



**E**news is back following a break for the Pax Romana-ICMICA International Assembly in Poland. This edition contains a reflection by Peter Maher, one of ACMICA's delegates at the Poland meeting, on the metaphor of Auschwitz in contemporary Australian exclusionary politics. Also in this edition are two reflections on the maritime border dispute between Australia and Timor-Leste, and some web links to resources grounded in Catholic Social Teaching for the upcoming federal election.

## Reflection

### The story of Timmo and Ozzie

Sian Prior\*

*The story of Timmo and Ozzie is Sian Prior's reflection following a visit to Timor-Leste*



Once upon a time in the southern hemisphere there were two young lads named Ozzie and Timmo. Ozzie was a big boy from a well-off family whose mother fed him copious quantities of red meat and plied him with fresh milk, which made him grow bigger and stronger every year. Timmo was a small child from a poor family. His

Portugese step-father worked in a factory, his mother was a home-maker and the three of

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them lived together in a small flat, not far from Ozzie's house.

One day when Ozzie was playing in the kindergarten playground, he was threatened by a couple of other big boys who fancied the enormous lunch that his mother packed for him each day. They pushed Ozzie to the ground, grabbed his bulging lunchbox and left him lying there with a badly sprained ankle. Timmo found Ozzie crumpled in the dirt, crying his heart out. He helped him up, put Ozzie's arm around his own thin shoulders and led him, limping, inside to the kindergarten teacher. The teacher rang Ozzie's home and when his mother arrived to take her son to the doctor, she heard all about how little Timmo had looked after her injured boy. She thanked Timmo with a big hug and promised to reward him for his kindness.

When they were old enough, the two friends both went to the same local school. Ozzie had grown fat, but Timmo's family couldn't afford to spend as much money on food as Ozzie's could, and Timmo remained quite thin. When Timmo turned eight his parents separated and his step-father returned to Portugal, so there was even less money to go around at Timmo's place.

There was an ex-army bloke with tattoos and bulging muscles who lived in the flat next door to them. He'd had his eye on Timmo's mother for a while. After Timmo's step-father left, the

bloke made his move. He started walking into their flat unannounced, stealing things and threatening Timmo's mother with violence if she didn't provide him with sexual favours. When she locked the front door, he bashed it open with his big shoulders. When she continued to refuse his demands, he started hitting her. When that didn't work, he turned his attention to young Timmo.

One weekend when Timmo was playing over at Ozzie's house, Ozzie's mother noticed bruises all over the small boy's back. She was shocked and embarrassed, but didn't say anything to Timmo or his mother. Not long after that, Ozzie stopped hanging around with Timmo in the school playground, and Timmo was no longer invited over to his place on the weekends.

Timmo's mother was caught in a trap. Their neighbour had threatened to kill her son if she called the cops. But after enduring several months of violence, she finally rang Ozzie's mother and poured out her terrible story over the phone. Confronted with the grim details, Ozzie's mother had no choice but to act. After all, she still owed young Timmo a debt of gratitude for looking after her son in kindergarten. She called the police and told them what was happening. When the neighbour found out, he gave Timmo and his mother one last terrible beating before the police took him away.

Timmo eventually recovered from his bruises, and Ozzie began playing with him again. One day when they were mucking around in Ozzie's father's shed, they found a couple of bottles of Coke sitting on the work bench. Both bottles were open, and one contained only a small amount of Coke. The other one was almost full. Both boys wanted the full bottle, but before Timmo had a chance to ask for it, Ozzie grabbed it and ran out of the shed. Timmo drained the dregs of his bottle and went outside into the garden.

There he found Ozzie kneeling on the grass and retching violently. His lips were covered in something black and sticky, and he looked up at Timmo with tears in his eyes. 'It wasn't Coke. It was oil!'

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**Analysis**

## East Timor needs justice not charity

**East Timor's long-term independence will depend on the outcome of current maritime boundary negotiations with Australia, writes Susan Connelly\***

The point has often been made that the dispute over the resources of the Timor Sea is about justice, not charity. This is a principle of international law and is enthusiastically accepted by the Australian Government.



The spin on this principle is put by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade thus: "It is not appropriate to link East Timor's economic and social development with requests for Australia to sign away long-standing sovereign rights in respect of its continental shelf."

The whole matter must of course be resolved on the basis of fairness as regards the maritime boundaries *in themselves*. However, our topic is the long-term consequences of the present Government policy, consequences that affect both East Timorese and Australian people.

What is the present Australian Government Policy? It concerns a fair and equitable maritime boundary, which has not yet been established. Our Government agrees to meetings only twice a year, despite East Timorese requests for more frequent meetings. It says that we settle disputes by negotiation rather than arbitration, and hence there is no need for us to be part to the maritime boundary sections of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Australian policy is that we benefit financially from areas which are under

dispute, and that policy has brought us nearly \$2 billion since 1999.

In discussing consequences of this policy, it is both fair and proper to consider the effects of the distribution of wealth. So whilst the ownership of the resources of the Timor Sea must be determined only on principles of accepted law and customary practice, the dire need of the people of East Timor makes the application of justice a priority.

East Timor has gained its political independence, but is not yet economically independent. It is one of the poorest nations in Asia.

The East Timorese Government has developed a National Development Plan for the next twenty years, which is aimed at lifting the nation out of poverty. It was drafted after consultations involving 40,000 people in more than 500 towns and villages across the country. The top priorities are: education (70 percent), health (49 percent) and agriculture (32 percent) as the top three, followed by the economy, roads, poverty, water and electricity.

It is interesting to compare the concerns of the East Timorese people with those of Australians as we face this election. Education and health are top priorities for both peoples, with the economy high on both our lists. However, our poorest schools are whiz-bang compared the best Timor has to offer, and our dogs and cats have far greater access to health care.

There is a sense of purpose in the new East Timorese Government. They plan that education and health will consume 48 percent of spending in these first years of independence. They plan to bank rather than spend revenue from the new offshore oil and gas for the first few years. They plan deficit-free budgets. They have begun life as a new nation debt-free, determined to leverage the oil and gas windfall to create a self-sustaining economy.

These positive aspirations are tempered by the realisation that there has been a decline in international assistance and reconstruction activities. There has been an estimated two per cent decrease of the Growth Domestic Product (GDP) in the Fiscal Year 2003-2004 meaning a decline of overall economic growth.

Capital spending has been curtailed by 15% of the GDP, and there will probably be a decrease in public investment of about US\$40-45 million a year for the next four years.

This situation has been caused by:

1. the winding down of the United Nations presence;
2. normal post-conflict transition;
3. a decrease in demand for goods; and
4. an increase in poverty.

It has been remarked by a number of people familiar with East Timor that the well being of people out in the country has noticeably deteriorated. With a population of about 900,000, half of whom are under the age of 14, East Timor faces an uphill battle even to feed its own people. Food insecurity is widespread, resulting in wasting and stunting.

**“ With a population of about 900,000, half of whom are under the age of fourteen, East Timor faces an uphill battle even to feed its own people. ”**

Wasting, as measured by weight for height, is used as an indicator of short-term access to adequate food, and is therefore affected by seasonal food availability. Over one in ten children are moderately or severely wasted. Stunting, which is measured by height for age, is an indicator of longer-term nutritional deficiency over multiple seasons. One in two children are moderately or severely stunted. This evidence points to widespread chronic malnutrition.

Life expectancy is low at 57 years. There is a lack of safe drinking water and poor sanitation facilities, and to the predominance of communicable diseases: malaria, tuberculosis and infections.

In order to halve poverty by 2015, East Timor needs an annual economic growth rate of 4.4 per cent over the next decade. To achieve this a number of issues must first be addressed.

The Government has to generate sustainable domestic production, services and employment

and so become less dependent on external support. This requires the promotion of good governance and efficiency, professionalism, transparency and accountability in state institutions, and the willingness and capacity to fight corruption in these areas.

“Despite the poverty of the East Timorese, the Australian Government feels justified in dithering around over the oil and gas issue.”

Forty-six percent of the population live beneath the poverty line, that is, they have less than a dollar a day to live on. Most of these people are in the rural areas. But only one-third of the total expenditure of East Timor and one-fifth of its goods and services go to these districts. The agriculture sector contributes only one-fifth of the GDP while employing two-thirds of the population. Because of this overwhelming poverty in the rural sector the first priority must be to address rural skills and resource needs, to decentralise government agencies and development, so that basic services are provided where they are needed. The East Timor Government needs to increase productivity by large-scale investment in rural development including infrastructure, agriculture, forestry and livestock.

East Timor's only natural resource of any magnitude lies under the Timor Sea. No other resource exists on a scale which could seriously address the food needs and other needs of the people. Whilst it is true that the decisions on maritime boundaries must be based on justice, not charity, such considerations are luxuries which only those in Australia can afford, and they are beneath the contempt of those in East Timor who are dying from lack of nourishment and care.

Despite the poverty of these people, the Australian Government feels justified in dithering around over the oil and gas issue, a policy which has health, even survival consequences for some East Timorese people.

One of the consequences for Australia is a further squandering of international respect. If we are not willing to act responsibly in our

region, particularly where money is concerned, how can we expect that others treat us in good faith? When Australian officials bleat on and on about issues of sovereignty, how can they hope for a respectful hearing in the light of Australia's recent history of resistance to the claims to sovereignty made by the East Timorese, issues which caused so many deaths? Australia's pathetic self-interest, so transparent in this case, must cause Asian nations to raise their well-mannered eyebrows.

Another consequence is the further eroding of the Australian people's trust in Government. Where does willingness to dupe the population stop? Do we expect any Australian Government to value truth when manipulation of the truth is so prevalent, and in this case, so profitable?

Official communications are full of half-truths. A good example of this is the latest two-page summary of Australia's position published by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). It says:

“No country has done more than Australia to assist the people of East Timor to realise their aspirations for independence and to help bring peace, stability and prosperity to the new nation.” The history gives the lie to all this fluff. Alone among the nations, Australia gave official and supine recognition of Indonesia's illegal occupation.

In discussing the Timor Trough, DFAT's paper says: “International law supports Australia's claim to the full extent of its continental shelf northward to the deepest part of the Timor Trough.” But as Frank Brennan points out (p.23), from 1985 International law has been moving “in the direction of drawing a median line between countries with coastlines opposite each other and separated by less than 400 nautical miles,” as is the case in point.

The DFAT paper says that International law does not require that all maritime boundary disputes be resolved by using median lines. Indeed, that is true. But it is even more true that the *general movement* of international legal opinion is to decide these issues on median line principles. The Australian Government has the tricky knack of caricaturing opposing opinions and then building its case on refuting these caricatures, in this case, by using the word “require.”

Another example occurs in the same paper. The paper suggested “that an equidistant boundary would attribute to East Timor most of the Timor Sea’s resources are simply wrong.” But what fool would assert such a thing? No one is saying that Timor should get all the resources of the Timor Sea. That would be unfair to us Australians. We are talking about, and only talking about resources which happen to exist on East Timor’s side of a half-way line, which in anyone’s language is a pretty fair place to talk about fairness.

Another of the many examples of this illegitimate type of argument occurs in some letters received from Liberal ministers, those who move themselves to answer letters, anyway. For example, one said that we should remember that “Australia remains a party to UNCLOS”, a statement designed to mislead. They don’t say clearly that whilst officially a party to the Convention and to the Court of Justice, Australia has withdrawn from those elements of the ICJ and UNCLOS which affect the dispute between East Timor and Australia. It is dishonest to pretend adherence to the whole while omitting to mention self-imposed exclusion from the only relevant part. No wonder it would not subject itself to the ICJ and ITLOS, where such underhanded use of language would be seen for what it is.

One reality which seems to be beyond the comprehension of many in Government here is the probability that East Timor will simply not give up. Refusal to find a just solution now will promote a festering sore for many years to come. The East Timorese know how to hang on. They survived the laziest and most inept coloniser – Portugal – and the brutal and stupid dictatorship of Suharto. They will use to their advantage the musical chairs of the Australian Parliamentary system. The only aspect which will grow in strength is bad feeling between the two countries.

DFAT has stated, “It is clearly within Australia’s national interest that East Timor be a stable and economically self-sufficient neighbour.” There is a sense in which that statement is unfinished. Australia’s recalcitrance in seeing that justice is applied suggests that the stability and economic self-sufficiency somehow must be on our terms, as though it is up to us to dictate how rich the nation should be.

In fact, in a ABC *Four Corners* report (26 May 2004) Alexander Downer said: “If there is an issue of economic disparity between Australia and East Timor that should be addressed through aid, which it is. It should not be addressed through shifting boundaries and changing International Law.”

**“ The Australian Government would prefer to see a dependent East Timor, one more likely to be controlled by aid and debt, than a free and self-sufficient small neighbour. ”**

What this means is that the Government would prefer to see a dependent East Timor, one more likely to be controlled by aid and debt, than a free and self-sufficient small neighbour.

Australia and East Timor are involved in talks at this very moment. It would be unfortunate if East Timor relinquishes its claim to resources on its side of a half-way line in return for a greater share of the oil and gas revenue in that area which at the moment Australia controls.\*\* It would be making a long-term decision on the basis of present need, which while very understandable, is flawed.

**Note**

\* Susan Connelly is a Sister of St Joseph, a Congregation founded by Mary MacKillop. She is well known for her work on behalf of the people of East Timor, and through the Mary MacKillop Institute of East Timorese Studies.

\*\* I do not pretend to speak on behalf of the Timorese people; I accept and respect their decision. But I do speak as an Australian citizen, one who believes that Australian Government and practice in this area is wrong.

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**Special Feature**

**Reflection on Auschwitz and Australia**

By Peter Maher



The theme for the quadrennial assembly of Pax Romana was *Poverty and Injustice as Challenges to Ethics and Cultures. Responsibility of Christian Professionals*. This theme built on the reflections of past



Auschwitz. Photo: KIK

assemblies and continued to look at the way dominant socio-economic systems in the milieu exclude the poor, create a bigger poorer class while claiming to stand for democracy and equality.

**Auschwitz and Birkenau**

Let me begin with the cultural tour to Auschwitz and Birkenau, those now infamous names standing for the horrors of the Third Reich under Hitler's plan for the creation of the pure race. No documentary can prepare one for the experience of standing on the platform where the trains carrying the excluded from Hitler's master plan would disgorge their human cargo to be sent immediately to the gas chambers and the crematorium proudly standing at the end of the platform or to be sold into human slavery as workers for the nearby factories. It is just as unbelievable standing there as it is when watching the documentary but the physical presence of the evidence, the death machine, the degrading conditions, the sheer size of the camp and the guide pointing out that we were standing on the ash and bones of the waste from the crematorium forced me into belief – yes, it really happened and on a scale unimaginable.

Why did it happen? Our guide informed us of the strategic geographical location; the plan to create the pure race and the need to do away with all imperfections in the human condition. This means racist genocide and selective extermination. It means recasting the identity of millions of so-called "misfits" into something other than human.

How did it happen? The system was very clever. Authorities firstly isolated those to be removed from society into ghettos where they

**“ No documentary can prepare one for the experience of standing on the platform where the trains carrying the excluded from Hitler’s master plan. ”**

were refused the chance to mingle with the population – they became “invisible” in Jewish ghettos or prisons as political or social prisoners. These included Jews; resisters of the state; Christians (particularly religious men and women); homosexuals; mentally ill and people with a physical disability – those who were deemed either unable or inappropriate in procreating and producing the master race. This kind of madness produced the concentration camps designed to concentrate in one place all those deemed a danger to the purity of the race. The third stage of this plan was the extermination camps or death factories. All those who had no means of producing a cash return because of age, gender, disability or race were simply exterminated. Falsified records of death were produced to send to any surviving family members.

This three-phase program often meant nothing was reported or what was reported looked to be a “normal” death in custody.

**Reflections on Australian exclusion**

My experience at Auschwitz and Birkenau led me to reflect on some exclusionary practices in Australia especially important to Australia in our election/post election period. Let me begin with these reflections.

Why are average Australians untroubled by the systematic denial of Indigenous Australians to their story, language, history and culture? Just like Hitler’s plan, they have been cast as the “other”, both less than “us” and expendable. The methods of exclusion and concentration, so frighteningly similar to the Third Reich, are effective today as ever. Even more clear and despairingly painful is the truth about Australia’s mandatory detention of refugee families. We have enacted the first two phases of exclusion and concentration while avoiding the extermination of those

demonised because of method of entry, race, colour and creed.

My experience in Auschwitz brought into vivid relief the precise strategy of Australia’s government to hide the truth and thus make something totally heinous palatable to the people by sophisticated arguments that are really no more than the ends justifies the means. While government and community attitudes are shifting due to the work of advocacy groups in the community, there is still evidence of a systematic attempt by this government to exclude those who do not fit the profile of the “real Australian”. This seems to be based more on cultural affinity and financial security than on compassion and care for those escaping oppression who happens to be the “other”.

The refrain from Canberra runs like this: We have stopped the boat people coming, we have stopped Aboriginal demands for sovereignty and land rights, and stopped those bleeding hearts, surely we need argue no further our case.

**Escaping exclusion: The study session**

The study session raised many issues that inspired my reflections at Auschwitz and Birkenau. Many sessions offered hope for escaping exclusionary practices. While there were many speeches and clarifications on the key thematic much of this was either not new or a little academic. Some key indicators of poverty and its link with injustice, racism, patriarchy, neo-colonialism and neo-liberalism were analysed. There is a final statement of the assembly being prepared for publication and other papers will be published in due course I hope, so I will restrict my reflections here to one paper.

**“ My experience in Auschwitz brought into vivid relief the precise strategy of Australia’s government to hide the truth and thus make something totally heinous palatable to the people. ”**

Joe Holland, a philosopher-theologian from St Thomas University, Miami, USA, offered a thought provoking paper that I found symbolises the best of the reflections and analysis of the relevant issues. He noted that global capitalism rightly belongs to a mechanistic modern cosmology favouring centralisation of an often spiritually and ethically empty “market culture”. This system is driven by market forces in a classical sense resulting in a utilitarian ethics that commodifies people and the planet in service of the market. We can see this for example in the argument that Australia can not “afford” to ratify the Kyoto agreement on greenhouse gas emissions. Holland would we say we can’t afford not to. The first perspective looks at short term business profits for its “moral guide”, while the second follows the long term moral objective of a sustainable environment for our children. The new cosmology as found in Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry offers a truly post modern meta narrative that incorporates a humanising power because it asks important questions: Who are we? Where do we come from? How do we relate to each other and the environment? Where are we going and where is the sacred? The question of profits on this year’s financial report are relegated down the list not because they are not important but because they are not as important in an ethic based on the bigger cosmological story.

The new cosmology of interdependence and inter-subjectivity of all things in a hard spiral of evolution that keeps folding back on itself offers an antidote to the mechanistic cosmology of evolution as an exponential line of growth that moves ever upwards, independent of the basic human questions. For Holland a system unbridled by an ethic based on the new cosmology will lead to a culture of death bringing unsustainable ecological, spiritual and societal devastation because it has no roots in the human and cosmological story. Holland suggests that in embracing the new cosmology there is a way out. An earth story that respects biodiversity in a new feminine-masculine partnership can overcome the marginalisation of the poor, the devastation of the eco-system and the alienating spiritual despair among so many young people. This new story offers hope through decentralised community and business projects that favour eco-sustainability in regions. This radical movement includes the respecting of indigenous cultures and ways of

moving to reconnect us to the universal sacred so that ethics is not just a static system but an evolving encounter with the sacred nature of work, family and citizenship. This is precisely the heart of Catholic Social Teaching. So far from the new cosmology taking us away from Catholic Social Teaching, it will reunite us with it in an ever more profound and compelling way.

This thinking is revolutionary for theology, spirituality, politics, sociology and economics. There is much work to do to find its full implications. This is the essential work of Christian professionals in all fields and a prime motivation for the reflection and practice of members of ICMICA federations.

This reflection highlights a critique of the study session. It was at once too centred on the philosophical, political and social analysis from an academic perspective and failed to offer a thoroughgoing theological (especially biblical) analysis of the Christian way to confront dominant systems of oppression; while also being less concerned with strategies for action in the world of ICMICA federations. However, this is more a note of what needs still to be done than a criticism of the meeting itself.



ACMICA delegate in Poland, Bill Neville  
Photo: KIK

### Ten Challenges for ACMICA

A number of issues emerged that I feel might be useful for ACMICA. I will list these as questions for reflection by our movement.

1. How will we relate to the International movement?

2. How will we find practical expression for our regional position in the movement – especially as our Convener Minh Nguyen is now a sub regional coordinator of the Asia Pacific ICMICA.
3. How can we contribute to the role ICMICA has as an NGO with the UN?
4. How do we more fully relate to the Catholic Church? This question emerges from a clear sense at the meeting that we are a significant member of the eight International Catholic Organisations (ICO) globally with close links to the Vatican, and the Vatican representative to the UN. Here in Australia we have little connection at all with the local church except as members of our parishes. How do we strengthen this both as a partnership and a challenge to the institutional church to be informed by lay groups experience as Catholics in the world and as professionals in the world?
5. What is ACMICA's relationship to IMCS at the International Regional and local level? This is an important question because we are sister organisations forming Pax Romana.
6. What is our relationship to YCS/YCW given the closeness with Pax Romana internationally?
7. Can we be involved in some of the permanent working groups of ICMICA, for example, the Jurists, Teachers, Gender, or Economists groups?
8. Can we publish either a small simple booklet ourselves or offer articles to be published in regional or international publications?
9. The Asia Pacific Regional Calendar: How can we stay in touch at the regional level? With Minh as a sub-regional coordinator can we try to get him to a meeting once a year OR offer to host a regional coordinators meeting in Australia. Both would require fundraising. The next meeting will coincide with the Asian Civil Society Forum in Bangkok (Nov 21 – 25); the ICMICA Asia Pacific meeting being from Nov 27 – 29.
10. What will the ACMICA Calendar be for 2005 – when ICMICA will be hosting many

events around the world to celebrate 40th Anniversary of *Gaudium et Spes*.

### Links:

Download information, programs and photos:

—● [www.kik.waw.pl/paxromana](http://www.kik.waw.pl/paxromana)

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## News and events

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## Election resources

### NetAct's 2004 Election Kit

The NetAct Kit has become a feature in recent elections. This year's Kit, titled *A Fair Deal for All: Your Vote can Make a Difference*, contains a range of material including hints on how to approach a local candidate or Member of Parliament, and a number of easy-to-read papers covering a wide range of socio-economic issues suitable for copying, distribution and discussion; and suggested alternative policies and action.

Download at:

—● [www.scan.org.au](http://www.scan.org.au)

### Vote [1] No More Poverty campaign

A campaign organised by a new coalition of faith-based social welfare and justice groups called Christian Community Services Against Poverty.

Visit:

—● [www.nomorepoverty.org.au](http://www.nomorepoverty.org.au)

### SAO's Vote for the Common Good campaign

The Social Action Office (SAO) of the Leaders of Catholic Religious Orders in Queensland's campaign aims to highlight the values that support the principles of the common good of all. People are encouraged to sign up to this campaign as means of being in solidarity with each other and those suffering most in our society.

Visit:

—● [sao.clriq.org.au/election\\_campaign.html](http://sao.clriq.org.au/election_campaign.html)