

# **NURTURING JUSTICE: 2006-7**

***A Collection of  
Broadsheets to Promote a  
Christian Political Option  
for Australia within the  
South-West Pacific.***

***Bruce C Wearne***

***Point Lonsdale***

***AUSTRALIA***

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# INTRODUCTION

I introduce this collation of *Nurturing Justice* broadsheets from 2006-7 by making available an exchange between Professor Richard Larkins and myself about the yet unanswered questions that have been raised about Monash University's involvement in human embryo research. The letters published below have been available on-line since 2005. By referring to them I can give a relevant explanation of why I deemed it important to start *Nurturing Justice* in the first place. This is my on-line contribution promoting a "Christian political option". Whatever else these letters may be in a political sense they were also an exchange between a Monash graduate and that University's Vice-Chancellor. Let me briefly focus upon that since it has significant *political* relevance.

If what I say in my letters to Professor Larkins is valid then it is also the case that my own public standing as an educated citizen has something to do with my own membership in the Monash University community. After the Government induced merger of Chisholm Institute of Technology and Monash University in 1991, I served as lecturer and senior lecturer of sociology in the "greater Monash". But, I am also a Monash graduate having received a BA in 1972.

It is appropriate therefore to introduce this collation of *Nurturing Justice* articles by drawing attention to a *self-critical aspect* that has to an integral part of any truly *Christian* political option.

Let me try to clarify what I am trying to suggest by asking a few questions: how, for instance, should I relate my membership of the Australian political community to the fact that I am a Monash graduate? Further how does my status as a Monash alumnus relate to the ongoing research that takes place within this significant academic institution? And then, how should I view my ongoing attempt to advocate public justice, and in this instance raise my concerns about research in the "life sciences"? Such concerns are related to my own responsibility as a scholar, as a citizen and pre-eminently as a follower of Jesus Christ. This is not to draw attention to my qualifications so much as to say that my public contribution as a citizen is not unrelated to my status as a Monash university. I may work in the expansive field of "social theory" but I have not done so without university qualifications in that arena.

Below, in many of my posts, I draw attention to the fact that we continue to hear a lot from politicians on all sides claiming to uphold Christian values. But in this "hairy-chested" era of neo-liberal individualism on "all sides" of politics, there seem to be more appeals to phobias to engineer "politically correct" responses from the political "other person" than any genuine call to repentance for one's evident failings and complicity in injustice.

However, let me draw attention, as I do in one of the posts below, to a quote from a prayer in the 1662 Anglican Book of Common Prayer. It is found in the general confession asking God for His mercy and forgiveness:

*"We have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep; we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts, we have offended against Thy holy laws, we have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us..."*

The order of priority for this prayer of contrition is intensely relevant. If our *political* thinking was to develop by taking serious note of this, we might even begin to find a *political* path that has hitherto been hidden from us. The prayer implies that by following the devices and desires of our own hearts we have *omitted* what we most surely should have done. This comes in the prayer *before* the admission that there are other things that, indeed, we ought not to have done. So, I am suggesting that the insight given expression in these words can help us in understanding, at this time in the history of God's world, what our advocacy of a Christian political option must involve: it is an admission of solidarity in our deepest failings.

We should also not forget that in its day the Anglican Prayer Book of 1662 was the politically entrenched vehicle for enforcing the Act of Uniformity and led to the notorious intolerant ejection of dissenters and non-conformists from England's national church.

In other words my on-line broadsheet to promote a *Christian* political option, along with these letters to the Monash Vice-Chancellor of 2005 indicate my own political solidarity, a co-responsibility *coram Deo*, for the way in which the national scientific ethos is formed as well as recognising that I am still a Monash graduate. My ability to launch this broadsheet is not unrelated to that fact. In summary I am suggesting that Christian political wisdom will humbly reckon with the various offices in which we transact our public and private responsibilities.

Of course it would be the height of foolishness to assume that some kind of incantation of guilt is called for, as if "mea culpa" has some special magic to address the problem at the heart of the *political* trends we seek to address. What is required is reformation not mystification. And, moreover, reformation is not only on the academic front with respect to how educational institutions function in our social life, it must also have an ongoing impact upon the very political processes that have shown themselves all too amenable to remove any barrier that might stand in the way of the ongoing commercialization human life, bodies and seed.

So in conclusion, the fact that I began *Nurturing Justice* with a flurry of letters to the Monash Vice-Chancellor is to be understood as my attempt to acknowledge *solidarity* with those with whom I deeply, spiritually, disagree. I am thereby committed to *nurturing* an understanding of public justice that refuses to dodge complex political issues. The initial provocation arose from a scandal that may not have been initiated by senior Liberal-Coalition parliamentarians in Canberra, but it was certainly aided and abetted by their refusal to disclose to the parliament crucial information even as they loudly advocated "Noe". This is discussed further in the initial edition in the pages that follow.

And so, that briefly explains how *Nurturing Justice* was inaugurated. The basic insight that propels this project is one of active citizenship in solidarity with fellow citizens who debate and struggle together for justice. The by-line of *Nurturing Justice* may be "political perspectives that (try to) reckon with the patient rule of Christ Jesus", but the conviction is that political responsibility is indeed played out in the context of the Lord God's mercy. Politics takes place in the midst of our incredibly diverse and complex context of institutions, organisations and freely-formed relationships which God bequeathes to us in order that we enjoy the life and abundant gifts he has poured out on His image-bearers.

Bruce Wearne

Point Lonsdale 12 September 2013 AD,

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Monday, June 6, 2005

Professor Richard Larkins AO  
Vice-Chancellor and President  
Monash University Vic 3168

Dear Richard:

**Re: University Development and Alumni Form Letter 30 May 2005**

This is to reply to your opening sentence and to simply inform you that your confident expectation is misplaced. I am most definitely unsure about whether I can be proud of "how far Monash has come ... since 1964". As an Arts graduate from 1972 I am on the Alumni roll. I also taught in the Arts Faculty from 1991 until 1998.

Two weeks ago I received Issue 15 of *Monash Magazine* and the article "Stem cells: the debate continues" does concern me very much. Now, your form letter deepens that worry, because it provides an official "CEO's nod" to the views of Professor Trounson on stem-cell research. You enjoin me to be proud of the fact that Monash has recently opened the "world's largest stem-cell research facility". That is my problem. Monash, in my considered opinion, is now part of a serious betrayal of public trust. This I should explain.

Professor Trounson writes that "scientists are unanimous in their opposition to any cloning that intends to produce a new human being" but what he omits from his account is what he wasn't prepared to tell the country during the previous nation-splitting debate over embryonic stem-cell research. His colleague in the Netherlands, Dr Christine Mummery, is on the public record in that country revealing that the EC ban on cloning would not hinder her research because she was then importing embryos from Australia. This was well before the Review of the Prohibition of Human Cloning Act 2002; in fact it was well known in the Netherlands long before the current Prime Minister and the Premiers of Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria informed this country that they had decided we had to have legislation to allow research on "spares". Could it be that Professor Trounson did not know that this was already taking place?

The sad fact, Vice-Chancellor, is that your support for Professor Trounson's article simply confirms University approval in a public way and it is hard for me to see how this is not a serious deceit. For the plain fact of the matter is that there were no import or export controls on human embryos at the time the previous debate was launched, when Professor Trounson was busy contributing to the debate and saying why the legislation was necessary. The

Federal and State Governments and Monash University were thus already providing in principle support to embryonic stem-cell research overseas before they succeeded in having it made legal here in Australia. But this was not and has not been revealed in the debate thus far. And so, it is simply deceitful to suggest that Monash is in the forefront of "continuing the debate". Its officers have failed to uphold the University's fiduciary responsibility in this matter and have stifled the debate where it needs to be generated. This is a shameful and unjust departure from the public standards that should always be applied to scientific research.

These facts can be very easily verified. And that being the case you will understand why it is no longer clear to me what path Monash thinks it is traveling on. Monash needs to reconsider its position and should not too easily take pride in this much vaunted development.

Yours faithfully,

**Bruce C Wearne** BA(1972)

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June 16 2005

Dear Dr Wearne

**Re: University Development and Alumni Form Letter 30 May 2005**

Thank you for your letter of 6 June. Obviously the matters that you refer are highly controversial, and there will be different views not only about the appropriateness of research on embryonic stem cells but also on the interpretation of matters which occurred before the prohibition of Human Cloning Act 2002.

I believe that Professor Trounson has been consistent in his view opposing cloning with the intention to produce a new human being, and I do not believe that any of his actions prior to 2002 were inconsistent with this. I am therefore not aware of the nature of any "deceit" which you refer.

I totally respect your right to have your own views on this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Larkins

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July 13, 2005

Dear Vice-Chancellor:

**Re: University Development and Alumni Form Letter 30 May 2005**

Thank-you for your reply of 16 June to my letter of 6 June (copies enclosed). I appreciate the respectful tone, but I have to say it did not meet my concerns. After some thought it seems clear to me that you have not rightly understood my use of the term "deceit". As my letter went on to explain, the Federal and State Governments (Qld, NSW, Vic) and Monash University, did not previously, and have not since, drawn attention to the *in principle* support for such research which was already going on (overseas) *some considerable time before* the legislation was introduced.

We agree these are highly controversial matters. I have no intention of debating them here. (You can consult my contribution to Quadrant Sep 2002 if you wish to be apprised of my views as a social scientist). But here my concern is that Monash University presents itself in the forefront of a debate in which it fails to admit what it should have long ago revealed. Monash's failure is an important part of the "deceit" I am talking about. Thus I conclude that Monash is not at all in the forefront of the debate, and your letter is problematic in that it confirms that Monash is not wanting to promote debate on matters that it should have hitherto been the first to

reveal. You admit there are "different views and interpretations" on the matters which occurred before the Prohibition of Human Cloning Act 2002 - can it be left like that? Are these not matters for serious debate?

It was not Monash University or Professor Trounson who drew attention to the fact that Dutch researchers were importing human embryos from Australia. That is a neglect that Monash University (along with the Prime Minister and the three eastern State Premiers) have not explained. They should have. But now, how is Monash University to be taken seriously if in its pronouncements it does not draw public attention to these facts which show its true position as well as Government and institutional commitment to human embryonic stem cell research long before the debate which preceded the legislation?

Yours faithfully,

Bruce C Wearne

# JUST HUMAN EMBRYO RESEARCH

Nurturing Justice 2006 1 October

There has been a consistent pattern by which parliamentary debate about human embryo research has been malformed by the failure of those opposing the research to properly reveal the true state of affairs. I suspect that this is the outworking of various dubious assumptions that are held in Government ranks. One of those assumptions is that what is good for the economy (the pharmaceutical industry's investment) is always in the national interest. The other, concerns the problematic ethical standing of the PM who has tried to form this debate while changing his stated position. The facts revealed on this page cast a different light on the change of view that John Howard says he had after being elected in 2001 on a platform which opposed such research. The PM and his supporters may close ranks once more to prevent these matters from being properly debated, but the issues are not going to go away. They will still be with us when the current crop of politicians have completed their Parliamentary terms.

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*Sent: Friday, October 20, 2006 11:19 AM*

*Dear Friends:*

*Can I try to encourage you to give voice to your concern about an ongoing national avoidance, that is being perpetrated by Federal and State Governments and their parliaments? Here I refer to an important aspect of the debate about embryonic stem-cell research.*

*There is an ongoing problem with the way this issue is being conducted.*

*If you have been following the development of this debate, you will note that advocates of this "initiative" are very careful to avoid mentioning the embryonic stem-cell research that is currently underway. The focus is always shifted to alleged "future benefits". When this was last debated the matters I have been raising, and which I raise again here, were conveyed to the Special Minister of State and the Deputy Prime Minister who had joined themselves to "No" side in the conscience vote on the issue. These facts were not then aired in parliament nor, to my knowledge, have they been part of the debate since then. The fact that Australia's publicly funded research facilities have already been involved in embryonic stem-cell research is simply ignored.*

*[This way of framing public debate reminds me of the marketing that was put forward some years ago when drug companies were initially seeking to have RU486 commercially available. The claim was then made for a 60% success rate in clinical trials. Clinical trials? How could such trials take place if the drug was illegal in the first place? And how could such trials take place without subjects willingly becoming pregnant in order to trial the drug?]*

*The debating tactic that tries to focus exclusively on goals, is completely consistent with the utilitarian world-view that is dominates our system of national Governance. In this case the debate is over the "ends" and all else - moral scruples along with fertilised eggs - are discussed as if they are merely "means" that have to be utilised, overcome or discarded.*

*In the case of embryonic stem-cell research the latest parliamentary advocates, Senators Stott-Despoja ad Patterson, have been given their opportunity by the PM, to present legislation that will be decided by a*

*"free vote" on the issue. We notice that the same PM is now rather silent on this matter, having already discarded his pre-election opposition to such research from 2001.*

*The advocates of embryonic stem-cell research are engaged in what Bob Goudzwaard describes as tunnel-thinking. To gain further clarity on this, you might like to find and read Keynes' 1930 essay "Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren". Bob Goudzwaard's 1979 book, Capitalism and Progress, is an excellent one in order to explore the utilitarian world-view. In Chapter 13 "The Vulnerability of the System" he explores Keynes' contribution. In his 1930 essay he tried to justify the maladjustments that are needed in order for mankind to solve its economic problems. Keynes opined: "Avarice and usury and precaution must be our gods for a little longer still. For only they can lead us out of the tunnel of economic necessity into daylight" (p. 138-9).*

*This is indeed consistent with the ideology that has been driving the federal and state parliamentary machines in Australia for over two decades. There is a concerted and ongoing effort to convert law and politics into the mere fine-tuning regulations of national business interests.*

*So I have included below my recent letter to the Minister for Health and Ageing for your information and consideration. In this letter I ask the following questions:*

*"Is the export of human embryos from Australia still legally possible? Should the law, for whatever purpose, allow human embryos to be sent out of this country?"*

*You might suggest that these questions do not go far enough. I phrase them in this way because the issues need to be explored comprehensively and in full and despite the Minister's apparent opposition to such research, it is hardly clear what his exact and comprehensive position is. In these questions you might note that I am not ruling out the possibility of the lawful and appropriate sending of human embryos to research facilities overseas for the purposes of facilitating IVF treatment for would-be parents. That assumes that an embryo is the responsibility of those who have conceived it. But when we learn of embryos being sent overseas for research purposes, unrelated to IVF, as in the Dutch case referred to, such actions imply that human responsibility for embryos can be dispensed and thus generated for others purposes, according to the requirements of unspecified scientific experimentation. And that is where the specious futuristic views, about what such research might lead to, distracts us from what is obviously taking place. That is the problem that needs to be exposed here and the Federal and State Government office bearers, in particular, called to account.*

*Should you need further information please contact me or consult my website page that refers to this where I have raised this matter only to have it dismissed with the usual platitudes by Monash University's vice chancellor.*

*I trust that you will agree with me that this is a matter with enormous implications at home and abroad.*

*Yours sincerely,  
Bruce C Wearne*

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Thursday, 19 October 2006

Hon Tony Abbott

Leader of the House, Minister for Health and Ageing

Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Abbott:

I refer to the letter, penned on your behalf by Adrian White, 10 October 2006, in answer to my communication with you of 28 August 2006.

The reply is very disappointing. To allow this form letter to pass without comment would mean I was joining your office in appearing to ignore the serious matters I have raised with you. Mr White's reply contains nothing I didn't know before and read alongside of my original communication seems to imply that your office hopes the facts I have raised will go away. They will not. They are very relevant to the just consideration of the relevant legislation and more besides.

To repeat: Australia was already in support of embryonic stem-cell research prior to 2001 when this became a political issue here. Human embryos were being exported from this country for research in the Netherlands. At that time there were no import or export controls on human embryos.

Does your office concede the serious situation that these facts reveal? Is the Australian Government going to allow human embryos to be used for commercial gain under the rubrics of "national interest", free trade and commercial confidentiality? This matter deserves much more than the superficial gloss that the PM and state and territory leaders have given by appeal to the need for "nationally consistent arrangements." Moreover, the Lockhart Review failed to convey the true gravity of this situation which your office must still now address.

Is the export of human embryos from Australia still legally possible? Should the law, for whatever purpose, allow human embryos to be sent out of this country?

To reflect upon these matters is to **begin** to address this issue, and all complexity notwithstanding, the Government must ensure that these matters are known and discussed openly, and laws framed so that justice can be done and human life protected fully and comprehensively in public law.

That is why the October 10 letter is unacceptable. It does not address these matters and be assured they will not go away.

Yours sincerely,

Bruce C Wearne (PhD)

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Dear Friends (once more):

Sorry to bother you again. But, almost as if it was a response to my letter, I have just now received an email from Mr Tony Abbott on the topic of embryonic stem-cell research. However, we still do not have any admission that the problem I raised is a real one, one requiring a serious legislative rethink about the entire parliamentary response that has been made thus far.

The minister says: "I see no reason to change the position arrived at just four years ago."

What I have raised are matters that have a direct bearing upon how any "position" is determined in this case. As it is the researcher who imported

embryos into the Netherlands for her research did so with a claim in a 29 November 2001 interview for the NRC Handelsblad, that is she made this claim *before* the 2002 parliamentary debate on the legislation with respect to "spares":

*"Een verbod op therapeutisch klonen zou op dit moment ons stamcelonderzoek sec niet belemmeren. Wij werken immers met reeds bestaande embryonale stamcellen die ik importeerde uit Australië."*

This can be translated as:

*"The ban on therapeutic cloning would not hinder our research at this point in time. For we are already working with existing embryonic stemcells that I have imported from Australia."*

*The important point is that she uses the adjective **embryonale** and embryonic stem-cells were not able to be extracted without destruction of the embryo. So the point is that research on human embryos in order to extract **embryonale stamcellen** was already underway in this country.*

*Here is the Minister's most recent reply, an email, and I attach his pdf attachment as well. It will be interesting to see if the Minister replies to the questions that I have put to him in the letter I sent yesterday.*

*I hope this can be helpful to you in any letters or communications that you make to government. It is still possible that I will receive a further communication from the minister's office and if that happens I will let you know.*

*And by all means keep me posted.*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Bruce Wearne (PM 20.10.06)*

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*Dear Dr Wearne,*

*Thanks for letting me know your views about research using embryonic stem cells and human cloning.*

*As you probably know, the Parliament extensively debated this issue in 2002. At the time, I opposed any research that involved the destruction of human embryos. That position was not supported by the majority of the Parliament. Instead, Parliament voted to allow research using "spare" IVF embryos but not to allow the creation of embryos simply for research purposes. In addition, the Parliament voted unanimously to ban all forms of human cloning.*

*I see no reason to change the position arrived at just four years ago. There have been no new ethical insights or research breakthroughs in the interim that would justify change. All that's happened is that a report has been received calling for change. I don't doubt the standing and goodwill of the Lockhart review team but I respectfully disagree with their conclusions and don't believe that they had any particular ethical expertise that should trump that of the Parliament.*

*Of course, we must strive mightily for new treatments. That doesn't mean that nothing should stand in the way of a cure. In fact, much promising work is occurring using adult stem cells which doesn't raise any possible ethical objection.*

*I'm attaching an article on this subject which you might find interesting.*

*Yours sincerely*

*Tony Abbott*

# PUBLIC EMOTIONS AND JUST DEBATE

Nurturing Justice 2 2006 25 October

In this and the next issue, I want to discuss why recent calls for "gay marriage" from the Greens and Judge Michael Kirby miss the point. But first, in introducing the topic, I want to draw attention to the emotional aspect of this debate. We need to think about this if we are going to make a positive and constructive Christian contribution to discussing marriage law and whether justice might require civil union legislation of some kind.

On a global scale we are weathering the storms of terrorism and, closer to home, political talk in the media and with our neighbours is often peppered with references to how some public official has been afraid to act in some way because of "political correctness". Then there are also our own emotions when we suspect that our political views on some or other topic will not be well received in some quarters.

As much as public life is now filled with fear, we might also discern an increased reticence on the part of many to express their fears in public. So let's spend some time thinking about this seemingly paradoxical situation. We need to develop a better understanding of the social and psychological aspects of political debate as we rethink our political theories and preferred policies.

When we confront "gay politics" we regularly hear accusations of 'homophobia'. The term is often used by activists seeking to pin-point a mindset that has the potential of generating, or re-generating, fear (hence phobia) about homosexuals and homosexuality. But it is highly ambiguous.

In other debates the term 'Islamophobia' is used in a similar way with respect to Muslims. If you follow the debates you may see some similarities in how the label is used to pre-empt some or other, presumed negative, viewpoint. Often the suffix "phobia" is consonant with a view that the homophobe or the Islamophobe is really afraid of some inner desire that they are trying to suppress by externalising the 'threat'. An examination of this psychological viewpoint can keep for another occasion.

Any open and public announcement by any group that homosexuality is wrong these days seems likely to run into the accusation that they want to exclude homosexuals from public life. Such an announcement will be viewed as an attack on the identity, the self-definition, of homosexuals. As a result, those organisations which do not accept homosexuality as a life-style option among their members, are sometimes pressured to keep such views out of the public realm. But then a deeper problem emerges - if the view that homosexuality is wrong is privatised, then it cannot be adequately debated. The debate about homosexuality is then malformed. But the debate needs to be open and it needs to be public.

The shift that has occurred with respect to public standards (polite behaviour) is pronounced. Homosexuals are no longer prevented from identifying themselves in the public domain if they wish to do so. They are no longer required by "polite society" to keep their homosexuality private. But what is the grounds upon which this public shift has taken place?

These days it would seem that an open democratic society will attempt to avoid "exclusion" - no sector of the population need be excluded from public life - there are however unresolved ambiguities in how this "inclusion" is implemented. "Inclusion" means a willingness to accept "inclusive" values, and that is close to the nub of the problem with respect to the 'homophobia' label. The label in the arsenal of the political activists not only becomes an endorsement of "gay rights", an announcement of victory, but it assumes that those who do not accept homosexuality as a moral life-style should keep their views private. No further debate is necessary. The legalizing of "gay marriage" is then viewed as the logical and historical endorsement of this enlightened majority acceptance of inclusive values.

But the "gay rights" argument, with the homophobia label, consistently runs things together too quickly. There are important questions that need teasing out. For instance, should any group of people be excluded from public life because they are afraid? This is the point where we can identify perhaps a *public justice moment* in the "gay rights" agenda. Public policy these days recognises the possibility that fear about the exposure of one's way of life (or private life) may prevent some citizens from full participation. "Inclusion" policies seek to overcome the fears that many minorities (including homosexuals and the so-called the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) community) experience. The inclusive rationale when applied to "gay rights" goes like this: those who have felt compelled to keep their sexual identity private have often been inhibited from making the kind of public contribution they could have made if they were not afraid of being "outed." Hence a special effort is to be made to ensure that the public domain welcomes diversity. All are welcome.

There is a problem here. If it is 'homophobia' that now should be kept private, policies which require the inclusion of the "LGBTI community" may succeed only in implementing a new style of *emotional* exclusion. Let me get at this problem by putting this question: why should fear about the fear of homosexuality be given priority over a fear of homosexuality? Why is it that some fears can be given a special privilege in public policy (i.e. the fear about homophobia) while other fears (i.e. fear of homosexual proclivities) are to be excluded or repressed? How can some fears be viewed on the side of justice while other fears are excluded? What kind of slope are we on if our public life now is geared to ensure that only the right kind of fears are allowed to be expressed? Is there no public place left for the honest (and fear-less) statement about one's fears, whatever those fears may be?

Yes, previously a homosexual person was expected to fear exposure and thus induced to avoid making the relationship public. Now,

however, the label homophobia seems to indicate that it is those who oppose homosexuality - for whatever reason - who are expected to be afraid and thus should keep their fears private or else they will be "outed" as homophobes. The implication is that anyone who is afraid of homosexuality should see themselves as deviant and thus "exclude" themselves from full public participation - homophobes are expected now to do what homosexuals were expected to do previously - keep their status private.

That I suggest is part of the flawed logic that very often accompanies the use of the homophobia label. The problem is that the label is a blocking device, a tactical label which prevents debate. To challenge the label we need only to ask: Why should it be disrespectful to give honest expression to fear about homosexuality? Why should people who have a way of life that teaches them to steer clear of homosexuality have to fear explaining themselves?

Perhaps the wise way is to spend more time developing public policies about human sexuality that comprehensively explains sexuality as God's gift to marriage. Christians need to spend time developing a comprehensive political world-view that takes account of marriage and family, household and friendship. We need to avoid a political voice that only reacts when "gay rights" advocacy gets moving. We need to be wise and avoid giving extra stick to the homophobic label. As Christians, we should not be afraid of homosexuals, or of anyone, as we seek to find a way to express our understanding of the gospel for political life. But as Christians we should be aware of the way that fear can prevent fellow citizens from living the lives and contributing publicly to our political debates. We should also expose the unhealthy manipulation of fear or of the fear of fear. And we should examine ourselves and our rhetoric in this regard.

Politics is about open debate. We citizens may disagree with each other, but the point is to find a way by which we can keep discussing as we disagree. We need to avoid treating fellow citizens as of no account because they disagree with us, and certainly should not exclude their voice from our attention because they have different fears to us. We should certainly keep an eye and ear open for those who are afraid, for whatever reason, of expressing their views.

# PUBLIC DEBATE AND GAY MARRIAGE

Nurturing Justice 2006 3 November

In this issue, I want to extend our discussion of the calls for "gay marriage" from the Greens and Judge Michael Kirby by setting forth a Christian strategy to discuss this contentious and problematic issue. By this stage we should not be under any illusions. The possibility that "gay marriage" will be given legal sanction in this country is by no means remote. Perhaps, as time goes on, the likelihood even increases. Mark Shields of the NewsHour recently gave this opinion: "I mean, the tide has turned on this issue. I mean, the next generation is just immeasurably, profoundly more tolerant of gay relationships than are their grandparents. And there's a movement that's inevitable" (October 27, 2006). He is speaking of the US. Are we in Australia about to follow the US down this path? It wouldn't be the first time.

In introducing this topic last time, I drew attention to the emotional aspect of this debate and emphasized the importance of developing an overview of political life. To make a positive and constructive Christian political contribution to all political debates, not just about marriage law and related issues, a lot of careful analysis will be required. We will have to sort through issues self-critically and certainly not hide from the possibility that our presentation of the Christian message has failed to provide any clear alternative to the so-called sexual revolution. The public confusion about sex, sexuality and marriage is all around us. It is a confusion that has to be addressed. With something like 80,000 abortions per year and many, many marriages falling apart, there simply is no ground for Christian triumphalism. In our reflection on this issue we must question ourselves as to whether we are rightly understanding the problems confronting us.

So to start. The question before us is: should a homosexual relationship be granted the legal status of marriage? "No!", all on its own, doesn't get very far. If "No!" is to express a genuine political concern for public justice its needs to be followed by an elaboration of the political view of marriage that has brought us to this conclusion. Can we do that?

We have to explain what our "No!" means politically? OK then let us first explore what "No!" shouldn't mean. Remember, our aim is to develop political argument to meet the arguments of those whose answer to the question is "Yes!"

First, "No!" doesn't mean a desire to avoid political debate by merely expounding moral and ethical precepts. The question needs to be taken in its political-legal sense and our "No!" needs to be a political-legal "No!". It needs more than moral elaboration.

Second. "No!" doesn't mean that we are making an argument for legally restricting the use of the word "marriage" so that committed couples who might want to refer to themselves in this way are legally

forbidden to do so on pain of penalty. That would not be a positive development. If a couple are living together and want to refer to themselves as married, we might have our own views on that, and if asked for our views, we might tell them that they are not really married. But on that level of inter-personal interaction our "No!" to gay marriage is not to suggest that the law be changed to restrict the way people use the word in public or in private communication. To expand the powers of government to control the way the word "marriage" is used (or any other word for that matter) would be to take a path that wanders far from the limits of public justice.

Third, to say "No!" doesn't mean that homosexual couples are being singled out for special negative treatment. The demand for "gay marriage" is often couched in terms of civil rights. Though our "No!" is based on the view that marriage is not a civil right, it is not to suggest that homosexual couples have in some way forfeited their civil rights. Any view that a homosexual couple is not marriage needs to be explained in terms of a wider view of law and human relationships. The law doesn't usually regulate friendships and nor should it. Here are some other dimensions of the issue.

If a mother and son want to be legally recognised as a marriage the law already says "No!", and so it should. Likewise for a brother and sister who might want to make the same claim. Moreover, in this jurisdiction, polygamous and polyandrous arrangements are not accepted as lawful forms of marriage, even though our legal restrictions do not deny that these arrangements are marriages. What the law says in this instance is that polygamy is not a recognized form of marriage in this jurisdiction.

"No!" means: a homosexual relationship is something other than a marriage and therefore should not qualify as a lawful marriage. Our "No!" means that we will still not accept that it is a marriage even if marriage law is changed to include homosexual relationships within the definition of lawful marriage.

As we have suggested already "No!" also means that Governments sometimes make mistakes on the basis of erroneous legal judgments. In this instance, should a legal judgment decide that homosexual relationships should qualify as "marriage", it would not only misidentify the committed non-marital relationship that may or may not want to be legally recognised as a marriage, but it would also mean that marriage had been redefined because the law would henceforth consider something that previously was not marriage as marriage. What isn't being addressed is the underlying dogma that it is the law itself that makes marriage. "No!" in this case means a rejection of the idea that the law makes marriage marriage.

To legally redefine homosexual relationships as "marriage" on the basis of an assumption that the law makes marriage would certainly challenge the widely held view that marriage law is about the legal recognition of marriage. What is ignored here is marriage's ascribed institutional character, having an authority that is established outside the competence of the political community. It seems that advocates of such

law assume that marriage is a human creation and so assume that what humans have made they can re-make.

"No!" here also doubts whether the just support and regulation of committed, long-term relationships will be enhanced by legally re-defining those relationships (including homosexual relationships as "marriages". "No!" views two friends who are living together, committed to supporting each other, without any sexual bonding, as a friendship, not a marriage and for exactly the same reason considers a homosexual relationship to be a friendship. In our complex society there are indeed multiplying ways in which people can live together in supportive relationships. Such diversity of relationships should evoke our (civic) respect and honour and at points there will be need for changes in laws to ensure justice. But justice is not served by calling a relationship marriage just because the parties to that relationship want to have their relationship re-made in those terms. More can be said here about the "social constructionist" and "consumerist" assumptions that are strongly evident in our commercialised and post-modern way of "doing politics".

Fourth, to say "No!" doesn't mean that only heterosexual lawfully married couples should qualify in law for benefits that are already available for people living in committed (household) relationships. "No!" in this case does not mean any criticism of such provisions like "paid carer's leave" or hospital visiting rights, and so on. Moreover, it may indeed be a matter of justice that laws governing such allowances and access, as well as many financial and contractual relationships (health benefits, superannuation, inheritance), be changed in order not to discriminate against non-married supportive couples. And it would in fact be discriminatory to single out one kind of non-marital relationship for a privilege usually granted to marriage partners while denying that privilege to other kinds of enduring partnerships and committed friends.

Politics is about open debate. We citizens may disagree with each other. At this point in time those arguing for and against "gay marriage" are certainly going to disagree. But the important point is to find ways by which political debate is developed as we disagree and as we find just pathways for policies and laws. We need to avoid the tendency of treating fellow citizens as of no account because they disagree with us on contentious issues, and certainly we should not exclude their voice from our attention because they are committed to other political causes. We should seek to tell the prominent public advocates of "gay marriage" why we disagree and why we think the campaign for "gay marriage" is misconceived. But we also keep alert to the clash of assumptions that will come when public policy is debated.

Next time I will develop this topic with some more points to nurture our reflection on this debate.

# CONSCIENCE VOTES AND THE WITHERING OF CONSCIENCE

Nurturing Justice 4. 9 November 2006

In the three initial mail-outs of *Nurturing Justice* I have tried to suggest how we might begin to develop a constructive Christian contribution to Australian political debate. If any alternative policy proposals are to grip the policy rails, not only with "human body politics" matters (abortion, cloning, embryonic research) but in *all* policy areas, we will need careful, and painstaking, analysis of current realities. We also need a good grasp of how and why political debates are unfolding like they are.

Some readers have said they have appreciated the clarity of previous editions. That is gratifying, but I wouldn't want to suggest that it has been easy. Writing critically about politics has to overcome confused emotions. And it's too easy to become entrapped by the very negative force-fields one wants to expose. I'm pleased I have a certain leisure and remoteness to think about these small contributions to your reflections. My involvement is with the aim of promoting a politics that views our citizenship as an integral part of life in God's world, redeemed by Jesus Christ.

Readers who have followed my argument in *Nurturing Justice 1* will have noticed my concern about the way "conscience votes" now function in Parliament. In the most recent vote on cloning research, the term "free vote" was used. The "free vote" this time was allowed after debate of a "private member's bill".

The fact is that Australian medical research *has been involved* in the kind of "cloning" research that Parliament has recently been debating since *before* the matter emerged on the national political agenda after the 2002 COAG meeting. Then, the Prime Minister, and the three eastern State Labor Premiers, made a joint announcement that national legislation was required to enable embryonic research. The State Premiers were said to have threatened going it alone, enabling the promised pharmaceutical industry investment in their States, should the PM not agree to the introduction of federal legislation.

If that is so, we might say that the State Premiers' "threat" needs to be looked at critically in terms of whether as State leaders, they had the mandate to issue such a "threat". What does it say about the State's respect for the integrity not only of the recent federal election but also of the fact that they had not won their respective State elections on such a policy. Still, the political reality we now confront is that the threats have stuck and what we have seen subsequently is, in part, what these State and Federal political leaders have delivered. Our question needs to be: What does this say about the way political leadership goes

about its task in this country? We won't answer that here, not directly, but we will have to return to it at a later stage.

Already we note a number of complex issues that have been folded together in this discussion. Readers will recall that I have drawn attention to the fact that the PM in becoming a supporter of embryonic stem-cell research, could not do so without going back on his pre-election platform in the 2001 election. He had stood as the Liberal Party's endorsed candidate for the seat of Bennelong and won, but he won as a candidate who let it be known that he was opposed to this research, research which, only a few months later, he publicly endorsed and became, for a time, its leading spokesperson.

The critical political point to remember here is that in our system of Government members of parliament *represent* the electors. And do we have to remind ourselves that it was not as PM that he was elected; our Prime Minister is not elected like the Americans elect a President. The convention is that elected members of parliament are representatives of their electors and the party of Government decides who will be its Prime Minister who then chooses his ministry.

Now of course, there is a certain amount of lee-way granted to parliamentary representatives to develop their views when matters arise in the parliament, as they will, which are not specifically covered by the party's platform, or which have not been promised by the candidate during the election campaign. But our system of parliamentary *representation* does anticipate that candidates will stand by their pre-election platforms and promises. For elected representatives to change the platform and promises by which they were elected *after* they have gained election is not envisaged by our system of parliamentary democracy. If a candidate wishes to be free on particular issues that are important to electors then such desired freedom should be spelled out before one is elected, not after. If a candidate makes a clear and unequivocal statement of support for a particular view that he or she knows will draw support from the electorate, as the sitting Member for Bennelong is reported to have done with respect to embryonic stem-cell research in the 2001 election, then our system presupposes that that candidate will abide by that prior commitment and should the Parliamentarian's view change he or she will wait for the next election before changing the platform on which he or she stands.

Readers who have read *Nurturing Justice 1* and my other writings on this matter will know where this is leading. I have been suggesting that the member for Bennelong, a firm advocate of "Australian values" has diverged seriously from the accepted values undergirding parliamentary representation by becoming an advocate for embryonic stem cell research soon after being re-elected at the 2001 election. If he could not bind himself to keep his pre-election promise until the next election then, if he still wanted to become the leading parliamentary advocate for such research at that time, he should have stepped down and submitted himself to re-election. That, as we know, is not what he did. The issue was fudged. Not only by him, not only by his party, but also by his political opponents, in parliament and around the country too. And

since then the question of embryonic stem-cell research has been contained within a convenient *cordon sanitaire* by which it has henceforth been dealt with as a "conscience vote" (or a "free vote"). In this way the Member for Bennelong, actually re-defined himself in relation to his Bennelong electors. The system was inverted and the major parties are been freed from developing coherent policies on this and related matters. It's now all down to "conscience". Well I for one find this very unsatisfactory. This essay is a vote of no confidence in such "conscience votes" particularly now that other matters, basic to our political system, are being ignored.

Of course, had the PM and Member for Bennelong, been wise enough to take my advice and submit himself to re-election, it might not have made much difference to how the Parliament subsequently handled the matter. We do not know for sure, but it surely would have given some leadership, in a manner reminiscent of Alfred Deakin, about the kind of discipline which a parliamentarian in our system must adopt. But no. There has not been any complaints from his colleagues or the opposition on this matter, and we are left with a Parliamentary leader who has simply got away with breaking one of the cardinal tenets of Australia's democratic system of parliamentary representation, and aided and abetted by his political opponents, the 3 State Labor Premiers. Has there been any suggestion by a leading politician - Mr Costello, Mr Anderson or Senator Abetz for example? - that his was an improper course of action for any parliamentarian to adopt? As well, we might ask what the "absence" of criticism now says about the way our current crop of parliamentarians view our system of government. How do they see themselves? What are they doing, really?

But, in terms of the rules that we say we do accept as a constitutive element of representative democracy, it would seem that the member should have done what I have outlined. The rules are such as to leave little room and give no justification at all for the way he acted ... and yet he did. One might even say that if there is any validity in Mr Howard's rather belaboured appeal to "core Australian values", then the rules under-girding parliamentary representation in our system of government are surely close to the heart of the matter, moreso than who won the Melbourne Cup, what sauce should be served with a hot pie and who will win the next Ashes? Something is seriously awry here and the current PM is at the centre of it .... again.

The fact is that no-one in Parliament has made an issue of this. This suggests that our elected representatives are so preoccupied with other "more important" matters (the national economic figures, interest rates, the Iraq War, the Government's industrial relations legislation, being a pal of the US) that matters of proper governance, "due process" and abiding by the rules do not rate too highly on the agenda. But we seem to be suggesting that they *en masse* have missed what has been developing in the nation's legislative chambers. Yes, and the nation itself has not exactly been energised by this "blip".

Still, it is a serious development. This way of acting confirms the view that parliamentarians may at some or other point suspend their status as

representatives of their electorates by a appeal to their conscience. And I would suggest that it is this view, that has gained dominance under the current parliamentary leadership. It is not only a serious departure from what we have hitherto understood by representative democracy - it strikes at the foundations of our parliamentary system of government. The Member for Bennelong thus provides us with good reasons for wondering whether a genuine aspect of the "national interest" - the integrity of our system of government - is on the way to being lost. Was it the proposed X billion dollar pharmaceutical investment that the 3 State Labor Premiers were keen to attract to their own States that was allowed to over-ride our own parliamentary principles "in the national interest"?

But it is even more than that. "Conscience votes" and "private members bills" under such a pragmatic, shifting, régime are all too convenient means by which parliamentarians can allow the "touring capital" to make demands upon our nation and our government, *at the expense of proper and adequate public debate*. Does not this case reveal a trend by which parliamentary representatives will be allowed to *systematically avoid accountability to their electors* if the price is high enough? Are we still seriously wanting a system of government where elected representatives are disciplined by what they have said they stand for BEFORE they are elected? Or not? Our major parliamentary parties are all too complicit in this avoidance of accountability and it cannot but play havoc with our parliamentary representation system, since contentious issues will be left *off party platforms* freeing parties from doing the hard work of policy development because they are unwilling to *lose* votes on the basis of believed principles. But is that not what it will cost our major parties if they are ever to regain some semblance of commitment to parliamentary democracy?

And so there are questions to be asked about the integrity of "conscience votes" and "private member's bills" particularly when we suspect that under the current régime our system as a whole has shifted and we are wondering what will come next if the basis upon which our system of parliamentary representation has been undermined. Have the parliamentary rules and procedures been avoided because it is simply assumed that politics must be subjected to the demands of global capital investment? Is that what Mrs Thatcher meant when she said: "There is no alternative?"

# ... AND TO GOD?

Nurturing Justice 5 16 November 2006

How many times has Caesar's coin been raised in your political discussions? The radio shock jocks, politicians and ministers of churches, refer to Caesar's coin as if we all know what it means.

If your experience is like mine then the reference is a rather pious "Render unto Caesar ..." with the implication that religion is really out of place in (secular) politics. Are there not two realms? The one where Caesar rules is supposedly the domain of politics in which we are all equally engaged as (secular) citizens. The other is that other realm, over there somewhere, which is the realm of faith, the realm of God (if you choose to believe in Him), the realm of private religious conscience and conviction.

Allegedly, these two realms must be kept apart. "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's!" is regularly wheeled out to remind "religious people" that Jesus Himself taught them not to get their faith mixed up with politics. Or so it would seem to many of our fellow citizens in this country.

I think this predominant view of Caesar's coin is wrong. The story of Caesar's coin can be found in Matthew 22:15-22, Mark 12:13-17 and Luke 12:1-12. My own exegesis of the Mark account is available. Read the bible passages over and ask yourself what it is about. Is it actually about keeping religion out of politics? Is Caesar's coin really a biblical justification for insisting that politics is "secular"?

The common interpretation goes something like this. *Here is a coin. It has Caesar's head on it. It belongs to Caesar. Give it to him. Pay your taxes. What belongs to God is something else. Not part of the grubby world of politics. Don't get these mixed up. And Jesus said it, so if you are a Christian you should take His advice and keep your religious views to yourself.*

Well, if we actually bother to study the New Testament, it doesn't take us too long before we have to confront Jesus, Paul and the other New Testament writers telling us that government is actually God's servant, whether the person filling the office believes it or not.

The Bible is unequivocal. Government exists by the Grace of God, and that is the basis upon which Christians were called to give rulers their allegiance. Our neighbours used to a secularised view of politics may not like this view, and perhaps they will not like having their interpretation of Jesus' statement challenged.

Paul was a Roman citizen; but not all Jews and Christians were citizens. Not then. But that was later, when Paul was seeking to use his citizenship as best he could as an ambassador for God's justice around the Roman Empire.

But Jesus made this comment, a little earlier and He made it to a predominantly Jewish (and Herodian) audience. Clearly, His comments put taxation into their true context - that is ***taxation exists under the rule of God***. It was as if He had said, *"Pay your taxes. You shall love*

*your neighbour as yourself, even if that neighbour happens to be a Roman ruler because God calls you as He calls Caesar, to do justice."*

What then of our life belongs to God? The New Testament and the entire Bible is unequivocal. Everything in our life belongs to God. So, even the taxes we pay to Caesar, belong to God because Caesar belongs to God. Caesar is God's servant. This view is quite consistent with what the New Testament teaches on other relationships. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord." "Be subject to one another out of your love for Christ." And more.

The New Testament does not advocate a lifestyle in which God gets what's left over after we have given all the respect we can as marriage-partners, family members, members of households, citizens, church members, and frequenters of the market place. No. Jesus Christ claims it all. God the source of everything, is owed everything including our citizenship.

So by saying "... and unto God the things that are God's" Jesus was saying that everything is owed to God. Giving taxes to Caesar was part of a God-given responsibility. What is given to Caesar in taxes is given "as unto the Lord."

This actually has laid the foundation for the Christian church which has always confessed that Jesus Christ is the Ruler of Heaven and Earth in answer to the question: "Who is your Lord?" When, Christians were asked by the Roman Emperors to swear allegiance to them they refused and paid the penalty with their lives. To "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's" is to simply tell Caesar that he is but a servant of God. And that profession, on pain of death if need be, remains part of Christian discipleship to this day.

And that will mean standing up and making it clear when we oppose some or other injustice, if government were to flag through policies that assume an unjust path is the way to go, whether that be embryonic stem-cell research, the removal of legal protections for the unborn, the ignoring of just-war criteria when our military is deployed, or the wholesale restructuring of the workplace in order to ensure that those who are investing in "touring capital" will get high returns at the expense of ordinary workers trying to make ends meet.

So we had better keep working to explain why we believe which policies are just and why some other policies are unjust and have some clear idea of what needs to be done instead. But that is what politics involves. Justice requires its advocates. And sometimes that means we will have to face the wrath of government.

From this then, Christians indeed have a basis from which to develop a creative approach to citizenship. We are called by Jesus Christ to participate politically in service of all our neighbours by seeking justice for all and promoting the health of our community. That's to put it in its most general terms.

And indeed government gains the respect that is its due when it is the vehicle of public justice. Citizens should work so that government can gain authentic respect. We confess that citizenship has its true

foundation in the grace of God in Jesus Christ and when we Christians get that clear then the path to follow Him and serve Him in our political lives becomes clear as well - and so we work away at articulating the implications of the patient rule of Jesus Christ for all areas of public policy in Australia.

# TO STIR WITH LOVE.... FOR JUSTICE (1)

Nurturing Justice 6 November 26 2006

In "Amnesia in Australia", a remarkable review for *The New York Review of Books* November 16, 2006, Caroline Moorehead discusses paintings from a Melbourne National Gallery of Victoria exhibition *Exiles and Emigrants: Epic Journeys to Australia in the Victorian Era*. This then becomes her jumping-off point for a psycho-historical examination of the inner tension in our national psyché.

Moorehead is impressed by the bleak and tragic beginnings of the colonies that became Australia. Her picture, of course, is of a land which was very hot and very dry, even in winter. Things have not changed as the south-east of the country reels from a drought that shows little sign of breaking. Back then, this land was but a far-away prison "of little interest to the architects of this penal experiment in Whitehall, for whom the *terra nullius*, the no man's land of Australia, from which there could be few hopes of return, offered a remedy to the alarming rise of crime. It was its very remoteness that made it so attractive."

She refers to well-known historical works by Robert Hughes [That Fatal Shore](#) and Thomas Keneally [A Commonwealth of Thieves: The Improbable Birth of Australia](#) in her "colonial dispatch". But she also adds novels by Kate Grenville [The Secret River](#) and Roger McDonald [The Ballad of Desmond Kale](#), to illustrate the brown dusty red ochres of despair that arose from the colonial confrontation with the great Australian isolation. And so Australia has grown with a shadow, a "dark stain". This is also a discussion in which she intends to bring her readers up to date, by showing how this tortured self-definition has re-emerged in Australia's recent political past. The political story behind two stories - of Eva Sallis's [The Marsh Birds](#) and Linda Jaivin's [The Infernal Optimist](#) - is of a national psyché beholden to a concerted effort by the leaders of the Federal Parliament to stare down our historical past. Australia has caught itself on the morally compromised "Pacific Solution" barbed wire of detention centres built for the "illegal queue jumpers" from Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan.

From this angle the story of Australia's recent past connects the political exploitation of defenceless and frightened people, who have fled for their lives, to the 160,000 convicts sent to the Great South Land prison settlement. Moorehead shows how the recent arrivals, the asylum seekers, became a useful pawn for a group of politicians desperate for re-election, and who maintain their power by appealing to "core values". These values are then traced all the way back to Australia's earliest colonial beginnings, to a squalid and brutal prison perched on the banks of Sydney harbour.

Moorehead's argument hones in on the end of the transportation of convicts. "But by 1840, the Whigs, under Lord John Russell as home secretary, had decided that transportation was not only immoral but efficient, because it encouraged corruption, failed to act as a deterrent to crime, and was economically unprofitable. A spirit of reform rather than punishment was in the air." She continues: "What came next was willful amnesia. A history so shaming, so full of violence committed against Aborigines and convicts alike, needed to be forgotten. Australian history was tacitly deemed to have begun only around 1850, with the daring exploits of the outlaw Ned Kelly and his gang, the gold rush, and the legendary expeditions to explore the interior."

Yes, some will dismiss her review as just another "black armband view of history." But she is not exactly trying to endorse the alternative "white blind fold" view, either. Instead, she is linking Howard's "Pacific Solution" - and by implication many other policies as well, including the illegal invasion of Iraq - to the Prime Minister's defence of his actions in terms of "core Australian values." Yes, implies Moorehead, that is true. This amnesia is indeed basic to Australia's heritage.

This reminder of our national forgetfulness is important to us as we think about our Christian political responsibility. Do we not inherit a *Christian* tradition of willful forgetfulness? And if we don't want to forget our current responsibilities we will do well to remember what it is we inherit, even if it is our own tradition of amnesia.

That might sound convoluted. But don't send this tract off to the WPB just yet. Let me try and indicate something of the depth of the problem we face in trying to overcome this amnesia. Consider, as an example, the biblical passage Hebrews 10: 23-25 and then ask about the way this has typically been interpreted. Having expounded the full consequences of Christ's victory, in the restoration of God's purposes for His creation, the writer urges the followers of Christ Jesus, to keep on meeting together in order that they may "stir up one another to love and good works." This writer is not pleading for regular Sunday by Sunday church attendance (with mandatory coffee and cake "chat" sessions afterwards) which come to demonstrate how civilized we are. This is about the Christian task of building each other up in *every* way in the faith: in families, in public life, in working the land, in science, in art and literature, in education and also in the life of congregations. It is in fact a passage that assumes that Christianity is on a collision course with a tradition of civil and civilised religion that is content to keep church things holy while politics can stay a dirty business for ever.

Since the late 18th and into the 19th century this text has been regularly interpreted as a "clincher" in any discussion about the way attendance at church services should function in the Christian life. But if this verse has been used in order "to keep the church show on the road" then the battle has been lost before it has been fought. Such a prevalent interpretation easily forgets the responsibilities in which we Christians have to live out our lives, as citizens, as workers, as farmers, as students, as family members. But the text is not about "going to church" or appending a fellowship to one's daily life. It is telling us what

being the people of God means. Christians need each other as they serve God in their lives. A tradition that takes this text and uses to keep the church's pews full will, in the long-run, be self-defeating. And does not the weight of evidence before our eyes today in the diminished numbers that attend Christian worship confirm the point?

The biblical admonition is that Christians are called to consciously incite one another to do good, which is the opposite of any amnesia about our life in this world. The implications of this are significant. Christianity as a way of life, not just a Sunday-by-Sunday habit, needs to figure out how we are to serve in the many responsibilities God has given us. But saying this is easy. How should we now understand the revival of the heritage of Christian political forgetfulness that views faith as a habit, as a psychic twitch that follows us everywhere we go? How is this forgetfulness to be overcome? We will have to discuss this further another time.

In the meantime, here in Victoria we now enter the final days before a State election. Why not consider arranging your visit to an electoral booth on Saturday by walking there with a fellow citizen from your neighbourhood and discussing how you as a citizen propose to nurture public justice. It might not get you onto any front page, but why not develop this as a useful and regular polling-day tradition with your friend. You might even think and pray about an initiative with a few Christian friends. But keep it open. A little yeast can make a whole lump rise and as we meet to stir one another in our voting, we can remember that our citizenship is a gift for which we can thank the patient rule of Jesus Christ, the ruler over all local and state governments, of this country, around this region and over the entire earth.

# NURTURING JUSTICE IN THE SOUTH-WEST PACIFIC

Nurturing Justice 7 28 November 2006

We continue the discussion begun last time. The difficult question of how we should view Australia's past and confront any national "amnesia" will be addressed further in a future posting. But in the meantime there are regional tensions pressing for our consideration. We need to remember that our Christian political responsibility to seek justice must extend beyond our borders. The ongoing political and constitutional tensions in the region remind us of regional responsibilities. We have to ask ourselves whether Australia, as a large and prosperous nation, has respected and cared for our South West Pacific neighbours as we should have done?

In recent decades the major forces in our national life have pushed us relentlessly to adopt more centralist, and less federalist, political planning. Whatever the area of government concern, it seems that only policies that equate "national self-interest" with economic profit and financial gains will get on the national political agenda. And in the meantime, far-reaching alterations are taking place. Our 1901 constitution was framed with a clear understanding that it was in the national economic interest for the State Governments to regulate the economies of the former colonial centres of power. But now, after 105 years, a centralist policy agenda is firmly in place. The current Prime Minister is pushing centralised control from Canberra as hard as he can and it seems that he considers that this will be the culminating transformation that has resulted from his tenure as Prime Minister. This is a significant turn-around for one who began his political career as an avowed defender of the States, alleging that any centralised and nationalised economy as espoused by the Whitlam Labor Government was merely a socialist half-way to communism, a denial of human reason as expressed in free market principles. But now communism is no longer on the radar and Australia's "national interest" has become the unifying theme in all federal policy areas promulgated by the Liberal-National Coalition.

But, in the light of current regional instabilities we should surely ask: what has been achieved long-term for our region by Australia's subtle change to its own self-definition? And what has this internal change done to Australia's "national interest" in the region? It is an important question, needing sustained historical analysis. In recent years the Howard Government has been happy to play the role of regional "sheriff" for the US and Australia's military involvement in Iraq confirms this obsequious attitude. But then the split in ANZUS was brought on when the Hawke Labor Government insisted on concurring with the Reagan

administration's demand that ships carrying weapons of mass destruction be allowed to use Australian and New Zealand port facilities. Our efforts to understand what is happening today should not ignore these historical background factors, which are themselves developments of the security agreements set up after the Second World War.

Today, there seems to be a perverse relationship at work: the more Mr Howard and Mr Downer appeal to the "national interest" the more, it seems, that our region is characterised by political instabilities and constitutional imbalances. It is as if Australia's national interest should operate as the primary framework for the region's development. And so the imbalances continue provoking a new round of affirmations of the importance of "Australia's national interest" from our politicians.

Why is the network of international relations in our region less peaceful these days? Could it be that the successive policies of Federal Governments since the 1980s to advance Australia's "national interest" in the region has actually contributed to profound structural changes in the region? Is the region more just, more healthy, more stable, more safe, and more prosperous than it was before this two decade effort to equate Australia's "national interest" with programs that progressively centralised ongoing economic restructuring? If, as a result, we have become such a wealthy nation and if the freedom of the market is supposed to be the key to democratic governance, why then all this regional instability?

There is indeed a serious problem with the involvement of the Laskar Jihad terrorist group in West Papua that the Australian Government must not ignore in its dealings with Jakarta. But, the instability among Pacific Island states can hardly be blamed on terrorism. But then, maybe this country's grandiose and altogether inadequate response to the "war on terrorism" has actually had a negative impact on relations between it and the South Pacific nations, not only at Government to Government level, but also where grass-roots meet grass-roots, and NGOs work with NGOs, not to forget where police work with police, and military strategically co-operates with military. This is a critical line of argument and it must be asked by "all sides of politics" as we reassess our regional standing, as we think about our own strategic place among the nations, and as we calculate the political, cultural and social impact of more than two decades of economic restructuring. It is not just a matter of those responsible for current foreign policy from Canberra.

We need to develop insight into how Australia's national and economic development has been contributing to our region for good and ill. We cannot now avoid the prospect of a long-term instability in West Papua. But the Solomon Islands, Tonga and Fiji also show the world signs of considerable constitutional uncertainty as the citizens of these island states seek to resolve problems that are deep-seated in post-colonial settings.

Meanwhile, how does Australia, via its powerful media and our political leaders, interpret these regional instabilities? Is our country properly aware of *the inner weaknesses in our own system of government* as we give attention to the political difficulties faced by our

neighbours? Are we as a country sufficiently empathic about the difficulties of constitutional change? Or do we forget our national irresolution about our anomalous "monarchic republicanism" and proceed to comment as if we have reached a point in our national life where no constitutional self-criticism is needed for ourselves? To listen to our PM and Foreign Minister it would seem that Australia's constitution is perfect. They seem to go out of their way to make conciliatory and complimentary comments to the Indonesian government, but at the same time the *Pancasila* doctrine, basic to Indonesia's emergent democracy since independence, is itself undergoing significant challenges and threats. Australian Government representatives seem to be extremely quiet when it comes to the privations and depredations of the indigenous people of West Papua. On the other hand, the reported comments of the Australian Government to the island states of the South West Pacific seem to regularly adopt the tone of an imperious "head prefect" as if relations in the region are merely about organising a sporting carnival for first formers at high school. These are matters that need our further reflection.

In the meantime, in the context of Foreign Minister Downer's comments about the possibility of a attempted coup in Fiji, we offer the following Christian democratic editorial from the Fiji Daily Post for your careful consideration. Further news on this matter can be gleaned from the Fiji Daily Post site

*On using the c-word  
26-Nov-2006*

*THE comment by Australian Foreign Affairs Minister, Alexander Downer that another coup is likely and imminent in Fiji, is most unhelpful. It will not help resolve our crisis. His opinion brings nothing new to the discussion except to raise levels of alarm even further. The fact that our military commander 'could conduct a coup within the next couple of weeks' (as Downer put it) simply adds fuel to an already volatile situation because of his position - who he is, and the weight his opinion is likely to carry. It sends all the wrong signals to an already jittery international investment community and will do nothing to assist tourism in Fiji.*

*Of course, Mr Downer will have his defense at hand: he will claim that he is simply reporting what has come through to him from his departmental resources and the Australian High Commission. He will say better to be forewarned than regretful after the fact. But in all of this, he must understand the difference between an ordinary citizen in the street expressing that opinion and his status as a top-level political diplomat of a powerful neighbouring nation with deep historical, economic, social and political ties with Fiji.*

*He must also appreciate the incendiary potential of the word 'coup' when used by outsiders in an already coup-drenched culture such as we have in Fiji. Local political scientist, Dr Steven Ratuva, has rightly drawn our collective attention to the hyperbolic use of the 'coup' word by overseas journalists who seem too willing to sum up any political tension in Fiji as 'coup'-related, or as having potential for a 'coup'.*

*While there is a proper place for the consideration and evaluation of our rising political tensions and especially the prospect of a stand-off between police and the military, it is analytically wrong and injurious to the*

*national interest to over-simplify these critical tensions as necessarily coup-driven or unavoidably coup-oriented.*

*That is to say, the free use of the 'coup' word such as we have in Fiji is part of a localised discourse, an ethno-linguistic 'rap' that is generically built into political exchange since 1987. We wish the c-word could be erased from Fiji's consciousness and correspondingly expunged from our dictionary and discourse. But that may take generations.*

*The point is, we in Fiji use the word loosely, Mr Downer uses it seriously. Our use of the c-word has by its currency debased the fear-factor considerably. See evidence for this, for example, in the recent DP street polls which provide admittedly anecdotal evidence of people's willingness to support a military overthrow of the very government they elected just some six months ago! This evidence suggests that a truly democratic culture in Fiji is skin-deep and few appreciate the philosophical contradiction between supporting democracy on one hand and supporting its overthrow on the other. Hence, the use of the c-word among us should be interpreted quite differently from the way non-Fiji outsiders and observers would use the word.*

*While we do not doubt the Australian Foreign Minister's genuine concern for Fiji, it is this anthropological and cultural-linguistic point that he is missing and which, if taken on board, may better temper his choice of language in addressing our present crisis.*

# TO STIR WITH LOVE... FOR JUSTICE (2)

Nurturing Justice 8 November 2006

This edition continues the discussion we started previously. Caroline Moorehead's provocative article "Amnesia in Australia" in The New York Review of Books (Nov 16, 2006) identifies a persistent Australian habit-of-mind, a "willful amnesia" she calls it, and its depth and subtlety is well illustrated by her review of some recent Australian novels in a "post 9/11" context.

Australia, she suggests, is characterised by a peculiar activism that would achieve its short-term goals as it distracts itself from its "dark stain". Put in another way, Australian society, at least since the 1840s according to Moorehead's historical account, has been shaped by immigrants caught up in their immediate short-term need to settle in the new country. This immigrant activism with immediate short-term results, with making a living for oneself in a somewhat forbidding environment, has been deeply ingrained, generation by generation, so that it is clearly evident in the Australian political psyché. And so it began when the convict past, and any difficult relationships with the prior occupants of the land, were given lower and then even lower places on the list of public priorities. Concern about history, or worrying about the plight of aboriginals, can come later. So, first things first.

Already we can begin to perceive the emergence of what we now identify as typical Australian "values" - a way of life geared to a mutual respect for each individual who is assumed to be making sure he or she has "something to fall back on" (in retirement or when the hard times hit). This utilitarian emphasis upon the "good life" shared by all "dinkum Aussies" is not only a private matter; it embraces all of life. And at various times it has shown that it is willing to doff its cap or "tug the forelock" to religion. After all, religion has an important part to play in private life by shaping the moral conscience of "dinkum Aussies" who are the ones who will then create the important political and economic institutions (and sporting achievements) that we are all so proud of. Religion is needed if we are to maintain our way of life and have "something to fall back on" ... later. Those other things can also be given their due ... later.

Caroline Moorhead's review provokes us to think about the kind of "willful amnesia" that is characteristic of the dominant religious viewpoint in Australia's past and present. And we need to better understand the dominance of this religion that takes up residence in the utilitarian private realm. Why? Because it is this dominance that puts genuine Christian profession in public life on the back foot, if it hasn't rendered it problematic. **It is this religion that expects that Christians will spend their time waiting for the moment when "spiritual things" can be relevantly inserted into an otherwise secular context.**

But then think about the basic tenets of this "Aussie religion" in the light of scriptural passages like Hebrews 10:23-25 or Colossians 1:15-20

or Matthew 28:18-20. Are we to accept Australia's privatization of religion? Is this "Aussie system of values" compatible with the rule of Jesus Christ?

We will need to develop this discussion further particularly since we seek insight into our Christian political responsibilities.

# LOOKING FOR ONE'S CAREER BY DENYING ONE'S OFFICE....

Nurturing Justice 9 December 2006

Sometime on Sunday afternoon, the Commander of Fiji's Military Forces, Commodore Vorege Bainimarama made a slip which involved an important admission, the significance of which the international media has thus far failed to note. He as good as admitted to the entire Fiji people that he is making up his "coup" as he goes along.

Why do I say this? During his nation-wide television interview on Sunday afternoon, the Commander refuted a report in the *Sunday Post* newspaper, which claimed military action would begin early Monday. "That is not true. We don't announce our intentions," he said in the Fijian language interview. During that interview he is also reported to have said: "We have a plan, my officers are now meeting to polish that plan, but we had it six to 12 months ago."

Now ask yourself: what is the Commander trying to say? To try and understand the Commander's erratic pronouncements, I would like to put forward a statement that I think can help us understand what he is wanting not to say:

*To all my fellow Fijians, of all races, tribes, and families, of all our institutions, organisations, corporations. I am glad that the Government has gone as far as it possibly can under the constitution and according to legal process to accept the matters that have been put to it by myself on behalf of the Fijian military. We have done what we have done out of loyalty to our nation, to our constitution, to our system of government. And so I acknowledge that my failure in the past few days to be gracious and accept the Prime Minister's concession has been due to my initial inability to face up to the gravity of the situation. The PM has tried from his side. But I have refused to desist from the position that has taken this country to the brink of disaster. In fact, having rejected his concessions, I put myself in a position where for a few days I no longer knew how to carry on in my military tasks under the constitution. But now I have seen the errors of my ways, and I am calling off this "clean up" campaign. I am asking for the people's forgiveness and I am ordering all officers in the Fiji military to return to barracks. We will continue to work with the Government, now that concessions have been made, to ensure that any future military does not get into the no-man's land in which I have been in the last few days. Please forgive me. Now I know I should have been more conciliatory. My fellow Fijians, I ask your forgiveness. I ask God's forgiveness. Let us all work for justice and peace in our country...*

But that clearly is not what the Commander is wanting to say, at least not at this point. Let us pray that it become so sooner rather than later. This is the miracle that we need to pray for. And let us be forgiving and forbearing just as God in Heaven is patient with us and all people.

When the Commander says, "We don't announce our intentions!" he assumes that he is in control or that he should be in control. This

amounts to the same thing, the same problem. "We don't announce our intentions!" Really? He's been announcing his intentions for months. And now he says he doesn't announce his intentions. Over the last week it has become clear that he has one plan in mind. That plan is clearly that the PM, Laisenia Qarase, must concede totally. That is his intention whether he puts it into words or not. Hiding behind ambiguous "clean up" phrases, he must also be wondering whether the military circle promoting his "clean up" has leaked his plans. But then what plan? What kind of plan is it if after "6 to twelve months" he claims that his intentions are still un-announced?

The interview was in Fijian, and clearly was an important message from the Commander. One thing seems to have become clearer by it and the events of the last few days. The Commander's *modus operandi*, his way of describing his "coup", is not all that different from the way other powerful holders of public office around the world have described their actions at critical times in their own careers as public servants. I think here of the explanations that have been given by President Bush and Prime Minister Howard for the invasion of Iraq. **The goals keep changing in order that these leaders maintain the appearance of being in control.** Still, in the present case in Fiji there is an important difference - unlike these other "career politicians", Commander Bainimarama is a military officer, head of Fiji's military and he has actually been making his political threats to the Fiji government for "6 to 12 months". His political threats bind his own (military) career to an unjust **political threat** of military force against his own country's government. His unconstitutional action is now well and truly indistinguishable from his own personal career aspirations, his own career path. **And so his plans and intentions are in tatters. But that is precisely why the situation is so dangerous.** The comparison between the Fijian military leader and political leaders from near and far is not all that outrageous or ridiculous. Such world leaders are not engaged in a threat of a military takeover of their own country, but they have challenged their own nation's respective constitutions by assuming that justice is a consequence of mere goal-seeking, in which political action becomes too tightly bound to political career aspirations.

So how does a person find one's calling in one's office? The way to do so is first to ask a simple, but also difficult-to-answer, question: From whom do we humans gain the authority to be human and to do the tasks that have been asked of us?

We can only answer this question in faith. Every office holder must answer it. It is unavoidable. That is the way that God asks us to come to Him. Remember. Without **faith** it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to God must believe that He is the One who made the path on which we approach Him? But we don't approach God at the end of our goal-seeking, at the end of our path when things get out of control. Faith to be faith is at the beginning of our office-bearing. It underlies everything we do. The authority to be human, and hence the authority to do all the various tasks we are called to do, does not come from within, or from our own goal-setting, or our own self-control. Appearing cool at the rugby is not the God-given way to relieve a

nation's fears when you've gone beyond the bounds of office. But repentance will begin the process of what is needed to get ourselves out of a jam of our own making when we have assumed that it our goal-setting that will bring justice.

Go back now and read the newspaper reports of the tension between the Fijian Prime Minister and the Military Commander. Read the minutes of the Wellington meeting <http://www.fijitimes.com/> including the letter of PM Qarase to the Commander. Consider the above quotes again. From whom does the Commander take orders? What is driving him? It is clear that the Commander is seeking to present himself as a man on a mission, a man in control of himself, the military and his nation. But who has sent him on this "clean up" mission? His problem is that his goals cannot be reached without the total capitulation of the lawfully elected Fiji Government. And so rather than the PM being in a corner, it is actually the Commander who has nowhere else to turn. When the PM acceded to his demands he wasn't able to say: "Enough. Yes. Good. I now retreat." But he hasn't faced up to the fact yet. He must. He must repent.

He demanded total capitulation. To whom? The answer is, whether he likes it or not, his words and deeds demand a total capitulation of the PM to himself. This is to ignore the PM's office. This is to ignore the authority of the PM and ultimately to ignore the One who has given that authority. And so the Commander is left trying to find out why he and his country are now in this strange nether-world. He is now trying to discover the limits of his office having ignored his office, having stepped outside the limits defined by the Fijian constitution. And that is why he is unable to keep his word; this is why he no longer knows the capacity in which he is acting. This is man who cannot now take "Yes" for an answer because to do so will require that he step back, and turn around and admit that he has overstepped his office.

So in brief it is now a matter of open conciliatory negotiations on the one side and implacable demands that simply ignore the fact that the Prime Minister would be violating his oath of office under the constitution if he now were to capitulate.

This is not to suggest that Mr Qarase has not erred in the past. Nor is it to suggest that he has never deceived the military commander. Nor that the Fiji Constitution doesn't ongoing careful reform. But the Prime Minister would be going outside his office if he were to capitulate if he were to publicly capitulate on his own authority, and meet all of the Commander's untenable demands. That he cannot do without denying his own office.

In other words, the Government has said "Yes" and will agree with the military should the police and the Public Prosecutor and other statutory bodies and committees be willing to recommend the military's line of action. And so the Commander is stymied and does not now know how to retreat. But more basically, he doesn't know how to repent. He doesn't know how to "clean up" his violation of his own military office. And so the threats continue. The "clean up" will go ahead. And the Commander's bottom line is now clear.

That is why I am suggesting at this point in time (11.45am AEST Monday 4th December) that the Commander has left the path of public *service* to relentlessly resolve his own career goals. Sad but true. And it sad but true that this could lead Fiji into deeper confusion and injustice.

# FORGIVENESS, FRANK! ....

Nurturing Justice 10 December 7

Frank:

The time has come.

Lay down your arms.

Sit in black with the rest of your country and mourn.

Mourn the failures of your country.

Mourn the corruption. Mourn the deep hurts that do not seem to go away.

The time has come for Australia, New Zealand, and all the South Pacific to mourn with you, Frank.

Not against you, but with you.

We mourn and don't not even dare to try to prove our sincerity by a pre-emptive strike against ourselves.

Our corruption goes that deep. And we must mourn.

We have heard Dr Senilagkali's "butt out and leave us be" to the Australian and New Zealand Governments, and we also listen to his concerns about Iraq.

And we are hurt to the bone to hear him say Fiji will go elsewhere for support and aid. We support Fiji because Fiji is also part of what we are in this sector of the globe. You are us. We are you.

And that's so whether you like it or not, Frank, and no rifle is going to change that reality. No dismissive appeal to "national interest" or "necessity" is going to make a scrap of difference to this reality.

Consider Frank your "necessary" investigation into corruption. Who is corrupt, really? Isn't it the one who says he has authority from himself to ... be himself?

It's not true Frank.

It's not true.

But you are just like all of us, Frank. You are like all of us who pretend we have the authority to be human, that we can if we have the guns make ourselves president by our own words. That is corruption of the first order Frank and deep-down you must know it or else you wouldn't have dared to wear your uniform in the first place.

You know it not only from your army training. You know from your family. You know it because that was the corruption you opposed in previous times. You know because you didn't create yourself Frank.

Even if there were a measure of right on your side, which I doubt, it would still be time to forgive.

It would still be still to stop this rebellion against rebellion. Lay down your arms. Coup your coup and sit with your country again, sit with your

fellows around the yaqona bowl and admit it Frank, stop this terror. Forgive and find the forgiveness you push away.

And we will, as your country invites us, join in - not as an outer circle, but as part of who we are together being willing to work through this together - for peace and justice for Fiji yes but also for the entire region.

We will sit with you through this night until a new day, a new day when the sun of forgiveness rises in the region, in our hearts.

That is the other thing that you have forgotten here. Forgiveness, Frank. Forgiveness.

You know what is really sad about your conduct Frank over the last weeks?

It's this. When the Prime Minister conceded, when he said that he was unable to stop all police investigations into the military and those concerning yourself, he still conceded. You have wanted to dress that up and say that he was corrupt, that he consorts with cronies who are not "coming back". Your shouted cry is of one who has wrongly sent his brother away and doesn't have the strength of courage to face his deepest fears.

Of course so often we act and do not even know our own hearts so how can we say what lies in the heart of another?

But ask yourself this Frank.

You have acted as if you know what is in the heart of Laisenia Qarase. You brushed aside something that was present in his statements because you have since then acted as if you know, as if you are God and know, his deep down intentions. You have doubted his good faith toward you.

Was he simply playing to the gallery by saying he would accept advice "in the national interest" that charges be dropped? If he were then, in principle, he has overturned his own stated position - he has couped himself. But you don't know that although your actions say that that is the case.

You have simply said that you know and you not only ruthlessly brushed aside his last effort at national reconciliation, you have also been unkind, Frank.

Unkind Frank. You have shown an unfriendly side and have ignored the possibility that he was trying to find a way to forgive you man to man, person to person in the midst of the tension between your two official positions.

You have responded with your gun to his outstretched hand and it is time to lay down that gun and finally reach out to the man who should still be forgiving toward you as you should be to him.

You have used your office to avoid forgiveness, and that is the wrong way and the time has come for you to wear black with all other mourners at Fiji's constitutional funeral and with all other South Pacific seekers after peace and justice take a different path.

That path is still available even at this late stage.

It's almost Christmas and the greatest and most difficult miracle in the world is nothing less than forgiveness.

Governments can be overthrown - that apparently is not so difficult - the baby boys of Bethlehem can be massacred and yet Christmas is still on our and your horizon. To fail to forgive, to fail to accept another's forgiveness, is to coup Christmas. The arming world around us says it is impossible, but forgiveness, reconciliation, saying sorry, that is the miracle. And that is the miracle that you and we must experience too, now.

May God grant it Frank.

# THE "CLEAN-UP" COUP'S INTELLECTUAL ANCESTORS

Nurturing Justice 11 December 2006

We have rubbed our eyes and got another cotton bud to clean out our ears. Is it really happening? The Fiji military is now telling law-abiding, justice-seeking citizens to "watch your mouth or we'll close it for you!" Such threats take us into a reality we never thought possible.

And so now those Fijians who have demanded an immediate return to democracy ask themselves: "Could it be possible that we have been living in the wrong reality these past few years? Could it be that reality is really on the side of Commodore Vorege Bainimarama after all and that his outrageous threats against the elected government were simply the wake-up call we refused to accept?" Frank the prophet? Could it be so? Was last year's election merely a part of our misinterpretation? Were we just giving the military further reason to "clean up"? Is that it?

Military "emergencies" have now been announced with the presumption that they will be accepted by all ... or ..... A "clean-up" is underway. It is as if the Commodore is now saying, "If you don't see it our way, we're going to stay until you accept that we are the reality. We define totally and even your inability to see it our way is going to be changed by the way we change Fijian reality."

But isn't that like saying Fiji is going to rid itself of disease by allowing leaking sewerage containers to be paraded through Suva's streets for the next while?

With some justification many say (quietly lest he hears) that the Commodore is holding on to his illegally-acquired power simply because he doesn't know how to let go, he no longer knows the pathway back to his barracks. He's now told us that he is **El Presidente**. If he lets go now before he has uncovered the reason for the coup he will hijack himself. So he holds on. And the nation is required to hold on with him. Give your salute and keep your gob shut.

But for all its apparent madness, what is happening in Fiji today is completely embedded in Western military history since Leonardo da Vinci. At first, such a statement sounds preposterous, as crazy as the two-years of threats by the Commodore before he proceeded with his "clean up". But don't consign this to the waste paper basket just yet. Consider the fact that military campaigns, like everything else in our lives, can't avoid an underlying basis, a view of the meaning and purpose of life.

And since the 16th century, our entire globe, including social life ordered by the military dimension of nation states, has been completely absorbed with an ongoing titanic struggle between two paths which lead

in different directions. The struggle is over which direction should be taken for human life in its totality. It is not too much to suggest that now all people around the entire globe are drawn into this struggle whether they welcome it or not; it demands that a choice be made, a choice that has also been unfolding for centuries. My point is that this current crisis brings Fiji right into the midst of current global tensions with a vengeance.

With these two spiritual forces wrestling for control comes two distinct pathways - the first is to renew our commitment to walk in God-given ways, to live justly, to love all our neighbours, and to take care of all of God's creation as good stewards. On this path, goals are determined by the path we take, the path of obedience, self-limitation and service of God and others. The second path is quite different. It assumes that the path is what we make it to be - the path is determined by the goals we devise.

And so, we have witnessed recently the well-intentioned, but tragically mistaken, interim Prime Minister, trying to walk on both paths at the same time - and in any one life, it must said, one or other path will come to dominate. Either the God-given standards and rules for life will define how our feet tread - "thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light to my path" says the Psalmist. Or, our path will always be redefined so that we make our feet walk toward the goals we have devised, which we have defined. Then we may not even refer to our autonomy when we make our appeal and prayers to God. In our own autonomy we will assume that it is not necessary to tell God about our faith because our faith is our own creature. We are our own law. Our goals will determine what freedom and justice are. And God, God help Him, will just have to get in behind. We justify our behaviour by our behaviour - it is our goals which hang in the balance. We show that right is on our side.

And so it is in these terms that we discern the two major spiritual forces in our lives - Christianity following Jesus Christ in which He tells us what it is to be human and the religion of humankind (humanism) in which we continue the process of defining who it is we are to be.

I mentioned Leonardo, the great artist and scientist, the epitomé of "renaissance man." He is famous for designing ingenious military weapons including the submarine and helicopter. War's renaissance meant that henceforth it would be a new "art", an expression of the human ability to make and shape reality.

Let us say that the Commodore's "clean up" shows the marks of the creative artist in the line of Leonardo da Vinci. Vorege Bainimarama as Fiji's own renaissance man. Would this be taken as a compliment? I suspect so. His actions as military commander - over the last two years at least - certainly have all the hallmarks of a renaissance appeal to human ingenuity and autonomy. But we take care. If we were concede this, we might just take an extra step in the historical sense and link the actions of this self-appointed president with Machiavelli, and that might well incur his wrath - after all, the author of The Art of War has given his name to a mode of politics which evokes wide-spread suspicion these

days. But as we identify the Commodore with Leonardo, we note that he is well on the way to re-writing his book *The Chief*, (he says that the Great Council can now only meet on his say so) and that supposition is confirmed as we see him seeking to capture "renaissance" goals by his clean-up - public rectitude, peace, order, economic prosperity are now to be the creations, the end products, the justification, of the military's ingenuous accomplishment by improving governance by overthrowing the military's subjection to the law and the constitution.

Unlike former coups this one has been executed with the rational circumspection of the laboratory scientist's "experiment". It has the concerted objectivity of one who wishes to exclude chance and uncertainty from his "clean up" labours. And it is the rationality based upon a monopoly of fire-power that means that this scientific operation can indeed maintain objectivity by shutting people's mouths without any blood being shed. That is its genius. The goal of this experiment is to bring an end to coup-culture. This is the coup to end all coups.

And immediately we are back in a reality where we realise that what we have just said might put ourselves in danger. A coup to end all coups? Wasn't that what they said about the first world war - the world to end all wars? And look where that got the combined renaissance ingenuity of Europe? A coup to end all coups? Well think it, whisper it perhaps but by no means say it out loud. You don't know who is listening. You don't know how your listener is going to interpret your words. This coup is a coup of genius, renaissance genius.

A coup to end all coups? Is Frank off his trolley? No, not exactly.

Before we endorse such extravagant questions we need to properly understand the connection between what we are facing here and now in Fiji in the early 21st century and its connection with the 20th century, two bloody European civil wars and their aftermath. But to do that we need to take note of transitions in military thinking after the French Revolution which superseded the confidence conquering chivalry that had emerged since the 16th century. Since the time Fiji was colonised, European war was no longer a last resort in an overall international campaign of employing diplomats to negotiate boundaries so that governments could develop their policies on compliant populations. Since the time Fiji was colonised, war has pretty much been policy. And now in pacific isolation, Fiji confusedly confirms the coup policy as the means to ensure good governance.

It was after Napoleon, coinciding with increasing industrialisation, that war became just another policy. War is just another way of talking. "War is the business of the people!" And it is that view of Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831) - known as "total war" - that has defined military thinking ever since. Its most recent formulation is the "shock and awe" that was so certain of itself that it would clean up Baghdad and the entire fabric of Iraqi life in a very short space of time. (And what now that Donald Rumsfeld is no longer in office?)

The assumption is that in military campaigns the goal will be reached by a campaign that is "sufficiently intimidating and compelling ... to force or otherwise convince an adversary to accept our will ... such that

the strategic aims and military objectives of the campaign will achieve a political end" (Harlan Ullman in Shock and Awe: Achieving Rapid Dominance National Defense University 1996).

And so we now can see how Fiji's current "clean up" is completely dominated by the underlying logic that accompanies contemporary military thinking dominating the world today. The notion that military action was a last resort, a kind of repentant governmental action, preventative and seeking to avoid undue harm, strictly limited by laws that protected the rights of non-combatants, is almost completely lost. And Fiji's military commander, with his taciturn spokesman Major Leweni, show themselves to be on the same page as military commanders elsewhere. What is dominant is an urge to dominate, to over-power, an urge in which the military power demands that it expose the potential adversary. And so for the good of the country the military has taken over, has taken control, has assumed the power of life and death over all who wish to stay. Those who criticise, those who shrink back from this domineering aspiration are now in danger - just as the military says there are - they can too easily become enemies if their mouths are opened to say the wrong thing.

And that is also why the interim-PM, for all his Methodist piety, is completely wrong when he suggests that Fiji is now on a completely different path to democracy. It is not true. The "clean-up" of Commodore Bainimarama is **not only comparable** with Shock and Awe in Iraq (the monstrous ends-justifies-the-means pre-emptive war of Bush, Blair and Howard) it is **also striking in its consistency** with the underlying self-worshipping assumptions that dominate western military theory and implementation when "shock and awe" are given full sway. These assumptions have their roots in a humanistic world-view that puts its faith in human autonomy. To that extent the "clean up" cuts itself off from the just-war criteria that for centuries Christians have sought to follow when they have engaged in military action.

# HUMAN SEED, LAW AND POLITICS

Nurturing Justice 1 (2007) 14 March

Here is the formal reply from a Government minister to my 19 October 2006 letter to Minister Abbott (reproduced below), which Mr Abbott's office had earlier informed me he had passed on to the Attorney General, which I now surmise was passed on the Senator Ellison. It is an interesting letter and addresses (finally) the legal issue about the export of human embryos. It discusses the current law but does not address the involvement of Australian research facilities in embryonic research prior to 2001.

I will work on a reply to Senator Ellison and would be interested to hear comments from readers about ways in which the discussion can be further developed.

You will note the Senator's reference to "difficult and complex issues on which many different views are held", "the strong views that people hold" and the "*Research Amenment Act 2006* which ... was enacted following a conscience vote." Despite the 2003 "ban on the export of human embryos from Australia", which as the final paragraph states is now to be replaced by the 2006 Act which comes into effect on 12 June 2007, the export of embryos for assisted reproductive technology (ART) is to be allowed now with no restrictions.

Where does this leave the embryonic research that was underway as part of Australian medical research prior to 2001? Clearly, it was an embarrassment to the Howard Government when a prominent researcher from the Hubrecht Institute in the Netherlands publicly stated that her research side-stepped the EU cloning ban by importing embryos from Australia. That no doubt, with Senator Harradine's persistence, led to the 2003 legislation. However, it has also meant that this debate has been unnecessarily convoluted.

If those issues had been raised when they should have been raised then the focus would not have been solely on the future prospects of such research but also upon the fact that such research has already been underway for some time, presumably made possible in part by the provision of public funding for medical research. After all, there is at least one Australian research facility that was in a co-operative partnership with the Hubrecht Institute.

But clearly, those facts were not publicly revealed when they should have been revealed, around the time that Mr Howard precipitously changed his electoral promise to become an advocate of research on "spares", calling for a national debate on the issue. Questions would have then been raised about the co-operation of Australian research institutions with the Dutch research. It would not only have been about whether such research should be allowed but it would have meant that public debate was properly informed about the research that was already underway **as it should have been**. It seems to me that the

Parliament, if not the Government, has for some time been guilty of sitting on important matters while pretending to promote a debate about the morality of such research. A vote against embryonic stem-cell research in these circumstances, is not only a statement that human seed is not a commodity, that a human embryo is human life and as such requires legal protection, but it would also mean a public audit of the research facilities to ensure that public grants had not been funding such research.

The issue will not go away.

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*Senator the Hon. Christopher Ellison  
Minister for Justice and Customs  
Senator for Western Australia  
Manager of Government Business in the Senate*

*27 February 2007*

*Dear Mr Wearne*

*Thankyou for your letter of 19 October 2006 to the Hon Tony Abbott MP, Minister for Health and Ageing, asking about the legal requirements for exporting human embryos from Australia in light of the recent stem-cell research debate. Your letter was referred to me for response as I have the responsibility for administering permissions to export human embryos. I apologise for the delay in responding.*

*I appreciate that the regulation of stem-cell research and human embryo exports are difficult and complex issues on which many different views are held. I recognise, acknowledge and respect the strong views that people hold.*

*By way of background the regulation of human embryo exports, in February 2003 the Australian Government amended the Customs (Prohibited Exports) Regulations 1958 to place an absolute ban on the export of human embryos from Australia. The rationale for doing so was that if Australian embryos were exported overseas then once they were overseas Australian law would not apply to their use and they could be used for research that was not permitted in Australia at that time.*

*Currently the export of human embryos is prohibited under regulation 7 of the Customs (Prohibited Exports) Regulations 1958 unless I grant written permission for the export. Legally I can only grant permission if I am satisfied that the export is for assisted reproduction technology (ART) purposes, such as invitro fertilisation treatment or surrogacy, and the application meets the conditions set out in the regulation.*

*These arrangements came into place on 27 March 2003 when, recognising concerns raised by couples seeking to export ART embryos for the purposes of continuing the treatment overseas or in accordance with surrogacy arrangement, the Australian Government lifted the absolute prohibition and replaced it with the current permit scheme. The intention of these embryo export arrangements was that they would be in place until the most appropriate mechanism for regulating the export of human embryos would be determined.*

*The Prohibition of Human Cloning for Reproduction and the Regulation of Human Embryo Research Amendment Act 2006, which are you are probably aware was enacted following a conscience vote in both Houses of Parliament, will operate to repeal the current permit scheme on 12 June 2007.*

*As stated in the Explanatory Memorandum for the Act, this change made by the Parliament is consistent with Recommendation 41 of the Lockhart Report that the import or export of a patient's reproductive material, including ART embryos, for the purpose of that person's ongoing ART*

*treatment should not require any regulation other than that required under existing quarantine regulation.*

*I trust that this information adequately addresses your queries.*

*Yours sincerely  
CHRIS ELLISON  
Senator for Western Australia*

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*Thursday, 19 October 2006  
Hon Tony Abbott  
Leader of the House, Minister for Health and Ageing  
Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600*

*Dear Mr Abbott:*

*I refer to the letter, penned on your behalf by Adrian White, 10 October 2006, in answer to my communication with you of 28 August 2006.*

*The reply is very disappointing. To allow this form letter to pass without comment would mean I was joining your office in appearing to ignore the serious matters I have raised with you. Mr White's reply contains nothing I didn't know before and read alongside of my original communication seems to imply that your office hopes the facts I have raised will go away. They will not. They are very relevant to the just consideration of the relevant legislation and more besides.*

*To repeat: Australia was already in support of embryonic stem-cell research prior to 2001 when this became a political issue here. Human embryos were being exported from this country for research in the Netherlands. At that time there were no import or export controls on human embryos.*

*Does your office concede the serious situation that these facts reveal? Is the Australian Government going to allow human embryos to be used for commercial gain under the rubrics of "national interest", free trade and commercial confidentiality? This matter deserves much more than the superficial gloss that the PM and state and territory leaders have given by appeal to the need for "nationally consistent arrangements." Moreover, the Lockhart Review failed to convey the true gravity of this situation which your office must still now address.*

*Is the export of human embryos from Australia still legally possible? Should the law, for whatever purpose, allow human embryos to be sent out of this country?*

*To reflect upon these matters is to begin to address this issue, and all complexity notwithstanding, the Government must ensure that these matters are known and discussed openly, and laws framed so that justice can be done and human life protected fully and comprehensively in public law.*

*That is why the October 10 letter is unacceptable. It does not address these matters and be assured they will not go away.*

*Yours sincerely*

# THE WITHERED LIBERAL PARTY

Nurturing Justice 2 (2007) 20 March

Introduction: Last December, I promised further comment on what called the "constitutional crisis" that is revealed by conscience votes on cloning, embryo research, abortion and gay marriage. I've been thinking about how best to discuss this issue. In last week's **Nurturing Justice** I provided Senator Chris Ellison's explanation of current law with respect to the export and import of human embryos. This continues to ignore the political problem I raised - and it seems that politicians will continue to avoid such **political** questions, as long as our system of parliamentary representation as we now have it, fails to require accountability on such matters from our elected representatives. "Conscience" votes are a convenient "opt out" clause for political parties. So, I have decided below to tackle this systemic issue by providing some critical observations about the liberal "side" of politics.

Let me begin this discussion by stating my view in categorical terms: it is still quite feasible that in the Federal election due later this year, the Australian electorate will return the Howard Liberal-National Coalition.

Why then have I headed this tract in the way I have? If Australians are willing to return the Government at the next election how can it be said that the Liberal Party is withered? How can it be in poor shape if it is about to win yet another term for John Howard as Prime Minister. The answer is plain and simple. It is as an electoral machine that is more concerned about winning elections than it is a genuine political party concerned with putting forward coherent and comprehensive policies for the nation's benefit.

As an electoral machine, the Liberal Party is quite healthy. One only has to recall the L-Plates adorning the fences of polling booths on polling day last time to confirm that. Moreover, it has demonstrated its ability to win federal elections for more than ten years while the Labor opposition has failed dismally. It seems that when Federal Labor tries to convert itself into an electoral machine it ends up in the ditch, time and again. It seems that Labor has grasped something of this problem and is seeking to approach this election in terms of clear argument, not merely in terms of managed marketing of policy costs.

At least part of Liberal's hold on the electorate is its ability to market itself as a government even when it is clouded with scandals and controversies and even when its policies prove very unpopular. I suspect that as an electoral machine the Liberal Party is still in fine shape. Its power should not be underestimated. But as a political party the Liberal Party has withered.

And that, my fellow Australians, is a clue to understanding our depressing politics. It also helps us understand why the next election poses such an emotional hurdle for Coalition Parliamentarians. Their policies lack argument, their posture avoids debate, and this lack speaks much louder than their protestations that they have been doing a better

job than Labor would have done. That's not political debate! At best, that's merely an unsubtle way of saying political debate isn't needed any more. Trust the Liberal the management team! Now that approach raises problems for people at a grass-roots level and that's the problem for any Liberal parliamentarian seeking re-election.

What does Liberal stand for in positive terms? What is it that the Liberal Party promotes? In fact, it is not at all clear what the Coalition stands for apart from telling the country what a good job the current Prime Minister has done in the "top job". To say it again, that's their problem. And that's going to be their problem **whether they win or whether they lose**. Their *raison d'être* is to get re-elected. But when it is asked "For what?" we are left with a screaming void that has been created by their commitment to a managerialist image that "winners are grinners". It's all about "leadership" and now (surprise, surprise) John Howard seems to be grooming Malcolm Turnbull as his successor. The arch-anti-republican is now grooming the former leader of the so-called republican movement to lead the Liberal "side" after he retires. What is this all about? Where are they taking us?

Doesn't the country recall how Howard's intervention duded the referendum on the republic, wasting everybody's time and the nation's money? Australia under Hawke, Keating and Howard has proved to be an extremely fickle electorate and this fact of history may well be ignored by most, just as most forget how Hawke joined forces with the Americans to excise New Zealand from ANZUS.

But as with the Hawke Prime Ministership and the Labor Government, John Howard poses a similar problem for the Liberal Party - the more he wins, the more the party is committed to winning, and the less it is committed to policies and principles. How did this come about? Why is it that looking over Howard's political career it is so very difficult to discern a clear and unequivocal policy line? He has been willing to accommodate the trend that allowed the electoral machine to dominate the Liberal Party. But that has never been a Liberal Party election plank. Even Howard's opposition to refugees resettlement in the 1980s together with his post Tampa "Pacific Solution" have been more about gathering populist sentiment for the next election, than they have been about formulating clear policies that actually address global and regional issues in a comprehensive political way.

It remains significant that Howard's initial election in 1974 was after the parliamentary Liberal Party and its allies forced the first double dissolution on the Labor Government by holding up supply. And so his career can be viewed as a confirmation of the trend by which the Liberal Party has become dominated by its electoral machine who take their orders from the parliamentary wing and thus leave behind a constituted commitment to being a grass-roots party of principles **which would allow an elected government to govern even if the opposition did have a Senate majority**.

The Liberal Party's membership drives focus upon conscripting powerful member of communities who can effectively **serve** the parliamentary wing's interests of being re-elected. And this was the

"quiet revolution" that has ever since significantly formed post-1975 politics in this country.

Once again, consider Howard's views on embryonic stem-cell research. In the 2001 election he was against such research; after the election and with the Queensland, New South Wales and Victorian Labor premiers revealing the massive pharmaceutical investment prospects he was persuaded to change his mind; in the most recent parliamentary conscience vote, he voted agin it.

This pattern is simply part of wider trend in parliamentary conduct in which "politics" puts a *cordon sanitaire* around itself when it comes to the most pressing issues concerning the drafting of laws that would truly show respect for, and protection of, human life. Seemingly, it is very inconvenient for "moral matters" to be incorporated into economic policy, even though the main drivers of embryonic research are the pharmaceutical companies.

The phrase "hard yards" is a favourite of Treasurer Costello which now returns to haunt him since his party is unable to set itself to develop a comprehensive policy on "body politics". It has to avoid such comprehensive policy because on such matters the party would be split irrevocably. And so the search for principle is lost before it begins and pragmatism prevails. The unscrupulous who want to make a research killing for pharmaceutical dollars have a field day while the parliamentarians polish up their "consciences".

No, this is not all the fault of one man, the man who has occupied the Prime Ministerial office for more than eleven years. But his style of politics has not helped the country face this trend, let alone think about how to reverse it.

As I say, under his watch of liberal pragmatic politics, "conscience" or "free" votes have become opt-out clauses for the political parties that claim to stand behind elected representatives. The parties not only avoid clear policies on these issues; they simply assume that *there is no alternative* (TINA) to the electoral-machine trend and so it is given normative status in our political life. Another name for this is idolatry. The decline of the party as a party of principle is widely viewed as simply a part of our political way of life.

At least that is the way the Liberal Party now views politics. And this is a very serious and structural issue. The Constitution assumes elected parliamentarians are accountable to their electors, and though parties are not mentioned explicitly, their contribution is constitutional to the extent that they facilitate accountable parliamentary representation. A clear party platform that is explained and developed in an election campaign should do this. That is what our constitution expects and thus the validity of political parties in our system of government is established by clear and coherent platforms for candidates who wish to stand under that banner.

The current approach to politics however has moved significantly away from this. John Howard's prime ministership has significantly pushed politics further down that "winning" path, and as yet the Liberal

Party machine sees no advantage to itself in reversing that trend. That is why the Liberal Party is withered.

So as we prepare for an election it is important to keep a look out for how John Howard's political opponents address this important issue. Christian citizens who seek to serve their neighbours politically should not ignore it. Australian politics stands in need of a political contribution that explains why it would be good to return parliamentary democracy to a healthy state of accountable representation. That must also be part of our effort to nurture justice.

# IR AND A MORE IMPORTANT ELECTION ISSUE

MAY DAY Nurturing Justice 3 (2007)

In the previous edition I discussed how pragmatism has dominated the Liberal Party since 1974, turning that party into an electoral machine. This edition of *Nurturing Justice* continues to explore the political problems that have come to our country as a result of the decline in genuine party politics and electoral debate. I do so in terms of the debate that has begun to envelope us in the run up to the next Federal election. But as we know, a party that has degenerated into an electoral machine is not some inert presence. It has consequences and it has its own way of enforcing itself upon the political landscape. These consequences run deep into the life-blood of our system of government and our constitution. And that is what we will confront in this coming election, whether we want to or not.

Yes, there has been a collective sigh of relief around the country as opponents of the Coalition and of John Howard's Prime Ministership read the polls and sense that the Federal election will result in a Labor victory. But the psycho-dynamics of media spin in this volatile situation should not deter us from addressing the serious structural problems that have manifest themselves in our parliamentary democracy during John Howard's time in parliament (1974-2007). Those who seek a Christian political option have to grow wise about electioneering and we have to ask ourselves whether our system of elections is still capable of addressing the big questions that need to be considered.

As an exercise in political education let me try to put this as briefly and as cogently as I can.

Firstly, the problem with this election is not simply Labor's response to the Coalition's IR legislation. The deeper problem that this election confronts is that the Coalition's IR policy was *not* spelled out and defended during the last election campaign. The Prime Minister says that this legislation has always been high on his list of priorities - but his problem is that last time it was not high enough on his agenda to make a point of telling the country the details of the legislation that he intended to introduce. In other words it was kept under wraps in order to enhance victory.

It wouldn't surprise me totally should John Howard resign before the election is called, but if he is still the PM after the next election we should make no mistake that it will have been an *implicit* endorsement of that legislation, the policy for which was not spelled out previously when it should have been. ***That is the real political issue we now face*** - I would go so far as to call it a serious political danger. This country is now, once more, at the political cross-roads.

The second problem follows from this and is really a complex nest of problems that arise from the swift and scathing responses to Labor's policies by business and employer groups who have swung in behind the Coalition's IR legislation by attacking Labor's proposed counter-proposals as potentially disastrous for the economy. The Treasurer's view that Kevin Rudd is a "menace" is a convenient summary of the responses that have been forthcoming. There is deep unease by employers and business groups and their comments and editorials are clearly designed to engender fear. They are in danger however of ignoring the important facets of economic and industrial life that are inextricably interwoven with our electoral system of parliamentary representation and of our government:

1. they ignore the fact that the legislation was not highlighted by the Liberal-National party election campaign last time;
2. they thus assume that the needs of the economy must now override any political attempt to address the subsequent situation;
3. many if not all of the comments assume that the union contribution to work-place reform should only ever be peripheral. Unions are viewed as external, foreign bodies that can only have a genuine place on the shop-floor if capital is given top if not sole priority (we will discuss this problematic and reductionist view of the business enterprise in the next edition).

These detractors, which also includes the usually even-handed *Financial Review*, will have to watch their step since they could very easily find themselves defending the view that contentious legislation that is deemed important by powerful groups should be kept under wraps during election campaigns. Are they prepared to give *carte blanche* to a policy that allows any party seeking government to refrain from revealing to the electorate their legislative intentions? Do they think that a union movement excluded from the pre-legislation discussion with the Government will simply sit by and say and do nothing? Will not a Labor Party consult with the union movement under such circumstances in order to develop a proposed legislative agenda to put to the people during the election? These detractors are treading a very dangerous path; it's been given some pretty ugly names in times past.

And once again, Australia is on the verge of being ensnared in the prevarications which have characterised Liberal Party pragmatism at least since John Howard' first entered politics back in 1974. But this time the consequences are very serious - to endorse John Howard's Prime Ministership in terms of his industrial relations legislation is tantamount to further *subverting* the accountability of elected parliamentary representatives to their electors.

So as we prepare for an election it is important to keep a look out for how John Howard's political opponents address this important issue. It will not be in the service of enduring public justice if Labor merely bangs away at Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) and the imbalance in the IR legislation without a clear commitment to restore political debate, especially at election time, by taking another path, a

non-pragmatic path. There needs to be a nation-wide recognition that this issue, like so many others, indicates that pragmatism has caused more problems than it solves. The legacy of Liberal Party pragmatism may well be with us for some time yet, but the way to effectively confront it and overcome its problems will not be by simply endorsing Labor Party pragmatism.

Labor and the union movement cannot avoid putting up industrial relations policies and it is right and proper that they do so. But the underlying manipulation of the electorate that has led to these IR laws needs to be challenged by a new approach that is open and truly accountable. One hopes that the election of a Rudd-Gillard Labor Government will signal a fresh and energetic revival of a commitment to parliamentary accountability throughout the country. We need electoral reform to promote the accountability of representatives to their electors. We need to rethink our political system and to do so in the context of a comprehensive Christian political option.

We also need to find a way to promote an authentic Christian approach to business and industrial relations and that will be the topic of my next contribution.

# RELIGION AND LABOUR I

Nurturing Justice 4 (2007) 3 May

The previous broadsheet, drew attention to business and commercial criticisms of Labor's recently unveiled IR policies. These criticisms are straining on the gnat of collective bargaining while swallowing the camel of political deceit. These criticisms, seen in recent historical context, are very close to compromising the allegiance of those who make them to parliamentary democracy itself. They are not focused on the right issue. They have not addressed the fatal flaw in the Liberal-National Coalition's IR legislation. The strategy, as adopted by the Liberal-National coalition during the last election, to avoid announcing the planned IR reforms, can never truly be good for business and can never be in the true national interest. And so the critics of Labor's IR policies are exposed. They have failed to stand up and be counted for democratic politics by refusing to be compromised by a strategy to win an election by keeping planned changes under wraps. Their combined criticisms of Labor now, is simply a smokescreen that tries to draw attention away from the fact that they failed to criticise the PM's plans when he decided to reveal them *after the election*. Business should never have bought this reform. The nation's interest now stands exposed because of that self-interested silence. And so, the critics threaten to use their collective commercial and economic muscle which in fact is to put their own commercial interests ahead of the national interest. They do this by meekly endorsing a deceitful approach to electioneering.

The pragmatism that has dominated the Liberal Party since 1974, turning that party into an electoral machine, has now brought the country to a fork in the road, as business now gives its implicit support to a party that "win at all costs" pragmatism is a *sine qua non* of Australian democratic politics.

Ironically, it is quite possible that those supporting the Labor Party and wanting to see a Rudd-Gillard Government do not realise the seriousness of this situation. That being so, it doesn't make the situation any easier. In fact our problems are deepened. Yet, if Labor chooses to skirt around this issue rather than finding a principled way ahead, it wouldn't be the first time that Labor had ignored political principles in the euphoric fanfare of popular support.

In Parliamentary democracy terms a return of the Liberal-National coalition will be an electoral endorsement of a serious retrograde step in our system of parliamentary elections and accountable government. That is not to say that a vote for Labor will avoid all the looming problems this country will have to face. This broadsheet is not an attempt to justify a vote for Labor; however, given the rules that govern the lower house ballot paper, all citizens are now faced with the problem of which of the two major parties to prefer on their ballot. A preference for the Liberal-National coalition is not just a vote to retain the same government; it cannot avoid being an endorsement of the conduct of the Liberal-National electoral machine last time around. It

may be that we are in the early stages of the complete demise of that "side" of politics. An electorate that voted according to political principle would probably have consigned the Liberal Party to the historical WPB long ago. But we cannot deny that the Liberal Party reflects the pragmatic self-interest that is so dominant throughout the electorate, a self-interest that is continually showing itself to be willing to subordinate political principles for economic gain

Whatever the commercial and economic problems that will result from the election, the re-election of a Howard Government will simply indicate that Australia's parliamentary system of government has turned another corner ... downwards. Even before the election we are confronted by a serious problem: a huge number of Australian citizens are simply not perturbed by this serious state of affairs. The momentum along this pragmatic path is such that it seems almost unstoppable. So where do we go from here?

This edition of *Nurturing Justice* continues our exploration of the political problems that have emerged in the governance of our country - at all levels - as a result of the decline in genuine party politics and authentic electoral debate. We have to address the absence of a clearly formulated Christian political option. We need to understand why there is such lethargy among Christians to consider citizenship as an integral part of our service to God and neighbour. It may well be that the political parties have degenerated into electoral machines, but a biblically-directed Christian response can not be to pronounce a plague on both their houses as if "we" had nothing to do with the political sickness that afflicts us. "We" too must count ourselves among the politically infirm. But where are we to start our rehab? This question brings us back, once again, to what *Nurturing Justice* is all about - finding the path of a Christian political option and walking on it.

We can hope that the election of a Rudd-Gillard Labor Government will signal a fresh commitment to genuine political accountability throughout the country, at all levels of government. Our political system needs reform and the impending disaster that we face, from the many-sided ramifications of a pragmatic politics, only serves to highlight that need. We sincerely hope that a Rudd-Gillard Labor Government might move toward seriously examining our electoral system so that all Australians can be more effectively represented in the chambers of government at federal, state and local levels. That hope this broadsheet would also nurture.

But in the meantime, those who are seeking a truly Christian political option should not assume that merely formulating an electoral reform proposal will get us very far. Instead, I suggest we give urgent attention to developing a Christian political option for industrial and business policy. And as a first step we need to develop a Christian view of the business enterprise, that social structure in which many workers are found at many levels, supported by capital, shareholders and consumers. This will occupy us in a future edition. Labor and the union movement cannot avoid putting up industrial relations policies and it is right and proper that they do so. But the underlying manipulation of the

electorate that has led to these IR laws needs to be challenged by a new approach, one that is truly open and accountable. As we encourage Labor to look again at the way elections are run and representation is structured throughout our country, we for our part will seek to develop a Christian view of industrial relations and business. That way, we at least begin a discussion by assuming that a comprehensive political approach worthy of the name Christian is possible if we are persistent and continue the work.

# RELIGION AND LABOUR II

Nurturing Justice 5 (2007) 10 May

The Government, with a Federal election defeat looming, recently conceded that major modifications were necessary to their Industrial Relations reform package. They now claim that a "safety net" of entitlements will be retained for the lowest paid workers. Whatever the merits of this attempt to improve the legislation by concocting an electoral "safety net" for themselves, we simply note that the basic issue we have been discussing has been avoided.

Workplaces are not simply machines. Government's calling is not that of remote control of the nation's workplaces from Canberra, occasionally pulling levers to ensure that more profits will be cranked out. Workplaces are places where we are called to exercise stewardship with the resources of God's creation in co-operation with other workers. The workplace may be highly mechanised but the workplace itself is not a machine and should not be treated as if it is. That, in a nutshell, is the problem with the current IR laws. The workplace is not a machine but a place where humans, God's image bearers, do our work and oversee our work so that it is improved. Here we also grow and develop. We make decisions, we learn how to respond to complex problems and so we form the day-to-day life of the enterprise. And we do this as employers and employees, as management and labour, as full-time, part-time and casual. And because work and workplaces are complex entities we need industrial unions to assist us in all kinds of ways. But this Government is threatened but that industrial need. For some deeply perverse reason they can only see unions as a spanner in the works.

The current Liberal-National Coalition have not in 11 years of office spent any time advocating reform to the work that people do. There is no attempt to address the meaningless monotony that some people have to endure to get paid. In their policies there is not a positive view of industrial unions and their contribution to the national economy. Why is this? Why do they see no advantage in advocating an alternative non-mechanistic view of the business enterprise and the workplace? In these terms they simply talk about workers those who like robots are simply programmed to receive more take-home pay. Presumably, this narrow vision has something to do with the way these elected members of parliament see themselves in *their* work. Indeed, the way they talk about Parliament it is as if it is the Board of Management of the National Enterprise. And they believe they are making themselves indispensable when they describe their legislation as lever pulling, turning on the public works, switching on educational investment, taking hold of the lever that allows the government to ease off on tax, and making sure that the interest rate lubricant prevents any "over heating". The mechanistic metaphor is very pervasive and it seems that economics is no longer about human responsibility, about a God-given calling to exercise stewardship. We have to wonder if the mechanistic obsession

indicates a desire to keep our own human failings out of sight. It is as if economic problems are merely mechanical.

And so any questions about the meaning of work and the calling of the business enterprise is rendered irrelevant. This is a momentous issue and we will be returning to it regularly.

The aim now is to explore a Christian political industrial option. The previous broadsheet has suggested that it is timely to specify key elements of a Christian political option for business, industry and unionism.

Some of the readers of *Nurturing Justice* will have read articles by Bob Goudzwaard, the author of the piece re-published below. It was written 34 years ago. Keep that in mind as you assess its viewpoint. It's pertinence to our current discussion is that it draws attention to a key issue that sorely needs to be addressed if our national economy is to give expression to our God-given call to *stewardship*. The issue is: ***Who owns the enterprise?***

At least since the industrial relations reforms of the Hawke-Keating-Crean Labor Government (1983-1996), Labor has pragmatically accommodated itself to the liberal-capitalist assumption that the enterprise is owned by those who provide capital. This is a view that Goudzwaard does not accept and the article gives good reasons for avoiding such a truncated and reductionistic view. Readers like ourselves, outside its original (Canadian) context, may still note the relevance of the principles to which the author refers. But any attempt to implement these in legislation will be no simple exercise. For starters, the view put forward here, requires further investigation on many legislative fronts. Moreover, readers in Fiji, New Zealand and Australia, should not read this as a criticism of current FTU, FOL or ACTU policies, except in so far as these bodies in any of their policies assume a "truncated and reduced" and "animalistic" view that treats workers, work-places, unions and enterprises as merely economic objects that exist to crank out material needs. Such a view flies in the face of the divine call to serve God and neighbour in our work.

Some of us in Australia and New Zealand were aware of this view in the early 1970s. It cannot be said that we have made great strides in elaborating its implications, even among our fellow Christians. But now, with a forward looking hope, we might do well to engage in a critical re-consideration of Goudzwaard's views. Our own assumptions need to be subjected to the searching light of God's call to do justice.

A Christian political option needs to grow in wisdom and knowledge about labour and industry if it is to express our God-given *stewardship* and make a difference in the workplace, industry, the nation, the region and the globe.

# RELIGION AND LABOUR

Bob Goudzwaard

(*The Guide* October 1973 pp. 6-7)

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Many people consider it ridiculous to make a link between religion and labour. After all, religion and business don't mix.

Partly, this conviction stems from the very peculiar but widespread notion that religion is restricted to the so-called sacred things of life. The moment we adopt such a conclusion, we must admit the difficulty of seeing any connection between the celebration of a solemn mass and the hostile atmosphere so often prevalent at the bargaining table.

We would do well to remember that such a narrow notion of religion results not only from the secret desire to behave a little less solemnly in the 'non-sacred' areas of life, but also from the urge to consider ourselves masters and law-givers in those areas.

However, there is more to this view however. The relationship between religion and labour is frequently obscured by the prevailing notion about the role and character of the industrial union. The union is commonly considered to be a power organization, designed only to further the material interests of its members. Generally, it is expected to carry out a well-organized, relentless drive for more and more. It seems obvious that such a view of the union has nothing to do with religion, when religion is viewed as the service of God. But then the unlimited drive for more material gain is by no means irreligious, since it is also driven religiously, by service of self. But within such a framework a Christian union is a contradiction in terms, an unattainable ideal.

## The Reduction of Man to Animal

Essentially, we are dealing here with an animalistic view of life, a view which we meet almost everywhere. It is a view which tries to convince us that *ultimately* politics is nothing but a power struggle, that *ultimately* the wife-husband relationship is purely a matter of sex, and that *ultimately* work is only a means of making money. In such a vision the trade union as a mere power machine fits very well.

Why do I call this vision animalistic? Because all norms for *human* relationships have been ignored and eliminated. We are confronted here with a view in which human personality is truncated, cut down to its barest animal-like interests. To put it differently, in this conception the totality of social life has been reduced to the sum total of its founding functions. I use the term "founding functions" together with "qualifying functions", to describe the character of human relations, how they are founded and how they are qualified and distinguished.

Let me illustrate. The state is founded on the power of the sword. Similarly, a business enterprise is founded on the power to combine and correlate the diverse forces of production. The founding function of marriage is organic-biotic, for a marriage presupposes a physical unity of man and woman. However, does this mean that these founding functions express the deepest meaning of state, marriage and business enterprise? Of course not. The power of the state is not an end in itself. It serves to make *justice* triumph in all

public relationships. Sexuality, too, is not an end in itself. It serves to deepen the intimate *love* between husband and wife. And a business enterprise can only reach its purpose if the productive powers within it are used not merely for the self-satisfaction of investors, but for the formation of an enterprise of *stewardship*.

Founding functions therefore call for further disclosure and development - what we technically refer to as an "opening-up" direction. Political power must open the way to justice, sexuality to love, and economic power to stewardship.

Therefore, the animalistic and truncated mentality which confines social life to money, sex and power is a deadly danger. It destroys life, eliminates meaning, and is, in the final analysis, nihilistic. In short, society becomes a wasteland, a prison with closed doors instead of an open vista.

The same also applies to the labour movement. It is quite easy to truncate, to reduce the trade union to an institution of workers who are only concerned for financial gain. ***It is ironic that many employers accuse the unions of such base motives, yet never cease to praise the profit motive as the leading principle of the corporation.***

And it is because of this animalistic and truncated mentality, which has such deep roots in industrial relations and economic planning, that any appeal to a more Christian, normative approach to business and industrial relations proves so very difficult. Yet, it is of utmost importance that we try to do so, since the outworking of the truncated viewpoint shatters the myth that economic and industrial matters are religiously neutral. As the idea of a normative development of society gains acceptance, the belief in a false neutrality of business/ industrial life will no longer maintain its exclusive dominance. Work, in all of its valid facets, is another way of showing our love to God and our neighbour.

How can a trade union movement stimulate such a normative development and make it a part of its every-day life? I would like to give two examples by assessing the labour "factor" within the enterprise and in society and by analyzing the place and task of the trade union movement in today's social development.

### **Appreciation of the labour "factor"**

The trade union movement has sometimes been credited with emancipating the production factor of labour. Undoubtedly, there is much truth in such a description. To illustrate this, we should go back for a moment to the animalistic view mentioned earlier in which the enterprise is not regarded as an institution of stewardship, but as a vehicle of commercial gain for the providers of capital. This still prevalent, if not dominant, orthodox-conservative view defines private enterprises as a) an object of private property and as b) an organization with a *closed* purpose, namely the acquisition of a maximum return on invested capital. Such a view of the enterprise - in which labour can only be one of the production factors - is still as common as it is repugnant. Countless people, including Governments, still maintain that the enterprise *belongs* to the shareholders.

Is there in such a view any room for the idea that the enterprise is a *human community* called to responsible stewardship? Of course not. Just as individual people cannot be owned, so also a community of people cannot be owned. Anyone who believes in the "ownership of the enterprise" obviously does not consider the enterprise as a human community. Instead, such a person

inevitably regards the enterprise as a workshop with different production factors, of which labour is but one, along with capital, the machine, and raw materials. Rather than being respected as responsible subjects, workers are relegated to a position of mere objects in the production process.

At this point it is important to re-state the motive of the Christian trade-union movement. This movement has stressed that the worker, as God's image bearer, is *not* just an economic production factor, but is called to be an integral partner in the enterprise.

Perhaps it would be correct to state that the issue at stake here concerns our view of the enterprise rather than our view of the worker. For it is especially the enterprise which, in our culture, has often been reduced to an object of ownership, established for the *restricted* purpose of gaining maximum returns on investments. Within such a conception the worker as *human being* can at best be allotted a marginal place. However, as soon as the enterprise is regarded as an institution in which stewardship is central, the integral partnership of the worker automatically receives its proper emphasis.

At this point, the reader might pose the question: what is the difference between this *Christian* idea of the worker and the enterprise, and the socialist approach? After all, socialists, also speak of "emancipation of labour" and the right to co-determination and workers' participation.

Anyone who takes the trouble to study the deeper motives of the socialist movement will discover a fundamental difference which reveals itself also in the practical aspects of the issue. Where socialism adopts a truncated view of human personality and the enterprise it may distance itself from the view espoused by orthodox, traditional capitalisms, but it has found it very difficult to avoid its own closed and restricted view of man and society.

In orthodox socialism the enterprise consists of two production factors: the economic power of *labour* and the economic power *capital*, each struggling against the other for supremacy. The existing order is considered a capitalistic one which sees to it that the production factor capital constantly triumphs over the interests of the exploited worker class. It is remarkable that the traditional socialist idea also views the enterprise as an object.

As a consequence the socialist criticism is not that the enterprise cannot be owned (in the Christian terms that we are suggesting), but rather, that it is owned by the wrong people. As a small fraction of the total working class, the worker must wait for the liberation of his life which can only come about with the overthrow of the capitalist system.

It is for this reason that the true emancipation of labour cannot be realized by the socialist approach. When the enterprise is reduced to a mere object of the class struggle, and when men are blindly divided into two warring production factors, the Christian concept of *communal* responsibility of employers and employees cannot take root. Instead of communal responsibility, we are left with a brute class solidarity. Then life is indeed reduced to its founding functions: power pitted against power.

### **Trade unionism and societal development**

In our modern society the labour movement possesses significant economic power. By means of wage demands, strikes and boycotts, the labour movement is able to force certain economic developments. Labour's power calls for a responsible use in accordance with the calling toward stewardship. At times, this calling requires the union to make certain wage demands. When the profits of an enterprise climb steadily, a wage increase is often the best

corrective of the income distribution pattern, especially when such an increase benefits those falling in the lower income brackets. But the reverse is true as well. Certain wage increases conflict with the calling of stewardship. I am thinking, for instance, of wage increases which do not correspond with increased production. Such increases are inflationary. Inflation is a very unjust form of income re-distribution inflicting the greatest harm to the economically weak among us. Inflationary wage increases, rather than being an exercise in responsible stewardship, result from a brute power struggle.

One may rightfully expect that every trade union, and especially the Christian one, realizes the need for a responsible exercise of its economic power. Usually, this is a difficult task which will not gain the union much popularity. Let's not fool ourselves. Too many union leaders and members refuse to realize these matters and insist that the union under all circumstances must demand more and more. It should be clear that we are faced here with a deadly danger. This danger becomes even greater in a time in which we slowly begin to realize the shocking results of our neglected stewardship towards the environment and the limited resources of energy and minerals. Our sense of stewardship will gradually have to lead us as westerners to accept stable or even declining income levels.

Will the labour movement, especially any Christian labour movement, be able to stand the test? That is a question of central importance for any efforts to give expression to a Christian view of stewardship in businesses and in industrial relations. It will depend on whether we reduce the labour movement to a materialistic power institution, or whether we will support it in its difficult task to develop as a genuine institution of stewardship.

*The Guide is the monthly magazine of the Christian Labour Association of Canada  
<http://www.clac.ca/information/flash.asp>*

*Bob Goudzwaard is an emeritus Professor from the Free University of Amsterdam.  
His email address is [bob.goudzwaard@ext.vu.nl](mailto:bob.goudzwaard@ext.vu.nl)*

# POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AND RELIGIOUS BELIEF

Nurturing Justice 6 (2007) 21 June

**Nurturing Justice** seeks to promote a principled Christian involvement in democratic politics in this part of the world. This is an election year in Australia, and I think it might be useful if, for a while, we discuss the "intersection" of political representation and religious belief. Retiring Senator Vanstone has recently contributed to the *Australian Quarterly* with an article entitled "Fair Go - Our Ultimate Value" and apparently expresses her "increasing sense of unease" when politicians introduce their religious beliefs into the political debates. On the face of it, Senator Bob Brown is correct when he suggests that Cardinal Pell has broken the law by making veiled threats to Roman Catholic parliamentarians about their votes on cloning legislation. But what are we to make of the urging of Greens NSW MP Lee Rhiannon that when some Christian members of the NSW Parliament's Privileges Committee examine Cardinal Pell's statement they "leave their religious beliefs at home"? The manner in which these matters are brought into public debate are almost as contentious as the issues themselves. And we are not helped by the media seeking to up their ratings by regularly running after the Minister for Health and the Leader of the Opposition in the hope of hearing some "religious" headline grabbers.

Our difficulties admitted, the complexities conceded, let us then try to find a path on which to consider these issues with the seriousness they deserve.

To begin, I am republishing below (with permission of the authors), a brief statement that they composed in recent times to develop principled political discussion among their fellow Christians. They are part of a combined effort that has recently launched ReformationalUK. As such the piece is written for UK political circumstances but I hope it stimulates your thinking.

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*Ending the dialogue*

*Rudi Hayward, London, [rhayward@fish.co.uk](mailto:rhayward@fish.co.uk) and*

*Jeremy Ive, Kent, UK <http://jgaive.wordpress.com/>*

*It is quite common these days to hear people talking about "Christianity and Politics" and perhaps the suggestion is made that we should not view them as existing in two separate worlds. There should be, we are told, a dialogue between the two. Politics can benefit from an injection of Christian 'values' (a term that should be submitted to some careful scrutiny), and Christianity itself can profit from a more public profile. The idea of a dialogue requires there to be dialogue partners and here there*

*may be a number of ways to proceed. Is this a dialogue between the church(es) and state, or between theology and political science, or is this just a call for Christians who are involved in politics to be more forthcoming about their faith? However we answer this, the implication remains that 'Christianity' and 'politics' are seen to be, at least potentially and possibly usually, self-contained spheres that should nevertheless talk to each other. Now it may well be true that such an implication is not intended, and even denied, but it is there nevertheless and so the title of this piece wants to suggest, a little provocatively, that it is time to end any dialogue on this basis.*

*We will only be able to make a genuine contribution to politics in the UK on a Christian basis if we recognise the twofold necessity of a Christian politics. On the one hand we must accept that politics involves us whether we like it or not. We may not support a particular party, or even go out to vote on polling day, but the very real political difference between living in Britain or Iraq concerns us and should lead us to prayer (1 Timothy 2:2). Politics then is one of the fundamental ways in which we are joined together with our neighbours in this world. This draws us on to the second necessity which is that God calls us to love our neighbour and this command contains within it a responsibility for politics. The Gospel is a reshaping power that turns our whole life around to follow the Risen King Jesus. This Gospel is concerned also for our political life.*

*It might be that we prefer to close our eyes and forget about such things, but this twofold necessity means that politics is part of our life and that the Gospel, as the message and power of God's redemption of our whole existence, claims this part of our life also. The Christian life is an integral whole so a Christian politics is not an artificial creation born out of our own striving, our own ingenious dialogue with 'the world'. Just as any other part of the Christian life, politics must start with confession of our failing and weaknesses, and will progress only as far as we let the Gospel work through us.*

# WHY RESPECT ETHNICITY AND RACE ALL ALONG THE LINE?

Nurturing Justice 7 (2007) 26 June

Nurturing Justice seeks to promote a principled Christian involvement in democratic politics in this part of the world. This may be an election year in Australia, and **Nurturing Justice** will certainly seek to examine what is at stake in our voting responsibilities. But for the moment I must leave election matters to one side and focus attention on assisting our reflection on the Federal Government's recent Northern Territory initiative aimed at ensuring public justice in remote aboriginal communities.

So, finding appropriate material is always a challenge. As I noted last time, the manner in which these matters are brought into public debate are sometime more contentious than the issues themselves. And so that does not only mean we are critical of the media and journalists, but it demands a heightened level of scrupulous self-criticism. I was relieved to find an editorial which can significantly advance our efforts to respect to the indispensable part the indigenous people of this land in an Australian "economy of care". This editorial is written by Dr Robert Wolfgramm of the Fiji Daily Post, a long-term advocate of racial and ethnic justice in Australia, in West Papua, in Timor and also in Fiji. His sharp insights can help us view our national situation with renewed compassion and commitment as we follow Jesus, Our Lord, in public political life.

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## A WISE WORD FROM ACROSS THE WAY

Warnings from across the way  
Fiji Daily Post 26-Jun-2007

*Fiji's problems pale into the background when set against the human disaster that dogs the Australian political scene. After 200 years and millions of white settlement dollars, Australian Aboriginals are no closer to achieving the same life chances and life expectancy as their colonial and post-colonial landlords. They remain in the socio-economic doldrums. Socio-economic statistics tell the familiar story of getting nowhere in terms of parity with white Australia. In recent days, Australian PM, John Howard, has been confronted with more doom and gloom accounts of Aboriginal living conditions - this*

*time of rampant child abuse in the Northern Territory. According to one of the latest reports, 95 per cent of Aboriginal girls sampled by some health professionals were found to have semen in their urine. Some of the Aboriginal girls were as young as seven years of age.*

*But now, the findings of a larger research and report (by Wild and Anderson) have been made public and are the subject of heated public debate in Australia. The central findings of that inquiry are, that: Aboriginal child sexual abuse 'is serious, widespread and often unreported'; that Aboriginal people 'are not the only victims and not the only perpetrators of sexual abuse'; that 'much of the violence and sexual abuse occurring in Territory communities is a reflection of past, current and continuing social problems which have developed over many decades'; and that the 'combined effects of poor health, alcohol and drug abuse, unemployment, gambling, pornography, poor education and housing, and a general loss of identity and control have contributed to violence and to sexual abuse in many forms'.*

*The research also more positively concluded that 'most Aboriginal people are willing and committed to solving problems and helping their children' and 'eager to better educate themselves'; and that 'existing government programmes to help Aboriginal people break the cycle of poverty and violence need to work better'. The report noted that 'there is not enough coordination and communication between government departments and agencies, and this is causing a breakdown in services and poor crisis intervention' such that 'improvements in health and social services are desperately needed'.*

*To properly address and solve the problem, the report predictably recommended micro-structural and as well as macro-political lines of attack. These include educational programmes and educational re-orientation to bring Aboriginal children into a safe learning environment; recognition of alcohol and pornography consumption as associated with abuse and a call for its reduction and control; the need for greater integration of families with police and social services; and also what the report authors called the 'empowerment of Aboriginal communities' through 'the introduction of community justice groups and better dialogue between mainstream society and Aboriginal communities' as well as the establishment of a 'Commissioner for Children and Young People' to 'focus on the interests and wellbeing of children and young people, review issues and report to Parliament'.*

*Most importantly in our regard, Wild and Anderson's findings underscored 'the common view' (in their words), 'that sexual abuse of Aboriginal children is happening largely because of the breakdown of Aboriginal culture and society'. Alarm bells should be ringing in the ears of all in the Pacific, and especially Fiji, who would call for de-racialising of our societies. As noted in this column recently, deracialisation of the political sphere has cultural and personal consequences. It is not something that can be operationalised at one level without affecting the whole person and society on every other level - religious, economic, cultural and psychological.*

*The plight of the Australian Aboriginal ought to be a glaring red flag to any who would pursue de-racialising, or de-ethnifying policies. What you get at the end of them will likely be the same genocidal effects which have decimated every other indigenous people around the world and not just our lamentable Aboriginal brothers and sisters across the Pacific from us. What is required to preserve that which is valuable in our respective racial communities, our children, is not deracialisation into nothingness (with its accompanying ills of alcoholism, pornography and child abuse), but ethnic pride in what we are and a trans-generational understanding of why they, our children, matter most.*

# SORRY JOHN

## IT'S TIME!

Nurturing Justice 8 (2007) 29 June

The report by Wild and Anderson has spurred the Prime Minister to action. Even so, he has not acted as the report requested. Rex Wild, according to the Economist, has accused the government of taking a “gunship” approach and **ignoring** his report's call to invest instead in better education.

Mr Howard, never one to shirk the use of hyperbole, has referred to this as “our Hurricane Katrina”, and this, presumably adds weight to his decision to proceed as he has. But, then how are we to compare the American President's much criticised failures in bringing relief to New Orleans and its coastal regions after that storm, with John Howard's conduct in this matter? The problem is that Howard's successes or failures do not all lie ahead of us in the future as he suggests. What is problematic in his allusion to Hurricane Katrina is that this action appears to be an attempt to draw attention away from the impacts **his own government's attitudes and policies** have had upon the morale of indigenous people across this country.

Let's take the Katrina allusion one step further: Is it possible that the failure of the Federal Government to say “sorry” on behalf of the nation is in fact the “eye of the storm” that has been wrecking moral havoc on aboriginal communities for decades? Is it possible that these problems have deepened not just **during** the decades of his watch, but **because** of his watch?

These matters were raised again and brought to our attention and to the Government's notice by Noel Pearson four years ago. These matters have been part of the alarm of those indigenous leaders who were faced with what appeared to them to be Howard's irrevocable abandonment of the historic national process of reconciliation that William Dean, on behalf of our Head of State, had championed. And so, we have to ask whether this storm and its havoc is in part a result of the Federal Government's failure to rightly and justly continue the reconciliation process?

We hear a lot from politicians these days claiming to be Christian but where is the recognition of the need for a repentant prayerful admission of national guilt? To quote the Anglican Book of Prayer: *“We have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep; we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts, we have offended against Thy holy laws, we have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us ...”*

Too often Governments act with an eye to electoral appeal. In this case we find it difficult to exclude the possibility that this is simply another effort to assert “leadership”. My point is that if this is simply an attempt to “show leadership” without any admission of our corporate

guilt for our national negligence, then in time this remedial action will fail at its deepest level. We are now confronted with a national quandry: is this the action of a government bent on self-justification of its own late-in-the-day remedial action or is this, finally, the Liberal Coalition Government saying "sorry"?

We have to ask this question. It cannot be avoided. Has the Prime Minister finally accepted that Government needs to issue an apology or are we confronting an apologia which goes something like this: "Sorry, but I'm going to do it my way!"

If drastic measures are now required then to overcome our long-term neglectful governance as a nation we cannot avoid saying "sorry" any longer.

But who can give leadership that, with due insight, can lead our troubled country to face up to our national guilt and shame? Who can find the path of justice and national stewardship in which we can politically walk with a resolute commitment as fellow citizens to work for public justice, to act politically to show the love God has shown to our country, and to serve all our neighbours?

# THE IMPOVERISHMENT OF POLITICAL ENTITLEMENTS

Nurturing Justice 9 (2007) 3 August

When did the 2007 election campaign really begin?

There is a serious problem with the coming 2007 election. It is actually a problem that emerged shortly after the 2004 election. The problem we face in **this** election is that the Australian electorate is being asked to make a judgment about a legislative programme that was not revealed to it at the last election. In these terms, we are being asked to make a decision about a strategy that was decided upon **before** the last election and about which we now are given an opportunity to make our judgment.

The subsequent re-election of the Liberal-National Coalition gave it an unexpected Senate majority, but that did not give the Federal Government any mandate to do what it liked. In fact the mandate which the Government should have adhered to was the one that it presented in its policy platform and which it argued for as it faced the electorate. Of course we will now be told that the IR intention was "always there" for electors to read in the fine print of the Liberal Party manifesto but is also quite clear that last time the incumbent Prime Minister and his Liberal-National Coalition colleagues chose **not** to give priority to their industrial relations reform package in their attempts to gain re-election. And so, after having won the election, we as a nation were confronted with legislation which John Howard said was the most important legislation since Federation. However, the proposed legislation meant a significant transfer of powers from the jurisdiction of the States to the Federal sphere. And if it was the most important reform since Federation you'd have to ask why he would have failed to talk up its merits in the 2004 election campaign.

That is a good illustration of how the current PM goes about his political business and gets away with avoiding the political issues. There is a deep failure on his part to honour "the political entitlement" of electors. When it is politically advantageous to refrain from doing so, he will not spell out his policy platform. But, as with the matter of embryonic stem-cell research, he might spell out his opposition, but once in office that will not stop him from ignoring his own platform, and that without any "by your leave" from his electors.

When it comes to discussing the IR laws we are talking about something more than what is allowed to happen where people work. The current Federal Government makes no secret of its belief that unions have passed their "use by date". They are only nuisance value when it comes to our increasingly globalised economy. Can you recall the last time you heard a Liberal Coalition Member of Parliament lamenting the

sad deterioration in people's working lives and how unions were crucial in ensuring worker health and safety, let alone work satisfaction? The way the Government defends its IR laws you'd be forgiven for thinking that there's apparently nothing wrong with a workplace so long as the \$s keep coming into a worker's bank accounts. Apparently we don't have to worry about the burn-out, the work stress and after all we can simply rely on management to ensure that workplaces meet their minimum standards in our "lean and mean" economy. You have to adapt, it is said, or you will not survive.

That's one side of the current Federal Government's IR legislation. **What kind of worker is this country producing?** That is the question that needs to be asked of this legislation. On that score alone, I believe, they deserve to be thrown out of office. Workplace reform is not simply a "bottom line" efficiency issue to ensure profits. Workplace reform needs to reconsider the downright unhealthy character of work, and for that unions are not simply a hindrance but a necessary part of any well-run national economy. We need a Federal Government and State Governments that not only give lip-service to the rights of workers, but which work with unions for a healthier, more creative and more satisfying working life. Work place justice cannot ignore work-place health.

But the problem I have raised about the Liberal-Coalition's IR legislation is not just about work. The problem is that when we look at the IR legislation, as well as many of the initiatives that the Howard Government is taking in the run-up to the election, we are forced to ask: **What kind of voter is this country producing? What kind of citizens are we in the process of becoming?** The legislative change to IR which the Federal Government brought in without appropriately revealing its intentions at the last election, has in fact begun a process that is changing the State - Federal balance in a significant way.

We cannot forget that the current PM was vehement in his advocacy of State Rights when the Federal Labor Government made changes which upset what he then said was a crucial balance in the Federal-State system. But now it is not only industrial relations, but other areas as well - health care and the taking charge of a community's hospital; education, nationalised curriculum and examinations; aboriginal affairs; water. The Government's pre-emptive actions confirm that it is now seeking to develop a new relationship between the Federal Government and the States.

Wouldn't it be more appropriate to put such proposals for change to the Federal system into a party platform and present it to the electorate for its endorsement? Is not that the way a party goes about getting its members elected? Isn't that how it should respect the electors? At this late stage in the Government's term, why does it take the pre-emptive path which seems calculated to overcome the need for formulating a policy platform?

Going ahead in this way at such a merry pace, and thereby beginning a process of change to the structure of the Australian Commonwealth, is actually to deny the citizens of this country their rightful entitlements.

When are we going to vote on this proposed change, whatever its rationale? Moreover, this way of "doing politics" simply blurs the line between a Government's legislative programme and the policy platform of its constituent parties, asking electors to make a judgment on its pre-emptive activism to gain re-election, when in fact the electors have been ignored from the outset. Sure we will be asked to make a judgment later, in order to legitimate an *ad hoc* and unprincipled attempt to stay in power, but Australia now deserves better. Australian voters should be respected as those who vote for a Government; their entitlements should not be manipulated in ways that allow some to sidestep political accountability, whichever party or parties may be in power.

# JOHN HOWARD'S REPUBLIC?

Nurturing Justice 10 (2007) 9 August

The current Prime Minister has his own distinctive view of politics. We have pointed out, again and again, that his approach involves a basic unwillingness on his part to be **politically** accountable. When it comes to political accountability, the current PM's skill with words is paramount. He reacts to the situation and then formulates a justification. This approach - with himself as the prime mover - when translated into political action means an avoidance of the fundamental and comprehensive re-think about parliamentary democracy this country needs. The political approach of John Howard is successful precisely because so many people in this country have been nurtured in the aspiration of avoiding the difficult discussions needed for comprehensive political re-form.

The 11+ years of John Howard's Prime Ministership represents a basic Australian unwillingness to discuss and criticise the structure of our Commonwealth, of our Monarchical republic, of our parliamentary democracy, of our political responsibilities to the descendents of those who have lived on this soil for thousands of years, to the people who now flee to these shores seeking refuge and to the peoples of our neighbourhood, particularly in the South West Pacific. It has been all too hard, especially when the economy has been cranked up and so many are overworked and suffering work-related illnesses. When would we get the time to discuss these matters at the depth in which they need to be discussed?

But now, more and more, this approach to politics is coming unstuck and large constitutional, judicial, social, cultural and economic cracks can be seen.

During these years the Liberal and National Parties have come to rely upon the person and standing of the current Prime Minister to such an extent that they have lost sight of the fact that they, **as parties**, need a clear vision about the future of the country. A clear vision needs to be argued and communicated. But if you have given your support to a leader who avoids basic political argument then you are, in fact, asking for trouble, if not in the short term, somewhere down the track.

What these parties end up saying is simply like: "Return us and you won't have to engage in any of that difficult re-thinking stuff." Reconciliation? No way... But the Government had to intervene in the Northern Territory and by so doing challenges the decades of hard legal work that has gone in to recognising aboriginal land tenure! Human rights for asylum seekers? Well trust us we'll protect the borders, there's a war on terror going on. And so the Government has taken away Dr Haneef's work visa with little justification. What about the illegality of the war in Iraq? Don't we have to be friends with the US? And so on it goes.

We should not ignore the fact that the Prime Minister's current legislative activism is part of his frantic run-up to the next election. But it shouldn't fool us. We should not allow the contention that is now introduced hide the fact that these same Coalition parties - the PM's parliamentary support - *need* this kind of "save the day" interventionism to gives them something to defend if they are not to be wiped off the electoral map later this year.

Consider what the PM said about his Government's latest intervention in Queensland: "*The people of Queensland, particularly those who are opposed to these council mergers, should have the right to express their view.*" And then ask yourself about the rights of Australian workers, and whether the national electorate was given an opportunity to express its views on Howard's intended IR legislation *before* the last election? *If the appeal is to the fundamental rights of citizens to express their views then it is no good trying to play their rights at the level of local Government now when they have already been denied the same thing at the Federal level.*

And that's the problem. It may be complex, but Howard's way simply makes for confusion and more importantly is an approach bent on *avoiding accountability* in an honest and "straight-up" way. This country does need good governance *at all levels*.

But will we get to debate the policies that are enacted *at all levels* that aim to re-structure our entire electoral system to bring that about? Which party is proposing electoral reform *on all levels*? Which party is seeking political reform that would ensure that elected representatives are bound by a higher degree of accountability to their electors than they are now?

We cannot begin to address these issues if we refuse to think comprehensively and critically about the system of political representation we now have, and the *lack of genuine accountability to voters* that is manifest in our electoral and parliamentary systems *at all levels*.

So how is this reform to be advanced if the political parties of the Liberal-National coalition simply allow themselves to go into this election endorsing the current Prime Minister's multi-sided strategic interventions in the States? That's no policy platform! That is a denial of the need for political debate. It is simply an avoidance of political accountability. It is simply running in the face of widespread voter cynicism about the political process *at all levels* which has been generated by the same old ruling pragmatism.

Look at what is happening across this country and if major parties are in denial of the *need* for a change in the rationale for presentation, then perhaps they have to face the historical fact that their time as leading parties has gone. It's time for a new constellation of genuine, citizen-led political parties in this country.

As it is, the Federal Government's intervention, designed to compete politically with good local governance at the State level, simply tells us that the parties of the Liberal-National coalition have no policies of their own, and have contracted the Federal Government to do its

electoral work for it. Indeed these parties have wandered a long way from the principled political process which our Commonwealth constitution presupposes and in fact they have wandered far from the path their party constitutions had initially endorsed.

By all means let the Liberal Party be opposed to the Queensland Government's amalgamations of local councils. But just because the Queensland Liberal Party is such a weak organization is no reason for the Federal Government to intervene on their behalf as it is now doing. By going head-to-head with the Queensland State Government on these amalgamations - which Labor had as part of its electoral platform when it fought the last State election - the Federal Government is actually taking its challenge to a deeper level, to the fabric of our constitution itself.

And that's why it needs to change its approach. It first needs to **argue the case** for such intervention first, and if it does so as part of the upcoming Federal election then that raises the question of local government across the entire commonwealth and not just in some vote-winning regions. Apparently the Coalition strategists want to act first and then receive a mandate for their action. They want the action to bring in the new votes. And that is exactly the Howard pattern. And so now we are faced with an election to endorse the growing number of interventions, and these are examples of the Federal Government's "constitution overboard" strategy. But keep in mind that this is all undertaken ***without first allowing for a full and frank public debate concerning the future of the Commonwealth***. This approach is not formed in a way that enhances political accountability.

Picking fights with State Governments may look like "election winning politics" as Ross Fitzgerald in "Queensland may sacrifice its best son" has suggested in The Australian of August 9. The strategy may well confuse voters by these "wedge" tactics, and further the Howard revolution another notch, but that would simply put off the much needed electoral reform ***at all levels*** - and all for the purpose of manufacturing the re-election of a man who is being told again and again, by the polls he relies upon, that his Prime Ministership has passed its "use-by" date. Actions like this do more to confuse than to clarify and at this point we need a clarification of policy not another smokescreen.

It has to be said that John Howard has been a very successful politician because he ***inverts*** the approach to democratic politics that is assumed by our constitution. He has always considered himself to be the new (liberal) man for the neo-liberal era, and whereas the Australian constitution assumes that elected representatives in Australia's parliaments will base their legislation upon the platforms they proposed when they stood for election, this is a man who forms his politics and policies the other way around. That is his approach to politics, and it has characterised his approach since 1974 when he was first elected as the Liberal Party's member for Bennelong; that was just after the Parliamentary Liberal Party had reneged on its own party's constitutional bias in favour of viewing the House of Representatives as the House of Government.

Reform of government *at all levels* is needed in this country and electoral justice is not served by a policy of self-serving intervention from the Federal level. One has to wonder what will come next. With Mr Malcolm Turnbull at his side, are we going to witness the PM calling for an Australian republic? Before Australia moves down the republican path (again) it first needs to find the path of honest politics for just governance and to discover a new form of electoral justice *at all levels*.

# AFTER THE ELECTION

Nurturing Justice 11 (2007) 14 August

A certain political leader opined the other day, "So if Labor and Coalition policies on the economy are basically the same, why should anyone want to risk a change in Government?"

Well, how do you answer this?

We might begin by saying that economic policies are not the same because, for starters, industrial relations policy is actually about the way the economy is allowed to have an impact upon our lives - whether we are employed, unemployed, dependents, or retired. It is economy through and through. The economy is about people and caring for people - it is not just a mechanical exercise in which workers under contract allow themselves to become some kind of prosthesis to be used by profit-seeking employers. Industrial relations policy cannot avoid being about the meaning we give to our working lives which is much more than just mortgage repayments - if we can ever get a mortgage - and it is also much more than just pay packets and feeding our credit card account. And in our working life at times employees will be called upon to call employers to account, just as employers can expect a fair day's work for a day's pay. Industrial organization is no optional extra; it is vital to any well running economy.

As well, the standards of parliamentary democracy, as they are assumed by our constitution, are also at some point about "economy". Trade and industry cannot exist without good governance and of course businesses, corporations, employer groups and unions all need good governance. But there is more. The institutions of government, particularly our parliaments, also need good governance or else the consequences are likely to be devastating upon our "economy". Let me repeat an example I have been using to discuss these matters since 2002. The current leader of the governing coalition in Parliament ought to be reminded of this. He should be called to account for the fact that he failed to stand by his own electoral commitment to oppose embryonic stem-cell research back in the 2001 election. That was a change in viewpoint that was about "economics" but his renegeing also violated something basic to our system of representative democracy. Yes indeed. And allowing oneself to be swayed by bogus speculations from the pharmaceutical industry when Australian agents were already into the human embryo export business well yes that was economy too, Prime Minister, under your watch. And now that same purveyor of zillions for the same research has pulled out saying it is all too expensive. Yes, that's economic management and how much tax-payer's money has gone down that gurglar as a result of your not being truly accountable in an up-front way to the electors of Bennelong?

Why should anyone want a change of Government? I think it is obvious - but that's up for discussion, I suppose. It would seem that a change in Government at the Federal level is much more likely to promote a

society-wide basic re-think about how we do "politics", and how we do "governance" and how we do "economy", because if we don't begin to have this re-think and find a new way then we are simply blundering on in a no-care attitude, leaving it to subsequent generations to pay the costs in human terms, in ecological terms, in terms of human stewardship for our failure to change direction.

The enthusiastic endorsement in the opinion polling of Kevin Rudd as leader of Labor, and as potential Prime Minister, has as much to do with a widespread yearning across our country to get out of the materialistic opportunism that has characterised our national life for decades, if not since settlement. We indeed need a new direction in which to develop our national life and Labor's lead in the polls has as much to do with that yearning as it has with the perception that the Liberal-National Coalition have simply run out of ideas and are flummoxing around looking for extravagant vote-catching opportunities. The PM, despite his interventions of recent months, is not advocating a reconsideration of our materialistic direction. In that he is completely at one with Bob Hawke and Pal Keating. Whether a Rudd Labor Government can actually inspire the renewal so many are looking for remains to be seen. But at this point Labor at least gives a prospect that these matters can be discussed, **after the election**, a prospect that at least new directions can be considered. There are many more views that need to be heard than can be contained in any two-party preferred paradigm.

And the first question might have to be the very painful one: how do we get ourselves out of a national and regional fix caused by our own immature national self-centredness. We have become enslaved to our own economic advancement at the expense of our neighbours, at the expense of the weak and needy in our own society, at the expense of harmony in the region (think for example of the South West Pacific and its emergent instabilities and think of West Papua). By endorsing an idolatrous and false priority to economic enrichment at the expense of public justice in political matters Australia is in danger of losing its life in an economy that counts wealth in terms of financial security for itself. Instead we must find the path again for genuine care and stewardship.

# A WAY OUT OF ELECTORAL SPIN

Nurturing Justice 12 (2007) 16 August

Politically speaking, Australia is not just "wound up" about the impending election - we are very much in a "spin".

Even the announcement that Kevin Sheedy was stepping down at the end of the season as Bomber coach might well prompt speculation about Sheedy's intentions. Is he going to be a candidate at the next election? Of course, to my knowledge that question has not been raised, but it might well have been for all the superficial speculation we have been given about the electoral consequences of this or that. Besides, it would sell more papers, and push the audience ratings higher for some TV or radio show.

There are some who are now trying to suggest that Jesus Christ Himself has become a party to this spin business. At the beginning of this week *Catch the Fire Ministries*, well-known for Victoria's recent and long-running "vilification" court case, sent out an email alert drawing the attention of subscribers to reports in the Fairfax press, that a poll had found a slight up-ward trend in the Liberal-Coalition's electoral prospects. *CTFM* was indeed pleased to tell its clients about the rosier re-election prospects for the Federal Coalition. Indeed, the day before *CTFM* had informed the "Christian community" that Pastor Danny Nalliah had conveyed the contents of his private revelation to both the PM and the Federal Treasurer at the recent ACL gathering, convened to quiz Mr Howard and Mr Rudd on their "Christian values". He apparently informed the PM and the Treasurer that the forthcoming election will confirm Mr Howard as Prime Minister and thereafter Mr Costello will be our next PM. The Pastor has boldly taken the bull by the horns with what amounts to a claim of divine approval for his contribution to our cumulative electoral spin.

And so it goes. Involvement in political debate these days seems to require some or other form of self-serving spin to enhance an argument. Well if Kevin Rudd doesn't become PM then *CTFM* and its populist vanguard are well placed to say, "God told you so!" And what will *Nurturing Justice* have to say in those circumstances?

It's hard to break the spin cycle isn't it? Instead of preparing readers for a post election "You heard it first from *Nurturing Justice* folks!" it would be appropriate to investigate the way in which all kinds of media, this kind included, *as well as our participation in it*, has been progressively transformed by a self-referential style of public endorsement. Why indeed do newspapers try to grab their own headlines? What is going on when we find ourselves embroiled in speculations about electoral results? The distinction between "tabloid" and "professional" journalism no longer seems to hold. They all do it. We are all captive to it. Or so it seems.

This is not to suggest that there are no responsible journalists. There is a lot of good journalism being done. The problem is that such journalists have to continually work against the tide of such self-referential spin - *CTFM* is simply a recent bizarre example - presenting itself as an "inevitable" dimension of our political discourse. In future editions of *NJ* we will look further at the process that has led us to this "fate".

For the moment let's just consider some ways in which "the forthcoming election" may come to be woven into items of news about global business and finance, South West Pacific regional politics and wider international affairs.

***Business and Finance:** The recent dramatic fall on the New York Stock exchange was a significant warning for Australia and there is no doubt that such volatility has a considerable "flow-on" effect via the Australian share-market. But is our upcoming election going to provide us with an open and forthright explanation of why Australia has allowed itself to be exposed to the massive fluctuations brought on by the "touring capital"? Will we be able to comment upon the fears about global finance that clearly drive politicians and our system of government? Will the current PM be required to give an account of his conduct now that ES Cell International has pulled out of embryonic stem-cell research? In this upcoming election will we be able to really and truly debate the pros and cons of the neoliberal globalization agenda which equates politics with ongoing policy accommodation to free-wheeling global investment patterns? Is it possible to have such debate, when the purveyors of neoliberalism continue to marginalize the discussion itself so that the issue might just as well be left off the agenda? Is it only ever to be brought up for discussion rhetorically (by Labor politicians) to draw attention to the line of Mrs Thatcher "There Is No Alternative" or (by Coalition supporters) to criticize Paul Keating's "This is the recession we had to have"? The problem is that we as a nation are now showing we instinctively believe that any criticism of the policies that expose ourselves to global financial fluctuations is merely unrealistic wishful thinking. And the result? We live in a dreamworld of spin. Public debate becomes mere wordy speculation about whether a Dow Jones rise or fall will be good or bad for the Prime Ministerial prospects of Rudd or Howard. And we have to endorse some brand of hyper-superficial politics. It's all we have!*

***South West Pacific Regional Politics:** There is the ongoing saga of the "threat" by Fiji's military*

*strongman, Commodore Frank Bainimarama, to attend the South Pacific Forum in Nuku'alofa, Tonga later this year. Will that showdown enhance Australia's image in the region, and of our PM and Minister for Foreign Affairs, as statesmen of "world's best" standing? Or will it unravel as a farce? It might. It needs to be pointed out that the deposed Fijian Prime Minister, Mr Laisenia Qarase denied outright the inept, if not highly dangerous, comment made by Australia's PM, that the Fiji PM had asked that Australian troops be sent in to crush the coup. To my knowledge these matters have never really been properly discussed in our media, nor have they been properly debated in our parliaments. Have you heard of the Bikitawa Convention, let alone of the Cotonou Agreement? These are agreements central to our place in the region. So when the somewhat hidden tensions do manage to gather steam and become genuine region-challenging issues, the chances are that they will be reported in ways that ignore the fact that the media has let us down badly. Of course that will be covered over by a (better-late-than-never!) series of investigations about the heightened tensions but the media's failure, and thus its belated contribution to the tension, will not be the centre of our focus. This kind of media-myth making feeds the kind of political gamesmanship that led the Australian PM to make his "pseudo-statesmanlike" mispronouncement in the first place. We all need to avoid all pretence. The Prime Ministerial office demeans the entire country, and the region. when it throws truth-saying overboard. The media should help us, and that means all public officials with us, find the truth-path, and not give obscure evasive signals about its own place in current affairs.*

***Relations with the Wider International Community.***  
*And what about the much vaunted APEC gathering in Sydney next month and the respective contributions of the New Zealand's Labour Prime Minister Helen Clark and of the neo-imperialist US President? What will all that do to our election, particularly if the independence of New Zealand is highlighted in such a way that shows Australia lacks a foreign policy which the country can be proud of?*

The problem is that these issues are also crucial to our nation's politics and should be discussed by the candidates in the election. But the mainstream media, aided and abetted by our own gullibility, simply feeds the spin, generating unnecessary and mythic tensions. In general it seems to expect that the Parliamentary Leader of the Opposition is merely the policy opposite of each and every Prime Ministerial action or

pronouncement. Somehow Kevin Rudd is viewed as not doing his job effectively when he fails to disagree antithetically with the "other side". But since when did the office of Opposition Leader mean shouting "negative" when the PM says "positive", or formulating policies which are merely the logical opposite of any Government view? Moreover, this country needs its *Parliamentary* opposition, for this too is an important political calling *Coram Deo* and it requires much wisdom and political insight to ensure that it is carried out in the national interest.

The foolishness of the *CTFM* attempt to twist God's arm on behalf of John Howard and Peter Costello is that in our system of parliamentary government (ie this not a Presidential election, Danny) the Leader of the Opposition is also called by God to fulfil his or her vocation. The long-term problem for the Coalition has been that their members are all too happy to welcome divine approval when they occupy the Treasury Benches but, as a rule, they do not welcome, or even understand, the calling to be a *Parliamentary* Opposition. The Liberal Party gave up that (Christian) view back in 1974. In Opposition the Liberal Party sees itself as merely the next Government and so, in effect, ignores our constitutional system in order to polish its own (party) self-interest.

And now parties and media, let alone the public, generally view "Opposition" as "alternative government". That's a view which incidentally is somewhat at odds with our system of government. It might comport with the populist pseudo-presidential culture in which we now have to cast our votes. But if this country is to find a coherent policy direction which enables government to prevent our lives from being swept along by all kinds of spinning currents, we need to understand how far we have drifted from the view of *Parliamentary Opposition* that is assumed by our federal constitution, and just as importantly we need to find a fresh way of expressing our commitment to *representative, parliamentary democracy*. A mass media which ignores this simply presents itself as the "alternative alternative" and so it goes ... around in circles.

And so the parliamentary chamber (Ayes to the right; Noes to the left) becomes merely an image for public debate, an imaginary suggestion that there can only be two "real" sides to any political issue. This is why we are continually in a political spin. The media, and the two major parties, have actually got it wrong. We are going the wrong way. Politics cannot be reduced to two sides. Public debate - unlike the "opinion" measured by 2-party preferred polls - is not a zero-sum game. And yet we continue to be fed speculations about the impact of New York stock exchange fluctuations for John Howard's re-election prospects; we will be entertained by accounts of the Fiji strongman's antics at the SPF designed to make an impact on our voting intentions; and the world's leaders will all be given respect in a form that discounts any possibility that APEC has a part to play in our forth-coming poll (not).

I have tried to illustrate a national political habit we are finding so difficult to overcome. On the one hand, there is an obsessive denial that we need a change of political direction - on the other hand, we view freedom in terms of being exposed to all kinds of superficial exploitation

which the hyper-commercialised media also gladly exploit. Efforts to promote responsible journalism all too easily get sucked in to finding self-promoting ways of drawing attention to "non-superficial" analyses. The media does it. The parties do it. We all do it. And so it is as if our paradoxical situation is telling us that we need a fresh path out of this cycle of chronic political superficiality. Is there but one step we can take to find a new direction away from this self-referential egotism?

I think there is. It may be painful to find it but it is available. There is an alternative to the political "wind up" and "spin" routine because it is Parliament which grants the Prime Minister discretion to decide when an election will be held. And yes, true to form, the incumbent PM is in "wind up" mode waiting for the moment to "spin" his case (again) to a tired electorate. This is simply childish and silly. It is childish and silly not to recognise it. And it is childish and silly for Parliament and the PM to perpetuate it.

Instead, legislating for fixed four-year terms would be a worthwhile first refreshing step on the path to our national political rehabilitation.

So, why not vote for the candidate, or party, in your electorate who is firmly committed to fixed four-year terms for the Federal Parliament? A small step but a significant one on the way back to genuine political accountability and a vote that says "yes" to a return to authentic political debate.

# PUBLIC JUSTICE: ON THE PATH TO POLITICAL LIFE

Nurturing Justice 13 (2007) 21 August

Last time I discussed the chaotic electoral spin in which our voting is now immersed. If we try to get involved in the election according to the ground rules that are already evident in the "campaign" thus far, we simply get ourselves exhausted by reacting to the silly antics of a confused parliamentarian who wants to be re-elected as Prime Minister. Yes, he seems to be calling all the shots, but if we take our eye off the principle of public justice as the *raison d'être* for our citizenship, we will soon come to a similar dead-end of incoherent politics. Let's instead look for another way - let us try and find another path upon which we reflect upon the forthcoming election. If we prayerfully accept the wisdom God has given us in Jesus Christ for politics - after all we confess that He is the Ruler of the Kings and Queens and Presidents and Prime Ministers of this world - should we not be able to avoid participation in what has become a grand satire if it is not a complete farce.

So, what I propose to present here is a provisional "think big" list of "public justice" issues which, over the next decade have to be reconsidered by us as we work for the reform of justice in Australian politics. These are issues for which we will need to generate a coherent Christian political vision. They demand a comprehensive approach to political life. There are twelve "issues" listed below and in this and future editions of *Nurturing Justice* we will comment on each of these offering a brief explanation of the significance of the issues listed and why that have to be considered in a comprehensive and coherent political vision. As we think about them over the next months and years we may find it necessary to add others, or some of the issues on the list may find themselves re-listed as sub-sections under other headings. This then is my suggestion for nurturing justice amongst ourselves as we approach the 2007 election. We commit ourselves to the long-term hard work of re-envisioning public justice for the Australian Commonwealth in relation to these and other crucial issues, issues that demand public justice "all the way down".

The twelve I have chosen are:

1. **Overcoming Incoherent Political Conduct**
2. **Reconciliation & Rediscovering the Nation's Calling to Do Justice**
3. **South West Pacific and Regional Relations to the North and West**
4. **International Relations**
5. **Promoting an Economy of Restraint, Care and Enough**
6. **Climate Change and Environmental Care**
7. **Commerce, Industry and Trade Unionism**
8. **Issues of "Body Politics", Marriage and Family**

9. Public Morality and the Reform of Mass Media
10. Health, Social Welfare and Education
11. Electoral Reform, Proportional Representation
12. Local Government and Australia's Constitution:

And now to begin with a comment upon

#### 1. Overcoming Incoherent Political Conduct:

How do we go about reforming our own political conduct in our complex differentiated society? First we may need to face the fact that we are all engaged in political conduct. That may be the biggest hurdle. A second hurdle may be the difficulty we have in admitting any incoherence in *our* political conduct. We would much rather locate the problem outside of ourselves, for instance in the major parties or among the politicians. But just as the Government has not absolved us of our national culpability toward the indigenous peoples of this land when individual office bearers claim that they have nothing to apologise for, so we, as Christian citizens, will miss the true state of affairs if we ignore the many good things which the confessors of Jesus Christ have failed to do politically. We have not only done things we ought not to have done; we have not done the things that we should have done. And if we start looking we may surprise ourselves by the long list we compile of sins of omission.

On the other hand, if start assuming that our own collective moral power will set things right then our impatience has got the better of us and we may well be on the way to adapting our political responsibilities to the reigning ideologies. Repeated appeals to “public justice” will not overcome the fact that *our own conduct* tells us we have lost insight into the true significance of God’s norms for political life. We might put all our effort into growing a Christian political viewpoint, but if we impatiently assume that norms only come into play when a majority of humans recognise them, then we have taken the path of political impatience, forsaking God's promises and adopting a deep-down belief that we humans have to create our norms for ourselves. No, one of the fruits of the Spirit is patience, and a Christian political patience needs to be aware that it is God's invitation to us to walk on the path of justice which He has laid out for us; our task is the thankful response of *doing* justice.

So, if public justice is a normative principle that binds citizens and government together in a political community with a common task, then its goal is none other than public justice for all, the formation of a just public-legal order. That is the kind of work that God calls us to, and that is the kind of work in which we are to be busy when Jesus Christ comes and brings God's Kingdom to its completion - "abounding in the work of the Lord we know with a steadfast and immovable knowledge that such labour is not in vain" (1 Cor 15:58). In that sense “public justice” can never become the possession or property of some or other elite, let alone the property of a group of "good guys". It is a path upon which all are called to serve their own communities and, more and more, their

neighbours around the world. Political scientists, and all other scientific specialists in many and varied intellectual pursuits, have their own peculiar professional contributions to make which should also enhance public life and promote justice everywhere. But that also requires the development of a way of Christian thinking about the connections between all the diverse sciences and how they relate to **and serve** the diverse and distinct social responsibilities that constitute our ever-more-complex lives at home and abroad.

It's no use blaming the politicians; our instinctive habit of blaming politicians is one reason why we have lost ourselves in political incoherence. We are all accountable. This is all the more reason to turn again and renew authentic political reflection, and search for the path of "public justice". By turning around politically, what better motivation do we have than God's own long-suffering over our political waywardness? We should not assume that what has taken 100 years or more to unravel will be set to rights after a few emails, a few elections or even a few hastily convened national conventions. Consider what the Bible teaches about God's patience and think about the way in which our current mode of politics encourages various forms of political impatience - by parliamentarians, by public officials, by political parties, by citizens, by the legal profession, by the judiciary, by ourselves. As a nation we need to re-capture a political style of quiet and steadfast patience in order to pursue public justice.

## **2. Reconciliation as the First Step to Rediscovering National Identity:**

As we consider God's patient call to us, we should deepen our appreciation for those who have patiently waited for justice in our land, despite the fact that many of us continue to live in denial of the need to redress the historic injustice to Australia's indigenous peoples. We need to find ways of serving all our neighbours, particularly fellow citizens in need. We need to find ways of helping that enhance rather than retract the dignity of those we are called to serve. We need to discover how to listen to the oppressed, the marginalised and those tormented by the madness of a consumerist society. We need to develop a better understanding of how our Christian profession is compromised by our unfaithful "affair" with consumerism.

Reconciliation with Australia's first peoples will have ongoing repercussions throughout our social fabric and in the region and beyond. We will learn again that people matter more than things; that caring and sharing rather than mindless consumerist competition is the way to peace and blessing.

Sure we may have very deep disagreements that arise from different religious assumptions. But we need to find non-combative and winsome ways of conveying to all who take on citizenship in this country that they are indeed part of an ongoing reconciliation movement with the indigenous peoples of this land and region. National repentance is not merely a set of rituals; it has to become a way of life. To deny this is to maintain an unhealthy uncertainty that undermines our national community. The nation's youth - all of them - need to be nurtured in the

importance of mutual forgiveness and compassion, between all people, between all generations, between ourselves and God. The constitution may also need to be reformed to better symbolise the importance to us as a nation of the descendants of the peoples who have inhabited this land for millennia. This reconciliation is also needed as part of our genuine care for this land - for what it provides and what it means and what it will mean in the future. Our national identity cannot be found without such reconciliation. And as Christians we confess that it is Jesus Christ's resurrection and ascension to God's Right Hand that provides is the firm basis on which reconciliation among can be achieved. This reconciliation will also be crucial if Australia is to fulfil its vocation as an advocate for justice in a world that will bring wave upon wave of asylum seekers, and environmental refugees, to these shores.

Next time 3. **South West Pacific and Regional Relations to the North and West** and 4. **International Relations** will constitute our focus.

# ON THE REGIONAL PATH TO POLITICAL LIFE

Nurturing Justice 14 (2007) 30 August

Last week I proposed a strategy to avoid the mind-numbing antics that are evident in our current election campaign. We need to grow up. We need to avoid childish and immature behaviour that perpetually draws attention to ourselves and own self-interest. So, I suggested a provisional "think big" list of "public justice" issues which will still be with us over the next decade. The aim is to challenge ourselves to think again about the way we fulfil our calling as Christian citizens. What does Christian citizenship mean? I am assuming we have to find a *modus operandi* for the reform of Australian politics that avoids the all-to-evident weaknesses of our current consumer-oriented, poll-driven, tabloid electioneering. If a coherent Christian political vision is to be generated, it will only come from a comprehensive approach to which argues coherently and forcefully for specific policies which promote justice. It's about politics for justice and good governance rather than politics manipulated for self-interest. Let me list again the twelve "issues". (You will notice I have reworded No. 2.) They are:

1. **Overcoming Incoherent Political Conduct**
2. **Reconciliation & Rediscovering the Nation's Calling to do Justice**
3. **South West Pacific and Regional Relations to the North and West**
4. **International Relations**
5. **Promoting an Economy of Restraint, Care and Enough**
6. **Climate Change and Environmental Care**
7. **Commerce, Industry and Trade Unionism**
8. **Issues of "Body Politics", Marriage and Family**
9. **Public Morality and the Reform of Mass Media**
10. **Health, Social Welfare and Education**
11. **Electoral Reform, Proportional Representation:**
12. **Local Government and Australia's Constitution:**

This week we comment briefly on No. 3. The next edition will be concerned with some thoughts about how we can understand the path of international justice (No.4).

### **3. South West Pacific and Regional Relations to the North and West:**

This week, as the Australian media tells us about Australian successes at the World Athletics Championships in Osaka, the XIIIth South Pacific Games are being held in Samoa. Take a few minutes to surf the web-site <http://www.samoa2007.ws>. Note that, for instance, cricket is alive and well in the South Pacific. Note also that the site tells us that "*Wallis et Futuna va participer pour la première fois à des compétitions de*

*voile à l'occasion des Jeux du Pacifique Sud 2007.*" "Who is 'Wallis et Futuna?'" "Why is the report in French?" This is our region. Can we deny that we should be more aware of what is happening here, in our South West Pacific neighbourhood? Can we deny that we should be more aware of who is living next-door and the games they play?

Every so often I have the chance to speak to young people who have done the "travel overseas" thing. Some return with a lament - Australia seems so insular, they say. Australia is a country obsessed with its own self-interest. These young people return to discover their growing sense of embarrassment about their own country, about the way we have misunderstood our place in the world. They may be right. But it is worthwhile listening to the experience and emerging consciousness of such young people. It might aid our political education. They may help us see things about our nation's spiritual direction which we would prefer to ignore or leave in the "too-hard" basket.

Geographically, of course, Australia for most of its life, has been a long, long way from where the ancestors of the settlers lived. The descendents of the settlers, with the later migrants, are now the clear majority. But in the 200-plus years of settlement and the 30-plus years of increased Asian migration, we are still asking ourselves about Australia's place in the world, and the contribution that should be made in this region. No doubt, the colonial sense of being far away is still a big part of Australian self-understanding. And a profound historical irony opens up to many sensitive people, young and old alike. A serious injustice has been done by a nation tracing its "Christian heritage" to "settlement" while it has, at the same time, aided and abetted the profound spiritual *unsettling* of the indigenous peoples and leaving them feeling far away from their own ancestral lands *even as they live on them*.

Now read and ponder what one leading Tongan Christian, Lopeti Senituli, says in response to the efforts of Australian capital to patent the Tongan gene pool.

***We really cannot afford to go back to the frontier days when it was open season on all things indigenous to the Pacific Islands including Australia. Instead we must build on the new foundations found in the Mabo and Wik decisions which the Australian High Court handed down in the early 1990s. That is the way forward.***

This raises a most important question about the regional implications of the Australian Government's attitude to the land rights of indigenous people, but it not only about what goes on *in* Australia but about how policies of just respect (or unjust disrespect) have a way of making waves, ensuring their impact upon the region as a whole.

This sounds as if I am simply repeating my previous "big issue" - **Reconciliation and Rediscovering a Nation's Calling for Justice** - but as our Tongan brother reminds us, these issues cannot be separated. Australia, like all the nations of the world, is called to do justice in all of its life. Having said that, we cannot avoid the bequest of a prevailing Christian ethos among the island nations of the SWP, particularly in Polynesia and Melanesia. When we as Australia's Christians answer the

call of God and seek justice *within* the Australian polity, then we are also called to join with our sisters and brothers among these island nations in the neighbourhood, who are likewise seeking for God's justice at home and abroad.

Bob Goudzwaard, an ecumenical economist, has noted: *Paul once wrote that it is only together, with all the saints, that we can begin "to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" and in knowing that this love surpasses our separate understandings (Ephesians 3:18-19). This is true with respect to the deep social problems of our time as well as for every area of human life as well.*

If we are to participate in a Christian political movement within Australia then we cannot avoid participating in the political development of the wider South-West Pacific neighbourhood and being willing to serve in that by taking the lead from our SWP brothers and sisters. But it must be the way of service along the path of promoting public justice. To forget that is to forget God's call.

So let me suggest one question we can ask ourselves to clarify how we view ourselves as citizens of the SWP neighbourhood: what do we really know about our region? In what ways can we begin to show (ourselves) that we truly care for the South West Pacific? Why not put yourself on the mailing list for one of the pacific newspapers we can access on the web - the Solomon Star or the Fiji Daily Post? Let yourself be surprised at the Christian orientation of the editorials that remind readers of the Christian calling to do justice.

There is another issue that can help us focus upon the reality of our situation. It is population and the dispersion of population. Australia accounts for 55% of the population of the South West Pacific region which has roughly 45 million people. Is that surprising? (I suspect that many Australians will be amazed by these figures. I wonder why?) Indonesia has a population of 235 million and Malaysia has 27 million. We are a country of extremely large distances within our borders - an important facet of our national identity. Large distance gives the appearance of independence if not self-sufficiency. Most of our population is found in large cities, our two biggest cities account for almost 40% of our 20 million. But I have been suggesting that as well as thinking beyond our immediate urban neighbourhoods and thinking of the country as a whole, we also find a way of thinking about Australia in our region, to think about the regional neighbourhood in which we live. We will return to this next time as we explore International Relations as a focus for Christian political reflection.

# JUSTICE AND GLOBALIZATION

Nurturing Justice 15 (2007) 12 September

This comment on **International Relations** is the fourth on our list of "big issues". If you wish to refresh your mind on the list just click on "PREVIOUS" at the top of the page. As we work through a provisional "think big" list of "public justice" issues which will still be with us over the next decade, the aim is to challenge ourselves to think again about the way we fulfil our calling as Christian citizens. So what does Christian citizenship mean for our lives on the global stage? How should we understand globalization? What of global warming and climate change? And what we do to act responsibly in the face of the still widening gap between rich and poor, not only between the "North" and the "South" but also within our own nation and region particularly when we, in GDP terms, are said to be among the world's wealthy?

The first thing that should be said concerns our need to know what is going on in the world and what is driving the major forces which shape international society. That means research; historical study, sociological analysis, economic evaluation and political diagnosis. It will also mean developing a sense of solidarity with all those people, wherever they are, who are trying to find an alternative path to materialism and the policies of those who still cling to the doom-filled scenario that without growth in consumption and production we will all surely perish. But to find and express this solidarity requires patient research: reading and listening to what others are doing. Here's two items that have come my way in the last two days:

*Have you heard of Raj Patel? He is the author of **Stuffed and Starved: Markets, Power and the Hidden Battle for the World Food System**. This is what he says about his book: "It's a story of the global food system, about why there are one billion overweight people and 800 million going hungry, and about the millions of people who are fighting back". That simply by-line for the book says a lot.*

*Or try this News Hour item titled: **Companies Race for Oil and Gas Reserves in Arctic**. Norway's state-owned oil company, Statoil, recently opened Europe's first large-scale liquefied natural gas plant in Hammerfest, Norway. As global warming melts Arctic ice and makes reserves more accessible, companies are racing to the Arctic to stake their claims.*

It seems that life around the globe is so incredibly developed that we could spend all our time listening to news reports, reading *Nurturing Justice*, trying to catch up with what is going on, on our doorstep, in our nation, in our region and beyond. We will also find it hard to avoid cynicism. So, how do we start to consider these issues? Web articles are

sometimes so full of links to other pages and other links, that we find ourselves overwhelmed. Is there any way to get a grip on what we see before our eyes? Is wisdom and insight in these matters a thing of the past?

*Wisdom is supreme, therefore get wisdom. Though it costs you all you have, get understanding (Prov 4:6-7).*

Can we obtain understanding? With ourselves caught up in the whirlwinds of globalization is it still possible to gain wisdom and insight? Are there grounds for hope?

For starters, let me recommend a study written by a banker and an economist. Leo Andringa and Bob Goudzwaard with Mark Vander Vennen have written: *Globalization and Christian Hope: Economy in the Service of Life*. Read it and think about its argument. Consider the examples they give of local initiatives - Focolare, Oikicredit. How do you think about money? What place does money have in our life? What has changed in the world of finance?

Can I also draw your attention to the "Letter to the Churches of the North" on pages 23-25. It was drafted by the participants of a Symposium of South Asian Christian churches on the Consequences of Economic Globalization (November 12-15, 1999, Bangkok, Thailand). Note the date. Remember the Asian financial crisis? This is a letter that is 8 years old. But its message is still fresh. Have you read it before? Have the churches of Australia heard this call?

*Next to the pain and suffering in the South, there are the threats in the North. We heard about poverty, coming back in even your richest societies; we received reports about environmental destruction also in your midst, and about alienation, loneliness and the abuse of women and children. And all that, while most of your churches are losing members. And we asked ourselves: is most of that not also related to being rich and desiring to become richer than most of you already are? Is there not in the western view of human beings and society a delusion, which always looks to the future and wants to improve it, even when it implies an increase of suffering in your own societies and in the South? Have you not forgotten the richness which is related to sufficiency? If, according to Ephesians 1, God is preparing in human history to bring everyone and everything under the lordship of Jesus Christ, his shepherd-king - God's own globalization! - shouldn't caring (for nature) and sharing with each other be the main characteristic of our lifestyle, instead of giving fully in to the secular trend of a growing consumerism?*

The letter is worth reading in its entirety. Why not set aside a whole day - or even half a day - to discuss this letter with a couple of friends and think about your response. If you are Christian the letter must have a particular prophetic poignancy. It reminds us that we have lost the cutting edge of our faith. We have become slack with lives that simply

accommodate the ruling neo-liberal ideology with "There is No Alternative" as we take another Tim-Tam. Any challenges that might be mounted are usually short-circuited by a determination to maintain levels of material comfort. But how did Christianity in the Western world fall into its grovelling posture to the god of Mammon? Could it be that we have accommodated to global finance as to an imperial power and thus put ourselves radically at odds with the religion we profess?

*We are convinced that the time has come for a return to the fundamental and undiluted teachings of the Gospel. It is time for all of us to make a choice: God or mammon. We know that some churches in the North are very active in this regard and we feel strong solidarity with their actions. But the present situation invites us to stand up all together. We call for concrete acts of solidarity to alleviate the massive suffering of our nations in the North and in the South.*

*We call for urgent action on your part to address your governments and the institutions that are designing and implementing the present globalization project.*

*We call for a process of study of the current economic system and its consequences in our midst, in the light of our common faith in Jesus Christ, the Saviour, who showed us caring and sharing as members of God's family.*

*Economic injustice is a violation of the basic tenets of our common faith. We call on you to join us in confessing that the economy is a matter of faith.*

This is a clear and forthright Christian call for repentance. Think back over the events of the past week and the APEC gathering. Was the contribution of Australia, this professedly Christian nation, inspired in part by this 1999 call by the churches of the South to forsake consumerism? Forgive me for saying so but reading between the lines it seems we, and the other nations present, were more concerned with reassuring the money-markets that they will indeed work to maintain consumerism as a *sine qua non* of our political and national life.

If our Government, or Opposition, were to take seriously the poverty in the world in the knowledge that "economics is a matter of faith" would this somehow indicate that the church had somehow taken over politics? Of course it wouldn't. But we, as a nation, don't seem to be concerned about walking the path of stewardship and justice among the nations of the earth. Rather, we seem more concerned with winding ourselves up to maintain the same old discredited nature-destroying, poverty creating course. Are the APEC nations really committed to working together to overcoming the increasing poverty, the land degradation, the environmental catastrophe, and other burgeoning problems in the Asia Pacific region, let alone the dispossession of indigenous peoples and the export of natural resources to deepen the poverty cycle of indigenous peoples everywhere? Why haven't we, and other rich countries, decided to heed the mounting evidence and adopt

a more restrained pattern of production and consumption by a joint and unequivocal commitment to refocus our economies towards care for nature and finding mechanisms that share the resources of the earth with true equity? Are we really serious about the massive re-direction of resources that will be needed to ensure basic necessities for increasing numbers of those who need them but don't have them? Are we now filled with urgency to live moderately, to avoid foolish consumption?

By simply asking ourselves these questions, we begin to sense the unreality of global politics of the APEC type - the unreality of an idealistic globalization that assumes that more and more production and consumption is the way to achieve the greatest happiness for the greatest number. It is the corollary of the crazy view that building more and more sophisticated defence weaponry is the sure way to guaranteed security. APEC has come and gone but is it still the Dow Jones, FTSE100 and Nasdaq indices which we rely upon to tell us how to interpret our immediate and long-term future?

Clearly, Christianity needs to rediscover itself, its own faith. In recent times there has been a modest revival of Biblical scholarship that has begun to explore the possibility that the early church was indeed a contra-imperial movement. The writings of Bishop N T Wright, and many others, are worth reading in this regard. Wright also offers a cogent explanation for the way in which English-speaking Christians have accommodated their reading of the New Testament to the privatisation of their religion and to latter imperial and colonial world-views. Many of his contributions are available at the N T Wright Page. In one recent lecture on the book of Romans he made the following remark:

*What Paul is talking about must have been heard by his Roman readers and must have been intended by Paul as counter-imperial theology. Paul ... fell heir to the long Jewish tradition in which the Creator God was the King of the world and relativized all pagan Kingdoms. God could use them and indeed God wanted there to be authority in the world but God was over against them particularly when they vaunted themselves over against Him. And when Paul talks about the Gospel of God in the Son of God who is the Lord of the world, who is the Saviour of the world ... through whom is revealed justice and freedom and peace - these are all part of the Roman Imperial rhetoric of his day. The Caesar cult was the fastest growing religion in Paul's world in his day - that is the world of the eastern Mediterranean - and Paul must have known that what he was saying is "God is King and Caesar isn't!" "Jesus is Lord and Caesar isn't!" "It is God's justice, not Caesar's, that will win in the end".*

If that is indeed what Paul was teaching, then this Christian revival in biblical studies issues a challenge to rethink our attitude to the New Testament. But not only that. Wright and others indicate that the Gospel always confronts its political context, and so we are encouraged

to read the bible in a fresh way in order to derive decisive guidance for making a political contribution in our world today. After all the confession "Jesus is Lord" carries with it the belief that God knows that we are citizens in various political communities at various levels. And God is not surprised by globalization. In fact, as the letter from the churches indicates, the Gospel is the heraldic announcement of God's specific globalization project (See Ephesians 1:10). We are called by these churches to discover citizenship as one of the ways in which the Gospel calls us to served our neighbours with love, to make economic confession with our lives. The question then is: how then is it possible for us not to develop a better understanding of what is required from us in the life of nations. Contribute we must. We cannot avoid it. And so some serious questions face us about the concrete steps we should be taking to walk the path of justice, of loving mercy and with a genuine intimacy with our neighbours. We keep close to the Good Shepherd, because we believe He has come close to us for our rescue, for the survival of those who are weak and cannot support themselves.

# RESTRAINT, CARE AND ENOUGH

Nurturing Justice 16 (2007) 26 August

This issue of *Nurturing Justice* is to make a general comment on Economics, the fifth on our list of "big issues". We have begun to explore what nurturing justice might mean for us as citizens, confronting demanding questions about our *vocation* as citizens. What does justice mean for our citizenship on the global stage and what is our responsibility to the region? How should we respond to globalization and what about global warming and climate change? What is our responsibility for future generations? There is a decades-long widening gap between rich and poor, not only between the "North" and the "South" but also in our own country and region, and so, numbered among the wealthy of the earth, we have to confront our responsibility for the poor, the hungry and the excluded. What are we going to do about all these things?

Clearly, politics is one important dimension of our response to these issues. And by asking ourselves these questions, quietly and persistently, we will make life uncomfortable for ourselves and perhaps others - but what alternative is there? We will confront the unreality by which election campaigns are conducted these days - its easy to sense this unreality but then we have to find a way to respond by "getting real" in politics? How do we explain the problem of political unreality in a way that mitigates the cynicism that sits patiently at the door of our lives, just waiting for an opportunity to barge in and take over? How do we confront the trivialisation of our task to seek justice and thereby strengthen our resolve to act with persistent compassion?

Here then let us discuss the place which economic policy should have within our country's political life. But to find that place we first have to address our current political experience which is dominated by economics. This dominance is deeply engrained and it can be easily demonstrated by noting the way we speak about, and think about, our political responsibilities. At an election we confront rival electoral machines telling us over and over that we are engaged in buying a political product. The very terms that we use to explain the political process indicate that our political world-view has been swamped by a way of thinking in which voters are viewed as political consumers, elections are a three-yearly political market, candidates are wanting to be elected onto the national or state board of directors (the parliament) that then take over the running of the nation's business. And that is only the start.

Why does an economic metaphor have such priority in our thinking and talking about politics? What does this language tell us about our priorities? I am not going to try to answer that question here, at least not directly, but I do want to provoke some reflection about this language so that next time a discussion of politics, the election or "the

economy" comes our way, we might be alert to the terms we use to explain ourselves.

Let me ask you this? What is the usual explanation that is given in your conversations with others to explain the political mess the world is in? The answer I often hear is: "It's greed." I suspect this explanation is widespread, if not universal. This is usually followed by, "And what can anyone do about greed?" When that statement is made, especially by the fellow you thought would be interested in discussing politics and justice issues, you realize the discussion is almost over, if it isn't dead in the water already. "It's greed and there's not much you can do about that!" Full stop.

Greed: over-extension of self-interest; self-interest at the expense of others. Isn't it interesting that in all the talk about how our country's economy is working, whether it is working so well (as the government claims - despite the drought for which we'll have to pull the farmer assistance lever) or whether it is working so poorly (as the government's critics claim - because the wrong levers have been pulled and the right ones not been tried), we don't ever hear politicians speaking about policies that could stem the flow of greed - policies that would challenge greed at its source. Even when the national curriculum standards are on the agenda, where is the discussion that emphasizes the need to educate young people to challenge our nation's greed?

Politicians are very good at complimenting communities who act generously in floods and fires; but even with the initiative to prevent child abuse in remote aboriginal communities, which has shown a residual deep concern across our polity, how much have we heard of government anger and disdain at the greed of those who exploit marginalised people by producing and selling pornography? It's been there in small doses but it is muted, not played in a major key.

How many times have you heard candidates address the issue of greed as a problem that has to be confronted politically, in the structure of our society, our political life, by all of us? I'm not talking about what is called "gutter politics" where one candidate tries to accuse a rival of being on the side of greed, but even when that moralistic tone is sounded politicians don't dare to suggest that we might have to build a society that confronts greed with a comprehensive *political* alternative of generosity.

Greed: everyone is talking about it, but when it comes down to policy it seems we avoid it, or simply throw up our hands and assume that there is nothing that can be done.

Why is that? Is it that the challenge to greed is too challenging. Will it challenge our view of our selves, our own self-interest? What would be so wrong with that? We have had a "war" on poverty, and now a "war" on "terrorism". Why not a war on greed?

In all the talk about the "Christian values" that are said to be the "core" of our nation, where's the assertion of the Christian value of self-denial in public life, self-criticism in ethical conduct, self-restraint in the market place? Are we really wanting to go head-to-head with greed,

the greed we all profess to carry around with us but do so little about? It doesn't seem like it.

Go to your local op-shop and have a look at old economics texts that end up there. Or go to the university bookshop and look through the latest ones. Find the sections which deal with the economics of greed; with economic policies that can confront the causes of the mess the world is supposed to be in. It would seem that greed is so central to our underlying economic world-view that our economic theory doesn't even bother to address it (except a brief mention in passing). Greed is so central to our political economy that it is the one thing our political and economic powers have agreed not to discuss. In this they follow John Maynard Keynes who is famous for this statement:

For at least another hundred years, we must pretend to ourselves, and to everyone that this fair is foul and foul is fair. For foul is useful and fair is not. Avarice and greed must be our gods for a little longer still. For only they can lead us out of the tunnel of economic necessity into daylight.

Keynes may have indulging in rhetoric, but he was assuming that humankind was capable of overcoming its problems and would surely emerge out of the tunnel of necessity. But the problem with his economic view of greed is that "foul" remains an unavoidable norm for the present: translated into economic theory we note an inability to deal conceptually with the human causes of economic hardship; the realities of human suffering and poverty are somehow off in another dimension of reality, which the figures, the trade weighted indices and the policy levers just cannot touch; when this comes to government policies we see an inability of politicians and voters, on all sides, to accept our God-given responsibly and to think structurally about these problems and so the pessimistic cynicism that nothing can be done prevails; and so when it comes to mere friendly discussion with those we meet as we walk along our daily path ....?

In Australia, politics has often been construed as a battle between "greed" and "envy" - I'll leave readers to line up this dichotomy with our political spectrum. But usually these days elections are about how **generous** the candidate will be to the electorate once in office. And that typifies the shepel we will hear on the hustings. At election time it is as if politics is simply a product which the candidate sells by giving attention (with our public funds) to packaging and advertising but after the election politics is simply about economic policies as our elected "salespersons" try to convince us that they are helping us go about consuming the *real* products that life is all about. And so the electoral-market cycle begins again.

If we acquiesce in this way of thinking, then we had better face the fact that we are also admitting the necessity of Keynes' vicious treadmill of avarice and greed as a *sine qua non* for our political lives. But, to turn away from that tunnelled enslavement and to accept restraint, care and enough is to start out on a new and better path, a path of political stewardship that can be trod step by step each day knowing that our

citizenship - global, regional, national, local - holds together as a very real facet of our lives, as a service of God and all our neighbours.

# TO DRESS & TO KEEP

Nurturing Justice 17 (2007) 15 October

You may recall that *Nurturing Justice* is trying to side-step the political frenzy that has been generated by the PM, the media and political parties in the run up to the election. Our aim is to find ways of thinking big about genuine political needs that will confront policy makers over the longer term whatever party or group of parties prevails at the polls. Hopefully, such a strategy - even on this small Nurturing Justice scale - can point to a quiet, humble and patient path upon which to promote public justice and better understand the complex political problems that confront us. To walk such a path is not, in any way, to obviate our ongoing responsibility to public political life. On the contrary; to walk this path is to attempt to deepen sensitivity to our ongoing political responsibilities; citizenship is a calling to promote justice for all.

Now we come to No. 6 on our list of 12 issues: "**Climate Change and Environmental Care.**" (The initial list is at [NJ13](#) or [NJ14](#)). Some readers may assume that the words "Climate Change" suggest that this will be a defence of the views put forward by the recent Nobel Peace Prize winners. That is not my intention, but the Faraday lecture [Global Warming: The Science, the Impacts and the Politics](#) by Sir John Houghton, FRS CBE, a co-chair of the Scientific Assessment Working Group for the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (1988-2002) is worthy of examination. There will be two parts to our consideration of "Climate Change and Environmental Care" - this first part will discuss the human task upon the earth and our orientation to the cumulative effects of our dressing and keeping God's garden. The second will suggest some obvious and unavoidable policy implications.

The title of this broadsheet "To dress it **AND** to keep it" refers to the way the King James Version of the Bible (1611) translates Genesis 2:15. In this it follows the Tyndale translation (1534) and the Geneva Bible of 1560 where the full verse runs: "Then the Lord God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden that he might dress it and keep it." The RSV (1952) has: "to till it and to keep it"; the Jerusalem Bible (1966) has: "to cultivate and to keep it"; and the NIV (1973) "to work it and take care of it."

Let's dwell for a little while on this remarkable sentence. For almost 5 centuries, the opening pages of the book many claim has God's seal of authority, has given western and English-speaking Christians a picture of human life, in words they can readily understand of one short sentence, a specification of the human own task. Heaven and earth was thus finished with all their apparel (as Tyndale had rendered 2:1) and God went a step further and planted a garden which was to be dressed and kept by the one made in His image! One very brief sentence says all of this.

And yet, now in 2007, we have to ask whether western and English-speaking Christianity has rightly understood this sentence. In our

inherited hurry, addicted to an instinctive formulaic reading, we tend to move on quickly without waiting to fully absorb what this tells us about God's purpose for our lives. We move on in haste and miss something vital to our well-being. Our superficial reading of the Bible confirms a way a life in which we live with an inherent tension between cultivation and restoration, progress and conservation. These become alternatives, a fated tension that manifests itself in political debate. Instead of cultivation and restoration as two aspects of the one human task, we assume an ongoing commitment to progress, to moving on, to move forward, to putting the past behind us, in order to facilitate a relentless process of production and growth. And then we have to confront our own belated attempts to mitigate environmental degradation. And all the while "downstream" there is burgeoning impoverishment.

Clearly, the sentence speaks of the Lord God's intention, not only for the "man", but also for the garden, and the entire creation. In that sentence we confront human-kind's purpose in terms of the Creator's desire - we are to cultivate and develop the plants and animals and their environments. We are part of God's process of enrichment of what he has made. The glory of the Lord God is to come to expression in the work of the Image bearers who are to have dominion over the earth. There is harmony here. We have been set to work in a task that, on the one hand, invites cultivation and development but which, on the other, requires conservation and restoration. Human work is specified in terms of God's purpose that there be an (agricultural) balance between these two facets of the one task, a task that is also bound to how human life will be "dressed" and "kept".

If here our life is presented in its totality, then we would say that the twin facets - cultivation and restoration - are basic to who we are and why we are here. They not only help define our existence; we are called to discern and define the balance that is needed between them. It can never be just a matter of extracting fruit; it is caring for the earth from which the plants grow and the fruit is harvested. It is caring for the plants. By recognising these two facets in what we do, we have an important part in making the earth fruitful by our cultivation and our restoration. We are part of God's plan to make the plants to thrive and animals to multiply. Clearly this means looking after the earth, the ground, the minerals, the water and the air. And if, somehow, we lose sight of these two facets, something basic to our life is lost and so we are at risk.

The Biblical way of construing the human condition means that we have been given to the earth as much as the earth has been given to us. We are called to care for that to which we have been given. Recall that the picture also includes the fact that we were made from dust and the task that is given to us requires a care-filled dominion. The task of caring for the earth is of one piece with our life. From generation to generation we humans are immersed in a task of careful cultivation: agriculture, horticulture, viticulture, hydro-culture - the earth, plants and animals are fully part of human culture. That care for these preconditions of life is activity basic to our calling. We cannot escape this. And such care is not about something other than us; it is indeed

part of us, about caring for ourselves and future generations. And so caring for the earth, the sky, the sea, the rivers, the water supply, is also caring for and about ourselves, it is of one piece with loving our neighbours. It is part of our ongoing livelihood. The earth, as our domain, invites our effort; our work involves nurturing and guiding the development of the earth and all that live on it. Reducing our carbon emissions is one side; contingency plans to take "climate refugees" another.

It is a very basic point, but sometimes the most basic points can be staring us in the face over a lifetime and we still don't get it. The point may have been in our faces for all our days and yet we will die without seeing the point. The earth requires tilling **and** maintenance; cultivation **and** enrichment. This has an important implication for the way we think about climate change. We know our actions have consequences and we also know that life on this planet is put at risk.

When climate change comes up for discussion we should be thinking about the ways in which we have been *called* to the cultural task, to cultivating and enriching the physical and biotic and psychic environment of the earth, including making changes small and large, *that can indeed improve the climate near and far*. That cultural task may have been misdirected and warped out of shape by our tendency to serve and obey the creature, rather than the Creator. In that context, when idols enslave human communities. it seems highly likely that the two identified facets of human endeavour will become dislocated, a tension between cultivation and conservation will emerge.

Of course there are matters beyond human control; the world is not a mechanism which we have invented according the specifications outlined in a manual we wrote beforehand, as if now that we perceive that something is going wrong we can just pick up the manual and identify where the root of the problem lies. **But** what we have invented (trains, air travel, motor cars, nuclear power, factories, sewerage systems, water reticulation, smokestacks etc) and thus also the environmental impacts thereof, should not be viewed as beyond our control and we should support all work that unremittingly promotes positive environmental changes. In this sense environmental justice is not a matter of asking government to intervene in a realm *outside* its responsibility - it is very much a part, a necessary public-legal part, of the human global task, of dressing and keeping the earth.

The question therefore is not about whether there is a human impact on the weather patterns; it is much rather how we should dress and keep the earth so that positive changes are maintained and that long-term restorative changes can be made to happen to the climate for the good of all who live on earth. At this point in history the need to find ways to lessen the threat to the health of future generations. is obvious. To repeat: climate change is not something other than our work. Change in the climate is implicated in our work from beginning to end. And the change in climate we are now beginning to experience tells us that there is something seriously awry with the way we have viewed our place in the world, with the way we understand ourselves and our work,

with warped views that put conservation and development at odds with each other. From where does that tension arise?

The caring that we do for creation is indeed part of our make-up. And that reminds us that we can be care-less. As we indicated last time: Keynes admitted that our economic system was built in such a way as to require the vicious treadmill of greed and avarice, a way of life that restrained and subordinated care within an overwhelming care-less environment. And we can try to build our lives in terms of that myth, and we do, as if the hard reality of economics must re-define care as merely an internal and emotional orientation. From that hard reality, biblical religion will be viewed as a fantasy dreamed up in cloud cuckoo land, and if we are prone to that view it is no wonder that we will quickly move on from "to dress and to keep" to see what else is present in that book to feed our starved imaginations. But if we take the Biblical picture of our human condition seriously, then patient progressive cultivation of the earth (dressing it) and wise conservation (keeping it) have always been part of the one human task. If we are on this earth in order to dress and to keep God's garden, to cultivate and care for His creatures, then we do not so much develop an alternative line of debate about climate change, but more importantly begin to see the warming of the planet, the destruction of forests, rising sea-levels as the compounding results of an ongoing care-less approach to economic life. We need to discover how this care-less attitude is generated and maintained by this incessant "go for growth" ideology. Its proponents **dress** it up as a necessity, but it **keeps** itself dominant in so many places, in so many lives by keeping to a course that is really blasé about the gathering environmental storm clouds.

But then reality itself confronts this care-less neoliberal ideology. Its dominance is confronted every day, even during our current drought, when we water the roses which will not bloom if they have no water. The sandy soil also needs a good mulch if we are to cultivate the best blooms from our much loved flowers.

# TO DRESS & TO KEEP (2)

Nurturing Justice 18 (2007) 16 October

We are considering No. 6 on our list of 12 issues: "**Climate Change and Environmental Care**", and this is the second in a two-part discussion. The previous discussion outlined the biblical view of the human task upon the earth and the second will consider our orientation to the cumulative effects of our dressing and keeping God's garden. We will also try to identify some obvious and unavoidable policy implications.

To formulate meaningful policies about "Climate Change" for governments to implement is easier said than done. After all, we are here confronted with the cumulative and long-term consequences of policies that have developed since the onset of the industrial revolution in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Such suggested policy work (as with the reports by the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change or the Stern Review Report) do not emerge by magic. Ongoing research is required, and that also means a change of attitude to scientific inquiry, in all fields - philosophical as much as historical reflection is called into service; the social sciences as much as the "natural" sciences can also make a contribution. We can expect that the policies that would bring about effective outcomes may take decades to implement. Yet what has already been disclosed in the debate about "climate change" is a responsibility with have right now, and we have to seriously consider the "unintended consequences" as much as the planned rational outcomes of any line of action. Our calling to be accountable for "dressing" and "keeping" means we become alert to direct and indirect results of our plans, our policies, our actions, our remedies and our inactions. This calls for a new way of thinking about our world-wide responsibilities. We need to learn to think about ourselves on different levels at the same time: personally, within our local community, as members of our nation and region, as citizens of the globe. One immediate result of the "Climate Change" debate is the willingness of people across the world to accept these responsibilities and to identify themselves with their neighbours far and near.

The **Stern Review Report** has now become a standard by which Governments in (so-called) developed countries accept the need for a cut-back on the level of greenhouse gas emissions and a reduction in the use of fossil energy per unit of production. At one level Stern's recommendation was a courageous attempt to confront a deeply paradoxical situation. The desire for ongoing economic growth now confronts a potential for long-term economic disaster; the search for human well-being through industrial production and consumption brings us to the possibility that we are have been part of a change that *"will affect the basic elements of life for people around the world - access to water, food production, health, and the environment. Hundreds of millions of people could suffer hunger, water shortages and coastal*

*flooding as the world warms*". Such a scenario confirms obligations we cannot avoid. We must reconsider the path we have been on.

And is that what the Prime Minister is suggesting when he puts forward his Government's policies on climate change? His policies now embody, almost exactly, the views outlined in the Stern Review. He claims that his approach "*balances our obligation to reduce gas emissions with the need to keep our economy growing.*"

The problem for us, as we consider this policy stance, is to identify what he means by "economic growth". Indeed this is a question which has to be addressed to the Stern Review itself. "*Tackling climate change is the pro-growth strategy for the longer term. And it can be done in a way that does not cap the aspirations for growth of rich or poor countries.*"

This suggests that a long-term stabilisation of global temperature levels will occur without any constraints on population increases or industrial production. What is the basis for this confidence? Is there one? It seems to be a re-statement of a taken-for-granted view that has faith in the abilities of the economic system to always provide the mechanism that keeps things in balance. That faith orientation is regularly on display when competing politicians claim "it is our policies which have got the balance right". What balance is that? It is rarely explained and because of that this silence gives rise to the suspicion that we are confronted by a religious commitment that keeps a deep-seated fear in check. The politicians in industrialized countries know that should they be too decisive about the problems that confront us, too incisive about all the threats that the incessant increasing rate of industrial production brings in its train, then the "touring capital" (to use the suggestive phrase used by Zygmunt Bauman in Postmodern Ethics p. 232 - available through google books) will simply up and leave and find another more hospitable location in which to provide "employment".

And thus "going for growth" is proclaimed as the *sine qua non* of life itself in a world where the clouds of environmental disaster continue to gather. Politics becomes a choice between alternative balancing acts of "dressing" and "keeping" and this means that what is now clothed in the natural environment can be un-dressed - species extinction, deforestation - as the resources of the earth are depleted in a desperate and ongoing (military-backed) struggle to maintain supplies of raw materials.

The problem is that such statements which balance "obligations" with the "need to keep our economy growing" - like the Stern Report, like the PM's YouTube presentation - never stop to explain why an uninterrupted growth in industrial production is the indispensable precondition for economic life. Clearly Stern and Prime Minister Howard believe that it is. But they never seem to get past demanding that it be so. They assume it just is. Why should it be necessary that this be accepted on blind faith?

When we ask this questions we begin to realise that we are on a path of fear, a fear to upset capital investment and the money markets, a fear that drives its proponents to announce: "There is no alternative."

But should it not be asked whether, in fact, "our" economy might be *restored* by policies that *reduce* production and consumption and search for policies that open up concrete ways of ensuring "enough" for those most at risk at home *and abroad*. Why should our economy be considered abnormal if it is not growing at an ever-increasing rate? Is it not our human vocation to help our vulnerable neighbours to dress and to keep their part of the earth? Why is so necessary about putting our creational vocation through the shredder of a misconceived political and economic "necessity"?

As we think about ways of preparing to care for climate change refugees who come to our shores, we will also want to strengthen their own island infra-structure to cope with the threat of rising sea level. As we advocate ways by which workers and their unions can be freed from the incessant demand for always increasing pay, we will also be attentive to the need to bring the preposterous levels of higher salaries back to earth. We need to show it will be to the true benefit of all for the over-paid to accept a reduction in their salary-levels and the under-paid to be guaranteed enough. Such are some of the provisional starting points as we turn to walk an alternative economic path. We re-commits ourselves to support our true wealth and prosperity in people and their relationships to their society and to the natural habitat from which we gain nourishment. To say that people matter more than things, does not mean we are opposed to things. A glass of water is a thing we will want it to be clean and refreshing. But the obscene priorities that also push ahead with space exploration, now stimulating a market for weightless space holidays for the rich and famous, will need to be foregone when so much of the world's people are suffering from the heavy burdens brought on by a lack of basic daily necessities in food and water, in medicine and shelter. If the exploration of outer space is ever to have any validity at all, it should only be considered after political authority, scientific expertise and capital investment has ensured the eradication of poverty from the earth and the restoration of places under environmental threat so that they are henceforth fit for human habitation.

# LABOR'S CAMPAIGN WEAKNESS

Nurturing Justice 19 (2007) 5 November

On our list of 12 issues we are now up to Number 7, "Commerce, Industry and Trade Unionism." In many respects these issues have been dealt with in previous Nurturing Justice editions in 2007: No. 3 **IR and a more important election issue** and Nos. 4 **Religion and Labour I** and 5 **Religion and Labour II**. In this edition I will refer to these in terms of a weakness in Labor's election campaign strategy. It has failed to grasp the opportunity that has been by the country's obvious concern about the Howard Government IR legislation.

Since 1996, Labor in Opposition has had repeated opportunities to redraw Australia's political map. It has failed to take the opportunity. It has neglected consideration of forming a non-Liberal alliance with the Greens and Democrats for the purposes of electoral reform so that a greater level of accountability be restored to our system of parliamentary government. By now we should be working with a reformed electoral system (perhaps similar to New Zealand), one that is more consistent with Proportional Representation principles. By now we should have had a Parliament in which most Australians find themselves truly represented by parties that accord with their own views and philosophies. But as the party that continues to command the largest electoral support, Labor continues to avoid the issue that stares it and the country in the face. Our electoral system lacks appropriate accountability. We have lost the Westminster sense of ministerial responsibility. The Howard Government has confirmed that departure again and again. It is now simply too easy for parliamentary representatives to become unhinged from the electors they represent and to whom they should be accountable.

If a Government is returned to office and discovers to its surprise that it commands a Senate majority, as the Liberal-National Coalition did last time, then it simply assumes that it has a "mandate" to introduce legislation that it kept under wraps during the election campaign for fear of an electoral backlash. We all know that that is what happened last time. And we all know why the Howard Government failed to unveil its proposed IR laws during that election campaign. We've allowed ourselves to be conned by a cynical view of politics that the purpose of elections is to win and winners can then do what they like, even if it means introducing something they have not emphasized during the campaign. That is the story of the Howard Government IR legislation. It's a national disgrace. We might even say it is yet another Howard Government scandal. And THAT is the kind of politics that Rudd Labor should be banging on about and making the major issue of this election campaign. Rudd Labor should be biting bullet and leading the way in advocating a restoration of Westminster parliamentary principles - the "core values" of our inherited political system - within the fabric of contemporary Australian politics.

But for some reason Labor declines to make this pitch. Is it because criticism of the Howard Government's departure from these principles would require a level of parliamentary and political discipline it is not willing to uphold? Does Labor want to reserve the right to do the same thing should it, at some stage, command a Senate majority? Let publicly distance itself from such an unprincipled approach to parliamentary politics and I suspect that the election would be decided then and there.

There is another other matter closely related to this one. The Coalition in its IR legislation, and in its scurrilous election propaganda, has not yet articulated a positive view of industrial unions. It may be there somewhere in its party manifesto, but the upfront view it continues to promote is the totally negative and unrealistic nostrum that a national economy has to be better off without industrial unions. If the form of unionism that is current in Australia is not acceptable to the Coalition, then it should ask itself why, with all its years in government (say since the end of the second world war) it still hasn't been able to affirm the importance of workers joining together to make their contribution to justice and good stewardship in the work-place! To listen to Coalition ministers on industrial relations is to listen to ideologues who demand a continual reduction in the public contribution of industrial unions. The political careers of John Howard and Peter Costello are marked by a persistent inability to develop an alternative positive view of the industrial union's proper contribution. And that lack of positive appreciation for the formal organisation of workers in workplaces from its political opponents is something that the Labor Party should continue to hammer home. It is such a fundamental weakness in Liberal-National ideology. If Labor can't avoid a business policy why is it that Labor won't call the Liberal-National Coalition to task on its gross inability to recognise the important contribution of industrial unions to a healthy economy?

These two issues suggest to me that Rudd Labor has not yet risen to the important task of lifting the political horizons of the Australian people as it might have done. It now commands significant and growing respect in the electorate. Yes, even with growing support, an election campaign is difficult; there's no denying that. It is also too easy to criticize. But with such nation-wide support for the last 12 months, I would have hoped that Labor's election campaign would have really taken a lead in highlighting the declension from the "core political principles" that we say are basic to our system of government. It would have done more to expose the serious vacuum at the heart of the Coalition's IR policies, while highlighting the scurrilous way in which the IR legislation was introduced. If instead John Howard had shown the proper restraint that should be characteristic of a Prime Minister elected with these changed circumstances, we would now have an election that would be a genuine debate about foreshadowed IR legislation. That would have been the right way to go. Instead the Liberal-Coalition in seeking the votes of electors are asking them to endorse their lack of parliamentary restraint, their impatient erosion of parliamentary responsibility.

It has to be asked whether the Labor Party is wanting to engage in a basic rethink about the way we do politics. It is not clear that Labor is ready to tackle the problems I have raised in the way I have suggested. That is a pity. It may be that some want this rethink but because of the party's unwieldy organisational structure it is incapable of doing so. Those seeking Labor leadership on these issues will have to think long and hard about this. Why does Labor avoid electoral reform and initiating the much-needed discussion about the implementation of a system of proportional representation for lower house elections throughout the commonwealth? As the country's major political party it needs to find a new maturity that recognizes its crucial place in Australian political history. But it also needs to realize that it cannot represent all non-Liberal and non-conservative citizens. It needs maturity to welcome, rather than fear, new political parties so that all citizens, whatever their political philosophies, can find their voice in the parliaments of the land. The Labor Party has an historic opportunity to help renew respect from all parliaments in the land to the electors who are represented in it. The Labor Party in commanding such widespread respect, has a big challenge ahead of it, to rightly challenge all Australians to actively contribute to public justice.

# BODY POLITICS (1)

Nurturing Justice 20 (2007) 8 November

*On our list of 12 issues we are now up to Number 8, "Issues Of Marriage and Family - Body Politics." In many respects these issues have been dealt with in previous Nurturing Justice editions in 2007: 1. "Human Seed, Law and Politics" and 7. "Respect for Race and Ethnicity All Along the Line."*

## The Carers Alliance

Senate Candidates are standing in all States; this initiative challenges the neo-liberalism dominant in debate of the more established parties. It seeks greater support, respect and *political* care for 13% of the population. It is worthy of your support. A vote for *Carers Alliance* may be the best way to register your commitment to an economy of care!

Dr Peter Gibilisco is a Senate Candidate for Carers Alliance. I know Peter since those years when he was an undergraduate sociology student and then last year I rejoiced to hear that he had graduated with a PhD from Melbourne University. His thesis is entitled: *The Political Economy of Disablement*. You can read more about him [here](#). I taught Peter from the early 1990s and like anyone else who has met him, his determination is striking. The story of his 12 years of university slog is the story of how he was willing to work for "as long as it takes." It is a continual joy to me, and to all who have the immense pleasure of knowing him, to confront his latest effort in a dogged search to do good and make a difference for justice.

But there's an important issue here about how we view Peter and also how we respond to the election gauntlet thrown down by the Carers Alliance. Our tendency is to romanticise Peter's dynamic achievements, to consider Carers Alliance worthy of our vote out of a sense of obligation to carers and those who they care for. But is our care merely an endorsement of a hidden assumption that our neighbours have to be helped by us to keep up? Is being a neighbour about helping others keep up? Sometimes it might be. But I suspect that if our amazement at Peter's achievements is about his ability to keep up then maybe we have missed the true challenge he presents. If our vote for Carers Alliance merely registers our hope that society should do more to help carers keep up then I suspect we've missed the reality that Carers Alliance unveil for us. Let me explain why I think we're in danger of missing the point. We should not let our enthusiasm for justice trump the true state of affairs.

The emergence of Peter Gibilisco in public life has not simply been a matter of him keeping up with a society which places so much emphasis upon mobility. Peter's achievements have come about not because society has been there to help him run around like a mad dog like everyone else is bent on doing; his persistent work in economics and sociology, in public advocacy and everyday life, has increasingly meant that he has challenged the people he has met to realize that he doesn't want to be run ragged by an economic treadmill that has lost the plot! His challenge to the people who have cared for him - for as long as I have known him and that includes myself - has been that he forces us to

rediscover a true and persistent reality in our lives that we, in our haste have truly and persistently missed. And we continue to miss the point as long as we fail TO SLOW DOWN. Peter's challenge is actually about the way our reality has been mis-shaped by neo-liberalism, by economic rationalism. His is a call to us who share the same society to come back to truth and reality. And in that Peter's candidature for the Senate is a call that is well worth stopping to heed.

Peter's achievement is as much about his giving public voice to what he has been proclaiming with his life. And those who pull the levers of our economy, the same stage managers of the stage props of our political facades, continue to ignore, continue to romanticise, continue to fantasize, continue to commercialise, continue to rationalise, continue to Hollywood-ise, the true state of affairs. Anything, but face up to truly hard reality which caring requires and which carers face day-by-day.

Peter's scholarly achievement in his doctorate thesis sounds a loud trumpet blast. There he systematically exposes the naïveté of "third way" welfare policy in which perpetual economic growth is blithely assumed to be the only path by which increased welfare demands can be funded. Think about this and we may find we see our instinctive responses to Peter and Carers Alliance judgments in a new light. We may even begin to see the challenge to care in a new light. Carers Alliance may help us see this election in a new light and if we take up the challenge we might find it is ourselves who are emancipated - freed to care.

Are you feeling oppressed by the election and all the propaganda? Well, stop just thinking of your own head space. Instead, think big. Think care. Think in terms of the election being a struggle to reassert the reality our political leaders are missing. Let me put it this way (thanks to Richard Russell): Care (and her sister Share) are the two elephants in the front room of our economy which nobody is really wanting to confront. We live in a society that has somehow lost the sense that outlaying money for care is an investment in people, in sustenance, in our community's connection with the natural environment and with our own 'nature'. But instead we hear again and again that welfare money is an enormous burden, even if it is a necessary cost and so when the rival money bags start debating welfare it is probable that all you will hear is a mutual firm determination to keep costs down! It is such a truncated view of reality. There's no deep-down joy in the politics of welfare provision by politicians; there's no futures market apparently in care. It's simply about costs, meeting the expected rising costs, costs which we would be better off without but, oh well, we have to deal with it somehow so ... etc etc. Pathetic. More than pathetic. Care-less. Discounted care.

No. Peter's challenge and the electoral appearance of Carers Alliance is something different. It points us to a new day ahead for our political lives if we dare to take the economic path of care.

Here I'm simply pleading with readers to reconsider our economy and why it needs to be re-directed to the unpriceables, and why those commodities which do have a price in the market need to be re-

evaluated by our caring responsibilities that cannot command a price. In social policy terms there are all kinds of issues that need to be better appreciated here. If we hear Peter's critique of "third way" welfare, and rise to the electoral challenge of the Carers Alliance we may well bless the day that our ears were opened to listen as we begin again to live with a deep sense of enough, and contribute more lovingly, with more care for all that is within our stewardship, for carers near and far, home and abroad. This challenge has global consequences. Our stewardship has a global focus.

Go to Peter's contributions on the net. Type in "Peter Gibilisco". You'll find accessible articles and you'll be enlightened by them. Before we close I'd like to give a highly schematic view of how Peter maintains his daily affairs. You may be able to expand this from your own experience. It is only a snapshot.

There is not only Peter and his needs and the needs of his carers who make sure he's in good health - think for a minute of what it must be like to have to move around in an electric wheelchair with muscles that sometimes do not do what you want them to do and then when they do respond they sometimes do too much. Think about the safety issues that arise from this kind of bodily condition. Think your way through other implications for the mundane tasks of buying a cup of coffee or going to the toilet. Get the picture?

And then there's the maintenance of the wheelchair - the need for a replacement when it is put in for the equivalent of a "grease and oil change." How to get the chair to the mechanic's shop and then how to get it back ...

Think how difficult it might be if you are in a wheel-chair and you see someone coming who you don't want to talk to. You and I can take evasive action (so can the other guy) - but if you are in a wheelchair it can be all too easy to be a "sitting duck". This is not a trivial matter. It has big implications on energy levels and such restrictions can lead to all kinds of worries, if not depression, and so planning one's day means all kinds of details others will take for granted. These details need to be attended to, managed sensitively.

Then there's the gym that Peter attends to keep his muscles in tone and keep his body as trim as he can; maybe there's hydro-therapy and the swimming pool. And it is not just that Peter has to have help to get changed and to get in and out of the pool; there's also a need for him to have skilled swimmers to swim with him, to have those at the gym who can assist and work with him on the weights.

There's the taxi driver bringing him to the gym. The taxi driver needs to know more than merely Peter's destination. He needs to have a good idea about Peter's needs and the condition of the chair. He needs the flexibility in his work conditions so that he can get to know Peter personally. This simply indicates that in order to get around Peter needs strong and knowledgeable support on all kinds of levels and the kind of support which is not going to eventuate if we simply leave it all up to the individual initiative of kind people (and there is thankfully a lot of that), or assume that the "market" will take care of it (and as I said the

market is always in need of being educated about true unpriceable values). Of course, there are lots of kind people and Peter can tell you of the multitude who assist him in all kinds of ways day by day. But there has to be a well elaborated social policy framework to ensure that Peter gets the assistance he needs and that those who care for him are able to do what they do. There will be the person we can specifically designate as "primary carer" but there are also other "carers" along the way in public places (the gym, the swimming pool, the coffee shop) and transport (taxi driver) who need support and probably also requisite technology to enable them to give their share of care and for Peter to receive it.

Some readers may tend to think that all this is an unnecessary diversion from the hard work I've given myself to begin formulate principles for a comprehensive Christian political programme and policy framework. It is not. Apart from the fact that the formulation of political principles must always keep its focus upon the needs of real people in real situations, the description of Peter's daily needs and the needs of those who care for him, raises once more important paradoxes that various economists have identified as abiding structural characteristics of rich capitalist countries. These will be discussed in a future edition. For the moment keep in mind that when welfare policy is debated an ongoing emphasis upon welfare costs and keeping welfare costs down actually shifts responsibility onto the shoulders of those who can least carry it. Great political capital is made by those lamenting increased costs for welfare who at the same time demand that continued economic growth be the only path to a healthy society. And the figures confirm that with our increased wealth comes increased demand for more health services. This is one of the paradoxes that is confronted by the Carers Alliance.

Carers Alliance might not gain a Senate seat. In [NJ18](#) we pointed out, as we considered climate change that "*going for growth*" is the confession of faith that appears to blind and bind our political community - the two major parties are especially beholden to this faith whatever "Christian" commitment they may corporately try to wear on their lapels. In their view, the economy must never be allowed to slow down - that, they say, is *bad management* - and the confession becomes even more shrill as the clouds of environmental disaster continue to gather. But Carers Alliance is now a political voice that alerts us to serious imbalances in our present priorities - they confront us to say what do we really *care* most about. Consider the decades of economic rationalism and how successive governments have bent their policies by the *irrational* desire to put the "market" first. What has been the result? Well Carers Alliance is on the witness stand for the people who have had to carry the burden of a badly managed economy from successive federal and state régimes. Are we going to confront this burden or brush it aside as "co-lateral damage". Carers Alliance tells us, if we have ears to hear, that another economic path, a path of comprehensive care, is the only responsible political way ahead in economic management for all of us. A new path is needed; an economy of care.

# SEEKING ELECTORAL JUSTICE:

## BETWEEN PARTY MANIFESTO AND PARTY CONSTITUTION

Nurturing Justice 21 (2007) 26 November

We will return to "Body Politics (2)" in Nurturing Justice 23. Last time the Carers Alliance was introduced. In this edition we discuss why the current election campaign confirms our national political failure.

"If I am elected you can rest assured that I will ..."

We have heard it many times. Such promises are made by candidates to their electors at election time. And we have learned to be wary, although "wary" probably says it too nicely. More likely the word "cynical" more accurately describes the prevailing public sentiment about politicians and their election promises.

Some politicians, like the current Australian PM, have tried to gain sympathy from the politician's failure to keep political promises by explaining to citizens that alongside "promises" there are also "non-core promises". The problem with this explanation is that it came *after* a broken promise. Howard didn't tell his electors that he was making a "non-core promise" when he made the promise in the first place. And this is the way he tries to maintain a façade of innocence. What was earlier thought to be "core" has, "due to circumstances", now become "non-core". And so Howard, and politicians like him, continue on as if electors should have no problem with the country being governed by parliamentary representatives who weasel their way out of the promises they make at election time. Supposedly, it makes no difference that politicians can't be trusted, that political parties have no role in ensuring that their candidates honour their word, and keep their promises. And presumably that is also why it is so hard to discuss this matter with those who say: "What do you expect! They all do it!" and then go and vote for the "non-core" promising politician.

Let's look a little closer at the promises given by candidates to electors. They can be presented in formal ways and published in a formal party document - **the election manifesto** issued in the weeks before the ballot is held. This is the outline of policies which a political party believes should be adopted in legislation by the subsequently elected Parliament. It is published by the candidate's party so that electors can know what they are voting for.

In what does the promise of the party election **manifesto** consist? Basically, it is the promised intention of introducing Bills for parliamentary debate that will implement these policies should enough of the party's candidates succeed in the election to enable it to do so.

But political promises of this sort are not just about explicit policies. They are not just about proposed legislation that a party wants to see

enacted into law. The election **manifesto** is a document that assumes and expresses the political commitment spelled out in the party's **constitution**. Political promises are based upon assumptions about political processes. The party's **constitution** is the party's attempt to define itself, to itself, and to the other parties and to the electorate it is wanting to serve via the parliament.

The party's **constitution** should spell out the party's view of how it will conduct itself in the complex business of parliamentary debate. It will explain how it views the task of political parties in the complex process of making and re-writing the law. It will explain how it sees the place of parties in parliamentary democracy, in the governance of the state. Or it should. It will provide guidelines for how the parliamentary party will conduct itself in parliamentary alliances with other parties, and in relation to the promises it made when it formed alliances with other parties during the election. It cannot avoid these issues, whatever side of the house its elected representatives find themselves on, and its constitution should spell out the way in which it will conduct its political affairs in the parliament.

Such a **constitution** is a party's necessary guide, not only to its own elected members, and not only to the party workers who are employed in the party organisation and who are engaged in ongoing electoral education. A party's constitution is needed to ensure that the party itself remains open and transparent to its **own membership**, so that the party's leadership remains accountable to the party's membership. Without such openness and accountability candidates and powerful members can too easily exploit the party rank-and-file and make secret deals with other political players and hence entrench themselves as a self-serving elite at the party's expense. In such a case party membership is compromised.

A party's **constitution** is also needed to allow non-party citizens to understand its structure, its commitment and its election promises. The party **constitution** should provide guidance to its own elected members and to elected members of other parties as to how it views good governance and the procedures that are needed if the parliament is to do its business in a way that gives the electorate its due. The party, and the nation as a whole, need to know how the party intends to work within the State's **constitution**, and what processes it will follow in order to bring about what the membership believe are necessary constitutional reforms within the limits of the law. And for them to know these things they need to be able to see how the party views itself in its own **constitution**.

The party's **constitution** should also acknowledge the local, regional and national levels of politics and explain how the party intends to operate, if at all, at the different levels of government.

And so, the party's election **manifesto** cannot simply be interpreted in its own terms but must be interpreted in terms of the **constitution** of the party that publishes the **manifesto**, the commitment to which is the basis for party rank-and-file membership and also party pre-selection.

It may be that the **manifesto** for fighting any particular election does not actually refer explicitly, or at length, to matters that have been of long-term concern to the party and which are spelled out in the party's constitution. In such a case, the party's **constitution** should spell out in clear terms the basic principles according to which it will implement the promises of the election **manifesto** should it gain success at the polls.

For example, if the party subscribes to the idea that the election is to determine the government's mandate, then the party **constitution** should very clearly explain how the parliamentary party will conduct itself and the procedures to be followed if it finds itself in a powerful position to bring forward legislation that it has not promised in its election **manifesto**. If the party reserves the right to bring in legislation that is implied in its **constitution**, then this should be brought forward and spelled out in detail in the **manifesto**.

Clearly, to restore the electorate's confidence in its political representatives, political parties should endorse as an ethical principle that legislation will **not** be introduced that has not be foreshadowed in the election **manifesto**. At this point we note how certain promises can be used politically to gain parliamentary representation, but it is another thing altogether to use the result of the election in which, for example, a Government gains an unexpected Senate majority, as justification for bringing forth legislation that was not unveiled in the campaign. That a Government will allow itself to do this is a strong indication that the parliamentary party is in crucial ways no longer disciplined by the party's **constitution**, it's "core beliefs".

What has been outlined in the previous paragraph implies a public procedure and a structure for parliamentary conduct that is, in fact, true to the promissory character of election campaigns. There is a serious ethical issue involved when a candidate stands up and appeals for votes: "If you vote for me and my party we will legislate thus and so." However, political ethics are violated when, having gained a surprising result, the Government then tells the electorate that they are bringing on legislation that was kept under wraps. The valid suspicion that then arises is that such legislative intention was with-held in order to preserve the vote and in so doing the promissory character of the election manifesto is seriously impaired if not completely undermined.

It might be asked how a Government could ever run the risk of offending and alienating its own party members, let alone voters, by such unscrupulous and unprincipled political weasling. But not only electorates, but political parties themselves, seem to acquiesce in this kind of duplicity. It indicates that at the core of our political system something is seriously broken, and it will remain broken until their emerges from the citizenry political parties that are actually capable of disciplining themselves and engage in self-denial because of **their own political principles**.

But if, in our system of parliamentary democracy, an election is not about promises and keeping promises, then it is simply becomes a matter of preening appearance, manipulation, and **breaking promises**. There is no neutrality here. Without a system of representative

government in which elected representatives hold, and are held to, political promises made at the election, then it all falls away into farce, a mere façade in a brutal search for power to rule, rather than, as it should be, a public path on which to offer the entire country as a whole a much needed political service on the basis of a clear political commitment.

The privilege of any political party, and its candidates, even if it has only a small number of elected representatives, or even if it has no parliamentary representatives at all, is that it exists to help citizens promote public justice. That is its *raison d'être*; that is its reason for existence. The citizens do not exist in order to endorse the elite status of political parties in the political process and political parties must learn to rightly respect this "core" obligation. In our experience they have wandered far from this path and our politics is an ongoing testimony to this anarchic self-service. When an electorate flags through a candidate who revels in making "non-core" promises, that electorate is asking to be ruled by a régime that has failed a basic moral test.

We all know that there can be unanticipated developments. Political circumstances change. A party may have made promises which it intends to keep, but it may fail to gain victory at the polls. Then, on the basis of its **constitution**, it might have to revise its electoral strategy so that next time it foreshadows a different legislative agenda. Parties learn that electorates need to be educated about policies and they should be educated about the justice of proposed changes. This needs party researchers and journalists who can argue a case. It should not be a matter of trying to help the electors catch up to the legislation **after** the legislative deceit has been foisted upon them.

A government may also be returned with a reduced majority and as a result may not be able to implement some of its proposed, its promised, legislative agenda. The party rank-and-file, as well as the electorate as a whole, needs to be informed about such changes to legislative proposals that diverge from what was set out in the election **manifesto**. Party members and the voters may prefer that the **manifesto's** legislative agenda be implemented and the parliamentary wing may say that it would be a waste of time and a loss of prestige for the party to bring forth legislation that will be defeated or severely modified on the floor of the parliament in ways that actually contradict the party's basic philosophy. Both party **constitution** and **manifesto** need to anticipate these possibilities and internal tensions that they bring and to set forth clear ways of resolving them. They are difficult issues and they need to be anticipated in advance by the party, by the on-going education of its membership, by its contribution to the political education of the nation as a whole, by its open-ness and willingness to serve politically.

If the party assumes that the internal party policy can be changed "from above" by its elected parliamentary wing, then this should also be spelled out in its **constitution**. But if a party fails to do so or, in violation of its own party **constitution**, allows its parliamentary wing to violate the processes and procedures that are implicit in its own

**constitutional** code for parliamentary conduct then really, that party is at odds with itself. If it remains a political force then its presence has significant power in redefining the nature and character of political parties themselves. The electorate, by continuing to give endorsement to such a party, allows itself to adopt the view that political parties are merely electoral machines that manipulate the electorate in order to keep the status quo and as a result any service function that they should have in the political education of civil society is lost. The party's public political education function becomes blurred and indistinguishable from the party's electoral advertising. As a result a serious narrowing of political accountability emerges on all sides. In the parliament, members act as party delegates rather than as representatives of electors; parties take on the mantle of advertising agencies; the political role of citizens is reduced to voting at the next election; the government via its PM and Cabinet proceeds to act like the CEO and the appointed Board of Directors of the national corporation. Genuine political debate about the common good and the future of the country withers.

This unhealthy and constrictive political development needs to be challenged by a re-emergence of genuine political parties. A first step might be to ensure that a party's election **manifesto** is framed in a way that anticipates the possibilities that are present for parliamentary circumstances to emerge other than the best result hoped for. A legalistic conformity with the letter of **manifesto** promises is likely to get the party into trouble with coalition partners, with its own membership and with the general public. But such trouble needs to be avoided in advance.

And so, we would suppose that the party's **constitution** has to have clear guidance about the party's view of the legislative reforms that the country not only needs (in the long term) but can also sustain (in the short term). The **constitution** needs to spell out the way the party will engage in parliamentary co-operation, negotiation and compromise in the forming of legislation, on its way to promoting a long-term vision, with a wisdom that appreciates longer term problems that need to be discussed politically among those representing all political sides on our way to the future.

The party's **constitution** should provide a framework, a *modus operandi*, from which to cover all such eventualities including gaining more seats than expected or of having insufficient power for implementation.

It would seem to me that the most vital part of the party's **constitution** is to be found in the way it directs the party's educational role as it sets about explaining how it sees itself working over the longer term. In the parliament this must also include working co-operatively with all other political parties and it needs to build positive and respectful relationships with all kinds of groups of citizens. In the case of a parliamentary party that gained such support at an election that it would allow it to implement **more** than was promised in the election **manifesto**, the electoral educative task of the party-machine would be

to uphold any election **manifesto** promise and to explain to members and voters how its electoral promises relate to the party's perceived long-term goals. The party must give ongoing and serious attention to holding firm to its political commitments as it seeks ways of working together, and talking with, political opponents who obviously have different views of the national future. In this way a party can help free up the discussion in the electorate and contribute to a parliament in which legislation is not rammed through or log-jammed out of fear of losing public support.

But such longer-term education, coinciding with principled longer-term restraint, would be an important innovation to the way political parties now relate to each other and do so in an ongoing extra-parliamentary way.

But such restraint built into the way we do politics would also challenge prevailing party trends in which politics is all about winning parliamentary control. Instead, let us reconsider politics and parliament and seek justice along paths by which all citizens can fulfill their calling to promote public justice in appropriate ways.

Such an alternative view of politics provides an angle from which to understand the recent history of parliamentary democracy. Elections have become the advertising campaigns of party machines and their rivals as they seek to harvest votes. Politicians who wish to maintain a high level of accountability to electors are at odds with the prevailing myth that politics is about winning power and keeping it. But a political promise "If I am elected ..." still implies that it is possible to lose and that standing and failing to gain election is no meaningless act. Sometimes to hold onto one's political commitment will simply confirm the fact that one is not going to win. But then that is to describe a return to principled politics rather than the politics of "win-at-all-costs because winner-takes-all". It is that immaturity that needs to be overcome by the emergence of mature, nation-serving political parties.

When political parties lose their purpose as vehicles of political commitment, then election promises become unhinged, the accountability of representatives to electors is compromised and instead we witness what we now have - ongoing, seemingly unstoppable trend by which rival groups of career politicians seek to maintain, enhance and increase their power over an electorate to which, increasingly, they are no longer politically accountable.

# THE POLITICAL CHALLENGE OF COMPLEX INTERDEPENDENCE

Nurturing Justice 22 (2007) 26 November

*We will return to "Body Politics (2)" in Nurturing Justice 23. In this edition we discuss the consequences of the election of a Rudd Labor Government for ongoing policy analysis.*

If there were a line in Kevin Rudd's victory speech that could help us explain the "swing to Labor", bringing with it a change in government, it might be this: *"It is necessary for us to embrace the future as a nation united, forged with common vision. I want to put aside the old battles of the past - the old battles between business and unions, the old battles between growth and the environment, the old and tired battles between federal and state, the old battles between public and private. It's time for a new page to be written in our nation's history."*

This statement shows that the PM-elect has wanted to tap a "grass roots" sentiment that avoids playing with reality in terms of outworn ideologies. He was the electoral victor over John Howard because he understood how a majority of Australians of all ages have been seeking a new political orientation. There is a strong desire in his words to find a path that actually diverges from former policies including those of "economic rationalism". "Economic rationalism" has been dominant in our national political life since the 1980s. It was the term which the Hawke-Keating administration gave to its "left-wing" version of neo-liberalism as they set about their wide-sweeping industrial reforms and changes to finance and higher education. It should not be forgotten that these reforms provided John Howard's administration with the framework by which the Coalition's neo-liberal policies have also been implemented since 1996.

In this sense Saturday night's "swing to Labor" was also evidence of a significant swing within Labor Party and ACTU ranks. In order to face the realities of an increasingly complex society, it has been necessary to significantly modify former ideologies. To state it broadly (and thereby risk over-simplification) the majority of the electorate believed that Labor's approach to the **complexities** of our political life is more realistic than what the Coalition offered. But it should be kept in mind that 4 million voters were still persuaded by the Coalition's appeal, and that number was just fractionally less than Labor's total vote.

Labor's victory can be ascribed to an electorate that is confronted by increasingly complex issues (at home, at school, at work, in politics, in ethics, in regional and global affairs) which can no longer be adequately explained, let alone confronted, by simplistic either/or formulae. We might say, adding to Kevin Rudd's statement, that the old binary oppositions no longer work. It is not enough to appeal to a dualistic

antithesis between business and unions, or growth and the environment, or federal versus state, or even public versus private. Labor has had to "move on" if it wants to capture the realities of what people want government to do for them. And in that sense we might further generalise and say that the Liberal Coalition lost because it was too ideologically fixated on the KISS (**Keep It Simple Stupid**) formulae which no longer courts the reality of the lives of most people.

Let me give just one example: the long-serving member of the electorate in which I live suffered a decisive loss. The reason has as much to do with his obsessive marketing strategies which became an embarrassment to his own Liberal voters. He sent up to a dozen letters and leaflets to the constituents in the last fortnight of the campaign. His support melted away, it would seem, because these items all said the same thing and hence, among their friends in this local community, this member's supporters were made to feel rather silly. The latest item of this barrage always implicitly suggested that nobody reads this electoral propaganda anyway. As a result this member found himself sending out more! We might say that his election strategy was undermined by a commitment that somehow confused his view of business marketing with electoral education. In the meantime he forgot the real needs of electors, including the real needs of those disposed to vote for his own party.

### **Conclusion**

What is there to learn from this election?

On this occasion we can say that the Liberal Coalition's **ambiguity** contrasts with the Labor Party's **grasp of reality**; that is one cogent way of describing the "swing".

The Coalition's traditional election strategy has been that they are better at "managing the economy" and on this occasion the rhetoric was no different. We might say that this "management" function of Government is a balancing act, and it is located somewhere between the twin poles of **independence** and **inter-dependence**. The Coalition believes that inter-dependence is best achieved by Governments giving priority to independence; social inter-dependence is the goal and emphasis upon individual initiative and the rights of individuals is the means. Labor, on the other hand, views independence as best established when Government policy gives proper recognition to societal interdependence. Human independence is the goal and a policy emphasis upon cooperation, corporate initiative and human inter-dependence becomes the means. These are the two dominant ways in which policy is formulated in this country. On this occasion Australian voters have "swung" (significantly but not completely) to the view that Government's task is to facilitate interdependence in order to ensure long-term independence. In terms of the major political debate of the election campaign - Industrial Relations - the Howard Government's WorkChoices legislation was viewed as "out of balance", as disadvantaging those who are most at risk in their workplaces, **and in their families**. Individuals and families need a legislative framework that strengthens, rather than weakens, inter-dependence with dignity.

I do not wish to go much further than this at this stage. The "swing", is away from a policy agenda that tries to shape the national economy in terms of individual independence. To reiterate - the Coalition view has been that social interdependence is the **ends** and the **means** is to give priority to individual independence. For Rudd's Labor Government, individual independence is the **goal** and the **means** is a fabric of societal inter-dependence strengthened by government intervention.

There is a complex issue here that requires systematic elaboration. It is also a matter that requires theoretical and philosophical reflection. If a comprehensive policy framework is to be developed that promotes authentic public justice it will need an approach that gives proper and due regard to the independent identity of all social institutions, organisations and relations as well as facing up to their necessary interdependence in terms of the high degree of complex interdependence in which all of us now live out our lives. At this point in time the goal that Kevin Rudd has set for the Labor Party in Government is indeed a genuine strengthening of all the institutions of our social life. We might say that the aim, the goal, the ideal, is to have families, schools, hospitals and businesses strengthened in their capacities to do what they do best - for families to be families (and raise children and care for their elders), for schools to be schools (and be genuine communities of learning and teaching), for hospitals to be hospitals (of care, to promote public health and provide bodily support), for local communities to be communities (of sustaining friendship), for businesses to be businesses (where capital and labour work cooperatively to develop work-place productivity and harmony, and of course for government to be government (to promote a public legal framework to guide our societal complexity).

The hope that many have for this Labor Government is that its legislative programmes will help to develop our society so that the distinctive character of these diverse institutions are properly understood and developed. They are not part of the State, or departments of government, but require a legislative framework in which their own public interests are respected and protected. That way the Government indeed makes an indispensable contribution to in promoting a renewed public-legal harmony that also recognises 'the role of government in ensuring the distinctive integrity of all persons and institutions in our increasingly complex national life.

As with any government, the ensuing legislative programme will need to be carefully and critically examined, so that when appropriate a loud and clear voice can be raised to remind all of the path of public justice.

# BODY POLITICS (2)

Nurturing Justice 23 (2007) 21 December

Let me refer you, once again, to a well-regarded study: Bob Goudzwaard and Harry de Lange [Beyond Poverty and Affluence: Towards a Canadian Economy of Care](#) (University of Toronto Press 1994). As the title implies, the authors explore the implications of redefining economics as a normative science concerned with care. Economics cannot escape the demands of human stewardship for the creation, for nature, for our bodies, for ourselves, for society. The book expounds six paradoxes that need to be confronted as we work to meet the burgeoning problems that are unfolding before our eyes with respect to our God-given responsibility to care.

Those who would like to read more of Goudzwaard's economics are invited to explore his on-line archive at All of Life Redeemed:

There is no getting around the significant *theoretical* and *scientific* work that is required if public policy is to comprehensively confront genuine political needs with well-worked out policies. All aspects of our social life have to be critically examined if public policies are to address the very real political needs present in our society in a comprehensive and justice-enhancing way. And our economy at all levels - household, neighbourhood, local, regional, national and global - is vulnerable, and so are we, the ones who are called to give an account of our stewardship. How do we make a stand for justice in relation to the issues of "body politics" without espousing a standpoint which in some unanticipated way may exclude the most vulnerable? How can justice be genuinely promoted and due respect given to authentic political needs?

I hazard the guess that there is no area of public policy that is more subject to confusion, at a deep-down spiritual level, than "body politics". To reiterate: "body politics" here refers to public policies that relate to the just public care for our bodies. I used the term "authentic political needs" in the last sentence of the previous paragraph. The spiritual confusion that dominates public discussion about "body politics" can be seen in the intense competition between rival arguments and positions over the right definition of "political need". Which definition is to prevail?

We also have to face the fact that the task of identifying true and real political needs is continually subjected to claims and counter claims from those who are defending "alleged needs", or who are accommodating "imagined needs" and then of course there are "false needs".

As we know, the public provision of In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF), has in recent years been one prominent domain in which this warfare has been waged. When he needed (sic!) to gain the support of his electors on the issue, the former PM was clear in his opposition to embryonic stem-cell research. This principled ethical standpoint was justified by the need to safeguard the integrity of IVF programmes around the country which were serving the *bona fide* aspirations of parents who wanted to

conceive children but could not. But then, as we know, after the election he was confronted full-on by the **alleged** needs of science (Dr Trounson and the **anticipated** needs of Monash University to maintain its "world's best practise" bio-research programmes), as well as the **speculative** needs of pharmaceutical companies claiming to be promoting basic research to meet the **real** needs of the severely disabled and those afflicted by debilitating diseases. And thus the political issue changed and no longer were IVF programmes viewed simply as a means of service to aspiring parents. In the public debate they became a **means** to another set of **ends**, and the COAG agreement between the PM and the eastern state Labor premiers clearly identified these ends with the **needs** of national economic development and viability. The human embryos, eggs and seeds that had been specifically gathered to do a specific work, were discussed in ways that assumed they could henceforth be used to meet (allegedly) **wider** public demands.

(But now a significant proportion of the "touring capital" - a term coined by the German sociologist, Zygmunt Bauman - has apparently left the country ...)

And so, in that situation, where the former PM - perhaps spurred on by his own **need** to offer the country **leadership** in a vexing moral issue - actually undermined his own relationship with his electorate by assuming he could dispense with one obligation in order to give leadership on another. I have repeatedly drawn attention to this. The **need** of the electors of Bennelong, to have an accountable representative in Parliament was displaced by other perceived needs. Any candidate's political platform in a Westminster Parliamentary system should be a capstone of democratic accountability. But in this **moral** issue, personal values were set against economic prosperity, and so the links of accountability became seriously, perhaps irreparably, unhinged.

We have expanded this discussion previously showing how the use of "free votes" (the latest secularised update of "conscience votes") confirms a sustained process by which Parliamentarians have actually come less and less accountable to their electors in our parliaments. "Free votes" are vital if political parties are to avoid coming down decisively on a range of contentious moral issues. Candidates are thus accorded the liberty of making up their own minds up on any particular issue. One has to ask what this then will mean for any party's attempts to promote a **comprehensive** political programme that addresses all the genuine political needs across the society. But it is this political party problematic which helps us understand why the libertarian view prospers and political parties shying away from a comprehensive policy framework for dealing with the issues of "body politics".

But here again, if we are serious about the work we intend to do to promote justice, we will see this as a further confirmation that there can be no getting around the **theoretical** work that is required. Public policy needs to be framed in a way that comprehensively confronts all genuine political needs with well-worked out policies. All aspects of our

social life have to be critically examined if public policies are to address the very real political needs that are present in our society in a comprehensive and justice-enhancing way. I'll leave that there for the moment.

Let us return then to the issue of safeguarding the moral integrity of IVF programmes. Readers will note that in commending the stand taken by the former PM in the election of 2001, I joined my voice to those opposing embryonic stem-cell research. To reiterate: This principled ethical standpoint was justified by the **need** to safeguard the integrity of IVF programmes which were serving the *bona fide* aspiration of parents who wanted to conceive children. But the problem we have to consider now is that the so-called integrity of such programmes was not "under attack" solely from powerful proposals that would gain access to use "spares" for such scientific purposes. The fact that there were already "spares" should alert us to other aspects of this complex **political** issue.

IVF, in cattle, has been developing for many decades. Around the time of the initial parliamentary debate on embryonic stem-cell research, I had an intriguing discussion with a bio-engineer with some experience of working in the bovine-IVF field. He alleged that the fact that there were "spares" left over after human IVF procedures could not properly be evaluated without also examining the overall research trajectory of human IVF and the initial research decision that had, at an early stage, been made to forego research initiatives that would develop the requisite one-on-one technology. Why? I asked. Well, he explained, such technologies have long been available in the bovine-IVF field. Thus, he said, the suspicion is raised that the alleged **need** for multiple fertilised eggs is actually a **false need**, an artificially (sic!) inflated requirement of human IVF programmes, in which the **imagined future** research needs (and promised pharmaceutical industry finance) have become the (hidden) main game. At this point in my discussion, I simply would say that I suspect that such allegations have validity. But they have to be treated as matters that need to be fully and expertly assessed if any public policy research programme wants to promote public justice in relation to human IVF provision. We can easily become very depressed because of the cumulative weight of the issues and the a-normative developments. And so at this point we have to ask: ***How are we to address this seemingly never-ending complexity with respect to the issues of "bio-politics"?***

Let me conclude. The above question is one that cannot be avoided even if NJ is in no position to definitively resolve it at this time. It just cannot be avoided. A broadsheet like this can only nurture justice in a step-by-step way. We will need to take note of developments in our society which relate to the apparent "free availability" of human seed, and eggs, and embryos. In certain respects, this discussion will be considered next time when we turn our gaze more specifically to "Public Morality and the Mass Media". A lot of our anxiety may well find its root in the failure of our news services to properly inform us about the legal aspects of legislation related to public morality. *Nurturing Justice* may advocate Christian industrial organisations and Christians organizing for

political service. But these endeavours are not going to get very far without a sustained effort in public education supported by authentically Christian journalism and news services.

At this point, the intense and seemingly bizarre economic-moral complexity prods us to compare our sense of Christian responsibility with that which faced William Wilberforce, so perceptively depicted in the recent feature film: **Amazing Grace**. How many of us, when considering these issues, are willing to think about them in ways that encourages the patient and persistent and humble push for justice for the rest of our days? If you need added inspiration to get busy, go back to the film and replay the exchange between Wilberforce and John Newton.

On our list of 12 issues we have been considering Number 8, "Issues Of Marriage and Family - Body Politics." These issues have also been dealt with in previous Nurturing Justice editions in 2007: 1. Human Seed, Law and Politics 14 March; 7. Respect for Race and Ethnicity All Along the Line 26 June; and 20. Body Politics (1) 8 November. Next time, we will consider No. 9 Public Morality and the Reform of Mass Media.

# PUBLIC MORALITY AND THE MASS MEDIA

Nurturing Justice 24 (2007) - rewritten August 2008 21 December

We have to try to find a way to confront the burgeoning problems that are unfolding before our eyes - our God-given responsibility to care is in the balance. Caring for our bodily life is not just a private issue; it is part of our responsibility to promote public justice. It can't be any other way. Previously, I have invited readers to reflect upon the bizarre complexity that now confronts us and compare that with the Christian responsibility of William Wilberforce, so perceptively depicted for us in the recent feature film *Amazing Grace*. We need to learn how to think hard about these issues if our efforts are going to encourage a persistent and humble push for justice for as long as it takes. The exchange between Wilberforce and John Newton in the film - whatever its actual historical basis - reminds us that we can't start anywhere else than where we are now.

And that adds to, rather than subtracts from, to our problems. Why? Because the reigning public definitions of "where we are" in moral and ethical terms is an integral part of the nexus of problems unfolding before our very eyes. Authentically Christian news outlets need to be developed. Sight Magazine is a good example of what can be done simply by beginning from "where we are now".

Recently, an interview with the newly elected PM became the basis of an article published in Sydney's *Daily Telegraph*, with the headline "Public servants will advise me, not God, says Rudd".

A reporter asked the new PM whether he would "consult God" for advice about his legislative programme. Kevin Rudd's reply not only showed that he understood our political system and that the journalist did not. It also showed that he was aware of the public-political consequences of his utterances. As Prime Minister, he will be taking advice from the Government's public servants. ***This is simply what his office requires of him.*** But this insightful reply only incited the ignorant newspaper to make a sensational headline, outrageously suggesting that now Rudd was in office he could ignore God's claims upon his Government. The implication, shared by Radio talk-back shock-jocks and some Christian fundamentalists, was that this proved that Rudd had given voice to his faith merely to gain office. Once elected God could be forgotten.

It was scandalous when leaders of some Christian groups pounced on this deceitful head-line, and used it to sneer at Kevin Rudd's attempts to explain how he understands Christian discipleship. Christians wanting to patiently push for justice can only lament when self-serving spin (look at me I'm God's contemporary Elijah denouncing today's Ahab!) receives prominence in our public life. It confirms again, if we needed to be

convinced, that Christian journalistic norms need to flower into genuine Christian news *service*. And let the emphasis of our efforts, as with our hopes and all our lives be just that: *humble service*.

Kevin Rudd's Faith in Politics is worth reading. It is a salient contribution to Christian political reflection.

Let us then consider some examples of how the issues of "body politics" are presented in the mass media. Legislative initiatives to human IVF have been foreshadowed by the NSW and Victorian Governments. These issues go to the heart of "body politics" and they add a layer of bio-ethical complexity to any search for policies that will truly promote public justice.

But then, if we are going to discuss the issues to which the newspapers consistently call attention, we really have to be prepared to do the necessary research.

Let's briefly look at two newspaper articles from 2007. The Sydney Morning Herald of 28 November, "Sperm donors to veto recipients" begins this way:

*Reproductive donors will be able to demand their sperm or eggs only go to certain religious, ethnic or cultural groups or be reserved for heterosexual couples ... women who receive donations now can have a say on the background of the donor but donors will for the first time have the right under law to whom they donate. The office of the Health Minister, Reba Meagher, said yesterday the law was being changed because it was "in the best interests of the child for the genetic parent to have given consent to the circumstances surrounding the child's birth and upbringing ... To put this in another way, it will not be in the child's best interests to discover later in life that their genetic parent has a fundamental objection to their existence or the social and cultural circumstances in which they were raised.*

The Greens, not unexpectedly, have called for changes. Their MP, Dr John Kaye, objected on the grounds that this provision "gave egg and sperm donors the ability to specifically discriminate against single mothers, lesbian and ethnic and religious groups." Claiming that this would be a legal sanction for bigotry and prejudice, Dr Kaye is reported as saying: "[It] sends an appalling message that it is acceptable to discriminate on grounds that are irrelevant. It will also reduce the availability of donor sperm to single mothers, thus increasing the amount of self-insemination. This can have negative health consequences in some cases." A Melbourne University medical ethicist, Dr Cannold, claims that the NSW legislative proposal is offensive. She is quoted as saying that "The whole idea of donating is giving and I don't think you give gifts with those sort of conditions attached."

So we can ask: do the criticisms of Dr Kaye and Dr Cannold as here reported, address the rationale, the complex attempt to balance rights, as explained by the NSW Health Minister? I do not think that they do. The Minister says her concern is with a just recognition of the best interests of the child (later in life). These critics, on the other hand, complain that the needs of those who wish to avail themselves of publicly available seed will not only be disadvantaged, but their "reproductive rights" violated.

Even in that brief comparative contrast, based on a newspaper article, we meet a nest of problems. Is it appropriate for legislation to respect the rights of a future person? I would think so. On a wider scale, this is simply what "sustainability" is all about. The critics try to trump the Minister's view by an appeal to the needs of those whose "reproductive rights" must be respected. Is this appeal a valid basis for a criticism of the Minister's rationale? I don't think it is. But then my answers here are based upon what I have read in the press and a full examination of the legislation, the Minister and the elaborated arguments of these and other critics, may bring other issues to light.

For instance, from what we know of the legislation, and the reported comments of Dr Kaye, there are good grounds for viewing this as an attempt to counter the practise of self-insemination. Such practises must also involve serious health considerations. But as we consider this, we meet again the concept of "need" which is attached to those women who want to become pregnant and so proceed to collect male sperm in order to conceive a child. They are presented here in terms that suggest not only that they "need" the seed, but that they "need" any resultant fertilisation to be dissociated from the males who have donated. The question has to be asked, at this point, whether a women's need to conceive on the basis of a dissociation from the "male supplier" can be viewed as a valid (indeed a just) need. It may be true that such "concrete dissociation" takes place outside a context of normal medical oversight, supposedly with intermediaries providing a conduit. But the legislation, on the other hand, seems to be suggesting that the "needs" of sperm donors who do not want to be completely dissociated from what they give up will also be respected.

One begins to sense the a-normative path on which our society has been traveling for some decades. The path travelled to reach this juncture also requires our careful investigation. How did it ever get to this? We need careful historical analysis of how our public morality has been formed, and that will tell us a lot about the "core values" which make a claim in the contested arena of "body politics". The "situation itself" is not above criticism. For instance, how is it that we, as a society, have come to a situation where the Parliament is being asked to resolve complex legal problems that arise when males presume that can dissociate themselves from their own seed. Previously, a future father could walk away from his pregnant girl-friend; but now this dissociation has seemingly become a matter of donation, if it isn't a straight out commercial sale. What are the consequences for males to be legally dissociated from the seed their bodies have produced? What are we dealing with here? What will the outcome be?

The issues thus facing the NSW legislature can't be properly addressed without also reckoning with the *further development* of "body politics" (i.e. abortion, IVF, embryonic stem-cell research, euthanasia etc) in our public lives. And we come to the question of how we can justly define needs. What are the true needs in this situation that have to be protected by legislation?

I would suggest that in this context Dr Kaye and Dr Cannold are implicitly suggesting that the Parliament should consider the seed as a harvest from a non-personal source, *as if* it had grown on a *terra nullius*, or more accurately a *personae nullius*. They suggest that the only just way for Parliament to regulate IVF is to do so in ways that meet the needs of women who want to bear children by providing seed that must be legally dissociated from the males who supply it.

What does this mean? Does it not suggest that our society, via assisted reproductive technology legislation, is on the verge of accepting that the Parliament should legislate to validate the right of any adult woman who claims a **need** to bear a child? If so, the legislation is taking a path that assumes that the Christian viewpoint is no longer relevant, let alone normative, for the way in which we understand our bodies, our families, marriage and having children? But what is that Christian viewpoint from which this legislation so decisively diverges? That is a part of the complexity which we, as Christians seeking to promote public justice, cannot afford to ignore.

From a biblical standpoint the **need** to bear a child is not the burden of an individual woman who has come to an autonomous self-definition that she should be a mother. Neither is it the burden of an individual male who similarly decides that this woman should become a mother because he autonomously wishes to become a father. The need to bear a child should never be viewed as a self-creating instinct out of an autonomous goal-seeking individual. It is always a human response *Coram Deo*. And the biblical teaching concerning family is inextricably bound to what it reveals about marriage. The efforts to form normative family life is one side of a complex historical process, the other side of which is the necessary formation of a normative marital relationship based on mutual self-giving love. The "need" to have children is one that arises *within marriage*, between the future mother and father, and the wife who wants to bear a child does so not by giving her body as some kind of erotic sacrifice, but by presenting herself to her husband. That, in outline, is indicative of a biblically-directed view, and it is also to be noted that such a view is actually integral to the Christian understanding of the Kingdom of God in a very intimate way (Ephesians 5:21-33). In this view the marriage-family tapestry is integral to a way of life that tends to all our bodily cares in a gentle way, just as Christ has tended the needs of His Bride.

This can only be a normative orientation for the pathway our analysis should take as we investigate what is going on in our society. Clearly, we confront other religious impulses (in particular those of human autonomy) and as a result our legislature is now being petitioned with an alleged **need** to supply seed to all women who may request it. But that is where the legal question arises as to whether the *distribution* of the seed is to completely dissociate the "seed" from the "donor". Parliaments are being confronted with a need to legislate and this need is often interpreted as a way of meeting the child-bearing needs of women (ie in general) whether they are married, whatever their domestic circumstances and even if it arises from those who simply develop a craving to be a (single) mother.

At this point of the political debate, Minister Meagher, the *communitarian*, has drawn fire from the *libertarians* Dr Kaye and Dr Cannold who advocate a radical "freeing up" of human seed availability. Here we see the view that seeks recognition for the innate rights to expand the realm of a consumer's freedom. Such a libertarian view is evident in the second example from the Melbourne Herald Sun's December 14 front page headline: "Gays in historic IVF win".

Mr Hulls, the Victorian Attorney General, approves the "social progressive" label that is persistently applied to him. But what is so progressive, we might ask, about legislation that regulates non-marital human seed commerce? Dr Kaye appeals to allegedly widespread "unregulated" self-insemination in NSW, but Dr Hulls explains the Victorian legislation in this way: *"The reality is that many Victorian children are already born to same-sex couples and to single women and yet those children don't enjoy the same legal protections as others. In most other states, same-sex couples and single women have had access to assisted reproductive technology for years but Victoria is lagging behind."*

We should not let this pass. Such statements need to be explained. How is it that any child does not enjoy equal protection under the law? How has this situation arisen? The statement of Mr Hulls might help explain why he gives this legislation the "social progressive" label, but the subsequent statement does not elucidate the lack of legal protection for children born to same-sex couples and to single women. That is, it simply takes as its criterion for political progress what the wider "society", in this case the other state and federal Parliaments, via their legislation, have deemed fair and just. *"Our laws in this area are out of date and have been found to breach federal discrimination laws."* (BCW: He means "anti-discrimination laws").

At this point the article notes that the Law Reform Commission handed down its report in June, recommending "sweeping changes that would allow gay couples to adopt children and free up IVF for single women and lesbians." But these recommendations are not about the rights of children but of the rights of those who state they have a need for children.

You will notice that the word 'free up' is used in the Sun-Herald article. It is an interpretation of the law reform commission's recommendations that assumes human seed can now quite validly be viewed as a commodity for human commerce. Usually the phrase "free up" is used in terms of "free trade" and the dismantling of tariffs and other barriers. Here it is joined with "progressive" to imply that an exclusive connection with reproduction within (heterosexual) marriage would make IVF into a conservative violation of human rights. So, according to Mr Hulls, IVF "resources" should not be exclusively associated with "conventional" marriage (the "non-progressive" view of human relationships), but as a means for "innovative" use and so the barriers to "progressive" scientific research, surrogacy and IVF for all women who may wish to bear a child, are simply being removed.

Let me emphasize that what I am trying to do here is to take two newspaper articles and consider what they tell us about the moral complexity (and perplexity) that our society now confronts. In this debate we note a continual shift between alleged *reproductive rights* for all adults and the stated *needs* of some adult individuals to bear children. Usually this refers to women although you will note how the language is contorted through efforts to employ a non-gender specific legal nomenclature (i.e same-sex parenting) and hence it all become very ambiguous at a basic level.

Of course, at this point, we cannot avoid coming slap-bang into the middle of another contentious debate about our bodies, concerning the legal definition of marriage and human sexuality. It seems that no definitive resolution is in sight. The impact is seen with legislation which would accommodate child-bearing within a re-definition of human sexuality. And so we note the ongoing effort to legislate for, and thus (re)make child-bearing compatible with, "same-sex marriage". In this country the charge is being led by Justice Michael Kirby who says that the legal definition of marriage has to be re-defined in order to ensure "equal justice under the law for all". The problem, once more, is with the view of "equal justice under the law for all". Presumably such equality simply has to be ascribed on the basis of those who have a recognisable "need" to be seen to be married. The legal argument here confuses marriage with something else, a same-sex friendship nurtured by the mutual development of a committed long-term sexual bond. But it is not so much a desire for marriage as a desire to be *viewed as married* and a call for "equality" for those who want to view their same-sex friendship as a substitute for a married relationship between a husband and wife. And so, when it comes to child-bearing we see a transition from same-sex couples as responsible adults in a family (i.e. a lesbian couple rearing a child) which then becomes merged with same-sex marriage. The Herald Sun headline "Gays in historic IVF win" completes the cycle of confusion; the term "gay" is now used in a (neo-politically correct?) androgynous way.

Where will this debate now "turn"? Will the alleged "progressive" label that Minister Hulls affixes to his legislative proposals be maintained in the light of ongoing public and media scrutiny? The public moral debate will have to turn, sooner or later, to other questions: What is progressive legislation? And how does such a progressive attitude construe "needs" and how are they to be distinguished from pure market "demands"? Throughout this discussion, it has surely become evident, that our society has absorbed the "core values" of a materialistic and consumerist society at a very deep spiritual level. Are we not, in principle, dealing with a multi-dimensional realisation of consumerism applied to our own bodies? Is it any less human enslavement because we enslave ourselves to our needs?

The problems that emerge in all the media hype, and in all the political debate, show us that politicians are under intense pressure to simply accept human seed as a commodity of "use", which is somehow detachable from human responsibility. What does the implied detachment mean?

It might pay us to reflect upon the level of detachedness within our society? Are we really willing to accept that the role of biological father is a take it or leave it responsibility? There are big questions here that relate to questions about male and female accountability, but they are also about the way in which we seem to progressively tolerate the sustained objectifying of fellow human subjects.

But then, the NSW effort to re-attach a degree of accountability to those donating seed, has only emerged after decades in which sperm banks have been employing their combine-harvesters to fill their barns with male seed "no strings attached". The issues here are far-reaching and we should not under-estimate the degree to which we, by the public practises we have been condoning, have emptied ourselves of our own responsibility for each and all the resources that have been given to us (natural, social, personal). That God-given accountability remains with us until the one known as Emmanuel returns. His rule will prevail despite the whirl-winds of media spin, the manipulation of our instincts by rapacious commercial interest, the no-where land of gendered phobias and the deeply regressive "progressivism" of libertarian legislative agendas that know no bounds other than what they can legislatively impose.