

## Do Justice!!

*"Do Justice, Love Kindness and Walk Humbly With Your God" Micah 6:8*

### A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues

Welcome to the April edition of Do Justice for 2019 as we discuss issues of Social Justice from a Christian perspective.

#### **The end of innocence.**

The tragic events in Christchurch on Friday 15 March have been seen by many people as a turning point in New Zealand history. It is the first time we have had a "terrorist" act in our own land. Many New Zealanders believed that we lived in a peaceful, tolerant, diverse, open society despite our history.

Why would anyone in this fair land want to take up arms and murder fifty of our fellow New Zealanders as they worshiped? Although the alleged terrorist is reported to be an Australian that should not be used as an excuse, he is reported to have been living in New Zealand on and off for the last two years. It seems possible that he chose to make his attack in New Zealand because our gun control laws are much slacker than Australia where laws were tightened after the Port Arthur massacre in 1996 and there was a big buy-back of guns.

But more important is the why? Why did he want to murder so many people? Why did he target a peaceful gathering of Muslims on their day of worship? What motivated him and drove him to such a dramatic act? We may never understand all the things that motivated him, the Royal Commission and the trail may give us some of the reasons. But perhaps more significant has been the way the New Zealand public responded.

The Moslem community in New Zealand has, to a degree flown under the radar, as far as the wider public is concerned. The community has grown and spread over the last 20 or 30 years and is now in all our major cities and most towns, there are now close to 50,000 people following Islam.

Regrettable the image of Islam has been heavily influenced by the events of 9/11 and the subsequent conflicts in the Middle East and North and West Africa. It is the terrorist who claims to be a Moslem that gets the media attention and the media ignores or under reports the terrorist activities of the far right particularly white supremacists.

The fact that our Prime Minister in her very first news conference after the Christchurch massacre described what had happened as a "terrorist act" set the tone for our response as a nation. The "aroha" that was shown by so

many New Zealanders to our Moslem neighbours is something we can take satisfaction. And, maybe we can extend this "aroha" to all our relationships in our diversified society.

The very quick move to ban semi-automatic weapons is much more than a "knee jerk" reaction to the massacre. It is something we should have done many years ago, but politicians were scared of the reaction from special interests. The public support of some of those "special interests" to the Government's proposals is encouraging as is the comments by some opposition politicians about possible intervention by overseas interests.

And then there is the whole question of "free speech" and "hate speech". Something that has been regularly in the news over the last two years. Let's be clear speech has never been "free", we are not free to shout "fire" in a crowded cinema and shouting hatred towards any group is the same as shouting fire.

There are limits to free speech and attempts to enforce them when several overseas visitors with "white supremacist" views visited New Zealand last year were heavily criticised as denying the visitors free speech. From the perspective of the Christchurch massacre it seems the visitors wanted to shout "fire".

Jesus taught us to love our neighbours whoever they may be. The action of Farid Almed, a Muslim man, who forgave the murderer despite having seen him shoot his wife is a great example to us all.

If reform of our gun laws, a better understanding of the limits of free speech, and understanding what loving one's neighbours really means, is one of the results of the Christchurch massacre, then maybe we have lost our innocence but started to mature as a nation.

#### **Managing conflict of Interest.**

The barrage of statements and comment that has come since the release of the Tax Working Group's report in February has been interesting if a bit one sided.

One of the challenges for Members of Parliament is how they manage conflict of interest. All MPs are required to annually update details of their property interests and other investments that may be subject to legislative action.

Although all MPs pay income and other taxes it is accepted that this does not constitute a conflict of interest that would mean they would have to abstain and remain silent when such issues are being discussed in the House of Representatives or Select Committee. If that was required, then no MP would be able to be involved with any parliamentary business involving tax!!

The Government has indicated that it needs some weeks to digest the report and decide what to do about it. By releasing the report before deciding what to do does allow some public debate to take place. Up until now that debate appears to be one sided, dominated by the relatively small number of New Zealanders who could be financially disadvantaged by the adoption of one or more of the Working Group's recommendations.

Who will speak for the 99%?

### **Forgiveness and Agape Love**

The recapture of virtually all the territory claimed by ISIS in Syria and Iraq over the last months has raised a major moral dilemma for many countries, particularly for countries with a Christian tradition.

Citizens of many of these countries for various reasons, some religious, moved to the ISIS califate in its early years as fighters and supporters. Now some want to return home. This raises some interesting questions.

In New Zealand the reaction of both Government and Opposition politicians has been largely negative. The people concerned are alleged to have broken New Zealand law. If they want to come back, they must make that decision and make the arrangements; they cannot expect any assistance from the Government. If they do manage to get back to New Zealand, then they will be arrested and charged with being a member of a cruel terrorist organisation. If convicted, they will be facing considerable time in prison.

Many, probably most, New Zealanders would support this position. But is that the end of the story? What happens if we ask the question "What would Jesus do?". Jesus tells the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15. Can we see them as a "prodigal sons"? There are some similarities, the Prodigal Son turns his back on his family (country) goes to a foreign land (Syria), and wastes all that he has (embraces an ideology totally foreign to their home country). Finally, is desperate with no home and no food (he is desperate and disillusioned), he returns home (asking for help from his home country).

As we know the Prodigal Son is welcomed back with joy by his father, but his elder brother despises him. Jesus leaves us to draw our own conclusions from this parable and over the centuries many have analysed and commented on the story.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, in his new book *Reimagining Britain* comments on the Parable of the Prodigal Son<sup>1</sup> and finishes by writing "*a family that loves*

*unconditionally and expresses that love-in-action, reveals and interprets what is meant by the dignity of the human being to a culture living by the idea of radical autonomy".*

As Anglican Christians each week we publicly confess our sins and ask God for forgiveness. We also promise to forgive others. The Prodigal Son's father demonstrates agape love for his son. The brother despises him and does not want to have anything to do with him.

But, as Christians we are called to express agape love, even to those who have disowned us. As a nation, do we turn our back on these very misguided people as the brother did or do we find some way to accept them back?

### **Prophetic voices from our youth.**

Up until 1:40pm on Friday 15 March the lead story on the evening news was going to be about the thousands of school students who had taken time away from school to march and protest about the lack of action by governments and politicians to seriously address climate change. Regrettably their voices were drowned out by the Christchurch massacres.

It was good to see the leadership taken by various school students reacting to the events in Christchurch. It is in our schools, perhaps more than any where else, that our diversity is experienced, understood and welcomed.

Those students who protested about climate change and those students who stepped out in support of their Muslim friends were making a prophetic statement. A statement that things must change: the old attitudes cannot continue whether it be the reluctance to really address the challenges of climate change or the willingness to accept even a low level of acceptance of hatred towards anyone different.

The prophetic voice has been stilled in Aotearoa for too long. We need these young prophets, they should be encouraged and listened to. As Christians we must encourage them to continue to speak out even when we find their message uncomfortable.

## **The Shift Aotearoa Conference 2019 – 5-7 June, Wellington**



**The Shift Aotearoa Conference 2019 will bring housing sector actors together to trigger collaborative action for one of Aotearoa New Zealand's most urgent problems.**

<sup>1</sup> *Reimagining Britain* by Justin Welby Bloomsbury 2018 pages 69-72.