

Panel Discussion

Catholic Social Teaching and Australian Politics



The La Salle Academy at Australian Catholic University, has partnered with Catholic Schools NSW to put the spotlight on a very significant publication that came out of ACU's PM Glynn Institute, *Shadow of the Cross*. It is a unique and provocative piece of work that proposes the possibility that the principles of Catholic Social Teaching may well be the answer to achieving better policymaking in Australia.

DATE: 1st August, 2024

TIME: 5:00pm - 7:00pm

PLACE: ACU, Level 18
8-20 Napier Street
NORTH SYDNEY

RSVP: 25th July, 2024

Light refreshments provided



David Hall

Professor Br David Hall fms, is the Dean of La Salle Academy for Faith Formation and Religious Education at Australian Catholic University and, as a member of the board or council of a number of independent Catholic schools, is actively involved in their governance. Previously, he spent thirty years in the Catholic education sector (both primary and secondary), including many as principal.



Dallas McInerney

Mr Dallas McInerney is the CEO of Catholic Schools NSW. He is a Cabinet appointee to the Board of the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) and previously held senior roles with Insurance Australia Group, the National Australia Bank, and the corporate regulator, ASIC.



Damien Freeman

Dr Damien Freeman is an Honorary Fellow of Australian Catholic University, a Research Fellow of Catholic Schools NSW's Kathleen Burrow Research Institute, and General Editor of the *Kapunda Press*. He was previously Principal Policy Advisor at ACU's public policy think-tank, the PM Glynn Institute. He wrote the editor's introduction to *Shadow of the Cross*.



Susan Carter

The Hon. Susan Carter MLC is a Member of the Legislative Council in the Parliament of New South Wales, where she sits on the Opposition benches as a member of the Liberal Party of Australia. She is Shadow Assistant Minister to the Attorney-General, Shadow Assistant Special Minister of State, and Shadow Assistant Minister for Corrections, who previously worked in commercial law, public policy, and legal education.



Julia Finn

Ms Julia Finn MP is the Member of the Legislative Assembly for Granville in the Parliament of New South Wales, where she sits on the Government benches as a member of the Australian Labor Party. She is Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier and Parliamentary Secretary for the Arts, and formerly served as Lord Mayor of Parramatta.



Sandie Cornish

Dr Sandie Cornish is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Theology at Australian Catholic University, where she lectures on Catholic social teaching, Ignatian spirituality, and theology. She is a member of the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development and was an advisor.

Overview of *Shadow of the Cross*

Australian Catholic University's public policy think-tank, the PM Glynn Institute, established the PM Glynn Monograph Series, which commissioned short books about different political philosophies that might provide a foundation for public policymaking in Australia.

These included:

- **Conservatism**
Abbott's Right: the conservative tradition from Menzies to Abbott by Damien Freeman
- **Social democracy**
Story of Our Country: Labor's Vision for Australia by Adrian Pabst
- **Liberalism**
The New Social Contract: renewing the liberal vision for Australia by Tim Wilson.

In response to these three books, it was suggested that a fourth should be commissioned which provided a critique of the first three and advanced a fourth alternative foundation for public policymaking in Australia: Catholic social teaching. *Shadow of the Cross: Catholic social teaching and Australian politics* consists of an essay by Greg Craven with responses by Kevin Rudd, Tony Abbott, Sandie Cornish, and Philip Booth, together with an epilogue by Fr Frank Brennan reflecting on the collection as a whole. It was edited by Damien Freeman.

Educational significance of the book

Craven's essay advances the claim that Catholic social teaching provides a more profound foundation for public policymaking than any of liberalism, conservatism, or social democracy can provide. This is because, he argues, whatever specific problems each of these might encounter, there is a more fundamental defect shared by all three: each lacks the kind of cohesive framework of principles that is capable of providing answers to the fundamental questions in policymaking. In contrast, Catholic social teaching offers a concrete vision of society anchored in the principles of human dignity, the common good, subsidiarity, and solidarity.

In 2017, the Congregation for Catholic Education explained that educating a person must include enabling the person to become "aware of an ethical universe in which the person acts." This requires the person to appreciate the ethical universe as including "progressively wider horizons of the common good, so as to embrace the entire human family."

An education in Catholic social teaching provides students with an understanding of such an ethical universe and a sense of how they can engage with the world around them as an ethical universe because, as Peta Goldberg writes, Catholic social teaching "challenges people to develop an authentic faith-based response to changing social, political, cultural, and economic conditions."

Understanding Catholic social teaching

Craven introduces Catholic social teaching as revolving around four cardinal principles found in papal encyclicals on the subject:

- **The dignity of the human person**
 - Each of us is a beloved person created in the image and likeness of God;
 - Recognising the intrinsic dignity of the human person includes recognising the person as a unity of reason, freedom, and love;
 - Recognising each person's free will, rationality, and capacity for solidarity compels a society also to recognise and promote each person's rights and duties;
- **The common good**
 - Human beings are not only sacrosanct as individuals but are also social and interdependent;
 - Societies have a duty to recognise the equal claim of all people to a good and fully human life;
 - The common good is the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily;
- **Subsidiarity**
 - Society should be organised so that decisions are made at the lowest and most local level;
 - Larger and more powerful authorities/institutions should not attempt to do things that can be done by smaller and more local associations;

- **Solidarity**

- o As people are socially interdependent, there is an obligation to aid and support those in need;
- o John Paul II said it is not “a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of others. It is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good”
- o Solidarity demands prioritising a preference for the poor.

One’s understanding of Catholic social teaching also depends which encyclicals one emphasises:

- Tony Abbott says that Craven is too focused on classical Catholic social teaching and instead should pay more attention to John Paul II’s *Centesimus annus*, which emphasises the **importance of the free market**;
- Kevin Rudd says Craven is too focussed on industrial relations and instead should pay more attention to Francis’s *Laudato si’* and the relevance of Catholic social teaching for addressing **environmental issues**.

Sandie Cornish offers a more nuanced critique of Craven’s approach. She argues that it is a mistake to conceive of Catholic social teaching in terms of ‘perennial’ principles that never change. Rather, she says we need to think of Catholic social teaching as an evolving tradition in which new insights may be gained inductively by responding to changing circumstances, rather than by recourse to unchanging principles.

Philip Booth, on the other hand, remains committed to the importance of the enduring principles of Catholic social teaching, although he thinks it is a mistake to try and use them to solve problems that could not otherwise be solved without them. He thinks their primary role is in helping to open a dialogue about problems, and, through enabling a deeper understanding of the problems, they can then to be solved in some other way.

Relevance to contemporary Australia

There is at least one aspect of public policy in Australia that has historically been directly influenced by Catholic social teaching:

- **Industrial relations**

In the famous Harvester judgement of 1907, Justice Higgins drew on *Rerum novarum* when defining “fair and reasonable wages” as that which is sufficient to enable a workman “to support himself, his wife, and his children” in “reasonable and frugal comfort”: see pp.113-115 of *Shadow of the Cross*;

Craven identifies three areas in which there are challenges for contemporary Australia to which Catholic social teaching speaks:

- **Education**

Craven argues that reform in the education sector can draw inspiration from Catholic social teaching: see pp. 44-49 of *Shadow of the Cross*;

- **Healthcare and Aged care**

Craven argues Catholic social teaching is able to address the “human dimension” in a way that is missing in the Royal Commission into Aged Care’s analysis: see pp. 50-52 of *Shadow of the Cross*;

- **Indigenous affairs**

Craven argues that Catholic social teaching provides context for the recent debate about constitutional recognition of Indigenous peoples: see pp. 53-55 of *Shadow of the Cross*.

In addition, Rudd identifies a fourth area:

- **Environmental stewardship**

Rudd argues that the contribution of Pope Francis has an important role to play in international efforts to address climate change: see pp. 102-109 of *Shadow of the Cross*.

Application to Australian politics

Accepting that Catholic social teaching does have something to say about contemporary challenges in Australia, should it be a resource for politicians?

- **God and Caesar**

Given that Christianity understands that there is a division between church and state, **should the church keep out of politics?** Abbott argues that the church’s role is in the formation of individual citizens, not in the formation of states or their policies;

- **Identifying problems vs finding solutions**

Are there specific ‘Catholic’ solutions to political problems that can be found in Catholic social teaching? Booth suggests that the principles of Catholic social teaching are useful in helping us think about political problems but not in finding solutions to those problems;

- **Disagreement between Catholic politicians**

What happens if two Catholics on different sides of politics reflect on the principles of Catholic social teaching and come to **conflicting policy positions based on their different understandings of Catholic social teaching?**

