



National Council of
Churches in Australia
Social Justice Network

SOCIAL JUSTICE SUNDAY | 2007

IN WHOSE INTEREST?

australia as a global citizen

30 september 2007



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Message from the National Council of Churches in Australia

Isaiah had a vision. He looked forward to the day when swords are beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks (Isa 2:4). This state of peace happens when nations enter God's house to learn God's ways and the Lord's word goes out from Zion.

Do we share Isaiah's vision? The Word has gone out from Zion - Jesus Christ, the epitome of justice, mercy and compassion. Justice, mercy and compassion are values also shared by all Australians, irrespective of their faith. These values must inform and shape our practice of global citizenship.

Social Justice Sunday 2007 is an invitation for all Australians, nationally and individually, to reflect on our conduct in the world. It is a time to review our relationships with our global friends and neighbours. It is a time to be reconciled with our enemies, real or perceived. Australia cannot achieve its security and prosperity alone as our security and prosperity are guaranteed only by the quality of our relationships with others.

Christians are global citizens and disciples of the one Lord. As citizens, we are concerned that Australia acts consistently and responsibly as a global citizen when dealing with other nations concerning matters of security, commerce, human rights and the environment globally. As disciples we carry in our souls the marks of God's Kingdom, knowing that Australia's security and prosperity can be achieved only by working together with justice, mercy and compassion.

We call on all Australians to consider how we might live as responsible global citizens. We believe that everyone has a right to live with security and prosperity. We believe that global security interests are best served through vibrant international partnerships, an unshakable commitment to human rights and nonviolence, and an unwavering effort to limit weapons proliferation, particularly cluster munitions, landmines

and small arms. We believe that fair and just trade will foster the economic interests of all nations. We believe that climate change requires a comprehensive response from all levels of government, business and individuals to live more prudently. It is time for Christians to show how God's justice, mercy and compassion can help Australia become a better global citizen.

This statement has been endorsed as a public statement for the Social Justice Sunday 2007 by the following churches of the National Council of Churches in Australia:

Anglican Church of Australia
Churches of Christ
Coptic Orthodox Church (Sydney Diocese and affiliated regions)
Lutheran Church of Australia
Roman Catholic Church
Syrian Orthodox Church
Uniting Church in Australia

Social Justice Sunday 2007 turns the spotlight on the quality of Australia's relationships with our neighbours internationally. It considers how our political leaders present and represent Australia's interests abroad.

It asks Australia's Christians and our people as a whole three simple questions. Are our interests too narrow? Are they consistent with Christian values? How might Christian values inform Australia's practice of global citizenship

Using this booklet

For much of our history, Australians were a global people of sorts. We belonged to the British Empire but we insulated ourselves from the rest of the world through the protective barriers of trade, immigration and defence. Today, Australia's future rests in the quality of our global citizenship, with our relationships to the rest of the world. Our interests need to grow in the soil of peace and justice.

This booklet asks Christians and all Australians to consider our nation's future as a global citizen. It asks whether our political leaders need a new vision, particularly concerning our:

- approach to the United Nations
- pursuit of economic prosperity
- commitment to human rights
- attitude to climate change and
- approach to conflict, weapons control and nonviolence.

The chapters that follow are written to spark discussion and a brief study guide is provided to facilitate conversation. Supplementary information is provided on the National Council of Churches website at www.ncca.org.au. All the material in this booklet may be copied for group work.

The booklet also provides a range of theological resources. The exegetical notes are based on the Revised Common Lectionary for 30 September 2007 (Year C). Notes for the Old Testament readings are on the website, just follow the links.

Developing a vision for global citizenship is not as hard as it sounds. You and your community can:

1. Develop awareness about how we act as global citizens, nationally and individually. You are encouraged to read broadly and engage with other points of view. Take time to listen to the experience of others.
2. Reflect theologically about global citizenship and the way our interests are portrayed and pursued. This kit shines light from Scripture and Christian tradition on Australia's conduct internationally. Are we making good choices as a nation?
3. Determine a plan of action because people who make choices, make a difference. Develop two or three practical, achievable goals. Be flexible and try to include everyone as you develop a plan that might make a difference. Review your progress and celebrate your achievements as we rethink our interests in light of our commitment to being better global citizens.



What is global citizenship?

Citizenship is a symbol of identity and place in the world. It represents membership and belonging. It involves participation in public life through all our social, economic and political relationships.

Global citizenship does not mean promoting a integrated world government, either by the United Nations or anyone else. Rather, the idea reflects the emergence of a new global society since 1945.

A web of interlocking international agreements and institutions now frames national interests. This network informs and shapes the way national governments construe, pursue and promote their interests globally. Although each nation can be preoccupied with their security and prosperity, global citizenship points out that these interests can only be achieved by partnership with others.

All people, irrespective of their nationality or beliefs, share a variety of common interests, concerns and values. These values need to inform and shape all international relationships. They include a respect for life, liberty, justice and equity, mutual respect, caring, and integrity. It considers that poverty denies people their basic rights due to its profound health, educational and security consequences. Many Christians and our churches share these values, even if we express them differently.

Global citizenship involves making wise choices because our decisions affect the lives of others. It pushes us to consider the security interests of all people and the planet, not just our own limited interests. It leads governments to consider how trade rules include or exclude the world's poor. It presses people to consider our consistency in recognizing human rights. It encourages us to consider the quality of our partnership with indigenous people, who are global citizens too.

Corporations and many non-government organizations, including churches, also operate globally. They inform, organize and mobilize people across borders for a variety of purposes. As global citizens, corporations are increasingly mindful of how their activities impact the lives of people and their communities.

Individuals are global citizens too. Through our work, play and patterns of consumption we represent Australia. The contribution individuals make as global citizens is vitally important. Global citizenship requires that we think critically, respect people and living things, and value cooperation and peaceful means of resolving conflict.

Global citizenship raises many questions for Christians today. How do these values look in light of the life, death, resurrection, ascension and return of Jesus? What values consistently inform and influence government choices, decisions and policies? Do our political leaders apply these values consistently or selectively?

As Christians, we need to evaluate our commitment to global citizenship in view of God's interest in justice, mercy and compassion.

Theological Reflection

Margaret Hinchey RSM

The realities of global conflict, poverty, human rights abuses, climate change and weapons proliferation can appear overwhelming. Their burden falls inequitably across the world. The poor often suffer the consequences while the comfortable west profits from cheap prices for goods and services.

Two approaches may help us think about our responsibilities as global citizens, both as a nation and as individuals. Affluent Christians need to read Scripture differently and so recognize the poor more clearly. Affluent Christians need to recognize their complicity in systems that perpetuate poverty. We must develop new systems that promote justice globally.

Knowing God, *knowing* God

Jeremiah 22:15-16 compares King Jehoiakim to Josiah, his great father, and makes it clear that to know God is to do justice for the poor and needy.

Do you think you are a king
because you compete in cedar?
Did not your father eat and drink
and do justice and righteousness?
Then it was well with him.
He judged the cause of the poor and needy;
Then it was well.
Is not this to know me?
Says the Lord.

To know God is not necessarily to worship in church on Sunday, to pray every day or even to know the Apostles' Creed. One could do all those good things and still not know the God of the Bible. God will be known and found in the doing of justice. This involves making one's own the cause of the poor, in breaking with the systems of oppression, in joining the struggle of the victims.

We are continually enjoined to do justice as God does justice. When God does justice it is not modest or polite or understated. It is an act of powerful intervention. It is

like Moses in the court of Pharaoh insisting on freedom. It is like Nathan sent to David (2 Sam 12). It is like Elijah thundering against Ahab and Jezebel who had Naboth killed to get his land (1 Kgs 21).

God loves justice. God intervenes for the poor and weak against the powerful, those with too much (Ps 99:4). These passages demonstrate that justice is no holding action that maintains equilibrium. It is instead an active intervention that brings social transformation.

Jesus' ministry put flesh on God's passion for justice. He claims that his mission from God brings "good news to the poor." This theme, found in Luke 7 and Matthew 11, echoes Isaiah 61 and the 'acceptable year of the Lord', the jubilee, the year of reversals.

This is a direct and shattering message. The good news is for the poor and oppressed. It is liberation from bondage, whether political, economic, social or all three. Debts are to be cancelled, slavery annulled, vast holdings of land broken up and the world reconstructed.

As affluent Australians, we spiritualize this message too often by turning it inwards and applying it to everybody. Robert McAfee Brown, in his mind-changing book *Unexpected News: Reading the Bible with Third World Eyes*, argues that spiritualizing poverty as virtue takes the sting out of these biblical passages. The more spiritual we make it the less threatening the Bible becomes. As Thomas Cullinan put it "we were given the Gospel that was a wild tiger, we tamed it and domesticated it into a pussycat"!

The poor of the Bible were unambiguously poor. They were the defenceless ones who were spun off an ever-accelerating spinning economic and social wheel. They are people experiencing extreme poverty, even in our own society.

Poverty is our choice

Since the 18th Century, religion has been treated as a matter of private belief while politics was considered

a public matter. Many consider that religion and politics should never be mixed. However, daily life is never lived in isolation. Community values and ethical standards are integral to the practice of politics. Poverty is a structural problem that is notoriously resistant to change because of the values that sustain it.

Poverty in our world today is not simply a matter of misfortune, bad luck or accidental. Neither is it inevitable or due to laziness, ignorance or a lack of development. Poverty is the direct result of the political choices and economic policies made by many governments, corporations and individuals. Centuries of slavery and forced labour in Africa, Latin America and Asia have devastating results today. Policies that dispossessed Indigenous people from their land, broke up families and destroyed cultural norms are global problems. The legacy of poverty in Australian Indigenous communities means that poverty is a political problem, a matter of injustice and oppression.

It used to be thought that giving aid and money to charities could solve global poverty. This is not true. Charity has its place and we are always called to offer it to the needy. However, the endemic and overwhelming poverty in Africa and Asia has to do with a lack of justice in social systems and structures. Those that exist were often established and maintained by a few to gain wealth for their own advantage.

It's easy to blame others for global poverty. Individually and nationally we inadvertently profit from the exploitation of others through many of the basic goods we take for granted. The coffee we drink, the clothing we wear, the electrical equipment we use are produced overseas because of low labour costs. The packaging never shows the sub-standard working conditions.

As individuals, we never consciously exploit or act unjustly towards anyone. However, if wages and conditions are poor or even downright dangerous then an injustice has occurred and we are implicated in it as consumers. This is what is meant by social sin. It calls for greater personal awareness and the kind

of conversion Jesus called for when he criticized the rich and powerful, not of malice but of 'blindness' and 'deafness'.

Micah's challenge

Most Christians are familiar with the beautiful text from the prophet Micah 6:8

This is what the Lord requires of you, only this: To do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.

Micah is the voice of the poor crying out against an unjust order. The remedy offered in verse 8 is a call to know and to be in good relationship with our God.

What the Lord requires are not three virtues or things to do. Rather, they speak of three dimensions to a life of faithfulness, each of which depends on and is reinforced by the others.

To love kindness means to enter into relationships of abiding solidarity with our 'neighbour' or anyone who suffers. It is to make commitments and to keep them. To walk humbly with God can mean to be mindful of God's power but it can also be understood as saying that God's walk is humble and imitation means that we must also walk humbly. The solidarity of God's loving kindness is not a powerful overriding solidarity but a patient, attentive, waiting, hoping solidarity. God's loving kindness is not only an act of humble solidarity. It is an active intervention that changes things. So we are called to do justice as God does justice.

Why does extreme poverty persist in our affluent world and what does it say to Christians and the Christian Churches? To know God in the scriptural sense is to do justice for the poor and oppressed. To do justice is to confront the systems and structures that make and keep people in poverty. It entails taking political, economic and social action in myriad ways in our everyday lives and in the life and work of our communities and churches.

Australia's Role in a Globalised World

John Langmore

SECTION

3

Globalization is changing the way nations interact and pursue their security interests. The time when states saw themselves as adversaries engaged in eternal confrontation is slowly passing away. Governments are realizing that national interests are best achieved through a stronger commitment to the principles and values of global citizenship.

A networked world

Globalization means many things to many people. It is not merely the emergence of global communication systems, a global culture or even the economic integration of nations through financial markets and systems. It refers to the web of linkages that are changing the way nations identify and pursue their interests.

Traditionally, a nation's international relationships were a story of rivalry, confrontation and conflict. Nations defined themselves by their territory, sovereignty and autonomy. Their borders were fixed and within them the government had exclusive authority to make decisions about social, political and economic life.



Today, these defining features are being transformed by the networked world. Borders are increasingly porous to the flow of goods, ideas and people. Authority is increasingly shared between regional, national and global institutions. Our claims to national autonomy are adjusted as interdependence grows through multilateral cooperation and collaboration. In a networked world, could Australians live as better global citizens?

Rethinking security

Political leaders often portray the world as an uncertain and insecure place. Our leaders believe that the greatest challenges to Australia's national interests come from those opposed to liberal democracy and resentful of the inequalities from globalization.

In response, our leaders continually seek to strengthen our alliance with the US. Our leaders have endeavoured to confront terrorism domestically, regionally and globally using force. Nations like North Korea and Iran who flout international law and UN Security Council resolutions are challenged. Closer to home, it meant helping South Pacific nations tackle corruption and develop better governments.

These strategies raise many questions about how Australia exercises its global citizenship. Are these strategies really the best way for our nation to achieve its security interests? Have our leaders left something out?

I believe that it is time to rethink our role in the world. Australians' security would be improved by consistently supporting a rule-based international system. Countries need to be drawn into cooperation through the United Nations for the security, peace and justice of all. The achievement of many goals requires effective intergovernmental cooperation. Without such cooperation, how can an avian flu pandemic be prevented or the drugs trade controlled? Without collaboration how can we control greenhouse gases or prevent nuclear proliferation?

The major issue for Australia is whether we will develop a stronger commitment to the principles of international cooperation or continue to follow the current American administration uncritically.

The invasion of Iraq without UN Security Council approval left the world without an agreed approach to minimizing the scourge of war. If the US can preemptively attack another country that is not an immediate threat, why can't others? The former UN General Secretary, Kofi Annan, proposed an initiative to address this illegality. He suggested a Security Council resolution setting conditions before use of military force. The US, Australia and others rejected it. As no country has repudiated the UN Charter, a legal framework exists to deal with conflict however it is weak while the US, Australia and others are inconsistent in their UN commitments.

Multilateral engagement does not require renunciation of our alliances. A large majority of Australians want to maintain the American alliance but many also want Australia to adopt a more independent stance. True friendship involves acting in the full interest of the friend rather than simply acquiescing with whatever they wish. The world would be a safer and more humane place if the US and Australia complied with their treaty obligations. Good international citizenship requires adherence to treaty commitments. Just peacemaking involves working with those who are attempting to resolve problems fairly.

We must engage more consistently in multilateral forums if we are committed to resolving major global issues. It takes real strength to advocate commitment to the international rule of law. It takes real determination and leadership to foster equitable development in order to increase our contribution to global peace and justice. Renewed multilateral engagement would have many obvious consequences for Australian international policy. What might a multilateral approach achieve on following issues?

Terrorism

The threat of terrorism needs to be put in perspective, if only because it generates exaggerated fears. A sophisticated, multifaceted strategy is required to tackle terrorism.

There is no dispute that we need effective homeland defence and to pursue terrorists and their supporters. This necessitates working closely and carefully with our neighbours. However, their security forces can actually cause as much trouble as they resolve.

We also need to patiently address the genuine political repression, corruption and exclusion, which generate grievances and produces militant reactions. The injustice, poverty and despair prolific throughout the Middle East, Africa and parts of Asia need far reaching programs for social, political and economic development and reform. The best way to overcome terrorism in the long-term is simply to act justly.



Nuclear proliferation

The authoritative Blix Commission on Weapons of Mass Destruction (June 2006) argued persuasively that, “so long as any state has such weapons – especially nuclear arms – others will want them. So long as any such weapons remain in any arsenal, there is a high risk that they will one day be used, by design or accident. Any such use would be catastrophic.”

The Commission sought to outlaw nuclear weapons by proposing a number of incremental steps. Such steps included taking all nuclear weapons off high-alert status and making deep reductions in numbers of nuclear weapons. The production of weapons grade material could be prohibited and all nuclear states urged to make no-first-use pledges. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty could be brought into force and the commitments of all parties to the non-proliferation treaty reinforced.

Australia’s role in this global survival strategy must include being a strong advocates of the Blix Commission’s strategies. It is important to sustain the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty and continue to rigorously monitor how our uranium exports are used. If uranium mining expands, Australia should refuse to sell to countries which have not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, such as India, or which do not comply with Treaty provisions.

The arms race

Military expenditure continues to grow rapidly. The major powers are upgrading dated weapon systems to ensure their military superiority. President Bush asked the US Congress to approve A\$780 billion in the 2008 budget. This is over half of total global military expenditure. Part of this increase includes the construction of a missile defence system in Europe. Missile defence, directed against rogue states, threatens to spark an unnecessary new arms race globally. China and Russia are responding with major increases in their

military outlays to ensure this defensive shield, which leaves them out in the cold, does not undermine their own security interests.

Australia is following a similar pattern of spending to secure military superiority in the region. Defence outlays were increased by \$2 billion in 2006-07 alone, an increase equivalent to two-thirds of the Australia’s total aid budget. Such military expenditure is of little use in combating terrorism.

For study and reflection

1. Read Amos 6: 1a, 4-7
2. Conversation starter. Get hold of a map of the world (Mercator’s Projection) large enough for the group participants to each mark the following on it:
 - Where they were born.
 - Where they have lived.
 - commitment to human rights
 - Places they have visited.

What does this say about the group’s experience of the world?

3. According to Amos, how did God view the strong nation of Israel? What undermined the ancient nation of Israel’s security? Are nations still liable for such judgment?
4. What security issues concern you the most? How effective is the current approach adopted or proposed by our political leaders? Can you identify alternative ways of addressing this matter? What could your church do to address these concerns?



Prosperity and Economic Justice

Tim O'Connor and Suzette Clark RSC

The 2007-08 Australian budget recorded the tenth surplus with an underlying value of \$10.6 billion. Unemployment is at a 30-year low. In the last 10 years and household wealth has doubled while wages have increased by 20%. We are one of the few developed nations to be federally debt free. Prosperity in our region has grown too. The proportion of people living in extreme poverty across Asia has fallen significantly in recent decades. Nevertheless, approximately 700 million or two thirds of people globally living on less than US\$1 a day are in Asia, often in the countryside.

How does our practice of global citizenship affected by such prosperity?

Is our commitment to international development sufficient? How widely are the benefits of global prosperity shared?

The Millennium Development Goals

In 2000, Prime Minister Howard joined with 188 other world leaders to sign the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a global action plan to halve extreme poverty by 2015. Eight goals were agreed:

- halve the proportion of people living with extreme poverty and hunger
- achieve universal primary education
- eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education
- reduce child mortality by two thirds
- reduce maternal mortality rates by three quarters
- halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- integrate sustainable development into national policies, improve access to safe drinking water and the lives of over 100 million slum dwellers
- develop global partnerships for development.

These goals tackle poverty by improving food security, educational opportunities, gender equality and health

outcomes that otherwise limited the security and prosperity of entire communities and countries.

Achieving the goals

In July we passed the halfway point to 2015. International institutions and aid donors have redefined their aid programs around the MDGs. Unfortunately, the Australian Government has not taken the goals so seriously.

A key target in achieving the MDGs is for all donor nations to spend 0.7% of their Gross National Income (GNI) on international aid. This equates to 70 cents in every \$100 earned in the economy. The proportion of giving by the Australian government declined from a high of 0.47% in the mid 80's to 0.33% in 1996 and 0.25% in 2004.



In 2005, the federal government agreed to increase Australia's aid budget from \$2.5 billion in 2004 to \$4 billion by 2010. Although the increase is welcome, current projections suggest that the level of aid in 2010 will only amount to 0.36% of GNI. This is just under half the target required to meet the MDGs. More disturbing is the suggestion by AidWatch that our national spending is inflated by about \$1 billion by including debt relief to Iraq and refugee assistance, including detention centres, in our aid budget.

The OECD average is approximately 0.46% of GNI, putting Australia well below average. Is this level of commitment sufficient given our level of economic vitality and that we will benefit from \$31 billion in tax cuts over the same period?

Free trade or fair trade?

Early in 2005, Professor Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University released a report, *Investing in Development: a practical guide to achieve the Millennium Development Goals*. It provided a practical plan to achieve these goals, emphasizing that such measures as food aid and emergency relief do not solve the problem. What is needed is assistance to improve agricultural activity, public health institutions for prevention and treatment of disease, and better environmental management.

The Sachs report also called on high-income nations to open their markets to developing country exports. They could increase a poor nation's export competitiveness by investing in trade-related infrastructure such as electricity, roads and ports. Sachs argued that there is no single remedy to poverty. "Development will depend on trade and aid and dropping the debt," he wrote. "It is not trade versus aid, it is not trade alone or aid alone."

Our political leaders have consistently placed a premium on market liberalization and global integration. Better access for Australian goods and services, especially in the trade of agriculture and food, is the priority. Our leaders have pursued free trade vigorously by signing agreements with the US and Singapore and is negotiating others with our major trading partners around Asia. We have benefited greatly from these international relationships to become one of the wealthiest countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

Trade, with accompanying debt relief and aid, can contribute to poverty reduction. Trade agreements however give priority to the flow of goods, services and investment, without considering the social impact on communities. The cure should not be worse than the disease. Trade rules and practices need to give support and differential treatment to the poor. The challenge is to ensure that the human person remains the centre and the beneficiary of all aspects of globalization. Trade should provide the opportunity for all people and

nations to share in the wealth generated. It is not free trade, but fair and just trade that will help people leave a lifetime of poverty.

Economic justice is not simply a matter for governments. Corporations play a role too. Coffee, tea, chocolate, herbs and spices are now some of the commodities available through fair trade arrangements. Certified producers are paid an agreed price for their goods, often above the low market rates, thereby offering many a real, living wage. Fair traders are able to deal directly with the grower or their cooperative and effectively bypass a market often flooded with excess and substandard supply. The premium is invested in local sustainable development projects. If consumers are willing to pay a premium for luxury designer goods why not pay a little more if it helps someone leave a lifetime of poverty?

Christians have done much to draw government attention to global economic issues. The Jubilee Debt Campaign, Micah Challenge and the Make Poverty History campaigns have demonstrated that ordinary people can focus government attention on matters of economic justice. The work of these campaigns is far from over. Some efforts are just beginning, like World Vision's campaign to end contemporary slavery. These are just a few ways people can go from bystanders to active agents helping people leave poverty behind.

From altruism to governance

The World Bank solution to poverty is stronger economic growth. This strategy is clearly seen in our government's 2006 White Paper on foreign aid. The paper outlined a fourfold approach:

- accelerating economic growth, principally through infrastructure development
- fostering functioning and effective governance by addressing corruption
- investing in people through health and education
- promoting regional stability and cooperation.



Education, health and infrastructure are the traditional staples of aid delivery. Yet in recent years our government has focused on good governance as the new aid mantra.

According to the 2007 budget, 25% of the total aid program will be allocated to governance projects. This eclipses the amount spent on health, infrastructure and rural development and even basic education. Funding to Other Government Departments (OGD) through the aid program has grown enormously. Funding to the Attorney General, Defence, Treasury and Immigration Departments rose from \$151 million in 2000 to over \$563 million last financial year. Much of it covers the cost of Australian government involvement in the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea.

Improving local institutional performance by fighting corruption is critical. The basics of human assistance such as health, education and infrastructure need to be delivered honestly and effectively.

Aid recipient countries are concerned about the type of good governance programs promoted by Australia. The kind of economic restructuring proposed may not be suitable given important cultural and social differences. For example, land ownership in Australia is individualized but in the Solomon's and PNG it reflects a different social and cultural legacy. Australia and other donors have attempted to enforce a land registration system that has provoked large protests and civil unrest. Australia also threatened to cut aid to PNG unless Australian police were given direct operational responsibilities rather than an advisory role. The PNG courts later declared this program unconstitutional.

Our national interest in aid

The 2006 White Paper softened Australia's national interest in aid, moving it from the front of the official objective to the back. Instead of reading "to advance Australia's national interest through the alleviation of poverty and sustainable development," it now reads, "to promote poverty alleviation and ensure sustainable development in Australia's national interest."

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The practice of tying Australian aid, which required the use of Australian contractors and suppliers in delivery, has ceased. However, a great myth that only non-profit groups deliver aid still lingers. Private companies continue to deliver most Australian aid, such as the Packer family owned GRM. Over 55% of Australian aid contracts are delivered by just 10 private companies, while the non-profit NGOs get less than 4% of the total aid budget.

Australia's record in aid delivery is drastically weighted to our own domestic commercial and political advantage. If Australia's aid program is continually focused through the lens of our national interests then our aid will be delivered in the interests of our business and political leaders. The focus on strengthening governance can be beneficial but it needs to be focused on assisting those who are most in need. If Australia truly wants to promote global security and not just its own interest then we need to deliver aid that goes to the most needy. We must not put our own interests, often practically translated into commercial and strategic advantage, before the goal of effectively tackling poverty.

For study

1. Read Luke 16:19-31.
2. Conversation starter. Break up a block of Fair Trade chocolate or serve a cup of coffee. How much would the producer of receive as a proportion of the block or cup? How much would they were working for a multinational company? (Follow the links on the website www.ncca.org.au for answers).
3. What values underlie Australia's aid practices? What does the passage from Luke say to the world's poor? How might it challenge the values change of our political leaders?
4. Has your church made a commitment to addressing the MDGs or is it a fair trade partner? Should your church make such commitments? If so, what would an adequate commitment look like?

Human Rights Belong to Everyone

Elenie Poulos and Alicia Pearce

For several months in 2007, Amnesty International's replica of a Guantanamo Bay cell toured Australia. The cell is cramped and claustrophobic, measuring only 1.8m by 2.4 m, and has no natural light; there is a single pallet bed and a steel latrine, nothing else. It provided a chilling insight into the day-to-day life of inmates like Australian David Hicks.

Although David struck a plea bargain and is now in an Australian prison we should not forget the reality of his detention without trial in Guantanamo and other camps, for over five years. His right to a fair trial was removed. The United States government denied that he had any rights under the Geneva Conventions on prisoners of war. His lawyers claimed that he was tortured in this time, even though his final statement denied it. Eventually, he plead guilty under a military commission system that would have permitted evidence gained through coercion. Despite widespread Church and community support for David's right to a fair trial, the Australian Government repeatedly refused saying that the camp held the worst of the worst. This is one situation where Australia did not do enough to uphold the fundamental human rights of one of its citizens.

Australia is a nation that prides itself on its strong democracy and independent judiciary. Our political leaders claim an ongoing commitment to human rights. But just what does this mean, and how can we ensure that human rights are upheld?

What are human rights

Human rights are basic principles that describe the way human beings should treat each other, and the conditions we need to live a life of dignity and peace. Human rights are widely recognised as the building blocks of successful and harmonious societies. They remove inequality and oppression and create the situation where all people have a voice in the processes

that affect their future. Human rights consist of a range of civil political, economic, social and cultural rights. They include a right to life, liberty and security. Equality of access and protection before the law, not to mention a public trial are rights too. People have a right to free movement and association, to speak, to hold beliefs and to change them also. People have a right to education, work, fair pay and rest.

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights was the first multinational statement on human rights. It forms the basis for the international human rights system. Later covenants and treaties elaborated on and delineated basic human rights more sharply. Australia has signed many international treaties and covenants, and continues to sign onto more as they are passed through the United Nations.

How do we uphold human rights?

Australia's human rights record at home is varied. On the one hand, most of our society has a high quality of life, including free compulsory education, clean water, access to fairly paid work or to welfare support, regular elections and an independent judiciary. Our justice system does not use the death penalty or corporal punishment. We make education universally available and do not condone child labour. We pride ourselves on our traditions of egalitarianism and "a fair go."

On the flip side, a small but significant percentage of people, often in remote and regional settings, live in poverty and are denied the economic and social rights that many of us take for granted. It is a terrible truth that Indigenous Australians figure prominently in this group.

Indigenous life expectancy continues to be much lower than that of the general population. Indigenous children born between 1996 and 2001 are expected to live for 20 years less than the national average for children born in the same period.

Australia's policies on refugees and asylum seekers have involved appalling breaches of human dignity. Asylum seekers have been detained for lengthy periods in remote locations, families have been separated, cases of deportation to danger and inappropriate legal advice, and policies that foist people seeking our aid onto other nations.

Churches, community organizations, and even the United Nations have criticized the Government for its lack of commitment to human rights. Although our leaders like to trumpet the importance of human rights internationally, the question of rights is often left untested when formulating industrial relations, social security, humanitarian migration, security and trade policy. Recent legislation around low-paid employment, trade union representation and anti-terrorism were passed with minimal public and expert consultation, sometimes with inquiries of only one day's duration. Such legislation has profound effects on our civil and political rights. For instance, a person suspected of engaging in terrorist activities can be detained in Australia without trial or evidence that they have committed a crime. This is a significant blow to our freedoms.

Why is our approach to human rights so uneven? Does our common law approach give the government too much discretion? Does Australia need a charter or a declaration of human rights?

Australia maintains far fewer protections for human rights than many other developed nations with a similar legislative approach. We have no constitutional protection for most of the human rights commitments that Australia has endorsed in the United Nations. Some of our rights are fully protected by legislation, but not all. Fundamental rights such as freedom of speech, freedom of association, and freedom from detention without trial are blurry at best. It might be time for Australians to consider how our rights might be better protected.

The decline in our reputation

Historically, Australia was heavily involved in the process which instituted the UN's human rights treaty system and developed a reputation for 'punching above its weight' in the international human rights sphere. In recent years, our interactions with the United Nations human rights treaty bodies have become more antagonistic.

The most recent rounds of reports from the United Nations human rights treaty bodies highlighted areas of deficiency in Australia's domestic policy relating to the realization of fundamental human rights. Rather than remedy these concerns, the Government reduced its commitment to reporting to the United Nations on Australia's human rights performance. Since then it has withdrawn automatic consent to requests by the UN to visit Australia to assess whether we are complying with international treaties. It has also refused to ratify two optional protocols that would have opened our detention centres to inspections by UN representatives, and established a complaints procedure to uphold women's rights.

The Government also cut the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's (HREOC) funding and responsibility, with the loss of the Privacy Commissioner. HREOC is responsible for ensuring that human rights concerns of a broad range of people are upheld. It also fosters education and understanding of the primary role of human rights in creating caring, functional and fruitful societies. The reduction in support for this body is indicative of Australia's lessened commitment to human rights at home.

Australians as global citizens

How can Australia hope to be responsible global citizen if we do not provide every support for human rights within our own nation? Australia's record in the international human rights arena and internally reveals a disturbing trend to erode and ignore the fundamental human rights of our own people and of those who come to us seeking aid.

Australia has a strong capacity to engage with the international community on human rights issues, and to work to rectify the inequalities at the root of the poverty and dispossession suffered by many of our own people.

Australians cannot look upon the suffering of other human beings and regard them as somehow outside of us. Endorsing and upholding the international human rights systems at home and promoting international cooperation on the essential wellbeing of the human population, is a crucial underpinning to other initiatives. Surely, a nation's interests are about human beings and their quality of life. The systems and structures we put in place must serve the interests of humanity. Part of being a global citizen is the realisation that we are all related. Each person is precious. Diminish one and we all become poorer for it.

For study

1. Read Jeremiah 32:1-15 and Psalm 146.
2. Conversation starter. Get hold of a Peter's Projection map of the world, large enough for the group participants to put labels on it with:
 - Words to describe Australia's role in our region, and in the world.
 - Words to describe how other nations and people see us.
3. Thinking about Jeremiah and David's Psalm, are human rights important to God? How important were human rights to Jesus?
4. Look at Amnesty International's human rights report for 2007 (follow the links from our webpage) and compare Australia's scorecard with nations in our region or with whom we have a close relationship. What similarities or differences do you see? Do we look at human rights in the same as that of other people of other nations? What practical steps might be done to improve our nation's record on human rights?



Climate Change

George Browning

Climate change is a moral choice and a core matter of faith for Christians. Christianity is concerned with salvation, which has a personal dimension and includes the whole created order. The morality of climate change is really quite simple. Morality is not about disciplining naughtiness. It is essentially the exercise of choice, specifically about choosing life.

Environmental degradation is destructive of life. It steals from future generations, it penalises the poor, it is exaggerated by greed and puts diversity at risk. Environmental pollution hurts all of life. It is nonsense to argue we have to choose between our present economic prosperity and a sustainable future. It should be clear that any prosperity we currently enjoy is but a fleeting mirage without a sustainable future. In fact, a strong commitment to a sustainable future will undergird a prosperous future.

The cost of doing nothing

The reality of climate change is acknowledged widely. The question is a matter of how much change will occur and whether we want to pay for it now by timely adjustment or later through delayed efforts.

In October 2006, Sir Nicholas Stern released the *Economics of Climate Change*. In Stern's view climate change is, "the greatest and widest-ranging market failure ever seen." He makes clear that policy must overcome this failure, promote sound market signals and have equity and risk mitigation central.

Stern is concerned that the poorest countries and their people will suffer most from these climatic changes.

Their suffering will be great because:

- geographically, they live in regions that suffer from high rainfall variability and/or flooding
- economically, they rely heavily on agriculture, the most climate-sensitive industry of all
- financially, their low incomes limit their capacity to adapt adequately.

There are 155 million refugees in this world now, due to warfare, natural disasters and development projects. Christian Aid estimates that 1 billion people will be forced from their homes by 2050 through climate change if too little is done too late.

Prosperity brings choice. Poverty limits choice. More prosperous nations have a greater obligation to make better choices. We have the capacity to adapt our environment to suit ourselves. We have to choose life in the most global of senses. We have now reached a point on this planet where there must be a change of heart and mind, metanoia, and look in a different direction.



Going beyond guilt

Environmental morality is not about blame, guilt or despair. It is a matter of looking at our foundations. All buildings are laid on foundations. People in the secular world and people of Christian faith can work together to build a healthy future. As a Christian my moral stance in relation to the environment is shaped by God's presence in a number of ways.

Firstly, I believe the natural environment is sacred because it is God's creation. We human beings have a vocation as stewards or carers of it. The whole created order belongs to God and not to us, it is our task to hand on, undiminished, the gifts we have inherited.

Secondly, through the grace of God what is broken can and should be mended, redeemed in other words. Christ came to redeem all things "in heaven and on earth." There is no place in the Christian life for discarding what is incomplete or disfigured. It should be restored.

Thirdly, I am a neighbour to everyone, not only to my local community but the whole global community. I have no right to a greater share of this world's resources than any one else. I cannot morally hope to enjoy a higher standard of living knowing that the poor of the world and future generations will pay the price of my profligacy.

Fourthly, relationships define and shape my reality. I have to live in harmony and at peace with God, my fellow human beings and the natural order. I am part of the total organism of life on this planet, its health is my health, and its destruction diminishes me.

Finally, diversity is important and that no part is more worthy or less worthy. I must live in a world in which diversity is protected and honoured, where human activity is not given a higher place than the protection of diversity upon which life depends.

Within our grasp

Human beings have the wonderful capacity to overcome the most horrendous circumstances. It requires us to face the situation, utilise appropriate information, understand the options and invest our personal passion and commitment. The cost of facing the present environmental challenge is daunting because it requires all human beings to cooperate together. What is required is a change of attitude or change of mind – a change of heart.

The most prosperous currently make the heaviest footprints. At present, our lifestyle contributes more to climate change than does the life of a poor person. The very thought of such inequity should spur us on to do something about it. Solar power to heat and cool our homes is within the reach of most average Australians. What other ways can energy be conserved in our homes and industry?

Jesus had lots of very demanding throwaway lines, one of the most challenging is, "the one who wants to save his life should lose it." The affluence, consumption and waste in our society is alarming. Image is often more important than substance and so we all want to be living in a bigger home, driving the best car, and displaying the most lavish lifestyle.

Almost everything consumed has a carbon component built into its manufacture. To consume less will automatically reduce our footprint. In all other spheres of life we take it for granted that we pay what is owed. Simply because carbon is released into the atmosphere does not mean it should not be paid for. The fairest outcome is that those who emit the most should pay the most. The unfair outcome is that the poor or the next generation meet the cost.

People with a strong investment in the status quo will constantly alarm us with the consequences of change.

Change is the harbinger of opportunity as inefficient and inadequate approaches are exposed and abandoned. There is every reason to believe that the changes required of us will play to the strengths of the Australian people. Our inventiveness will see new industries emerge and new technologies develop. The economic benefits will secure and strengthen the future while meeting our present commitments. It is quite wrong to suggest that we are forever locked into a polluting present. Our leadership should have the wit, courage and vision to take us to a sustainable future.

The role of government

Government regulates in order that there might be a reasonably level playing field for citizens to cooperate together in harmony and mutual goodwill. It is astonishing is that there has been so little federal leadership on climate change in the last ten years. The constant excuse for not doing so is that the Australian economy will suffer. Many economists dispute this as a statement of fact as a new policy environment could create an entirely new economy of innovative industries. Such industries will only emerge if we regulate to price carbon. Even nuclear energy and clean coal technology are not possible without such regulation. We cannot wait another ten years before we become serious about carbon emissions.

Recent polling shows that both business and the general population are well in advance of the Government on climate change. It is a truism that we have the government we deserve. Are we so comfortable that we will prefer leaders who narrowly protect our interests or do we want leaders capable of overcoming the moral challenges of our time?

This chapter is an edited version of a longer essay which is available on the Social Justice Sunday 2007 website.

For study

1. Prior to the group meeting, have every one calculate their carbon footprint. An online calculator is available at www.carbonneutral.com.au.
2. Read 1 Timothy 6:6-16.
3. Conversation starter. Think of the last four trips you made in the car. How many people were in the car with you? What would it take to get you to replace some car trips with public transport?
4. What light does our Scripture reading shed on our attitudes towards prosperity, consumption and contentment? What do our lifestyles say about the things we consider most important? Could we live differently?
5. Compare your carbon footprints. Why are some larger than others? How could they be reduced? Is climate change a concern for your church? What could it do differently to leave a lighter footprint?

Conflict, Weapons and Nonviolence

David Johnson

SECTION

7

Military planners often characterize the current global environment as one of growing insecurity and uncertainty. Armed conflict caused some 8.5 million people to flee their nations as refugees in 2005, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. A further 25 million remained in country but displaced from their homes.

Global citizenship involves a commitment to peaceful means of conflict resolution. How is Australia contributing to making the world a safer place?

Dealing with conflict

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) is tasked by government to uphold the rule of law, resist aggression, relieve suffering, promote freedom and protect Australia's borders and its exclusive economic zone. Its members are drawn from all parts of society and the way it operates is substantially informed by Australian values and community expectations.

The way the ADF operates has shifted in recent years from self-reliance to a concern with strategic global threats. These include terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the consequences of state failure. Military planners cast an anxious eye towards our neighbours. Growing economic prosperity means that our neighbours have a greater capacity to develop more sophisticated armed services. It also creates challenges to their internal stability as excluded or exploited groups challenge national policies.

Community expectations about the ADF's performance remain high. It's expected to provide humanitarian aid, like the Asian Tsunami in 2005. It is expected to evacuate Australians abroad, like it did in Lebanon in 2006. It is expected to make peacekeeping commitments around the world, like its done in Timor Leste.

Australia has increased its defence spending significantly in response to these challenges and

expectations. In 2006-07, Defence cost \$19.7 billion. This amount is scheduled to increase by 3% each year until 2016. The government is procuring many new weapon systems to ensure Australia's military superiority in the region. The purchase of destroyers, heavy lift aircraft, tanks, helicopters and a new joint strike fighter underlie this rise in expenditure. Are these purchases necessary? Even within the defence community these issues have been debated.

Weapons control

Australia's military and diplomatic initiatives have a long interest in controlling weapons. We have been a leader in nuclear non-proliferation by being active in the International Atomic Energy Agency and by ratifying several multilateral agreements, such as the Non-proliferation Treaty in 1973. Australia has supported the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and has established 20 monitoring stations to watch the globe for evidence of explosive nuclear testing. Added to this, we have actively sought and ratified agreements concerning nuclear safeguards and waste management.

Nevertheless, some uncertainty has emerged about the security implications of Australia's interest to expand its uranium production. Australia produces about 24% of world uranium and our political leaders wish to expand this industry significantly. Australia has a economic interest to supply uranium to the Asia-Pacific but the security implications remain unclear, particularly concerning China and India also. Are the safeguards sufficient to ensure that civilian production does not end up in military applications?

Australia has also played important roles in establishing the Chemical Weapons and Biological Weapons Control Treaties. Politically and militarily there is much interest in better controlling these weapons of mass destruction.

Australia has been very involved in the work to establish the Mine Ban (Ottawa) Treaty to ban antipersonnel landmines, and is proving an effective President of the State Parties for 2007. The Mine Ban Treaty is

extremely important because it embraces both weapons control and humanitarian aid. The landmines are banned, the stockpiles destroyed, the minefields cleared and assistance given to victims. This is an important model for building a safer and more sustainable world.

Having achieved these successes, global attention is turning to other weapons that wreak destruction on a mass scale. The first of these concerns cluster munitions that spread bomblets over wide areas. These weapons were widely used in Laos during the 1970s with terrible effects that continue to this day. They were also most recently deployed during Israel's bombing of southern Lebanon in 2006. Cluster munitions are as indiscriminate as landmines, leaving large areas of land unusable to civilians for decades after a conflict. People cannot build peaceful lives while their orchards and fields are littered with unexploded debris.

Talks about controlling cluster munitions are proceeding slowly. Although talks in Geneva failed in 2006, the Norwegian government hosted 46 countries in Oslo in February 2007. They agreed to a clear declaration committing them to conclude a new instrument prohibiting cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians by 2008. Of the states meeting in Oslo, only Japan, Romania and Poland did not support the declaration. Australia was not present at the Oslo Conference. Australia is planning to purchase cluster munitions, supposedly smart munitions.

The ADF considers itself to be a professional, disciplined and ethical organization. It values trustworthiness and compassion, particularly for non-combatants, and the need to adhere to laws concerning armed conflict. This interest in cluster munitions appears inconsistent with the wider ethical stance of Australia and the organization itself.

A parallel civil society forum was also held in Oslo during the government meeting with 100 participants from a variety of non-government agencies. This presence underlines the growing determination in civil

society for a new treaty concerning this weapon. The successful effort to ban landmines in the 1990s was led from this quarter and a similar public campaign and partnership with government now appears necessary.

Proposals also exist to control the movement of small arms and light weapons, led in no small part by the UK government. We have seen the problems caused by small arms across the Pacific region, especially in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Illegal trafficking leads to destabilized societies and increased criminal activities. In December 2006, 153 governments, including Australia, voted at the United Nations to start work on developing an international Arms Trade Treaty. The UN Secretary General is seeking member views as to a comprehensive instrument establishing international standards for the export, import and transfer of conventional arms. A report will be submitted to the General Assembly in late 2007. As Australians value gun control domestically, there is much to be gained by supporting efforts to control the small arms trade.

Nonviolence

"It is no longer a choice between violence and non-violence in this world; it's non-violence or non-existence," said Martin Luther King Jr. the day before his assassination.

Resolving conflict is not simply a matter for our governments, parliamentarians or leaders of the armed services. Citizens using nonviolence are often central to any campaign of social reform. Nonviolence is spelt as one word so that it is not just 'not violence' but nonviolence, a process and way of living with a wholeness in its own right.

Mohandas Gandhi acknowledged that Jesus was the supreme teacher of nonviolence. The great Christian leaders and martyrs were inspired by Jesus, and have attested to his teachings and the example of his life. Nonviolence does not entitle a person to personal safety. Violence guarantees people will be hurt or killed.



For study

Nonviolence has helped effect transitions of government around the world, even in nation's with military based dictatorships - Argentina, Chile, Czechoslovakia, Georgia, India, Mongolia, The Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, South Africa and Vanuatu to name a few. The civil rights campaign in the US was also one of nonviolent action to bring much needed social change.

Nonviolent transitions have involved minimal damage and killing compared to violent revolutions. The results have been more stable and lasting. Yet none happened without prior community training in nonviolence.

Training in nonviolence proved critical in the Philippines during the 1980s. Ferdinand Marcos was infamous for a regime marked by misuse of foreign support, repression, political murders, and looting of the Philippine treasury. What is less well known is the role played nuns and priests who separated loyalist troops from army units supporting democratic activists. Trained in nonviolence, they defused the potential for much bloodshed.

Similarly, nonviolence featured in South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle during the early 1990s. Important community based work at a local level formed the foundation for a strategic movement of nonviolent action. Wide use of nonviolent techniques by the anti-apartheid groups, backed with the spiritual leadership of Desmond Tutu and the churches, helped to bring regime change in South Africa. The transition to democracy has continued to move along smoothly, in marked contrast to the tragedy of Zimbabwe.

In Australia, our issues may not be so dramatic though there are neighborhoods where social exclusion is significant and racial tensions run high. There is much that churches can do to lead their communities address the problems besetting them. They are often good places to discuss frankly their concepts of nonviolence and provide training in nonviolent conflict resolution. companion organizations overseas.

1. Conversation starter. Before members of the group arrive, the host places a number of yellow circles of paper on the floor and – enough to make sure that people will tread or sit on at least one. Once people have arrived and taken their seats, have them turn over the circles of paper – each one says “land mine.”
2. Read Jeremiah 22:1-17. How does God view kings who trust in military power? Where is the true source of security?
3. How many places in the world can you name where land mines continue to kill long after the fighting has stopped? Are cluster bombs justified, even smart ones? Why is it important to control the sale of small arms?
4. What role does your church have in teaching nonviolence in your own community? Does it provide leadership and live as a witness of Jesus? How might it address issues of social, racial or ethnic unrest in your neighbourhood?

This liturgy reflects on the aspirations that forged this nation as a global citizen. The second verse of our national anthem describes us working for an Australia that would be “renowned of all the lands”.

As a global citizen, Australia has a proud early history of leadership in human rights. Australia’s social welfare system, among the first in the world, reflected our desire to be a community of “common wealth”. We were a founding member of the United Nations, and assisted in writing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Refugee Convention. Australian women were among the first to be able to vote in parliamentary elections.

The gathering/greeting¹

L: This is the place
and this is the time;
here and now God waits
to break into
our experience.

P: To change our minds,
to change our lives,
to change our ways.

L: To make us see the world
and the whole of life
in a new light.

P: To fill us with hope,
joy, and certainty
for the future.

L: This is the place,
as are all places;
this is the time,
as are all times.

P: Here and now,
let us praise God.

Call to worship

We gather together to worship God
We gather to reflect on our place in the world.

We are the disciples of Jesus Christ- as we gather so do many others in places around our region. In Jesus we belong to the world wide family of the Church and so we join our prayers with those of our friends in Christ, for the Kingdom of God to come with justice, mercy and compassion.

And so we pray:

Jesus who opened the eyes of the blind:
Open our eyes to see all humanity.

Jesus who healed the deaf:
Make us hear your Spirit’s call to new lives of justice and mercy.

Jesus who was friend of the poor,
Help us to make a difference in the lives of the poor wherever they are.

Jesus who leads us into lives of selflessness and compassion,
Help us to lead our nation into new ways of global citizenship.

For the kingdom to come we pray:
Come Lord Jesus, Come!

Sentence

Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these.

¹Timothy 6:6-8

Collect

Creator of all, you are our home and in you all blessings are found. Help us to see what is eternally good and true, and having seen, decide wisely and faithfully to live in the security of your love and the extravagance of your riches in Jesus Christ, committing our lives to justice and peace.

Intercessions

Loving God, Maker of all that is, we pause to pray.

Creator God, our eyes see what is happening to your good creation.

Put a right heart in us, to see as you see, and to grieve as you grieve.

As it is within our abilities to bring about change, give us courage:

to reduce our use of the Earth's resources;

to simplify our lives;

to engage in actions which heal the planet;

to live in ways which benefit our children and grandchildren;

and the world they will inherit.

Creator God, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Loving God, Healer of wounds, we pause to pray.

Peace-giver God, our eyes see the conflicts which mark our world;

yet we know that your way is the way of peace.

We pray for peace between nations,

in Iraq, Afghanistan and other places less well-known.

We pray for peace within nations,

in the Sudan and Chechnya, and those places not on the nightly news.

We commit ourselves to opposing violence.

Peacegiver God, in your mercy
hear our prayer.

Loving God, defender of the poor, the widow and the orphan, we pause to pray.

God of justice, our eyes see a world divided between those with a lifestyle and those barely able to live.

Some look to governments and seek tax cuts, others look to welfare and aid agencies to see them through the week.

As followers of your Son, we pray for the courage to change

the ways in which our lives are lived at the expense of others, and

to follow the way of Jesus,

who had nowhere to lay his head.

God of justice, in your mercy
hear our prayer.

Loving God, upholder of law and justice, we pause to pray.

Law-giver God, human rights are threatened throughout our world.

Torture has become commonplace.

Governments create fear of others as a means of gaining political advantage.

We pray that your Son's perfect love, which abolishes all fear,

will be our guide and experience.

We pray for

courage to take up the cause of those who are oppressed and tortured;

for strength to withstand the politics of fear;

for open hearts to receive and welcome people.

Law-giver God, in your mercy
hear our prayer.

We seek and commit ourselves to be your hands and feet each and every day. **Amen.**

Prayer of confession

Forgive us, dear God,
when our eyes do not see the world as you see it;
when we choose to look away from the results of our
lifestyle choices.

Forgive us our ignorance, apathy and silence.
Open our eyes to see that we are involved in all suffering
in the world.

Let the demands of your love call us to see, to know, to
act and to speak.

Deliver us from wealth while much of the world is
impoverished,
believing that we 'cannot afford' worthy causes,
even though you call us to simple living.

Lead us to a new way of life in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Declaration of forgiveness/words of assurance

Live in freedom and know peace through God the
Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. (Live in freedom and
know peace through God Father, Son and Holy Spirit).

Offertory prayer

Faithful God of freedom and justice, here is the work
of our hands, here is the love of our hearts. Bless these
gifts and grant us spirits of generosity, gladness and
thanksgiving as we seek to do your will in the world.

Preface to the great thanksgiving

May God be with you.
And also with you.

Let's lift our hearts to God.
With joy we lift our hearts.
Let's thank God.
Let's offer our thanks and praise.

It's good to thank you, loving God!
You reveal yourself to us
in Christ Jesus,
who lived among us,
and continues to live among us.

We praise you with the trees and rocks and stars,
and all creation for life, creativity, and passion,
and even when we fail:

Your love is constant.

You love is constant,
and through Jesus,
you reveal to us the purpose of the creation:

Your love is constant.

Your breath makes all things new.
Your love makes all things possible.
Your reconciliation gives us hope,
our Holy and life giving God.

Prayer after communion

Gracious God you have seen us in our poverty of spirit,
and fed us with the Bread of Life. You have nourished
and sustained us, so now send us out in the power of
Your Spirit to act for justice for the oppressed and give
food to the hungry. Amen.

1. Terry Falla (ed), Be our Freedom, Lord, Open Book Press, 1981.

Lectionary Readings

William Loader

Luke 16:19-31

Luke places the story of the rich man and Lazarus (which means, “God has helped”) just before Jesus’ warnings about abuse of children (17:1-2) and just after his attack on making money your god (16:13) and on divorce (probably for greed) (16:18). Greed and exploitation collide with compassion and justice.

For the way of God declared in the law and the prophets (16:17 and 16:29, 31) and the way of Jesus are the same. Both are under assault (16:16). So the parable says that one returning from the dead, a hint at Jesus’ resurrection, would have the same message (16:30).

The story reflects the ancient economy: a wealthy man, to whose house his clientele would constantly come to negotiate benefits. Beggars had nothing to negotiate, so they would sit where passers by might throw them a coin or a scrap of food, dog saliva their primitive health care (16:20-21). Only those with something to trade mattered. The pattern is alive and well today when only those able to trade matter or when preoccupation with profit in the present passes the bill for climatic disaster to future generations.

Such reversal stories are not uncommon in the ancient world. For some they teach the need for change through fear. If you don’t practice justice, you will burn forever! Such violence then threatens to unravel the story’s message. The parable is not there to induce hate for the rich and love for the poor, but to expose the need for change.

Justice confronts and seeks to restore. In the preceding chapter the parables of the prodigal son, the lost sheep, and the lost coin, speak of grace even for the exploiters. Zacchaeus is a prime example (19:1-10). Rich and poor, informed with such compassion, can make poverty history. The story’s primary function is not to propound the theory of the afterlife it reflects, but to challenge the rich to see and act differently.

1 Timothy 6:6-19

The passage ends with a wonderful assertion of God’s being unknown and dwelling in unapproachable light (6:16). It begins with the assumption that this God also meets us in the midst of life and did so in Christ. Jesus is the supreme example of fighting the good fight of faith. He did not fold before Pilate (6:13).

Eternal life is not a promise of a safe haven away from real life, getting rich with the rewards of eternity. It is about engagement with reality, including the possibility of tension and conflict with authorities (6:13). Pilate and the Jewish authorities would surely have had little to worry about if Jesus was only teaching personal repentance and forgiveness. For Jesus, hope included that, but much more. He was good news for the poor.

Our passage targets dangers then and now (6:9), especially wealth. Wealth seduces (6:10) and easily becomes an end in itself, for people and for nations. When our self-interest cuts across others’ we can develop an investment in keeping others poor, though we are often unaware of it. When they object and want a fairer deal we can easily see them as enemies of our lifestyle. Basic human needs matter, but enough is enough (6:6-8). The goal to pursue is goodness/righteousness/justice (6:11) and to bring real hope to the world.

It is all about helping to restore and reconcile. It is about creating a set of relationships within and among people and with God that are right. That is the opposite of wrong relationships where my well-being is not right nor good for others. Pursuing such goodness is inseparable from pursuing “godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness” (6:11).



All bible quotations are from the Holy Bible New Revised Standard Version (1993) Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House.

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