Let’s Educate Self Determining Authentic Students who Think and Act in a Catholic Way

Fr Frank Brennan SJ

The Federation of Parents and Friends Associations of Catholic Schools Queensland
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It’s great to have an opportunity to return to Central Queensland. My grandfather was the Supreme Court judge in this part of the world for many years. I never knew him but I am assured he was quite a character. One day he was catching the bus from Agnes Street up on the Range to the Rockhampton court house. A local solicitor who knew that the judge normally drove a car asked what the problem was. My grandfather explained that the car had “gone in for financial repairs”.

In 1982, I made my first visit to Rockhampton as the adviser to the Queensland Catholic bishops on Aboriginal affairs. I met one of the Munns clan from the Woorabinda Aboriginal reserve. He asked if I were related to the late Judge Brennan. Without thinking about the relations between the judiciary and central Queensland Aborigines in the 1930s, I proudly answered, “Yes, in fact, I am named after him.” Mr Munns dryly responded, “Yeah, we used to call him ‘Thirty days’.”

I have just returned from two weeks in China. In Shanghai I met Fr Warren Kinne, a Columban priest who teaches philosophy in a Chinese university. He comes from Gladstone. He told me that he has a Chinese ancestor who presumably was attracted to Queensland by the discovery of gold in the nineteenth century. That ancestor ultimately returned to China and remarried with the result that Warren has several Chinese relatives on the China mainland. Warren is at home now in two different worlds – China and Australia.

Having only made my first visit to China, I am no expert on China. It is a daunting place. The complexities are overwhelming. In Shanghai you can walk from the street where you see a man with his pedicab delivering a load of bamboo, up to the train station to catch the Megalev train to the airport travelling at 430 kmh. The Shanghai skyline boasts one fifth of all the world’s construction cranes. Beijing is said to be constructing another three Manhattans between now and the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Here is a “Communist” country which now boasts a free, completely unregulated market where some entrepreneurs are becoming fabulously rich in a society where there are still not the basics of political liberty or the rule of law. For how long is this...

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sustainable? While there is 10% economic growth, there seems to be enough trickle down effect to maintain social stability. But can this last once the growth slows and once there is a substantial middle class with access to the free thinking of the globe via the internet? Meanwhile I am happy to go to the Shanghai market and buy my “Armani” shirts for six Australian dollars. Meanwhile these huge cities of Beijing and Shanghai are drowning in pollution, and the Yangtze River has turned toxic.

Of course, the church scene is also very complex in China. There has been recent controversy about the ordination of some Chinese Catholic bishops. I was privileged to dine with Bishop Aloysius Jin, the senior bishop at the Shanghai Cathedral Church of St Ignatius Loyola. On this 500th anniversary of the birth of Francis Xavier, it is great to see Ignatius and Xavier given pride of place in that cathedral. Xavier died just off the coast of the China mainland dreaming of what might be achieved for Christ in China. Like myself, Bishop Jin was trained as a Jesuit. He studied at the Gregorian University completing a doctorate on the Trinity. He knew personally the great theologians of Vatican II like Karl Rahner and de Lubac. He was imprisoned by the Communists for many years. In the west, some conservative Catholics have been critical of him for his accommodation with the demands of the Chinese government when it comes to the ordering of the Catholic Church. But now he is in favour with the Vatican, having been invited to the last Synod in Rome and having received personal greetings from the Pope via influential Cardinals from time to time. His successor Bishop, Joseph Xing Wenzhi, was appointed in China and then received the necessary Vatican approval before his Episcopal ordination. When the 90 year old Bishop Jin and the other old bishop who leads the underground church community in Shanghai have completed their Episcopal ministry, Bishop Xing Wenzhi will take over as bishop of Shanghai, effecting a further reconciliation of the Catholic community in Shanghai.

It was a great privilege to travel to Sheshan, one hour’s drive out of Shanghai, and to join both bishops in a concelebrated mass with about sixty of their fellow priests, 100 religious sisters and a church full of the faithful making their pilgrimage to the Marian shrine at which Catholics have previously pledged China to the patronage of Mary. The Church on top of the hill is reached by a zig-zag route of Marian altars and the Stations of the Cross. The new bishop led the procession, carrying the wooden cross up the hill, performing devotions which were conducted for years by the faithful without leadership from the clergy. The three hours devotions concluded with mass with Bishop Jin presiding and exchanging the kiss of peace with every priest present.

China is a complex world. The Catholic Church in China is a complex reality. We all live in a complex world and a complex church. Against this backdrop of complexity, I have accepted the invitation to deliver the 2006 Jack Woodward Memorial Lecture, honouring a Catholic layman who dedicated his life to providing a voice and a space for parents of children at Catholic schools wanting to be partners with teachers and diocesan authorities in the provision of Catholic education for their children. Your Executive officer Paul Dickie wrote that I was “free to challenge the audience with some of the critical issues facing our church in the future”.

Tonight I want to reflect with you on how we might educate our students to think and search in a Catholic way when there is no single Catholic position or when there is
disagreement about the Catholic position on the complex issues facing us in the church and in the world.

I am no expert on Catholic schools nowadays. For my sins, I was sent to a large Jesuit school in Melbourne, Xavier College, to teach Year 10 Mathematics as part of my training before ordination. They did not quite know what to do with a Jesuit lawyer and I did not have a Dip Ed. So they decided I should teach the “Veggie Maths” Class. At morning recess in the staff room one day, the deputy headmaster asked if anyone had ever sat in on one of my classes. “No.” He thought he should come to my next class. Dread set in. My veggie maths class was scheduled for next period. Once the deputy entered the room, the 22 usually recalcitrant adolescents could not have been better behaved. Every time I asked a question, up shot 22 hands: “Sir, Sir.” The answers were still wide of the mark, but they were trying their best. I was proud of them. As the deputy left, one boy exclaimed, “You owe us one now, Sir.” In English, they were studying *To Kill a Mocking Bird.* They gave me the nickname Atticus. I daresay I am one of the few teachers to have been pleased with his nickname. There was only one boy in the class who never played up. His name was Dennis Minahan. Given my failure to teach them much maths, I would sometimes use big words in the hope of improving their vocabulary. One day I turned from the blackboard and spotted young Minahan throwing a ruler across the room. I said, “Master Minahan, would you please pay at least a modicum of attention.” Immediately, Matthew Vaughan, a red headed youngest of twelve, said, “Oh Sir, don’t be so bombastic.” I erupted in laughter. The rest of that class was a complete write-off. So I come with no pretence to be an accomplished educator in Catholic schools.

Just before my departure for China, I had lunch at my youngest sister’s house on Mother’s Day. A cousin who teaches in Catholic schools was there with her family also. This cousin was outraged that the Catholic schools debating competition in a Queensland diocese had set for debate the topic: “When is the torture of terror suspects justified?” She thought this tantamount to asking “When is paedophilia justified?” Should such topics even be debated in Catholic schools? Or is there something to be said for encouraging debate on all manner of topics in a Catholic school provided only that the teachers are in a position to give guidance on the Catholic tradition? She wondered whether she should contact the local bishop to discuss the matter or to lodge a protest. I doubted whether she would get an appointment for such a discussion but encouraged any attempt at dialogue on the issue.

I am the eldest of seven children. I and all my siblings attended Catholic schools. I have 21 nephews and nieces. Only about half of them have attended Catholic schools. I imagine my family is fairly typical in that regard. One of my nieces who attended a non-Catholic secondary school participated in the discussion with my cousin, observing, “Surely the same principles about debating torture should apply in any school professing good values, whether they are Catholic or not.” I thought she made a good point. What then is distinctive about a Catholic school education?

The late Archbishop Francis Rush who was originally bishop of Rockhampton was my mentor and patron in my early years as a Jesuit serving the Church’s mission for justice. Even before my ordination, he as President of the Australian Catholic
Bishops’ Conference had invited me to address the conference on the difficult political and legal issue Aboriginal land rights. It is over twenty years ago that he ordained me priest in St Stephen’s Cathedral, Brisbane. At the ordination, he and the other Queensland Catholic bishops invited Archbishop John Grindrod, the Primate of the Anglican Church and erstwhile Anglican Bishop of Rockhampton, and the Reverend Douglas Brandon, the Moderator of the Uniting Church to join them on the sanctuary for the ordination mass. This was appropriate because we had worked cooperatively espousing the rights of Aboriginal Australians. If you work together for justice, it is only natural that you would pray together regardless of your religious affiliation. With children from diverse religious backgrounds and none in our classrooms, we can work together and educate for justice, thereby making it more natural that we would pray together and learn from each other’s religious traditions.

In 1988, I was invited back to Xavier College in Melbourne to speak at the last religion class for the year 12 boys. It was the bicentenary year and all Australians, even those living in affluent suburbs without Aborigines, were focusing on the place of indigenous Australians. I told my oft repeated story about the fringe dwelling Aborigines from Mantaka near Kuranda in North Queensland. They were squatted beside the Barron River. Across the river was a multi million dollar weekender built by a Melbourne businessman who used to bring his family in by helicopter. The Year 12 boys asked all sorts of prying questions about the Aborigines and I was unable to give them satisfactory answers. In the end, I asked them, “Which side of the river are you standing on as you ask your questions?” “Can you see that there are just as many unanswerable questions that you can ask from the other side of the river? Mind you, they are very different questions.” At the end of the class, the new deputy headmaster could see that I was a little shaken up by the student’s reactions to Aborigines who they had never met. He opined, “The good thing is that they are asking the same questions as anyone their age would ask.” On one level, that was a good thing. But unlike many of their age group, they had just concluded five, seven, or twelve years of Catholic education. What difference did it make in their asking of questions and in their searching for answers?

Mind you, there have been some changes in attitude about the rightful place of Aborigines in Australian society. Yesterday afternoon, I was in the chambers of one of the most senior judges in Hong Kong. On the wall was a portrait of Eddie Mabo. He could detect my surprise. He explained that the Mabo judgment was one of the great judgments in the common law world. Three of his daughters are now solicitors and even when they studied law in the United Kingdom they had to study the judicial technique in the Mabo judgment. This morning I landed in Sydney and drove across the Sydney Harbour Bridge delighted to see the Aboriginal flag flying next to the Australian flag on top of the bridge, today being the fourteenth anniversary of the Mabo decision.

Next to the bridge is our Jesuit school, St Aloysius College, directly opposite the Opera House – a great location, provided you are not a teacher wanting to hold the students’ attention as they look out the windows on hot summer afternoons. On 25 January 1988, St Aloysius flew the Aboriginal flag from its well located flag pole, marking the bicentenary of the last day that Aborigines enjoyed uninterrupted occupancy of the Australian continent. Late that morning, three New South Wales police officers presented themselves at the headmaster’s office inquiring whether
someone had broken into the building. After all, how else could an Aboriginal flag be flying from the mast of a prominent Catholic school? The headmaster, Fr Anthony Smith SJ, son of a Western Australian magistrate who had administered justice according to law in Broome for many years, assured the police that all was well. He had authorised the flying of the flag and for good reason. Nowadays, anyone would think it ludicrous that police check out the flying of the Aboriginal flag from a school flagpole. Some attitudes and practices have changed over time.

Cardinal Basil Hume, the late Archbishop of Westminster, said his greatest grief was “the marginalization of the church” during his lifetime.¹ Hume thought he was not a bad politician. When asked what he meant, he replied, “Well, you see, I think I know when to speak, and more importantly, I know when not to speak.”² In one of his last public addresses, he said:³

It is important always to be strict concerning principles and endlessly compassionate and understanding of persons. It does happen that a person or group may take up a position on some issue against the teaching of the Church. How should the pastor act? A first instinct may be to exclude from the community those who dissent. We must rather keep them within the community and work – sometimes very hard - to lead them to take up positions consistent with the Church’s teaching.

Amidst controversy within church communities and in society at large, we need to discern the role of religion in the public forum, keeping religion in its place. There has never been any risk that Australia would be a theocratic state with religious leaders dictating law and policy for all citizens. Many Australians think that religion is purely a private affair and it should be kept out of politics. They presume that religious beliefs have no relevance to law. They are not troubled by the occasional public claim that Australia’s laws and policies are informed by values imbedded in the Judeo-Christian tradition. They are used to seeing church leaders making periodic appearances on contested moral questions such as abortion, euthanasia and stem cell research.

There is no problem with church leaders speaking to their church members even if they do it over the public airwaves allowing non-members to overhear the church instruction and discussion. There is a problem when church leaders or key church members appear to be speaking for their church members in the public forum. They may speak about their church’s tradition and teaching. But it is a bold claim in our pluralistic age for church leaders to claim that they speak for even the majority of their own members on any contested political question. Politicians know that on any contested issue there will be members of each church community on both sides of the debate, and on both sides of the parliamentary chamber.

In his first encyclical, Pope Benedict XVI is quite upfront about the failure of the Church leaders of the nineteenth century to adapt to new ways of thinking about morality and justice in light of the conflict between labour and capital. He says, “It must be admitted that the Church’s leadership was slow to realize that the issue of the just structuring of society needed to be approached in a new way.”⁴ Our new pope is adamant that Catholic social doctrine must not “attempt to impose on those who do

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² ibid., p. 324
³ ibid., p. 325
⁴ Deus Caritas East, #27
not share the faith ways of thinking and modes of conduct proper to faith. Its aim is simply to help purify reason and to contribute, here and now, to the acknowledgment and attainment of what is just.” Having said that it “is not the Church's responsibility to make this teaching prevail in political life”, he declares.\(^5\)

Rather, the Church wishes to help form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice as well as greater readiness to act accordingly, even when this might involve conflict with situations of personal interest. …

The Church is duty-bound to offer, through the purification of reason and through ethical formation, her own specific contribution towards understanding the requirements of justice and achieving them politically.

Benedict is adamant that the church “cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. She has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper.”\(^6\)

Here then is the challenge for our Catholic schools in a time of such complexity and diversity, in a time of such globalisation and technological change. Parents and teachers must help to form and inform their own consciences, and those of the students. We must produce real thinkers, graduates who can transcend their own self-interest, their own class interest, and their own national interest, to purify reason to think and act ethically – not to impose the Catholic solution on their non-Catholic fellow citizens but to seek true justice for all. This is difficult for us in Australia at this time. Let me highlight three of our disadvantages (isolation, fear and stereotyping), given that most of us are readily aware of the great benefits in being Australian.

We are an isolated nation. Geographically we are an island nation continent. I once asked a Malaysian Jesuit if he would visit us. He replied, “Why? It’s not on the way to anywhere.” Psychologically we are also isolated. That is why we react as a nation with such a lather whenever a boatload of asylum seekers appears on our radar screen. The Americans sharing a land border with Mexico find our lather a figment of imagination. We are a people who are readily led by our political leaders first to experience fear and then to trust them to provide the answer to our fear. The most successful politicians in our nation at this time are those who can look the camera in the eye and say, “Be afraid. But don’t worry, trust us. We will find the answer to this threat.” It may be a big ticket item like terrorism or Mabo and Wik or a more manufactured issue like Tampa, Children Overboard, or 42 Papuan asylum seekers arriving in the Torres Strait by boat. We are a nation which does not have to take ultimate responsibility for the world. We can opt in or out as we wish. We can commit to war in Iraq for publicly false or unfounded reasons while the real reasons are more related to our perceived national interest sustained by a strong US alliance. Having lost only one soldier, we do not have to do the soul searching or the heavy lifting that the Americans have to do. We have a lazy media that reverts readily to stereotypes. We do not publicly investigate the complexity of issues in the same depth as many US and UK publications do.

\(^5\) Ibid, #28
\(^6\) Ibid.
Isolation, fear and stereotyping allow us to escape the hard work needed to address the complex issues of our contemporary world. Let me take a few examples. First in the world of politics. Recently I spoke about social justice at the Australian Catholic University. A fine Catholic gentleman approached me after the presentation and complimented me on my work for social justice while expressing a reservation about my conduct during the 1998 *Wik* debate. He thought I had shown insufficient sympathy for good Catholic pastoralists who were afraid they would lose their livelihoods. I pointed out that I spent much time in 1997-8 meeting with pastoralists in Western Queensland and New South Wales. I assured them at the time that they would not lose one square centimetre of land and they would not lose any of their rights. They were not to be convinced in the wake of the fear campaign waged at that time. Now eight years later, not one pastoralist had lost one square centimetre of land and not one had lost any rights. Was there an apology or acknowledgment from any of them? Not a word. If anyone had lost a thing, it would have been trumpeted by Alan Jones and his ilk the length and breadth of the country. The fear campaign had delivered in spades.

After the *Tampa* incident in August 2001, our government convinced us of the need for a range of policy initiatives including Operation Relex on the high seas, long term detention of asylum seekers and the Pacific solution. The government assured us that these measures were needed because the threat we faced was not from a handful of refugees directly fleeing from situations of persecution but from thousands of asylum seekers who could have obtained protection closer to home but who engaged people smugglers to engage in secondary movement looking for a good migration outcome, thereby jumping the queue seeking access to the free and prosperous shores of Australia. Most Australians bought this line.

Just last week, Mr Peter Hughes, the most senior Australian public servant responsible for this area of policy explained to a Senate Committee:7

> The situation in 2001 had to do with people who were coming to Australia as secondary movements – it was not a question of first flight – and there was a possibility of returning them to Indonesia, where arrangements had been made for them to be looked after and for them to stay while any protection claims were heard there. I think the situation is different for any people who might be coming to Australia from a neighbouring country as a matter of first flight.

In 2001, these people arriving on our shores were someone else’s responsibility – anyone’s but ours. Fast forward now to 2006. Those boatloads of secondary movers have stopped coming. One boatload of 42 asylum seekers from West Papua flee to Australia in direct flight, fleeing persecution by the Indonesian authorities. They do not engage people smugglers. They make their own way here unaided. Indonesia objects. What do we do? We say we will now treat them in the same way as the secondary movers. So despite the words of Mr Hughes to our parliamentarians, how is their situation now to be different?

This is why so many informed lawyers and advocates are perturbed by this new legislation. We have argued that if every country signed the Refugee Convention and then adopted this policy, persons directly fleeing persecution would have nowhere to land. The Convention would be dead in the water. When this was put to Mr Hughes, 

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7 Hansard, L&C 61, 26 May 2006
he told our politicians, “I do not agree with the basic proposition, in that different
countries choose different ways to deal with people under the convention, according
to their own circumstances...There are quite different practices around the world to
respond to particular circumstances. I know of no proposal for everyone to choose
this particular policy.” 8 So there you have it. There might be problems if other
countries followed our lead. But while we go it alone paying Nauru to accept the
human flotsam coming to our shores, there is no problem. Mr Hughes who is First
Assistant Secretary of our Refugee, Humanitarian and International Division had to
concede that 95% of the refugees we shipped under the Pacific solution ended up in
Australia or New Zealand anyway. But it has now got to the stage that Australia is
not prepared publicly to say that we bear the primary responsibility to accept the few
refugees directly fleeing to our shores seeking protection. The government says that
the Minister has a discretion to allow some persons to be processed in Australia. But
that discretion would not be exercised favourably for Papuans in the future because
Jakarta objects. Mind you, Jakarta voiced no objection when Australia gave refugee
status to persons fleeing persecution in Ambon. Papuans in direct flight coming to
Australia will languish in Nauru until another country agrees to take them or until the
media spotlight has turned away and they can be quietly admitted to Australia at a
future time. Meanwhile Mr Hughes tells Parliament that the Nordic countries, the US,
Canada, the UK, and New Zealand might all be available to do their bit to help us –
even though it is our problem, and even though our problem is much less than the
problem confronting most of these other countries. Mr Hughes says, “There are
clearly opportunities, if it is important to government, for high-level approaches to be
made in order to reach some form of cooperation on that issue.” 9 Governments
should have better things to do with their limited opportunities for trade-offs in high
level approaches. As a matter of course, Australia should accept the handful of
people turning up on our shores in direct flight seeking asylum.

Five years on, we Australians need to admit that we have been deceived by the
Howard government. We were told that there was a need for harsh and expensive
measures specifically to counter secondary movers employing people smugglers.
Now those same measures are to apply to refugees in direct flight without people
smugglers. The government knew it could not implement such a unilateral non-
humanitarian plan in one shot. They needed to take an incremental approach lulling
the public into a moral torpor, convincing us first that these people had done
something wrong in coming to our shores and then applying the measure to those who
had done nothing wrong on any fair-minded calculation, and now in the name of
equal treatment.

Those receiving an education which forms conscience, purifies reason and provides
ethical formation should have no part in such an unjust policy. Alas, there are fine
products of some of our best Catholic schools sitting at the Cabinet table giving such
measures the tick.

Let me now say a word about the complexity of issues in the church. In February this
year, the Parliament had a conscience vote on the question whether the abortion drug
RU486 could be made available in Australia upon authorisation by the Therapeutic

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8 Ibid, 63
9 Ibid, 66
Goods Administration (TGA). Without a change in the law, the TGA would not be able to approve the drug unless approval was first received from the Minister for Health.

In a variety of circumstances, abortion is lawful in the states and territories. The Commonwealth Parliament has no power to make laws about the lawfulness or unlawfulness of abortion. However the Commonwealth Parliament does have power to regulate Medicare payments and the importation of drugs. Health Minister Tony Abbott had said, “For the record, I would not support withdrawing Medicare funding from abortion, let alone trying to re-criminalise it. With former US president Bill Clinton, I think there’s much to be said for ensuring that abortion is ‘safe, legal and rare’”.

There is no evidence that the introduction of RU486 has increased the number of abortions performed in other countries. There is no reason to believe that the introduction of the option of drug induced abortion in addition to surgical abortion would reduce the number of abortions.

The abortion rate in Australia is as high as or higher than the rate in other equivalent countries. In 2003, there were an estimated 19.7 induced abortions per 1,000 women aged 15-44 years in Australia. When RU486 was introduced in the UK (in 1991) the abortion rate was 15.5 per 1,000 women aged 15-44 years. Many surveys reveal that a majority of Australians are concerned about the high frequency of abortion in Australia. But in most circumstances, they think the decision should be made by the mother in consultation with her doctor.

At the time of the debate, I expressed the view that the TGA was not the appropriate body to decide if the options for abortion should be increased to include drug induced abortion. It made good sense for that decision to be made on a conscience vote by the Parliament. I said, “If Parliament so decides by its vote to indicate its agreement with the expansion of abortion options to include drug induced abortion, it then makes good sense to entrust to the TGA the task of determining whether RU486 is safe for women.”

In deciding how to vote on the conscience vote, members of parliament were free to express their personal view on the morality of abortion. But the vote was about increasing or restricting the range of options for how an abortion will be committed once a women and her doctor decide on an abortion without any interference from the law.

Any member who voted for the bill was voting for a measure which was unlikely to increase the number of abortions but which would definitely not decrease the number of abortions. One who voted for the measure might appear to endorse the ready availability of abortion in the Australian states and territories. The member might consider in good conscience that the range of options for the performance of abortion should not be expanded until the range of realistic options other than abortion are increased. The member might consider in good conscience that a vote in favour of this bill would obligate the member and the parliament to do more in the future to

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10 *The Australian*, 6 February 2006
reduce the number of abortions chosen under the law by means of providing women with more realistic choices to proceed with their pregnancy despite the burdens.

Bishop Anthony Fisher told the Senate committee: “Australians are deeply concerned that the abortion rate is already too high, and clearly this new direction will not help decrease abortion. The public clearly would like to see rates decreased and therefore looks to our leaders for ways to bring that about. Above all, they should be looking to ensure the women are offered real alternatives to abortion rather than alternative methods of abortion.” \(^{11}\) All members of parliament should say, “Hear, Hear!” to that, regardless of how they voted on the RU486 bill.

On this reasoning, I had advised that a Catholic politician could in good conscience have voted either way on this legislation. Cardinal George Pell did not agree with that approach. He said, “Parliamentarians will not be able to have a foot in each camp. Those who support introducing this pill are not pro-life…. A vote to make this drug available would diminish Australia. I urge the Members of the House of Representatives to use their conscience vote to reflect the conscience of our nation.” \(^{12}\)

Two days after the vote, a remarkable event occurred. I was on a panel with John Allen from the US based *National Catholic Reporter*. We were participating in the launch of the Australian Catholic Bishops’ statement on the church and the media. Here is Allen’s account from the *NCR*: \(^{13}\)

In a Feb. 16 panel discussion at Sydney's Notre Dame University, Jesuit Fr. Frank Brennan, a well-known Australian author, challenged Pell, suggesting that Catholics "in good conscience" could have voted either way on a recent bill regarding RU486, the so-called "abortion pill," before the country's parliament. Looking directly at Pell, who was in the audience, Brennan said: "I know Cardinal Pell would disagree with me on this."

Allen actually reported twice on this. Many of the Australian church and secular media were in attendance. Not one of them reported the matter. I suspect the secular media was running a simple line that the church was opposed to the RU486 legislation and had lost, having gambled that the politicians’ conscience would reflect the conscience of the nation on abortion. The church media had no interest in painting a diverse picture on this issue. Some church leaders had decided to treat the legislation and the parliamentary debate as a straw poll on the morality of abortion. Some of us church people were convinced that the legislation was not about the morality of abortion and that it was a mistake to represent the debate in those terms. There were thinking Catholics on both sides of the debate in our parliament. I still think that those on either side could be acting in good conscience, true to the sentiments expressed by Pope Benedict in his recent encyclical.

In the field of bioethics, our next national debate will be about the recommendations of the Lockhart review on stem cell research and experimentation on human embryos. Some church leaders are convinced that even the deliberate creation of excess embryos so as to assist an infertile couple with IVF is morally wrong. But even they would need to admit that the conscience of the nation is not with them on that. We all

\(^{11}\) Transcript, Senate Community Affairs Committee, 6 February 2006, p. CA13

\(^{12}\) Cardinal George Pell, Statement on RU486, 14 February 2006

\(^{13}\) *National Catholic Reporter*, 20 February 2006; see also John Allen, *The Word from Rome*, 17 February 2006
know couples who have undergone IVF with a desire and deep respect for human life. Many of them deny doctors the right to experiment on their excess embryos. They agree to the creation of sufficient embryos for the doctors to be able to choose a suitable embryo for implantation. If the Catholic view will not permit even the creation of embryos in these circumstances, then the moral purity of the view will do nothing to command the respect or assent of lawmakers wanting to know the appropriate legal limits to impose on citizens of all faiths and none when it comes to embryo experimentation.

There are many issues in our lives today which are so complex that they do not permit of simplistic assertions by church leaders insufficiently engaged with people’s experiences and considered reflection on that experience. There are times when I think church leaders like Cardinal Pell do a superb job in presenting the Catholic view to the world, but there are occasions when we must be able to disagree respectfully and publicly. Recently Cardinal Pell’s views on global warming were posted on his website. Addressing the emptiness of secularism, he said “some of the hysterical and extreme claims about global warming are also a symptom of pagan emptiness, of Western fear when confronted by the immense and basically uncontrollable forces of nature.” He asserted, “In the past pagans sacrificed animals and even humans in vain attempts to placate capricious and cruel gods. Today they demand a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions.”

This is all very well for a Cardinal breathing the clean air of Sydney. It came as no surprise to me to learn that Fr Warren Kinne wrote a very strong rebuke from his Shanghai apartment where the carbon monoxide emissions are infecting the lungs of believers and secularists indiscriminately. He found talk of pagan and human sacrifices sad and preposterous. He wrote to The Tablet:

Cardinal Pell’s comments on anxieties over global warming as ‘a symptom of pagan emptiness’, whatever the context, sound preposterous. I thought that the Bible told us to ‘care for the garden’ that is God-given and not to plunder and destroy it.

Last year I completed work in Rome on a Jesuit Taskforce on globalisation and marginalisation. It was the sort of process that only the Jesuits could come up with – exasperating and ultimately producing a long document sitting now on many shelves around the world. We were a diverse group to say the least, all Jesuit but different in most other ways: a philosopher from the Congo, an economist from Milan, a theologian from Leuven, a sociologist from Mumbai, a university rector from Venezuela, a networker with the World Bank and IMF from Washington DC, and a lawyer from Australia. We did try to come up with some practical and grounded suggestions. Let me offer them to you with some adaptation for parents, teachers and students in Australian Catholic schools.

To adapt our charism to the mission demands of a globalised and marginalised world, we should all be encouraged to examine the following, sample check-list of activities and dispositions which indicate our real willingness to move into this new world:

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14 Cardinal George Pell, Islam and Western Democracy, Legatus Summit, Naples, Florida, 4 February 2006
15 Letter to The Tablet, 20 May 2006
1 Espouse and cherish differences amongst ourselves as a privileged means of addressing the divisions in our marginalised and globalising world.

2 Presume that God’s self-revelation will be disclosed amidst differences and not just in the resolving of difference.

3 Adopt one justice issue, inform yourself, and after close contact with the marginalised, take some political action (no matter where you live nor what your work).

4 Ask yourself, when you consume resources, if similar consumption by all is sustainable. If it is not, ask yourself what you will do to make up or put right your excessive consumption of limited global resources.

5 Be an advocate for at least one culture different from your own.

6 Acquire an appreciative and advanced knowledge of at least one religion not your own.

7 Be involved with a community of solidarity i.e. a community which links the marginalised with the decision makers through shared relationships with our school communities.

8 Occasionally visit a community of insertion where we can share the life of the marginalised.

9 Ask your Catholic Education Commission to establish an accessible community of solidarity or a community of insertion if you cannot find one.

On many issues in our personal and public lives, there will continue to be THE Catholic answer to our quandary. But increasingly in our complex world, there will be no clear, uncontroverted Catholic answer, at least for the moment. And in Australia, there will be fewer competent priests and religious to provide THE ANSWER. We need to educate students of conscience who are able to transcend their own interests, looking from the other side of the river, purifying their reasons, acting ethically and acting for the common good, giving special preference to the poorest and most marginalised in our midst. I commend such a worthy educational partnership to the Federation of Parents and Friends’ Associations of Catholic Schools in Queensland and throughout the nation. Remembering Jack Woodward, let’s recommit ourselves to educating self determining, authentic students who think and act in a Catholic way.