

## *Life to the Full: Rights and Social Justice in Australia*

The day after Labor's recent Federal election victory, a buoyant Warren Mundine was on hand at the crypt of St Pat's Church Hill to formally launch the newly released *Life to the Full: Rights and Social Justice in Australia*. The former National President of the Australian Labor Party (2006-2007) pointed to the crucial role of Catholic Social Teaching in a secular political party. He laid out hopes that the Rudd government could be guided by such principles in dealing with diverse social and ethical issues, which include indigenous affairs, immigration, refugees, and the war in Iraq. Mundine also reminisced about the influence of religious brothers and sisters during his childhood.

Representing the other side of politics, and not so buoyant, Peter Coleman, former leader of the NSW Liberal Party (1977-1978) and Federal Member for Wentworth (1981-1987) also spoke of his deep and genuine appreciation of Catholic social doctrine. Coleman stated that he was struck by the fact that social teaching is not a recent phenomenon but is ancient and has had enormous influence over many centuries. In concluding he quoted St Augustine: 'Without justice, what are kingdoms except great gangs of robbers.'

*Life to the Full: Rights and Social Justice in Australia* is a collection of essays which provide insight into and reflection on how Catholic Social Teaching underpins and informs many fundamental human rights. Editor, Professor James Franklin from UNSW articulated the importance of Catholic social and ethical teaching in modern times. He highlighted that in the late twentieth century there were two contradictory trends in popular thinking about ethics. One was the relativist approach insisting on a toleration of diverse moral views. The other was the insistence on inalienable, objective human rights. Ironically, these two positions were often held by the same people.

Franklin argued that amidst all of this confusion, one institution, stood out like a beacon, defending the objectivity of rights. The Catholic Church, with its "natural law" view of ethics has always upheld the "irreducible worth of persons" and therefore has consistently defended the immense value of the human person and concomitant rights.

A number of contributors to *Life to the Full* were present at the launch and each spoke about what motivated their work.

Marita Winters, Director of the Catholic Enquiry Centre, introduced her chapter on *the right to choose and freely maintain a state of life, married or single, lay or religious*, by outlining the Church's role in supporting a person in their chosen state of life. She provided an insight into where documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reflect Catholic social teaching.

Garrick Small, a Senior Lecturer at the University of Technology, Sydney, spoke about the fundamental issue of the support of life and “the social obligation upon people to neither exploit nor extinguish the life of another” in introducing his chapter on *The right to a living wage*.

Anthony Cleary, Director of Religious Education and Evangelisation for the Catholic Education Office, Sydney, commented on the inherent dignity of each human person and went on to proclaim that the true nature of education stems from its etymological roots i.e. education serves to ‘lead or draw out’ this inherent human dignity so that a person may ‘live life to the full.’

Catherine Althaus, Centre of Governance and Public Policy, Griffith University, spoke passionately about the suffering of minority groups in today’s world and highlighted the principles of human dignity, solidarity and subsidiarity in introducing her chapter on *The right to assistance from society*.

*Life to the Full* tackles complex issues in an informative yet easy to read manner. It provides the reader with an understanding of the significance of Catholic Social Teaching, especially in the way that it has informed the nature, expression and preservation of human rights. *Life to the Full* is a great read especially in the context of contemporary Australian society.

Available through Connor Court Publishing [www.connorcourt.com.au](http://www.connorcourt.com.au) and other major bookstores *Life to the Full* is a great buy at \$29.95

Anthony Gordon