

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE
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Human Rights and Social Justice Lecture 2005
Rev Nic Frances OBE



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"Poor me: In a world of individuals have we lost the hope for the 'great society' and a healthy planet?"

15 September 2005

Nic Frances

Rev Nic Frances MBE is the former Executive Director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence (1999 – 2003), an internationally recognised social entrepreneur, and an innovator who has sought new ways of assisting the marginalised and unemployed.

Born in the United Kingdom, Nic first worked in the corporate world before establishing two social businesses: the Furniture Resource Centre and CREATE, both of which were recognised as leading the social enterprise agenda. He was awarded an MBE for his work in developing new models of working with the unemployed and financially disadvantaged.

Nic arrived in Australia in 1998 and in 1999 was appointed Executive Director at the Brotherhood of St Laurence, a position he held until December 2003. Under his leadership the Brotherhood worked for an Australia free from poverty by creating innovative 'whole of society' partnerships across traditional boundaries. These included initiatives in job creation for long-term unemployed people, microcredit for people on low incomes, a cross-sector strategy on affordable housing, and support for Indigenous programs.

In 2004, funded by the Brotherhood of St Laurence, he undertook an exploration of government-led employment opportunities for long-term unemployed people in the fields of education, care for older people, and the environment.

Nic was ordained an Anglican priest in 1996 and is currently Associate Priest at St Stephen's Richmond (Vic). He is also the founding director of 'easybeinggreen' – a for profit social and environmental organisation.

Note: This document is a record of the address given by Nic Frances to an audience of five hundred, which ranged in age from secondary school students to people in their nineties. Nic chose to depart from his script to engage with this very diverse audience. His 'conversation' with them was warmly received.

Introduction

I might just start by acknowledging that we are on the land of the Awabakal people. I come from Britain and it seems to me that I never get over the fact that we haven't come to terms with the long history of this country; that in many white fellas' conversation, the history and life of Indigenous Australia is unimportant – it's over. Yet, as someone coming to this country looking at our abuse of their land, working for an organisation like the Brotherhood of St Laurence which was serving the poorest people in Australia but didn't have a program that was working with one single Indigenous person, I couldn't help but wonder. It struck me that we have lost sight of our history / your history and as a result haven't come to terms with it yet. So I am proud to be on your land and thank you for your welcome, and I honour you and any elders present. Thank you.

To the University, I have got to tell you that I am not the person to be standing here. I went through school at a time when you used to be given a position in the class. I went to a Catholic boys school and there were 32 boys in my class; I know there were 32 because I was always 31st and I was always desperate to know who was the 32nd. That gave me my place in the world. So I didn't pass with great results. I worked for the Brotherhood of St Laurence and I still don't know whether you spell "Laurence" with 'aw' or 'au' and I should know, as I saw it for five years on the wall. So I mix up letters, I failed all my exams, haven't done a degree, so why would I be here today? I have no idea. And the other thing was that I wrote down something to say which I have never done before. But I got nervous. "Oh God, I'm giving a lecture in a bloody great big hall so I had better write something down." Before the lecture Shane (the Indigenous spokesperson who offered the welcome to country) said to me "Well you won't need that mate, just say something from your heart", which is absolutely right; I have been doing that for 20 years.

So I acknowledge the University for creating opportunities for discussion about those things that we miss, that we don't see on the television or we haven't got time for in the brief episodes of news or current affairs. So thank you.

Just one other thing about the University, I want to say that it's a tough time for you guys as you go through change; so to come to something like this and have space to think, and try to get outside the box for a bit or have a discussion – when actually for some of you staying alive and thinking about what the bloody hell am I going to do next week is what's important – that's a tough call. But I think it's alright. You know, life is like that and it is tough and you can hold those things together; and sometimes in those places it can even be the most exciting time. Now I know something of what you are in. I am running a business at the moment that is facing going out of business, and last week I laid off two people. They told me: "Nic, we're running out of money, we've got to go." but I still had to say "Good idea". You know, this is also a time of opportunity; a time to re-think who we are and what we want and what our values are, and where we will go, and how will we be together. But I know if you're in it, that just seems like a whole lot of bullshit. But you know, it's possible and we shouldn't not take the opportunities like this space offers.

My last acknowledgement would just be to the Brotherhood of St Laurence. I worked for what is a great Australian institution that has done extraordinary things for Australians in its 70 years of being around, and I learnt lots of things for which I am very grateful. Part of what I learned was that I don't think there is a role for welfare and I actually don't think that the way that we do it is helpful or healthy. So given that I am going to say that, I really want to say thank you and acknowledge the work of the Brotherhood, because I believe that they do it as well as anybody and I think that they got me to a place that I could think outside that box. So I am grateful for that.

So before I start my talk - which will actually be fairly short by the time I have done all these other things, which is really good news for some of you – I wanted to point out that the title: "Poor me, in a world of individuals have we lost the hope for the great society and a healthy planet?" is something I suggested two months ago, and so I have been thinking about that title and this lecture for two months. I think if you had phoned me up again and said:

"Now that you have been thinking about this for two months what would you call it? I would call it "Value-Centred Market Economics: the best of both worlds".

So my talk today is going to be called "Value-Centred Market Economics: the best of both worlds". But I have been on a journey of two months to get to that, so I would like to talk a little bit about those earlier words, why I chose that earlier title after thinking about it for a couple of days when we first had this conversation, as a way of trying to get you a little bit into my space about why we then do this very short talk that is left on 'value-centred market economics'.

"Poor me.."

So "Poor me" ... Social justice is not, I think, about winners and losers, it's about the world living sustainably with itself. It's not a kind of middle class or intelligentsia musing over the less fortunate: "oh that's an interesting thought"; "oh poverty, oh, yes, oh gosh yes" – even if we do it with real passion but still simply muse on it and go home to our lives and are not related at all to it. In fact we often then make personal choices to force the world to remain exactly how it is.

One of the things that struck me about being in the welfare movement was that we were passionate about having our jobs and our place and being on the radio and being heard, probably more so than we were willing to let go of our ideologies, let go of our position, to have real justice. So I ran the Brotherhood of St Laurence that was started in Fitzroy years ago by a guy called Father Tucker, who lived in a community where there was 90 per cent unemployment. Seventy years later I am the CEO, I am earning \$120,000 a year and I've got a company car, I am in the same community, I've got 700 something staff represented by 21 unions who aren't going to let me move anywhere, and we have got a situation where across the road we have 90 per cent of the community unemployed. Now, somebody has done well out of poverty and it sure as hell isn't the poor. So, "Poor me" – who's poor in this, and how radical are we willing to be, and how much are we willing to put on the line for it to be different? I'm not sure that we're really willing to put much on the line – other than the conversation – and I am going to try and prove that.

So who is the poor person? You know I get to say "Oh, those poor people, those poor Aboriginal people". I get to be in that position, and yet for me as somebody living in Australia, where is the real poverty? We now live in our gated communities, driving our air-conditioned cars that lock from the inside because we are paranoid that someone might open the car door if they're not. We drive to our work places where we've got our guaranteed parking spaces and we take our kids to the schools that aren't in our local community because we want better for our kids than our local community,

God forbid but we don't want the rest of our neighbours there. So we drive them somewhere where we pay shit loads of money for something that we actually think is going to be of quality, and then we drive them back. And they don't walk to school together, they don't hold hands. They can't play football with the people that are at school because the people they are at school with aren't around in their community. And that is our wealth. And then we go home and we go back into our gated community and we turn on our DVD player or our play station. We sit in front of a video and learn how the world is in America, and then we go to bed. And that's wealth. And you, (addressing Shane Frost the Indigenous spokesperson who offered the Welcome to Country) you grew up on the side of a lake watching your father throw a spear with not much to eat, only what you gathered. You didn't go and get 'bush tucker'; you just ate it. You didn't go to Woollies to buy it. And you're poor?

Well I'll tell you, I have spent seven years in Australia and I had five days with Noel Pearson on his traditional lands, up with him on holiday and it was the only time I think in my seven years that I felt welcome to country. I felt there, where I went fishing with his mother: "I'm not for once a white fella abusing his land, I'm invited, I'm a guest and I am sharing with him in a way that is sustainable. I'm rich."

So who is poor in this? It's really an important point for me because if we think we are rich and we are helping the poor to be like us, because that's where our value system is driving us, then where is wealth going to come from? And what is it going to look like? That's my concern.

"A world of individuals..."

"A world of individuals" – are we? A world concerned about "me" rather than the great society or a different community – is that us?

Take me and my kids as an example. Because I'm white and because I'm middle class, I might in some stupid moment decide not to send Charlie to the local school across the park at the end of our street which Charlie could walk to, because it hasn't got a great violin class or something that I aspire Charlie to have. I might decide that what's going to be healthy and good for him is some qualification that I myself haven't got and which therefore I definitely want him to have. I hate all that I have just described but I think we have to recognise what's happening here. I want to recognise it. Is this what "individual" looks like?

I separated two years ago ... we will just get personal for a minute. So I got separated two years ago. As a priest I marry people, I'm committed to that space. I married a woman I thought I was going to spend the rest of my life with and I am separated. So I now have kids who have two homes, and we do it kind of 50/50 and we're mates and you know, we try to do it in a way that is going to make sense. But I'm part of that thing that I look at and go: "well that's a failure". I moved in with a friend who had also separated and was really struggling with the idea and reality of separation. I moved into his house and now I have to drive in and press the little button and the gate rises; and I drive under and walk inside this building into a house that I live in – because I am in a gated community. I drive – because I am trying to build a house in the country – a four wheel drive truck. I am the living nightmare that I have just described! So I know how easy it is to get into this mess. I'm it! But I think it is really important that we get that we are in a mess and that we start thinking about the way we live and stop looking down our noses at people who do this differently but who managed to do it on this piece of earth for thousands and thousand and thousands of years, without damaging their community or the planet.

So let's get into this, because it's about you and me, it's not an intellectual exercise that is out there. We abuse this planet more than any other group

of individuals in the world. We use 23 per cent more energy – greenhouse polluting energy – than any other industrialised country. Twenty three per cent more energy per capita than America – the next worst. You and I create more greenhouse gas pollution. And that's why we are seeing 'Katrinas' (recent hurricane that struck the American coast at New Orleans); why half a billion people in Bangladesh could soon be looking for a home. You and I use that energy. The other thing is that we live on the driest continent on the planet that has got people on it, not including Antarctica, so we are on the driest continent and per person we use twice as much water as any other person on the planet. That's us. We're wealthy. So we have become this 'world of individuals': we strive for something that is completely unsustainable, that keeps us separated from others, and keeps our children separated from their friends, and we call it wealthy.

So have we 'lost hope' or do we even have a picture of what a great society or healthy planet should look like? I'm a priest so I am hopeful, but I am seriously concerned. So what do I mean by a great society? It is worth saying that and then I will try and get to the end of this talk.

"The great society..."

A "great society" is a just society. Social Justice, I think, is about maximising opportunities. I don't think it is about equality. We are not equal, we're all different you know, we are different sizes, we are different colours, we are different shapes, we've got different brain capacities, we have different capacities to dance and sing and laugh and make love. We are different and that's okay. But social justice is about maximising opportunity, it's about creating the opportunity that I might be all that I could be, and that your kids might be all that they could be – because if we don't maximise each of our children's opportunities, if we don't find a way that they can be all that they can be, we'll keep making the same mistakes. We'll keep having people who aren't educated, aren't skilled, who don't have strong self-esteem, who aren't resilient, who can't take risks, who are averse to change and who therefore strive for a little bit of money that buys them a little bit of control that allows them to buy the car and the DVD and hide in their front room. So justice is about maximising opportunities. To do that you have to embrace complexity.

Complexity ...

Let me talk about that. As I said I'm an Anglican Priest. I don't know if there is a God. I don't believe that anyone really knows what God is. I think it means lots of different things – like striving for community, striving for love, striving for a place in the world where we feel connected and we honour the amazing majesty that we might create at our best.

But I don't think I know the right way to God. I certainly don't think that by saying "I believe in Jesus" that I am right, and that if you don't then you're wrong and you're going to hell. I don't know if there is a God and I don't know the way to it, but I do know I am passionate about this search that we have been doing for thousands of years, and I am proud to be an Anglican Christian Priest trying to make sense of that in a community that is actually feeling very separate. So it's complex – this search. And similarly when we talk about this great society, it gets complicated. I am desperate that my kids might grow up to be loved and to love and be able to walk down the street and go "Hi" and not be frightened of that. Who can hold hands without everyone looking at them and thinking that they are either gay or that somebody is going to drag them away or whatever. Just a world of hope and being together. But we need some complexity if we are to think about this 'great society'; not simply right or wrong; in or out.

It's a global society now, it's not tribal. And it's a global society that is interconnected. In one sense the coal that we burn right here is part of the reason why in New Orleans there are people dying today as a result of Hurricane Katrina. It's just that that's how it is. We create greenhouse gases, they create global warming, that then creates unstable weather patterns, and in the end people like those in New Orleans die. Now if we look at that in terms of Newcastle with all that coal – boy oh boy – we'll know how difficult that is to change. We are not going to change that! We can't change that. There are too many jobs, too many people you know and love who are dependent on that; we are not going to wipe it off indiscriminately, it would be too frightening.

So we have to recognise the complexity and be able to think globally because the truth is, if there are half a million people in Bangladesh looking for a home because of the coal we have been burning around the world, they won't quietly drown. They will bang on our borders loudly. They will look like terrorists. It will come home to us then, and I think we will need to be tolerant.

What do we mean by that? Well tolerance isn't about being 'religious' or 'pious'. When I was training to be a priest I used to have conversations like this. We would be having a talk on Mary and I would say: "By the way, does everybody in the room believe Mary was a virgin? Is that what we all believe? Or is it just what we are talking about because we want to get our heads into it?" And when I would raise questions on Mary – just to get straight what the conversation was about – there would be a couple of guys who would consistently pray for me that I might find Jesus and be saved. And one of them used to give me a lift home and I remember one day on the way home he said "Nic, we've been praying for you a lot, that you might find Jesus." And I said: "If I ever find out that you have been praying for me again I'm going to thump you." I actually think I am in the same search. I am actually passionate about this thing. Now I know that you have a very narrow window of what that looks like, it's not my window and I actually don't want to be in that window that says "we've got it right and everyone else has got it wrong". It doesn't fit with anything that I want to be part of. I actually hate it, not you, it. So don't judge me, join me; don't pray for me; share the same search with me.

I think the other thing is that as well as being tolerant we ourselves have got to have some honesty. It's got to be real. So we have got to be able to tell ourselves what really is the cost of being wealthy. And that means getting better at answering honestly, for example when people say "how are you doing?" So not just saying "fine", saying "it's not as good as it could be. I am struggling with my relationship" or "I'm having a hard time with the kids". I've got a four year old, her name is Holly, and she has hair

that does this (pointing up) and an attitude that does the same. You know, I am struggling. She is extraordinary, absolutely wonderful, the reason for waking up in the morning and sometimes the reason for jumping out of a window, and yet you know, if someone says "How are you doing", I'm meant to say "Oh fine and she's gorgeous and she's doing very well, and the kinder teachers think she is the best in the class and don't worry I'm successful too, promise, I'm not a bad parent". I'm not allowed to say "God I just despair, I don't know how to do this, I thought I was a good parent, but I'm not sure what to do and the other day I was walking down the street and she just lies down and starts kicking and screaming and people are looking at me and I feel stupid and I don't know what to do, I'm supposed to be Father Nic". How do we get there! I can't tell anyone, I've just got to go home and work that out as the single parent I never thought I would be on a healthy planet. (Well you will have to get back up here Shane and remind us what that looks like and thank you for the introduction because that is what it might have looked like here.)

"Value-Centred Market Economics..."

Okay, so "Value-Centred Market Economics: the best of both worlds". Let me try and read this a little bit – something I have never done before so it should be amusing – for me anyway. And I might stop or I might try and get to the end and then pose some questions which will open up discussion.

So, the goal of governments is to place a price on our values and then allow the market to organise: value-centred market economics. I tried to coin this phrase when I was in the Brotherhood of St Laurence. I failed miserably. Part of the feedback was to drop the word "value" as it had become about money. So when you say 'value-centred market economics' they just think you are talking about the value of money. In my argument I wanted to say well we have to reclaim the word "value" in a different way from its being about money. That is the problem: we value things in terms of money which actually is worthless – it's just the thing we have chosen to use as a mechanism for sharing things of value. In itself – without the things or the services or the opportunities that it creates – it is worthless. So they wanted me to drop this "Value-Centred Market Economics" thing. So you might be interested to see whether you agree with them.

We have a system that divorces these two: values and the market. Historically, Labor or the Communists or those left of centre would have focussed on social values; the Conservatives on the economy and the market. Now we have the Greens who focus on the environment and the Australian Democrats interested in balancing those competing interests. Labor and Liberal both seem to want to safeguard and promote the economy and then do the other stuff. We consistently hear about their credentials for fiscally managing the economy, "we are good managers of the economy, that's why you can trust us"; "oh, and by the way, we will do a bit more on hospitals / schools than the other guys did".

Now, if you listen to the opposition parties around the states, you will hear them say: "We will manage the economy as well as they do but we will do better things on the schools". First the economy and then we will tinker with

schools or something. This has been the case for some time in America; it is pretty consistently the way things are done across the Industrialised World; economics has won. We are doing it for the money. But there has been a huge cost in both the separating of the economic from the social and the environmental, and the wholesale move towards short-term financial accountability and management by governments. All success has become wealth-linked and money-linked so we look at somebody's term in office in terms of how much they made or didn't make. In other words where did they leave the economy? So Bob Carr is not about what he did or about his leadership capacity or the way he raised questions well before his time, but rather about the things that you read now in the press, that he left a mess financially. That's all we are talking about, the mess he left. And his opponents (and I know nothing about NSW politics so you should know that I will get lost in this), are wanting to say "it's a mess" so they can improve on it.

Hurricane Katrina seems to me to be an example of the consequences of that short-term political thinking. Because there have been no economic drivers that have acted or helped us to act on changing climate change, and given that climate change has always been out there, no-one in their right mind is going to tax us or change the use of coal or do things that they might not ever see in their political lifetime when their goal at the moment is to be in power in two or three years time. So we didn't act and we haven't acted. We have refused to sign those things that have been around for the last 10 years that would have supported us to act, even in America. We are used to seeing it in Ethiopia. We are used to seeing it in Third World countries, people watching the plague hit them, driving through them and out the other side. We haven't expected to see that in America. People not able to get on a bus, or there being no bus so they waited and they drowned. As non-voters they were not a priority until the tragedy pointed to an inadequate administration that next time may fail a more affluent society. And the response in New Orleans was compounded by the seeming indifference of the President and the administration in those first few days. Some of the cold-hearted remarks

were: “well why didn’t they get out”, “why didn’t they leave”, “they just don’t care”. Now this is about votes, not because of those poor people but because lots of people went “If that can happen there, it could happen in my backyard; you had better sort this out Mr President”.

When I first started working in the area of welfare, I heard comments like: “you know people don’t want to work”, “they don’t want jobs; if they did, they would get off their arse and get one”. The fact that they might not have the skills, they might not have anywhere to go, they might not have anywhere to sleep at night when they came home from a job even if they got one, was a point that no-one wanted to look at because that’s too complex.

In the face of such huge and complex issues as climate change and terrorism we retreat to those spheres of influence that we believe we can control: ourselves, our children, our wider family. We create our gated communities, the safe places that we can influence, and to a lesser degree our immediate community – which isn’t very often a place but much more a place of work or the tennis club or the internet group. We retreat to those places where we feel we have some control. On a larger scale we might retreat to our sports team where we feel some connection. But on the whole we have retreated to something very, very small where we have control.

Control is linked to money. If you have not been able to get it legitimately then you either give up or turn to less legitimate methods. On a personal level that might be crime; nationally or culturally it could be organised resistance or terrorism. “It is not fair, what are we going to do about this, we don’t have the rights, we don’t have the power” and we act. These things might not be right but they do become understandable. I know if I had to defend Holly and if I was going to lose my land, I would fight you or kill you for it. I have a daughter and I know that I would do that for her. I don’t want to be that person, I want to be the person who would lie down but I know, I can see her eyes. It is understandable, not right, but understandable. But some people feel so marginalised in the vision we have created of what wealth

looks like and the way the world should be, that they might fight in ways that we in our world don’t understand.

But to return to the personal. Our behaviour, our politics can become very parochial, very self-interested. You know our focus on what we believe in and what we are willing to vote for, absolutely impacts on our life. Taxation, yes I want taxation because yes, I think some of those things are important, but I want less taxation for me. Of course we want road laws but I always break the speed limit, it’s okay because I am careful. Yes it is ridiculous that people use mobile phones while they’re driving but actually this call is very important. We have our rules. We of course want the rest of the world ordered because it is frightening and we want others controlled, but it doesn’t apply to us because we are sensible and we know how it is; we are white and we are in control and we are used to this. We want to control it. We are willing to break the rules that we advocate for because we are special.

In this context we’re kind of okay with people getting charity and welfare, provided we control that bit. It is okay that something may happen down there but only if we can empathise with their situation and they are not freeloaders like my uncle’s mate around the corner. So if we have some empathy it’s okay and as long as they are not going to challenge our position we are okay with their getting a bit of charity ... so long as it doesn’t mean that they are now enabled enough to be able to compete for my job or that they are actually going to be able to send their kids to a school as good as I got, because I worked bloody hard to get my kids to that school; I don’t want their kids having the same education as my kids because they haven’t done anything.

We’re not interested in the fact that we need a whole bunch of very talented young people or in the fact that your child is probably more talented than mine and that’s fine because we want to have the skill to make a great country. We are very, very small minded. “I worked hard for what I got!” And then we end up with a government that now plays to those prejudices – and that is my concern.

So, we've got a challenge and I want now to give you a little example and then we are going to have this conversation.

The role of government must be re-defined to place economic value on an activity that supports the common good and ensures a sustainable planet. This in turn will allow the market to deliver its efficiencies. Market principles are fine for the delivery of goods and services but there is a crucial role for government in valuing goods and services in a way that is consistent with our moral social values – rather than what financial considerations decree. Those values are those we want at our best. The problem is that we don't choose what we want at our best.

Eighty five per cent of Australians say that they rank the environment in the top three things they care about. And yet I have been out there in NSW for the last two weeks offering people \$60 worth of energy-saving household goods to put in their homes to make them environmentally friendly, and which will save them \$150 per year, and I can't give it away! Three people doing that in their houses is the equivalent of removing a car in greenhouse gas emissions. I am giving it away. It will save them \$150 and people look at me as if I'm from another planet and they won't take it! We are not interested. I'm frightening, I am out of their control, they don't know why I am standing there. The fact that I'm smiling and I am just trying to give them something and I have great big signs doesn't matter.

I've got a colleague at the moment in a Westfield Shopping Centre in Sydney. She has been there all day next to Coles; all day every day this week and she has managed to give away 30 a day. Three houses! Every three houses a car off the road in greenhouse gas emissions! \$150 worth of product! Save you \$150 a year and I cannot give it away! And the interesting thing is that the average person doesn't expect the environment to stop, so it's one of those things that are a cause, it's a welfare thing, and it's a cause, and we don't do causes; we are too busy controlling our lives. We don't believe that saving the environment is going to save us money; we don't believe that because that is not what we have heard for 20 years. The environment is a cause.

The fact is, we will never change this environment until a government says: "When you buy a new house if it hasn't got energy efficiency built into it, you are going to have to put that energy efficiency in. It's going to cost each of you \$5,000 a year at the outset. Stick it on your mortgage, you're not going to see it there. But you are going to have to do it. If there are four of you in the home it's going to save you \$400 to \$500 a year actually, more than the extra mortgage costs. Overall it will be cheaper every month to run your home. If we all did that – granted that 70 per cent of houses across Australia change hands in six or seven years – we will reduce the need for any new coal fired power station in Australia." That requirement would wipe out any future increase in demand.

I believe that the market could then deliver. If the government says you have to do that, the market will deliver. We will get good at it, we will do the R&D, we will create the jobs, we will export the success around the world but we need a government to say "this is important" – and to place economic value on an activity that supports the common good and ensures a sustainable planet.

And you know what? I think you could probably do the same thing with parenting. If we say we really want in this country kids who are alive, bright and resilient and loved, then we ought to value parenting. So governments could decide that every parent who stays home in a child's early years and does that until they are five, will be paid \$40,000 a year to do it because there will be nothing better for this country than bright, able, resilient kids. So any parent who stays home and does that for their kids gets \$40,000 a year. Now it's valued and now it's in the market and I think then we say "Oh by the way we actually want to make sure that this is working. So we are going to do some tests. We are going to do them ever so gently and ever so carefully, but we are going to observe, and if you are not managing the care of your child we are going to get you some great training and great support. We are going to tell you how to cope with a child as they do a tantrum in the shopping centre Nic, because actually it's about cognitive therapy and there are some really easy skills we can teach you." I have never been

taught to parent and I have two kids. I have the future of the planet in my hand and I screw up daily. Who is going to help me?

Maybe if we valued it and we put some economic price on it we would have women doing this and not feeling failures. We might have fathers stepping into that role and saying: "this is a valuable contribution that I make; I can sustain myself when I do it, I've got some KPIs that I have got to deliver on this child's happiness for the child's sake." So how far can we push it, this attempt to place economic value on an activity that supports the common good and ensures a sustainable planet. I'm not sure, but I'm really interested.

The trouble with any of these ideas is that the market does drive efficiency and I like that. But I believe we also need government engagement. I am out there giving these light bulbs to people and I'm getting them as cheaply as I possibly can because I want people to say "Easybeinggreen" (that's my company name) has a goal of 70 per cent of Australians using at least 30 per cent less energy and water in 10 years. That is my goal. But I know I need government legislation and then I need lots of competition to get the price down to make it easier and easier for you to put these energy saving devices in your home. But that market will not grow unless we have some legislation. And we won't have that kind of quality of parenting I was describing unless it is valued in the same way we value a hole in the ground where we pull out coal. If sustainability (or parenting) is to be important, we have to put some value on that.

You know we drive SUVs – those big four wheel drive trucks – as I said I've got one; we drive them around and we make them about 10 per cent cheaper to buy than any car that is made in this country. We don't put the full sales tax on them, so they compete unfairly. They are the most dangerous car that we drive, they are the worst for the planet, and the market drives their take up because it makes them cheaper than two wheel drives. We have to use government policy to drive the things that are good value, not of poor value. One of the reasons we are so bad on electricity in this country is because we

produce aluminium in this country, lots of it and we use, particularly in Victoria, brown coal to produce it so we are twice as inefficient as anyone else in the rest of the world at manufacturing it. That's why you and I are such bad users and yet we are given a government subsidy to make it cheap to produce.

So how do we get there? How do we allow ourselves to get out of this space which says over here there is good and over here there is bad, and the bad is the market and the good over here is the Brotherhood of St Laurence. And I say: "You're the problem". And you stand over there and say: "Well you don't know the way the world works; and we're keeping going". How do we work towards this middle space? The trouble is that our politics are now embedded and wedded to this side (the market) and occasionally they get enough power to walk over here, dump everything that they have learnt over here and give something away until it's not sustainable, and then they have a problem. A bit like a university that doesn't stay in tune and then has a problem. Or a welfare system. We have to be aware, we have to deliver value. And to do that we need leaders.

Where does that leadership come from? I don't think we have it in the political parties, I don't think we have it in our institutions. I certainly don't think the Church has it. I would love it to have it, I would love it to be a place of exploration with values bigger than believing 'this is right' and 'this is wrong', but I don't think it is there. In terms of leadership therefore I am not sure where it will come from. And it is risky.

You've got to risk a vision. You have to be willing to take on something for a greater good; to put a market value on something that people are going to want. That's not about money, that's about love and you shouldn't mix the two. The only example I have of it is Noel Pearson in Australia. Noel is an Indigenous leader, he is an intelligent man, a great lawyer who is really charismatic; he is a strong leader and he has really engaged with "I do not want welfare. I do not want Indigenous people to be cared for passively by white middle class. I want justice. I want jobs, I want my people to have a

right to this planet and to walk out there equally and not as someone who has been cared for by the other and who makes the other feel good about caring for them”.

Thank you for the right to be here. As I said, it is not polished – it’s a thought. I hope you forgive me that, and I hope that you can take it somewhere.

The University of Newcastle Annual Human Rights and Social Justice Lecture series has been established to provide an opportunity for members of the University and the wider community to reflect on issues of social justice that challenge Australia. It is the practice of the University to invite a prominent person active in the area of human rights to deliver the lecture.



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