

Mixed ironies in Aboriginal issue

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THE healthy exchange between Catholic Frank Brennan, and Lutheran Noel Pearson on Aboriginal futures is full of irony.

Brennan argues Aborigines should learn lessons from the failings of materialist white Australia and not blindly follow the same path. Yet Brennan also says Aborigines must be part of modern Australia.

Pearson agrees, but believes the economic structure of Australian society is a godsend, and the material wealth that flows from full and unqualified participation in it, solves all social problems. Pearson's dogma demands Aborigines follow suit and if not, laws banning alcohol and welfare payments to Aboriginal people are a legitimate tool to make them do so. So much for freedoms.

Pearson slams leftist do-gooders, meddling priests and "old Catholic, Labor social justice tradition". This is a probably a misreading of Power Without Glory, because the only old Catholic policy most Aborigines know of was how the old Catholics tried to take away our children and christianise us to make us white. Brennan's views, while condescending, reflect the new Catholic social justice approach, not the old.

Pearson says "our fundamental goal is complete and equal social and economic inclusion". He embraces assimilation as a goal. If Brennan had said the same thing he might have been labelled patronising, or worse, racist. Pearson's "final solution" is frightening. Brennan's is little better.

Both ignore the issue of Aboriginal sovereignty, and the denied right of Aborigines to govern ourselves. Both agree others should continue to govern Aborigines.

So where is their real disagreement?

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