

# Cross Current



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## Chindogu

For twenty years, writer Kenji Kawakami has been collecting useless and unusual inventions he calls *chindogu*, Japanese for “weird tool”. Pronounced *chin-doh-goo*, these are inventions that actually exist but are not for sale because — even if they were — nobody would buy them. They’re absurd, impractical and embarrassing to use.



Even so, *chindogu* is wildly popular all over the world. There’s even an International Society of *Chindogu*, complete with rules for eligible inventions. First, patents are not allowed. “If the idea’s worth stealing, it isn’t *chindogu*,” says the Society. A prototype must exist but it can’t be sold, and each invention must “challenge the suffocating dominance of utility”.

Among the most popular inventions is the *Commuter’s Helmet*. A red hard hat that straps to the user’s head, the helmet features a small toilet plunger that sticks to the window of a train or bus, to prevent the traveller from toppling over while asleep. A handy-dandy card attached to the forehead lists the user’s destination so fellow travellers can wake the commuter at the proper stop.

Then there’s the *Body Umbrella*, which looks like an ordinary umbrella, except — when open — it has a full-length, clear-plastic sheet hanging from it, to surround the user’s entire body. Or how about the *Baby Mop*, a specially designed outfit that turns every child into a duster as they crawl around the floor. For those with cats instead of kids, there are four *Dust Booties* that do the same thing.



**Why was the tomb  
of Jesus like a  
giant Easter egg?  
It was empty inside.**

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Athletes who don’t want to run outside can get the *Velcro Jogger*. A specially-designed set of shoes has male “hook” velcro on their bottoms, and a small mat features female “loop velcro on the surface. When the jogger runs on the spot, on the mat, the resistance caused by the two sets of velcro provides quite a workout!

For the environmentally sensitive, there are small, tubular *Filtered Nose Plugs* that come with a charcoal filter inside. And budding chefs who worry about cutting their fingers while chopping vegetables can find the *Hand Protector*, a realistic-looking, silicone “hand” that holds the food closest to the knife while you cut.

Preposterous, perhaps. But, regrettably, many people see the church as ecclesiastical *chindogu*: quaint and mildly interesting, but ultimately useless and unrelated to real life. But we must share the blame. Too often, we’ve focussed on minor, largely irrelevant issues, most of them related to budgets, real estate and denominational traditions.

Instead, the anxious world around us needs to see the radical, life-changing power of love, faith and genuine community that’s found in Jesus and the working of the Holy Spirit. People must be shown how a close, consistent relationship with God brings to life the crucial values of purpose, meaning and significance. They need to experience the security and peace of mind that comes of knowing they’re loved and accepted by a church family who’ll be there when things get tough. We have much to share.

But if believers continue to bicker and belabour the irrelevant, people in the pews will need a variation of the *Commuter’s Helmet* for sermon time, Satan and the skeptics will mop the floor with us, and we’ll get as far on the road to spirituality as we would on a *Velcro Jogger*.

There’s a time to deal with church business, but Jesus didn’t come to make us busy. He came to make us whole and holy, to bring us “*the abundant life*”, one that’s “*rich and satisfying*” (John 10:10). When we experience his love, we’re filled with endurance, patience, joy and peace while qualifying for eternal life and love (Col. 1:11-13).

If there’s anything people today need, it’s a faith and a church that emphasize relationship and relevance. We need to live “*a life filled with love*”, which rises to God as a sacrifice, “*a sweet aroma*” (Ephes. 5:2). Otherwise, pass the *Filtered Nose Plugs*.

Rick Gamble