pre-John Howard flag competitions is an inspiring exercise. Vexillologists, artists, thinkers and dreamers contributed images that show an engagement with the island continent that is inspiring, and a maturity that has outgrown the adolescent clowning of the Boxing Kangaroo. These are flags that take in the scale of the country, the variety of its nature, and the range of its colours.

Whitlam would be pleased with the number of entries that do justice to the Southern Cross, still the most popular image for a new flag. A favourite of mine is by the Austrian-Aotearoan artist Friedensreich Hundertwasser, which is longer than the conventional rectangle, more like a banner, with a sun that could be the bend of the desert horizon, or Uluru, above a seven-pointed star suspended in the blue of ocean, or space itself.

During one round of the flag debate the cartoonist Michael Leunig had his own lateral proposal on what constituted an Australian flag. His [corrugated iron flag](#) has become a celebrated emblem for those who mistrust nationalism and its habit of using symbols like flags for selfish and narrow patriotic ends. His wavy metal standard even questions what a flag should be made from.

But more poignant than Leunig's reasons for a corrugated flag, in my view, is the fact that the flag is blank. It is telling us to get over tired arguments about the Union Jack and make a fresh attempt at self-definition.

Australian flag design should be a national preoccupation, a meditation on the larger reality of a country bigger and better than politics. It should be informed by stewardship of the land: we don't own it, but we live everyday with its transformative power. Simply to ask yourself what kind of flag you would design can be the start of a journey into your own understanding of place, past, present and future.

US bishops' toxic tussle with Obamacare

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan

In the US, it's an election year, and the atmosphere is toxic. The incumbent president Barak Obama is up for re-election in November. The Republican primaries have taken a lot of airtime.

One of the contested policy issues is Obama's 2010 Affordable Care Act (ACA). Many of the US Catholic Bishops have been critical of this law on the ground that it might contribute to even more abortions in the US.

The Catholic religious orders which conduct health facilities are broadly supportive of the law because it would extend basic healthcare to millions of Americans otherwise deprived a basic right. The US Supreme Court is yet to determine the constitutionality of the law.

On 15 February 2012, the US Administration published draft regulations as a follow-up to the ACA. The legislative regime mandates three actions: each person must take out insurance; each employer must provide health cover; and every health plan must include preventive health measures including access to contraception, sterilisation and abortifacients.

Preventive health measures are mandated so as to reduce long term the overall costs of health care. Religious employers who have religious objections to such preventive health measures would be exempt.

On 14 March, the Administrative Committee of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops declared the exemption for religious employers was too restrictive in part because it would apply only to employers who hired and served those primarily of their own faith. But what about Church institutions responding to the gospel imperative to provide health, education or welfare to persons of all faiths and none, employing persons of all faiths and none?

The bishops said, 'We will continue to accept any invitation to dialogue with the Executive Branch to protect the religious freedom that is rightly ours.'

Feeling the heat from the bishops, the Obama Administration a week later issued 'a request for comments in advance of proposed rulemaking on the potential means of accommodating such organisations while ensuring contraceptive coverage for plan participants and beneficiaries covered under their plans (or, in the case of student health insurance plans, student enrollees and their dependents) without cost sharing'.

On 12 April 2012, the US Catholic bishops issued a statement on religious liberty entitled 'Our first, most cherished liberty'. The bishops are worried that religious liberty is under attack by an Administration that just does not get it and by an increasingly secularist environment which produces 'a naked public square stripped of religious arguments and religious believers'.

The bishops are not seeking a sacred public square which privileges religious citizens but 'a civil public square, where all citizens can make their contribution to the common good'.

They have asked Catholics to participate in a 'fortnight for freedom' in June—July in the lead up to the elections, and given notice that they intend a campaign of civil disobedience. Claiming that an unjust law is not law at all, they proclaim, 'An unjust law cannot be



obeyed. In the face of an unjust law, an accommodation is not to be sought, especially by resorting to equivocal words and deceptive practices.'

While highlighting half a dozen concrete examples of religious liberty under attack, the bishops' major concern is the Administration's insistence that contraception be made available to all persons under their health plans. According to the bishops, the preventive services mandate amounts to an unjust law.

Twenty-eight States already require such coverage, and in the past, Catholic institutions such as Catholic universities arranging health insurance for their faculty and students have found a mode of accommodation.

As these church sponsored employers do not themselves provide contraception, they have been able to argue in the past that they are involved only in 'remote material cooperation' with the provision of health insurance which makes contraception available, and this is morally acceptable.

These church related institutions do not provide, counsel or pay for contraception or other practices inconsistent with Church teaching; they simply allow their employees or customers to avail themselves of these practices.

The State is wanting to guarantee a minimum of preventive health measures for all citizens, including the availability of contraception. The bishops are claiming that 'it is a matter of whether religious people and institutions may be forced by the government to provide coverage for contraception or sterilisation, even if it violates their religious beliefs'.

Here in Australia, our taxes and health insurance premiums undoubtedly help to fund abortions, sterilisations, and the provision of contraceptives at more affordable rates. Most Australian Catholics, including most of our bishops, accept that universal health cover includes some remote material cooperation with activities which might not pass muster with the strictest codes of Catholic moral behaviour. We do not lose any sleep over this.

Let's hope the agitation by the US bishops does not lead to a similar campaign here.

If such a campaign were launched in Australia, we would all need to fill in a questionnaire on our tax return and health insurance applications indicating which medical procedures we thought consistent with our consciences informed by Church teaching. The questionnaire in principle could be extended to approval or disapproval of all other taxpayer funded government functions including war and border protection.

We would contribute only to those universally available citizen services of which we morally approved. Very soon, our public square would be toxic too.

Such a proposal would be not only unworkable; it would be wrong. As citizens and taxpayers we are committed to the common good which includes government provision of basic entitlements to all citizens regardless of their religious faith or ability to pay. Living in a pluralistic democratic society, we all need to make compromises.

Indeed it would be wrong for government to force us to cooperate formally in activities of others which we judged morally reprehensible. But we all know that some of our taxes will go towards activities in which we would not engage ourselves or which we think morally questionable.

The US bishops' emphasis on the primacy of conscience is welcome. They observe that 'if we are not free in our conscience and our practice of religion, all other freedoms are fragile', and ask, 'If citizens are not free in their own consciences, how can they be free in relation to

others, or to the state?’

But they do not consider the conscience of those in Catholic organisations who think that their employees should have access to preventive health services at affordable rates, provided only that they do not have to be formally involved in the provision of the services.

There is a risk that the US bishops are escalating a campaign of civil disobedience in the name of conscience when they are not willing to allow members of their own church to act according to a rightly formed and informed conscience on matters relating not to their own faith and morals but to civil entitlements of others in a pluralistic democratic society.

To invoke conscience against Obama while imposing an iron Vatican will on all Church organisations does raise questions, and not just with the secularists in the public square.

Two years ago when warning of threats to religious freedom in the US, Cardinal Francis George of Chicago, one of the intellectual leaders of the US bishops, said: ‘I expect to die in bed, my successor will die in prison and his successor will die a martyr in the public square.’

Thankfully none of our bishops has had cause to sound so shrill here in Australia. Let’s hope we can keep our public square less toxic and more accommodating than the American one.

The other side of suicide

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Another Earth* (M). Director: Mike Cahill. Starring: Brit Marling, William Mapother. 92 minutes**

***Melancholia* (M). Director: Lars von Trier. Starring: Kirsten Dunst, Charlotte Gainsbourg, Kiefer Sutherland. 136 minutes**

When I was 14 I decided not to kill myself. It's a decision I've stayed true to for reasons that are both profound and mundane: my love for the beauty to be found in *moments*; my love for people generally, and in particular for my family and friends. Yes, I am still sometimes prone to bottomless and baseless bouts of depression, but I've never let that ragged dark hole engulf me completely.

Two recent films, veteran auteur Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* ([released this month](#) on Blu-ray and DVD) and debutante director Mike Cahill's *Another Earth* ([also available](#)), tap into this hidden, unbidden part of me. Each film merges science fiction with elegant arthouse sensibilities and deeply humane themes. Each focuses on damaged human beings whose existence is magnified by the proximity to earth of new planetary bodies.

In *Another Earth* the planet in question is, as the title suggests, a replica of our own, as visible to the naked eye as a harvest moon. This is a most robust metaphor for self-examination: as scientists and sky-watchers gaze with wonder and awe at this eerily familiar entity, they are literally gazing upon themselves. That this other earth remains distant and mysterious merely suggests that human nature itself is inscrutable.

For much of the film, sci-fi remains in the background — its characters have other, more immediate concerns. On the night Earth 2 was discovered, ambitious student Rhoda (Marling) killed the wife and son of composer John (Mapother) in a car wreck. After her release from prison years later, she visits his house where he is living as a recluse, to apologise. At the last moment, she backs down and instead offers her services as a cleaner.

John has never seen her face, so has no cause to question her cover story. He has allowed the house to lapse into squalor; as Rhoda cleans, it becomes obvious that her service is an act of penance. As time passes though, friendship and even tenderness begin to bloom between these two lost souls. Surely it is doomed: John will inevitably learn the true identity and motivation behind this beautiful but enigmatic cleaning woman.

Sweetly portrayed (John and Rhoda playing Wii is adorable; John wooing her by playing a saw is unforgettable), their relationship alone would have made the basis for a powerful film. But science fiction returns to impinge upon ordinary humanity, with the revelation that at the moment the mirror earths found each other, their realities may have diverged. 'Another earth', then, is synonymous with 'another chance'. It is a profound symbol.

Melancholia shares *Another Earth's* sombre contemplativeness, but with an operatic flourish; it features music from the prelude to Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, and is rich with artistic and literary allusions. It focuses on sisters Justine (Dunst) and Claire (Gainsbourg), who are confronting personal anxiety and anguish even as a mysterious new planet, 'Melancholia', is grinding along its orbit on a collision course with earth.

Justine suffers from a depression that, in the first half of the film, sees her sabotage both her career in advertising and the promise of marital happiness. She speaks of her life as of

walking through a dark malaise that drags at her legs; later in the film, she opines that 'life on earth is evil'. Dunst won an award at Cannes last year for her performance; few have so viscerally portrayed the mortal heaviness of depression as she does here.

'Melancholia' may symbolise for her the sense of bearing the 'weight of (a) world'; in the second half of the film this idea finds a more direct expression, as Claire grapples with her anxiety that the planet will not pass earth, as scientists have predicted, but will collide with it. Her anxiety is fuelled by doomsday theories she reads online, but laughed off by her husband (Sutherland) who simply looks forward to the spectacle of the planetary fly-by.

Justine, by now ravished by depression, joins them at their country resort to await the fatal moment. But as Melancholia approaches, her own melancholia recedes, even as the ostensibly stronger Claire's terror swells. The intensity of the film's portrayal of depression, and of its deeply moving consideration of this sisterly relationship, is matched in the final moments of the film by a visually and metaphysically stunning climax.

Amid oppressive bleakness, *Another Earth* and *Melancholia* locate hope and warmth in the form of human relationships. Their characters are notable for deciding to live, rather than lie down and be overrun by dark emotions and events. These are heroic ideals that resonate even within the ragged pit of depression. I know.

Budget leaves baked beans for Struggle Street

POLITICS

John Falzon

The Budget confirms one thing that both sides of politics agree on. And that's their belief in the existence of an undeserving poor. Their message is that if you're poor it's because you're just not trying hard enough.

So the unemployed are left below the poverty line. Newstart has not received its much-needed boost of \$50 a week. And a \$700 million chunk of the surplus has been skimmed from the pockets of sole parents and their children.

You don't build people up by putting them down. You don't help them get work by forcing them into poverty. And you don't build a surplus on the backs of those who are already doing it tough.

There's nothing wrong with bringing home the bacon for middle Australia. But the people living at the rough end of Struggle Street are trying to get by on baked beans alone.

The young unemployed bloke scraping by on \$35 a day (and we wonder why he doesn't get a haircut before going for a job interview), or the single mum who has just been forced down to \$38 a day on Newstart; they remain unheard.

The middle-aged mum or dad on low wages or no wages as they battle to re-enter a workforce from which they have been dumped like so much human garbage; they remain unheard.

A good Budget should at least be a step in the direction of putting a charity like St Vincent de Paul's out of business.

That is not the case with this Budget. The forgotten and excluded have not been heard. They've been answered, not with hope, but with a bucket-full of austerity.

We at Vinnies will always be there to give our fellow Australians a bit of a hand-up. But people don't want charity. They want dignity, whether they are in the low end of the labour market or outside the door, trying to get in.

At a time when they increasingly have to turn to charity, it is not charity they long for. It is justice.

Shaky surpluses and dirty nappies

PARENTING

Jen Vuk

You could you call it fortuitous — or a not so happy coincidence — that on the week I'm asked to write a piece on family budgets, ours blows out.

Me? I call it life. This week's overdraft wasn't unexpected. Such is the cyclic nature of our one-and-a-half-incomes-and-two-kids lives that just when we think our savings are safe for another day, a new enrolment fee is due, the kids' jeans are suddenly a size too small and I've completely run out of nappies.

I'm also convinced that the utility bills use our letterbox to host their quarterly reunion. Why else would they arrive at the same time demanding our undivided attention?

Whether it be by design, luck or accident that we parents welcome a precious little person into the world, the two words we are taught to fear most in a single sentence are 'kids' and 'money'. There does seem to be a weird logic in it. Just when you lose an income, the cost of living goes up.

You need only read the reports and crunch the numbers to conclude that Life + Kids = Big Expense. Back in 2009, social researcher Mark McCrindle refuted the Federal Government's child-raising cost estimate of around \$384,000 per child until the age of 18, saying it was closer to the \$1 million mark.

For my husband and I managing the family budget isn't a matter of survival — no, certainly not that — but it's increasingly become an exercise in adaptability.

Terms like 'meal planning', 'going green' and 'free family events' are part of our everyday lexicon. We make good use of our local parks, schools, libraries and our annual subscription to the zoo. We're lucky to live in the inner city where we can take advantage of being so close to the river (free) and museums (economical).

Who would have thought we were such lateral thinkers? Certainly not us before we had children. Now, anything that can stretch the dollar is worth a second and even third consideration.

In truth, I feel I was more than ready for the changes parenthood would bring. Retail therapy was never my bag; nor were monthly trips to the hairdressers. My one regular treat was getting a shoulder massage. Now being 'worked on' by my own little 'doctor' and 'nurse' somehow meets the brief.

My husband, too, has long traded in the expensive late nights with the boys for early morning wake-ups with his boys, aged five and two.

And while it's certainly favourable to have a financial buffer when starting a family, I agree with Michael Dockery, associate professor in the school of economics and finance at the Curtin University of Technology — it doesn't feel right putting a price on kids.

Perhaps it's because parenthood came to us late in life (I was 38, my husband, 46). For us, having our first, and then our second child three years later, put us on top of the world. To this day I feel immeasurably fortunate, if not outright grateful.

It's easy to be unnerved by the cost of child-rearing, but I'm not convinced the stats are all that helpful. I mean, you could apply the math to almost anything in your life. I'd hate to

think how much my cars have cost me over the years, for instance, and I'm not joking when I say my kids have been more reliable.

After all, as Dockery points out, children are so much more than the sum of their costly parts.

'There seems little justification for considering expenditure on children to be a measure of their cost, any more than going to a restaurant can be considered a cost to the patrons,' he recently told Fairfax online magazine *Essential Kids*. 'Restaurant-goers saw their night out as a benefit, not a burden.'

Thanks to all those bills (did I mention the birthday presents?) it'll be some time before we enjoy the 'benefit' of a restaurant meal. Ours is nothing like the situation Eddie and Tanya Harnovey find themselves in author Elliot Perlman's grim 1990s downsizing tale *Three Dollars*, but it will have me asking 'Do I really need that caf  latte?'

This much I do know. Our one-and-a-half-incomes-and-two-kids lifestyle allows us the 'luxury' of meeting our debts, being able to afford swimming lessons for our boys and having a weekly supply of good, fresh food. There'll always be warmth, laughter and friendship. And a surplus of cuddles.

Swan slights jobless

POLITICS

Paul O'Callaghan

Budgeting is about setting priorities and setting national directions. When governments are under pressure to raise extra revenue and make savings, it's important that the burden is carried by those with the broadest shoulders.

Wayne Swan has made a commendable effort to share that burden more fairly than is often the case. He has achieved a modest surplus while assisting many on low incomes. Indeed, low income households have not been asked to carry the budget back into surplus.

However, working age people who rely heavily on income support remain most disadvantaged. For example, the Newstart Allowance is set at such a low level that it's hard for anyone to search for work and live decently. In past years this group even missed out on stimulus payments.

A new income support supplement announced in the budget is a step in the right direction, amounting to \$1.1 billion over four years. It goes to people on a number of payments, including Newstart and Youth Allowance. While a more substantial increase is needed so that this group can meet their essential living costs, this decision is a sign of some movement in recognising that action is needed.

When budgets are tight, governments tend to seek savings by moving people from an expensive payment category like parenting payment and the disability pension to cheaper payment categories like Newstart.

By moving a larger number of single parents from parenting payment to Newstart in this budget, the Government will effectively remove \$686 million out of the hands of low income families. While some parents may be able to find work and improve their incomes, many in this group will simply have a much lower income to provide for their children and themselves.

While it makes sense to encourage income support recipients into work, cutting back on payments is generally not the best way to achieve that result. Also, for many single parents in this situation, there are significant challenges to securing work which allows them to take good care of their family.

Surely it is better to actively promote work expectations and ensure access to child care while offering improved opportunities for education, training and employment assistance.

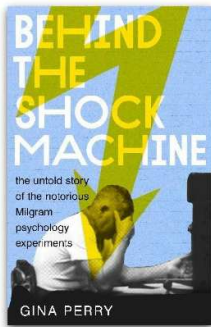
Relying on assistance that boosts opportunity rather than payment cuts does cost more, but parents with young children should be a high priority for our community. Research suggests that improving the incomes of disadvantaged parents can make a major difference for their children's future.

Swan has done well to invest in the future of lower income Australians in this budget while achieving major savings. The next step is to include some of the groups who have been left behind. After all, the way we treat the most vulnerable is the measure of who we are as a people.

When humanity came second to research

HISTORY

Lyn Bender



Has the tradition of the crude and often cruel [laboratory experiments](#), conducted in the name of psychology explained the human psyche to us? Has it brought us the understanding of how low humanity might sink, or of the importance of love? Or can we learn more from the laboratory of real life?

These are the ethical questions presented by the revelations of psychological research conducted in Melbourne almost four decades ago. [Behind the Shock Machine](#), by Melbourne author and psychologist Gina Perry (launched last week), documents and analyses the so called 'willingness to torture' experiments, conducted by the psychology department of Latrobe University in the 1970s.

The experimenters' intent was to observe the capacity of first year students to inflict pain by electrically shocking others, and to extrapolate the findings to humanity as a whole. Ironically the academics who designed and implemented the research may themselves be seen as subjects to be analysed.

The studies were a replica of the Yale Professor Stanley Milgram [experiments](#) of 1963 where subjects were asked (and verbally coerced) to inflict painful electric shocks on others despite hearing the screams of pain. Controversially these studies were performed at the time of the trial in Israel of Nazi Adolf [Eichmann](#) whose defence had been that he was 'just following orders'.

The experiments may have come out of a desire to test an ethnocentric conceit that Nazism was somehow a Germanic cultural flaw. However Milgram concluded that 65 per cent of Americans may have by implication been as capable as the Nazis of following such orders.

The double irony of the Milgram and Latrobe experiments is the apparent insensitivity of the academic staff and researchers to the evidence of the emotional pain they were inflicting on the subjects of their experiments. When the Latrobe staff disclosed, sometimes laughingly, that the shocks and screams had been faked, it left many subjects with an awareness of their own dark side.

There seems to have been no debrief and many were hurt and traumatised as though they had in fact committed acts of torture. The subjects' accounts of the impact revealed a lasting legacy, some having thought about the implications of the experiments for years. One [suggested](#) in an interview that he thought Milgram himself was enjoying inflicting emotional pain.

This raises an important question. Do we hold up the controlled variable experiment as more scientific and a greater way to further knowledge than observing the actual real human experience?

The famous [Harlow](#) experiments exposed sensitive Rhesus monkeys to cruel emotional deprivation to conclude that beyond feeding, these poor, maternally deprived creatures would cling to a soft 'cloth mother' substitute over a harsh wire mother.

In the same period John [Bowlby](#), regarded as the father of attachment theory, observed

the decline of infants in institutions where their physical needs were met but where they received little or no loving contact. They did not thrive and many died.

It seems that the suffering of the Rhesus monkeys was unnecessary for human advancement or to advance an understanding of the effects of emotional neglect.

Thankfully the electric shock experiments would not be allowed under current ethical guidelines for psychological studies, and animal rights movements have achieved some protection for animals; but this remains equivocal. The [guidelines](#) in place for animals bypass the question of whether non human animals should be used at all in experimentation and in particular by psychology.

The legacy bestowed on those who were traumatised in the Melbourne studies may not be 'undone' by the counselling now being offered by Latrobe. The subjects were subjected to an ordeal that remains permanently locked in the fight and flight responsiveness and may be reactivated under stress or by triggering events.

These people have been made to symbolically carry the can for all humanity's potential failings and, in particular, for the insensitivity of the researchers. Paradoxically the latest revelations may mean that the researchers themselves may need counselling and debriefing, as the realisation of the unconsciously inflicted damaging consequences of the Latrobe study continue to emerge.

But even more significantly these cases reveal the disturbing paradox of the culture on which psychology in universities has evolved: narrowly research oriented, experimentally depersonalised, and modelling an unconscious lack of awareness of human sensibilities.

For many psychologists the learning of how to be with the person in need, and development of the crucial compassion and capacity to maintain a therapeutic relationship, must come from outside traditional university courses, that confer the legal right to practice but neglect essential humanism.

Spoor of a soul

POETRY

Chris Wallace-Crabbe

Punctuation

Meditative on a brown park bench
at the top end of, was it? Hampstead Heath
in a colourful shower of ladybirds

I caught up the poet's canny division:
ways of butterfly, ways of hawk

but how that sliced at an angle across
private polarity in fox and hedgehog,
his version at the unlikely least
native to this ochre land of ours,
whatever earthly ours may mean
and how we jink between polarities.

Evening's extended mattress now,
its burnt orange slumbers all along
the sea's grey sill. Nearer to hand
seven surfers are continuing
to provide their black punctuation,
rescuing waves from silvery repetition.

Inside the no there always remains a yes
and everything depends on yes.

Where soul might

As those furry plumping quinces
hang above grit-grey lanes
and crimson buds erupt all over
the sturdy corner gumtree
our plant world murmurs
ripeness and foison,

those cruel nouns of time
tolling away my cells.
a slithery concept, that.
But at sleep's near edge
I busily ask myself —
redundantly, rather —
where soul might have its home:
Like the golden tumbling
apricots right next door
attending on Christmas,
my body has attained
what another age would
have called a certain age.
Player of life's queer game,
I'd better reach out to catch
the spoor of a soul,
being's fine pith and core.
I'm afraid that's what I'm doing
in the tremulous here and now.

Robert Browning at Bundanon

There's a kookaburra chortling, so I think it's time for tea.
That's a cup in bed for you, then, and another one for me.
We'll have a day devoted to creative enterprise,
you exploring with a paintbrush and, after several tries
I could come up with something: not quite burned out, after all;
might hatch a crafty lyric handling chaos and Man's fall,
but locating this among the valley's kangaroos and cows
with a special spot for wombats.

Around the lower boughs
fantails are finding insects, swallows fossick for their food.

Business bastards keep insisting profit is the only good;
old Galluppi's out of fashion; Philip Glass is all the go,
but any income from our art seems incrementally slow,
poet or painter.

How the Brangus bellow there,
wanting hay forked out for breakfast in the dewy atmosphere.
Who was it, I wonder, first contrived the electric fence
those cattle keep away from? They are not entirely dense.
Nor am I, one keeps on hoping, though absurdly out of date
with a weather-eye for verse-forms, fanciful and intricate.
What'll we do with the mystical, a question for us all
in an age way past King Arthur, Joan of Arc and bold Ben Hall,
when the shadows of religion are like birdcalls in the bush
and mammon jingles loudest.

There's a wattlebird now — whoosh!

Stealth, Melbourne

Mid-year's mellowing off-grey days can bring
a ferrous touch, hues and blush to numerous
streetside pin oaks; twiggy fingers are showing through
X-rays of English elm, plumago still winks its blue.
Burnt-orange again, the club's en-tout-cas darkens
while our saurian wattlebird swims across fishily
stitching bough to darkling neighbour bough;
bikes lean onto black iron pickets, hard by.
Moreover, and over and over, the last
four walnuts cling to their naked fretwork
like Christmas baubles done in bleak negative.
But the next morning burns us right back to gold
with nearby touristical balloons dangled from skyhooks.
Weaving or waving at my study window

snaky tendrils of the rampant hardenbergia
prepare to take on their appointed winter purple,
while the newspapers are puffed up
with rough stuff from gambled-on footy codes
coloured with manly energy but
compromised, as usual.

Big media's NBN convergence challenge

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

The National Broadband Network (NBN) is set to level the media's playing field, and that's good and bad.

We'll all have the ability to become broadcasters, with no need for licences and expensive infrastructure. Innovations such as YouTube have already given us a taste of that, and how 'citizen' media can contribute to our flourishing as human beings and communities.

But because our media world will be flooded with content from overseas, our distinctive Australian culture will be threatened. This has occurred with state and regional cultures in recent decades, as nationally networked content has become the norm. State based football now receives little media coverage compared with the past.

In the future we'll source the majority of our media content from the NBN rather than broadcast towers and newspaper vendors. The media industry as we know it will die if it fails in its various attempts to reinvent itself.

The end of big media businesses such as Seven, Nine, Ten and the newspapers would be bad for media proprietors such as Kerry Stokes and Rupert Murdoch, but not necessarily a great loss at all for the rest of us, given the NBN's empowerment of small media enterprises and the diversity that implies.

However it also provides an uncertain future for the ABC and SBS, which exist largely to promote Australian culture and identity.

Earlier this year, ABC managing director Mark Scott [sounded](#) the alarm at a forum of commercial and public sector broadcasters:

'In the short term, in the next couple of years it looks pretty good. People are still watching television ... But if you take a longer-term view, when the NBN is here and you are battling global content, where there's seamless distribution and endless content available, that's where you have got to be quite paranoid ... and you have to be positioning yourself quite aggressively now for the uncertainties of that world.'

The Federal Government's [Convergence Review](#) report released last week provides a blueprint for media policy in the NBN era. Its vision includes many radical changes including a 50 per cent increase in Australian content obligations for commercial free to air television operators.

More compulsory locally-produced programming will diminish the currently healthy earnings of the television networks. But broadcasting a substantial amount of local content will provide them with a point of difference that will potentially

cushion them against competition from foreign content providers.

Australian programs are costly to produce, but it has been demonstrated over the past two or more decades that Australians prefer local to foreign content.

The commercial networks are demanding that Australian content rules should also apply to the ABC. This seems fair, although extending the requirement to SBS would be another matter.

The report of the Convergence Review is a document with many layers of complexity and simplistic responses to it can be misleading and meaningless. Nevertheless we could find that the increased Australian content it recommends could mutually benefit the TV networks and the Australian public. Australians will watch free to air television to the extent that it provides Australian content, and this will ensure the survival of Australian culture.

No easy cure for 'cost disease' in Australian schools

EDUCATION

Dean Ashenden

The prospect of applying the economists' notion of 'productivity' to schooling was more inspiring than the resulting Productivity Commission *Schools Workforce* report (released on Friday) has proven to be.

One problem for the report is that it has been shaded by three other big reports of recent months, [Gonski's review](#) of funding, an excellent study by the [Nous group](#) commissioned by Gonski, and a report by the [Grattan Institute](#) that compares schools' performance with that of our Asian neighbours. Most of what the Commission has to say has already been said or implied by one or other of these three, usually in a more compelling way.



And that is the Commission's second problem. It is the opposite of trenchant. Even [Sir Humphrey](#) would be hard pressed to discern from this report that the productivity of Australian schooling has been falling for decades — that is, spending keeps rising much faster than student attainments — and no-one knows what to do about it.

The problem was detected almost half a century ago by the American economist William Baumol, who pointed out that teachers' salaries rise not because teachers are becoming more productive but because their employers are forced to compete in the labour market with industries in which workers are becoming more productive.

This 'cost disease' as Baumol called it, is widespread in the 'human services', but is compounded in schooling by the near-halving since the 1960s of class sizes, chiefly via industrial agreements.

This had the unintended effect of locking into place a way of grouping students and teachers still taken for granted when the 'class size' strategy was constructed. One of many possible ways of combining the 'factors of production' — time, effort, skill and space — became the only way.

The careful reader of *Schools Workforce* will find evidence to most of these points, but cast in such circumlocution, and so threaded among myriad minor observations and concerns, as to be neutered.

Perhaps the Commission was too anxious to avoid offence to its client COAG. Or perhaps it shrank from stating too plainly a 'disease' for which it can suggest only palliatives such as more pay for hard-to-staff positions, more training 'practicums', more local 'flexibility' in staffing mixes and industrial agreements, and so on.

We can wonder whether the ramshackle machinery of schooling is capable of

implementing these and other suggestions, but the real issue is of scope and depth. The Commission has begun from a misconception. It has assumed the 350,000-odd teachers and other employees of school systems constitute the 'workforce' of schooling. They represent, in fact, only about 10 per cent of it. Most of the workforce is comprised of students.

This is not a rhetorical point. Students are the only people in schools who can produce learning. As in any other workplace, what and how much they produce depends on the supervisor, of course, but also on how work is organised, controlled, sequenced, evaluated and rewarded.

In the recent flurry of reporting on schools only Grattan, an otherwise dubious document, really grasps that this is where the productivity problem needs to be tackled. Grattan notes that several high-performing Asian systems have opted for very large classes but low teacher contact hours because that provides the time teachers need to do the planning, preparation, review and peer mentoring so essential to more productive classrooms.

We should be looking hard at such 'trade-offs', Grattan rightly concludes.

Here as elsewhere it is possible to find in the Commission's report discreet expressions of concern over poor returns to the class-size reduction strategy as well as support for experimentation with other student-teacher groupings. But this kind of thing has been talked around inside the schooling industry for some time now.

The pity is that an outsider, with a rare chance to call a spade a spade, has preferred instead to talk about a resource worthy of investigation for possible application to at least some horticultural tasks.