

RERUM NOVARUM LECTURE
Catholic Commission for Justice, Development and Peace
By Brian Burdekin

**Human Rights: the Present and the Future:
Youth and People with Mental Illness**

I am honoured to have been invited this evening to present the 1995 Rerum Novarum lecture and the topic that I have been asked to talk on, I mention that lest I stray from it which I have been known to do, but the topic I will try to focus my remarks around is Human Rights: The Present and the Future and Youth and People with Mental Illness. If I could just say a couple of words by way of introduction, it would be that I want to illustrate my principle themes this evening by referring in particular to those groups of people, particularly young people who are homeless and those who are mentally ill but I also want to, if I might, draw on the evidence that came out of those inquiries in relation to all age groups in our community and all people in our society who I believe are particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged. My next preliminary remark would be simply to say that I regard, having been raised by a father who was a clergyman and a mother, both of whom did their best, but I regard human rights, social justice and the principles of the gospel as essentially synonymous. I don't think that at this stage of our country's history anyway there need be much time spent debating whether in fact what we are talking about when we are talking about social justice, the inherent principles articulated in Rerum Novarum, or whether when we are talking about basic human rights that's the same thing, or whether in fact social justice, human rights and the essentials of the Christian message or indeed of any other major faith or denomination are essentially synonymous. Anyway that is one of my fundamental assumptions in my remarks this evening and I say that because I am aware that the Australian Catholic Church has recently begun a national social justice inquiry into young people and the future. My next preliminary remark would be that I would you to bear in mind if you would during what I am about to say that I think it is fundamental for us to understand and I am now wearing my hat as the Chairman of the Australian Youth Foundation, I think it is fundamental for us to understand that our young people are looking for leadership, they are looking for a value system, in some cases with a much greater sense of urgency, indeed desperation, than perhaps we realise. And I believe and I say this without presumption, and I hope without causing offence, that our churches have not only the right to assume a position of moral leadership on issues affecting the most vulnerable and disaffected in our community but indeed that we have an obligation and our churches and our church leaders have an obligation to accept that that is a legitimate role for the church, that beyond that indeed it is a moral obligation for the church, and that that obligation could find its expression not only in the delivery of services which are extremely important of course for the elderly, the frail, the vulnerable, the mentally ill, the homeless and so on but that that right and that obligation to articulate a values system and to provide leadership which I believe that many of our young people from my contact with them are desperate and looking for, that obligation to provide our young people with a values system must also extend into the realms of advocacy, and with no apology.

When I was growing up in the church that I grew up in, the church was committed to and I believe importantly so to the provision of services for the elderly. Since that

time many years ago, our churches got more involved with young people. But I believe one of the things and as I said I hope I don't cause offence when I say this, one of the things our young people are looking for is the sort of moral leadership which if you look around our community and that will be the other principle theme I want to address myself to this evening, if you look at our institutions you find that the church is particularly, perhaps peculiarly, perhaps uniquely placed to provide the sort of moral leadership in relation to the faith, the plight, the access to equality of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our community, the sort of leadership that is not coming from anywhere else. And I don't say that in an attempt to disparage any other institutions, I say that because that is my considered conclusion after forty-eight years on this mortal ...?..., eight years as human rights commissioner, and nearly five years as chairman of our national youth foundation. So I want to emphasize that I think that the role of providing leadership, that role of articulating what are fundamental rights, rights that are not only recognised in the realms of human rights, in the lexicon of social justice, but are recognised in the basic principle of the gospel. That role of advocacy as well as service delivery is fundamentally important and I don't want to trespass into areas that are not my preserve to comment on but you would have to not read the media, not to know, that has been an issue in some of our major service institutions, welfare institutions and society in Australia in recent times and some of those include organisations associated with the Catholic Church.

I welcome a very vigorous debate, I think it is very important, I think our young people in particular are looking for very vigorous debate on where our ideas, our ideals and our value systems in this society come from. I want to now turn to what I believe to be the fundamental reason for that. I should make clear that any remarks I am about to make I am calling on a number of reports, including perhaps most recently the report that was compiled by People Together and Catholic Social Services on psychiatric services in this mighty state of Victoria. I am also drawing on a report called Being Young and Homeless, a recently published report by the Salvation Army. I am drawing on a third report called A Lost Generation which is a report that we compiled at the Australian Youth Foundation after interviewing between seven and eight hundred of our young people right across Australia in every state and territory. And finally if you will forgive me, I am drawing on the reports on homeless children and mental illness that I spent seven or eight years compiling.

If my assumption is correct that our young people are looking for moral leadership and are searching for a value system, and as I said I welcome the fact that the Catholic Church is embarking on a report, on an inquiry on this, then I think we need to look not only at human rights and social justice at the level of the individual and at the level of our community, I think we have a fundamental obligation as Australians, as Christians, as Jews, as whatever, to look at our institutions and by that I mean our political institutions, our legal institutions, our educational institutions, our religious institutions, our industrial, our bureaucratic institutions, I we have a fundamental right and with respect that our churches have a fundamental obligation to look at the adequacy of our institutional structures in an endeavour to find out why it is that hundreds of thousands of Australians who are mentally ill, who are homeless, who have dual and multiple disabilities, some of the areas I want to focus on in a moment, why it is that hundreds and hundreds of thousands of our fellow Australians are still deprived, what my father used to call the work of the human soul in terms of their dignity and their own worth of individuals, why are they deprived of that in what by

any standards is one of the wealthiest countries on God's earth. And I want to make that point very clearly because we are constantly told by our political leaders and sometimes by our bureaucrats that, yes the case is worthy or compelling but we don't have the resources. I have made this point before but I will make it again. I spend over twenty years in the foreign service, off and on, I have been in over one hundred countries we are enormously privileged nation. And I get very angry when I constantly see governments, it is particularly fashioned for state governments to say, we are OK you know Victoria is spending between 65 and 70 dollars per capita on mental health and we are \$4.00 a head a head of other Australians. So what? And as if that is a measure of our respect for basic social justice and human rights that we look at not what we are spending the money on and the results that we are achieving but some comparison with what is happening in New South Wales or Tasmania. That may be more relevant if we were one of the poorer countries on earth but as I said to a group in Queensland not long ago that state alone has the natural wealth and resources of fifty of the poorest countries in the world. Western Australia, the natural wealth and resources of about another forty or fifty of the poorest 180 or 190 countries in the world. We are an extraordinarily wealthy nation and we can afford and we must afford in terms of the principles of social justice, in terms of what I believe *Rerum Novarum* was about, but if we are really looking at what that embodies, what that entails, what the essential message of that is, then we must insist that our politicians and our bureaucrats are not sidetrack the public debate with what I regard as largely meaningless comparisons which I believe are illegitimate when you look at the natural wealth and the natural resources that this country has because I believe the parable of the talents. It is not only relevant to what we are born with in terms of our intellectual capacity, it is not only relevant to our wealth which if you like was the metaphor used in that parable, it is relevant to opportunity, our opportunity to contribute in a democratic society, to the debate about what is happening to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our community. It is relevant to authority, to power, now nobody is suggesting that the church, this church or any other church, should assume or subsume the role of political parties but in my view, and it is fundamental to my remarks this evening, the parable of the talents is as relevant to opportunity and to power as it is to wealth and IQ. And with the greatest of respect I want you to bear that in mind when I talk about our other legal, political and social institutions and what I believe to be the unique role of the church in articulating the fundamental right of every human being. The fundamental worth of every soul, if you like in religious terms. In advocating on their behalf, not just important as that is, and I am not in any sense denigrating the tremendously important work that is done in the delivery of services but in terms of articulating, in terms of advocating on behalf of those people.

Let me now turn to why I think that is fundamentally important. When I talk about our institutions I want first to turn to our democratic institutions. We are enormously fortunate to live in a democratic country. The ballot box is still a bit of a novelty in some other countries in this part of the world and indeed in many others. But our democratic institutions must not be, and there is an assumption abroad out there, that because we live in a democratic community it is reasonably fair. In my experience it is not because the mentally ill, the homeless, the indigent, those with dual and multiple disabilities, the intellectually disabled and I could go on, they are groups without much political power or in some cases when you look at the way in which our cake is divided up financially, you could be forgiven for thinking without any political power. Why do I say that? Well I guess I say it based by my own experience

in our federal bureaucracy, albeit in the foreign ministry, but perhaps more particularly as a former adviser to one of our former prime ministers and one of our former deputy prime ministers. I have seen our political system, I have been privileged to see it at close quarters. And if you don't believe that what I am saying is true just have a look at the debate on the environment, have a look at what public concern will do to the agenda and the focus on political issues and then translate that if you like to the argument about the resources that we are providing and not providing for the mentally ill.

Let me turn to that for perhaps a moment to look at the evidence. What we found in the mental illness inquiry and what I believe has very much come out of the recent inquiry that I referred to, the hearings that were conducted here in Melbourne, by Catholic Social Services and People Together. What came out of that inquiry was a picture that was not only scandalous and disgraceful it was chilling in terms of what it portrayed about the fundamental nature of a democratic society and its ability to ignore a particularly vulnerable, a particularly disadvantaged group. At the time when our report was tabled I was accused of being a bit antidotal and perhaps emotional and so on. It didn't matter particularly except it was an attempt in my view to distract the public debate from the enormity of the problems we had tried to portray. But six months later the government came out with its own report, the first national mental health report, in which it was admitted by government that 500,000 of our fellow Australians were affected by mental illness, serious mental illness each year, and 350,000 of them were receiving no help at all from either the public health system or the private health system. That is an outrageous state of affairs. The only reason in my view it has been allowed to continue and I believe on the evidence available to me that it is still very largely continuing, I mean there have been some small improvements in Victoria, there are some isolated patches which are great cause for optimism like the early psychosis research centre for young people in this state, and I applaud that and take my hat off to the people who run them, and I have been and inspected them and talked to those people, but by and large the situation is still grim. By and large we still have what we exposed in those hearings: dozens and dozens of people crammed into squalid, appalling places, with totally unqualified people handling out psychotropic medication and with many of them still ending up among the homeless. As I understand it the situation in this state, and the second national mental health report has just come out recently, that is another government publication, but as I understand it if you take that figure of 250,000 by the way, what I can tell you is that a disproportionately large number of those 250,000 Australians receiving no medical health at all in terms of private or public health care, a disproportionately large number are young people, a disproportionately large number are elderly people, and a disproportionately large number live in rural and isolated areas. Those three groups are particularly vulnerable. Bear in mind by the way, and I apologise if some of you have heard me say it before, the average age of the onset of mental illness is 16. Our community doesn't understand that yet. But it is fundamentally important. We did the mental illness inquiry because of the evidence that came out of the homeless children inquiry when we found that a disproportionately large number of our homeless young people either had intellectual disabilities, diagnosable mental illnesses which in many cases hadn't been diagnosed, serious mental health problems or a combination of the above. Now what we are looking at is a community which notwithstanding we have federal and state parliaments and democratic institutions, is as yet not conscious or conscientious or

conscientious about preserving in any real way the rights, not of a few dozen, not of a few thousand, not of tens of thousands, but of hundreds of thousands of our fellow Australians. I believe that is an outrage and I believe with the greatest of respect, our churches and our church leaders have a responsibility to call it what it is. I don't see how Christians, or people with any other religious faith for that matter, can see that sort of situation continue without getting up on the barricades, metaphorically speaking but perhaps literally if necessary, and demanding that our system changes fundamentally.

Theoretically, of course, if I can come to our legal institutions, our legal system should protect people from such basic violations of their rights, but it doesn't. Now let me say a few words about those which is probably one of the few areas I am actually qualified to talk about on this evening. I am a lawyer, I spent some years here in private practise with a Collins Street law firm before I joined the foreign service and I am still appalled with the legal system we have. I am proud of the fact that my profession as indeed I believe the medical profession and other professions are becoming more conscious of their social responsibilities. But the reality is that in this country, yes a democratic system but bear in mind that that has obviously got limitations from the evidence I just referred to, how much more did the common law system of which we as lawyers were told to be so proud during our university education, in my case just up the road at Melbourne University, how much more did legal system which is actually a system which is highly sophisticated when it comes to property and commerce and contract and protecting the above and essentially rudimentary when it comes to protecting the rights of the mentally ill or the homeless or the intellectually disadvantaged and God help those with dual and multiple disabilities and I will get to them in a minute.

You might ask why that is so. We haven't got time tonight to explore that suffice to say that this is supposedly one of the great legal systems of the world that developed over six or seven hundred years. The problems frankly lie in its history and in the class system which gave much more attention to property and privilege and commerce and contract than it gave to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged who very often were exploited by those in a position to do so. Now of course the church has a proud history in the main in allying itself with those underprivileged and vulnerable elements of society. But if you look at the history of the mentally ill you have to conclude that our democratic institutions did not protect them, our legal institutions did not protect them, far from it. The law responded to the plight of the mentally ill over the last couple of hundred years until very recently by essentially stripping them of all rights. Once they were certified they became a none person, you lost your rights to virtually everything, from testamentary disposition to control over your day to day finances, not to mention your liberty and so on. Now things have improved, we don't lock people up in nineteenth century deKensian institutions anymore but if you look at the evidence that came out of those recent hearings, here in Victoria, what you find is that of that 250,000 people between about 65,000 and about 80,000 would be Victorians. Between 65,000 and 80,000 of those 250,000 receiving no treatment live in this state. A very large percentage of those of course live in this city. Now we are starting to get to the real issue of, you know, Victoria's doing a bit better because it is spending \$67 or \$71 per capita on mental health whereas New South Wales is only spending \$55 or whatever. That is not the point. The point is that that is completely unacceptable if you regard people affected by mental illness as

having the same basic rights as others. Of course, young people are disproportionately affected which I will refer to a little bit more if we have time. What you have got is a situation whereby focussing on these per capita comparison, state to state comparisons, we miss the fundamental point. The fundamental point if you like in political terms or in human rights terms, or in social justice terms, or in terms of the Christian gospel is that mental health was so grossly underfunded for so long that you cannot possibly redress the situation which has grossly violated the rights of tens of thousands of individuals by tossing a few more dollars at it. There has to be a fundamentally increased allocation of resources and as I said I believe we can afford it. But let us have a look at what is actually happening, according to the information available to me and I instantly and readily and gratefully acknowledge my sources, which is the work done by Catholic Social Services and People Together. According to the information available to me in Victoria last year there was an \$18.4 million reduction in your mental health budget. A 5.8% decrease. Well how on earth do you justify that? Unless we got it totally wrong in the report on human rights and mental illness and unless the people involved in that more recent inquiry got it totally wrong, and unless the evidence I heard with my colleagues Dame Margaret Guilfoyle and David Hall when I came back here in November/December was totally wrong. What you have got in this state is still a system where people with dual and multiple disabilities have very few services, and God help them, most of them have no services at all.

Now let us just go back to the basic principles of the gospel, if I can assume you are familiar with those, and I am sure I can. One of the principles you would think, paraphrasing the gospel, is that in any community the most vulnerable, the most disadvantaged, the most needy should have first call or a high priority in terms of allocation of resources. Now what did we see during the mental illness inquiry? What did we see during the reconvened inquiries in November? What did Catholic Social Services and People Together see when they looked at the issue? What you see is a situation which is not only anomalous, it is outrageous. And that is a situation where it is precisely that group of people, those with dual and multiple disabilities, those with an intellectual or developmental disability as well as a mental illness or a mental health problem, those with a physical disability as well as a mental illness, it is precisely those groups for whom there are no services or pathetically few services. Our democratic system hasn't protected them, our legal system hasn't protected them, you begin to see, I think, why at least in my perception the role of the church is critical. Who is advocating on behalf of these people? Is it the legal profession? Well as I said I am proud of the fact that my profession is starting to come out of the burrows a bit more, but sometimes with the greatest respect, and I have said this in my own church for twenty years and they got sick of me saying it, sometimes I think our churches, our religious leaders, need to articulate in a very forceful way, in a role which indicates that advocacy is fundamental to the rights and the plight of the homeless and the mentally ill. In a way that indicates that social justice will not come simply by the delivery of services and ministering to the homeless and the sick and the poor and the afflicted is, in my view, both delivering services to those who are presently affected and changing the social and political agenda. So that we don't have this outrageous system where hundreds of thousands of our fellow Australians in an affluent country are left with no assistance at all and their carers, you ought to have a look at the evidence about the carers and there would be plenty here tonight because mental illness affected one in five people sooner or later. That means just about every

family sooner or later is touched by mental illness. What do we give the carers? In our inquiry we found very little. Not much in the way of respite care. I think you will find that what has come out recently in terms of Catholic Social Services and the People Together inquiry is that the situation in relation to respite care and services hasn't improved, I may be wrong, I hope I am. No doubt if this gets into the media some Victorian minister or the Premier or somebody will tell us tomorrow that the situation isn't as bad as we think but I am looking at the evidence, I am not looking at what ministers say about what is anecdotal or emotional, I am looking at the evidence of what is happening to people, what is happening to our fellow Australians who are the most vulnerable, who are the most disadvantaged and I can tell you that of all the groups, people with dual and multiple disabilities must fit into that category if you like, I don't mean to categorise them and it is precisely those people for whom there are, as I said, pathetically few services or none. Just let me give you one more illustration, I have got to be careful not to get bogged down in the evidence but what we found was that services for the homeless didn't want to deal with the mentally ill and services for the mentally ill didn't want to deal with people who were substance abusers. But if you look at the fact that mental illness exacerbates the tendency to homelessness and homelessness in turn doesn't help you mental health state and if you have a propensity for mental illness, homelessness is not going to help it, what we found is that among homeless people seventy to eighty per cent of them were substance abusers, be it alcohol, or uppers or speeders or downers or a combination of the above. And the substance abuser, if you looked at the evidence, and I am not being a bleeding heart, they were substance abusing because it was in most cases their way of coping with the very difficult symptoms of a very painful condition. And yet the detox services didn't want to deal with the people who were mentally ill and the services for the mentally ill didn't want to deal with people who were substance abusing. You wonder why we have got the highest youth suicide rate in the world, I can tell you one of the reasons and I will come to another one in a minute, one of the reasons is that at an institutional level, notwithstanding our extensive federal and state bureaucracies, we have thus far been basically incapable of designing and delivering services which actually in some holistic way meet the needs of the most disadvantaged groups and I don't believe that is good enough and I don't believe for a moment that we can't do a lot better. We can. Yes, there is now more CAT(?) teams. Yes there is now more mobile units but have a look at the size of demand, have a look at the number of people who need these services, have a look at the resources being allocated and you would have to ask some pretty serious questions about whether we can be diminishing the resources allocated. And what I am suggesting to you tonight is that is all our responsibility, every one, and our leaders responsibility to advocate on behalf of these people because one of the paradoxes of democracy is that A, those groups aren't represented in many ways, and B, very often they are the least able to advocate on their own behalf. It is very important that we empower them to advocate on their own behalf, but in the meantime we need to be in there and I suggest stay in there helping them. So I must say that in terms of the mentally ill, the latest evidence about what is happening in this state I don't think gives a lot of reason to believe that we have fundamentally addressed the issues.

If I can turn for a moment to our young people who are homeless, by way of illustrating the theme. this evening. What we found in the homeless children's inquiry was basically pretty tragic. At the time again I was told that I had exaggerated the numbers. I note with interest that the most recent research, including that one here in

Victoria by a couple of your academics indicates basically they agree with the figures. Nobody is certain, I made it clear that I wasn't certain. But whether the numbers are 20,000 or 25,000 or 13,000 or 19,000 or 21,000 in sense I think is not the point. We quantify the issue as best we can but we don't step back from delivering services to a group of young people who in terms of this latest report that was released just a couple of weeks ago again by the Salvation Army found exactly the same sorts of things that we found in 1989. It is not that we are not aware of this problem. What we found was, and what we found was among the most common causes of young people being homeless, and there is still a myth out there that if they wouldn't run away there wouldn't be a problem, among the three most common causes were the absence of one parent usually dad, gone, left home, secondly domestic violence either against the mother usually or against the children, and thirdly drug and alcohol substance abuse. And in domestic violence I include unfortunately physical and sexual abuse of children. Now I want to put this in context again in terms of our institutions and what I am suggesting is that it is our responsibility as voters in a democracy to question the adequacy of institutions that don't protect large numbers of children who have been physically or sexually abused, that provide adequate shelter and succour for the homeless particularly when they are minors, that don't provide the sort of basic services that we can afford to provide. The bottom line is that the evidence in the homeless children's inquiry, the latest evidence in the Salvation Army inquiry is that in most cases you can't blame the children. Much and all as it might be comfortable for adults in our community to say these are rebellious, difficult children, the evidence is that our society has changed in the space of one generation, it has changed a lot this century but in the last generation from about the mid seventies to the early nineties it has changed dramatically. Again I apologise if some of you have heard me say this before but the fact is we went from a situation in the mid seventies where we had about 170,000 single parent families to situation by the early nineties where we have nearly 500,000. In one generation we trebled the number of families where there is only one adult carer. I am not being judgemental, in fact very large numbers of those single parents, most of whom are mothers, do a tremendous job in tremendously difficult circumstances. But look at it from the point of view of the children for a change. From the point of view of the children we went from the situation where we had perhaps 400,000 or 500,000 children with only one adult carer on a regular basis to a situation where we have nearly a million. And when the politicians said to me, oh commissioner you couldn't be serious we only have 20,000 to 25,000 homeless children, I said O really. Have a look at the latest research in the United States which indicates in families where the adult male is not the natural father of the young women in the family the incidence of sexual abuse goes up 5 to 600%. We haven't done that research here yet. I am sad to tell you that when we do I am quite sure that the results in Australia will be very similar. Our societies are not that dissimilar that that pattern will be different. It is pretty disturbing when you think that eighteen months ago when I was ..?.. for Frankston, in what used to be called the Frankston and Melbourne growth corridor, 70 to 80% of the children in that area were from non-traditional, non-nuclear families. I am not suggesting that we force families to stay together, what I am suggesting is that we have a responsibility and our churches have a responsibility to articulate the needs of these young people and to advocate on their behalf, if we have state welfare systems that are grossly inadequate to the task that we are entitled to expect them to perform. And we have a collective responsibility for that and it a commensurately heavy responsibility when we are talking about children who in many cases are relatively defenceless. And just to finish off on a legal institutions, I

think we have got to be very careful of believing that we live in a society, democracy, where our independent judiciary must be reasonably fair, look the reality is, unfortunately, a lot of the time my profession and sometimes politicians think if we just reform the law that will take care of the problem. Well that is rubbish. As some of us have been warning for years if you bring in mandatory reporting of child abuse that is fine but if you don't put in place the resources to care for the children who are being abused it is effectively fraudulent. You haven't achieved anything, in some cases you have probably achieved worse than nothing by taking children away from homes albeit very imperfect homes where they are being abused, to what? I mean what is happening around Australia and it is happening in this state is that in a number of cases the children are simply being flick passed to crisis refuges. Governments are stepping back from the problem and expecting churches and charitable and voluntary organisations to take up more of it. We don't make kids state wards any more. If you look at the figures you will find that a decade ago we had about 10,000 and now we have got about 5,000 but the question is what are we doing with these children whose families in many cases have simply disintegrated underneath them. And the answer is quite frankly, as some of your Victorian judges have pointed out and I applaud them for it, even though they get abused by government for doing so, what you have got is a system where some of the most vulnerable children in our society are left bereft of the sort of support that we as a community can afford to provide but we get away with some superficial cheap option, bring in mandatory reporting laws and don't give the professionals in the system, many of them who are working very hard, the resources to them somehow adequately place those children in situations where they will have some sort of caring, loving, nurturing environment.

I guess in a sense a lot of this evidence is anecdotal. It is anecdotal in the sense, that I mention this in terms of our institutions, it is anecdotal in the sense that it is what the people tell us, tell us at the Human Rights Commission, or tell us at the Youth Foundation. But one of the great strengths of the church, I believe, is that it is an institutions which at the same time is an institution but is of course as we so often hear from the pulpit and rightly so, is the people within it, that's the institution. Well maybe we need to reflect that a little more in terms of the advocacy role that we all assume and our leaders perform in terms of promoting, guaranteeing, demanding respect for the basic rights for the people I have just been talking about. Because if I can turn for a minute to another illustration, elderly people with dementia. There are churches in this state closing down facilities for elderly people, purpose designed facilities for elderly people with dementia, because the government won't fund them because some nitwit in Canberra has convinced the relevant authorities that we need now are generic services, all has got to be generic. Rubbish all you have to do is look at the evidence about elderly people with moderate disability dementia and you will understand that it is fundamental for the respect of their rights and other elderly people in an institution that you design purpose-design facilities to care for them where they can wander, where they rummage, without injuring themselves or without upsetting people. But that's not the current trend in Canberra or in some states but the churches know because the churches are funding a number of the organisations and programs and facilities that are looking after those people. Therefore, I believe the church not only has the obligation, it has the right, to figuratively stand up on its hind legs and demand that government do better. And I believe we have to do that, I believe we have to change the situation whereas we found in that inquiry there is not a lot we can do about dementia yet, sadly, but we can do an awful lot about serious

depression and yet what we found in that inquiry was that serious depression affects twice as many elderly people as does dementia. There are thousands of them out there in this state, thousands of elderly Victorians affected by serious clinical depression receiving no treatment, you know why, they haven't been diagnosed. You know why? Because we didn't really train our doctors a lot in mental health and I am not blaming the doctors I am blaming our system. Just like we didn't train people like me in individual rights and social justice perhaps as much as we ought to have. But it is an inexcusable tragedy that thousands, tens of thousands, of elderly Australians affected by clinical depression are living in quite painful conditions and it is a painful condition, not because they have to, in the majority of cases we can treat clinical depression among the elderly pretty successfully, but as the medical profession now acknowledges, or at least the leaders of the profession that I have spoken to do, it is a question of focusing our resources and saying wait a minute, mental health, mental illness, this is a serious issue, we can't marginalise these people as we have done. We can't discriminate against them as we have done. We can't allow our institutional structures, bureaucratic, political, democratic to ignore them as we have done. But I believe from the evidence I have looked at for the last years our current institutional structures will not deliver that result without the intervention of our churches. Because we have got a long time for the rest of the institutions to get it right and they haven't.

Let me say a few words about our educational institutions because the evidence, or the information available to me, suggests that in Victoria the current policies mean that basically schools are being expected to raise more of their own money which might be fine if the schools are in relatively affluent areas but what about the schools in the poorest areas raising money from the private sector. What about the evidence in the homeless children's inquiry, which led us to recommend very strongly that we had to have in each school a properly qualified counsellor, we had to have resources, we had to have vocational advisers in our school systems, how do we seriously think we can go on as we are at the minute to a situation where those resources are actually decreasing in some of the most disadvantaged schools and think we are going to change the fact that we have got the highest youth suicide rate in the western world. Any government that doesn't see the connection between those two things isn't in my view trying very hard. And you don't do what, with the greatest of respect to the Minister, who hasn't invited me to lunch recently but who did a few months ago, I went the first time, I didn't go the second, but when I talked about one these scurrilous places we inspected where the janitor, the maintenance man was handing out psychedelic drugs to nearly a hundred people, the answer I got from system would say well that is the private sector. We are not responsible for that it is private sector, I said yeah but hang on a second, we have closed down the big institutions, we have de-institutionalised the people and I hearing in camera evidence because the officials concerned were too scared to say it publicly because they thought that they would get the sack, I am hearing that they have nowhere to refer these people to. There is literally nowhere else for them in the state to be placed except in these scungy, rundown boarding houses, so I said how can you say this is not the government's problem. You have privatised the human rights of these people, you have closed down the big institutions, have saved the money over here and now they are living over here and the church and charitable and voluntary organisations are supposed to be looking after them and it is not the government's problem. Well in my view that is a negation of what democracy and social justice and human rights and Christian principles are

about. I don't care what government's say, yes they are democratically elected and yes they have a right once they are elected to govern for their term but they also have an obligation to respect and protect the fundamental rights of each individual in the community and in particular, in my view, they have a heavy obligation to respect and protect the fundamental rights of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in the community - and that they are not doing. It is not just in Victoria. And I don't think we are going to change that balance in society unless and until some of our institutional structures start taking a more vigorous role in the area of advocacy. And that is my fundamental message this evening if I might presume. I have said it to psychiatric nurses, I have said it to the Uniting Church in Parramatta the week before last and I will keep saying it. I do not believe we as professionals, we as Christians, or we as any particular denomination have the right simply to provide services, that is very important, it is fundamentally important but we have to change that social matrix so that as our society evolves we do not continue to produce a situation where we are constantly sticking band-aids on the problems at the end of the equation because there will never be enough band-aids and it is not true that we don't have the resources to do a lot more at the front end of the equation. What is true is that we are just not doing it. We need to do a lot more by the way of early intervention and prevention and we can do a lot about that. I guess in conclusion our young people, in my experience and we talk to a lot of them at the Youth Foundation, are looking for leadership, they are looking for a values system, they are wanting to do that within a cohesive society. Most of the young people I know do want a job, they don't want to be marginalised, discriminated against, stuck over here, become the subject of law and order campaigns every time a state election runs around, wonderful isn't it. I am going to launch a report shortly from the Youth Foundation about young people and police powers, but the only time we seem to hear much about it by way of public debate and it is often not terribly elevating in my view, is when state elections come round and we look at law and order campaigns which in my view sometimes, perhaps, portray our young people as a social problem and garner votes, one would think or apparently some parties think, by getting tough. Well I have got to tell you that all the evidence I have ever seen, I will never forget Lionel Bowen saying to me when I first started working for him, you know he said I looked at Long Bay, I said the most disturbing thing I found, that was when he was a state politician, was that 60 or 70% of all the people in there are come under notice of the law when they were twelve or thirteen. And that tell you something about the way in which we deal with young people who are disadvantaged. The profile that we found about young people in prisons during the mental illness inquiry was very much the same as the profile of young people who were seeing a psychiatrist who came from wealthier families. There are a lot of young people locked up who are actually either emotionally very troubled or have serious problems. I am not suggesting that if they break the law there shouldn't be a sanction, what I am suggesting is the evidence in that inquiry that a number of them were taking their own lives because they couldn't get treatment, the evidence here in Victoria that a number of them were being incarcerated because they couldn't get treatment, I felt sorry for the young police constable who gave evidence. The acting police commissioner tried to stop it the night before, I had to appeal to the Premier over his head to get the evidence given. That tells you something about the way bureaucratic structures respond. And she gave some of the most moving evidence I have ever heard about how they were having to constantly lock up young people who were mentally ill because there was nowhere else to put young people. And what did we find in the inquiry? Something like 70,000 or 80,000 Australian young people

with mental health problems and a handful of beds across the country. Just a handful. And that is why in some cases they are taking their own lives, in some cases they are ending up in gaol instead of getting effective treatment.

I haven't said anything about the unions. I have been in a union, probably most of us have, most of us still are probably. The problem with the mental illness inquiry was that it demonstrated that some of the unions had been very successful particularly in this state in protecting the jobs of their members and not very successful in protecting the rights of the patients. The classic was Lakeside, I think, up at Ballarat where in a decade they de-institutionalised about 750 of 1,000 patients. An outfit which cost \$20 million a year to run. A decade later there are only 260 patients out of 1,000, it is still costing \$20 million a year to run. Ninety-eight and a half percent of the money, of that \$20 million, was still locked up in the institution even though seventy-five percent of the patients had gone out into the community. And what we found repeatedly in that inquiry was that community based care, and I am afraid this is still to a very significant extent the case in Victoria and other states, community based care very often boiled down to mum, grandma, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law or one of the women in the family. So governments saved a lot of money by closing down these big institutions but instead of the money going into the community very often it went into consolidated revenue, or, and I think the Premier said subsequently that what I had said was correct, the unions had protected the jobs of their members but nobody had protected the rights of the people who had gone into the community. Seventy-five percent of the patients out there, 1 1/2 % of the funds had followed them. That is why you are still finding homeless people wandering around mentally ill.

Ladies and gentlemen, what I guess I wanted to convey this evening in particular, was that our institutional structures in terms of the fundamental message in *Rerum Novarum*, our institutional structures are still in my view seriously inadequate to the responsibility of protecting the rights of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our community. That gives us all a responsibility as individuals, in particular it gives us a responsibility to our children and young people, who in many cases are not yet able to advocate for themselves. But it gives, I believe, those of us who are in church organisations, a responsibility to also look to the institutional structures, in terms of their ability to project a message, and I am aware that that's controversial in some quarters, but we simply cannot go on looking at the sort of evidence that I have given you a thumbnail sketch of this evening, and in any sense accepting that that is adequate of affairs in a society, in a country as wealthy as this, it is simply unacceptable. So as the church proceeds with this national social justice inquiry into young people and the future, I believe the young people will respond, I believe they will respond to any church which provides moral leadership, advocacy on behalf of the vulnerable and the disadvantaged, advocacy including when the politicians attempt to put down the church leaders for advocating on behalf of the vulnerable the disadvantaged. It is a sad thing about our society, that very often when the sort of gross inadequacies that I have pointed out are pointed out, our bureaucracies go into defensive mode instead of saying yes that is a serious problem. They say you must be exaggerating, it couldn't possibly be that bad. I would like to conclude by saying I think that series of hearings that was conducted in this state by People Together and by Catholic Social Services I think was very important in two senses. One in an immediate sense in terms of the plight of those people and what they identified as

problems very similar to those we'd identified. But secondly, and perhaps more importantly in terms of the broader agenda this evening, I think it is very important as an example of precisely the sort of advocacy and identification of issues, and engendering informed public debate about those issues which the church is not only capable of, in my view it has a right to engage in a moral responsibility to engage in and should never apologise for. I think if our young people see that coming from our churches and from our religious organisations they will respond in a way that will surprise us because so many of them are looking for a values system, are looking for moral leadership and in my experience are extremely idealistic about human rights, equality, social justice. They mightn't put a Christian label on it, they mightn't talk about the principles of the gospel but in terms of their notions of equity and fairness, frankly it amounts to virtually the same thing. So I believe the future in terms of the subject this evening, the future is relatively bright, in fact I believe it is very bright, if we as individuals and perhaps more importantly collectively in terms of a least the institutional structures of our churches can provide a vehicle for that sort of moral leadership, I think that will be one of the most fundamentally important things that can happen to translate the principles of Rerum Novarum into the sort of reality that we in Australia can well afford.

Thank you for your courtesy.