

## Do Justice!!

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

### A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues

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

#### **Reaction to the Christchurch massacre.**

As time has passed since the horrors of the 15 March it is interesting to look at some of the comments made by Christian leaders. We have selected three statements which failed to get much mention in the media but are important for us as Christians.

First, the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, speaking at an interfaith gathering at the Regent Square Mosque in London shortly after the massacre started by saying *"The killings in New Zealand are monstrous. The response of New Zealand, all its people, with Muslims in the forefront, is beautiful and inspiring."*

He then talked about our relations as Christians with Muslims and made it very clear that *"Hatred of Muslims denies and blasphemes Christ. Those who co-opt Christian language and history for hatred commit blasphemy."*

Strong words indeed, but words that needed to be said in reaction to 15 March. The Archbishop then went on to talk about the situation in Great Britain where there is a large Muslim community. He finished his comments with *"Jesus taught his followers to be peacemakers, "for they will be called children of God." Making peace is an action, it doesn't just happen. It requires us to be curious, to listen, to move across differences of culture, ethnicity, religion and politics in love. Hate crimes against those who are different have no place before God."*

In the USA the Rev Jim Wallis, President and Founder of Sojourners, in his Commentary in the Sojourners Magazine on 28 March 2019 referred to the "Reclaiming Jesus" Proclamation issued by 24 Christian leaders in the USA including the Most Rev. Michael B. Curry, Presiding Bishop and Primate, The

Episcopal Church (a member of the Anglican Communion) following a retreat on Ash Wednesday 2018. He wrote *"Christians need to do as they always should — go back to Jesus, believing he actually meant the things that he said. Go back to the affirmations of Reclaiming Jesus, and the rejections they involve. All still hold. None must be forgotten. That will help us to get to the core of the issues at stake in the days ahead. And these are the issues people need to hear from us.*

- I. WE BELIEVE each human being is made in God's image and likeness. Racial bigotry is a brutal denial of the image of God in some of the children of God.
- II. WE BELIEVE we are one body. In Christ, there is to be no oppression based on race, gender, identity, or class.
- III. WE BELIEVE how we treat the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the stranger, the sick, and the prisoner is how we treat Christ himself.
- IV. WE BELIEVE that truth is morally central to our personal and public lives. Jesus promises, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).
- IV. WE BELIEVE that Christ's way of leadership is servanthood, not domination. We support democracy, not because we believe in human perfection, but because we do not.
- V. WE BELIEVE Jesus when he tells us to go into all nations making disciples. Our churches and our nations are part of an international community whose interests always surpass national boundaries. We in turn should love and serve the world and all its inhabitants rather than to seek first narrow nationalistic prerogatives.

And thirdly, our Church leaders here in Auckland issued a statement on 20 March that was virtually ignored by the local media, but had an important message including the following:

*"As a Christian community we welcome, support and embrace all who live peaceably in Aotearoa New*

*Zealand. We remember that Jesus Christ spent his early years as a migrant/refugee in Egypt and so we celebrate all who have come to New Zealand looking for freedom, safety and greater opportunities for their families. Our national anthem says it so well:*

*“God of Nations, at Thy feet,  
In the bonds of love we meet....  
**Men of every creed and race,  
Gather here before Thy face....  
From dissension, envy, hate  
And corruption guard our State,  
Make our country good and great  
God defend New Zealand”***

*These words take on fresh and deeper meaning as we stand in solidarity with those who grieve the loss of their loved ones.”*

Each of these statements can be applied equally to the tragic massacres in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday.

### **Private and Public Debt, Tax and Poverty**

In April the Government introduced the Credit Contracts Legislation Amendment Bill which would strengthen requirements to lend responsibly, especially in relation to how affordability and suitability tests should be conducted, limiting the accumulation of interest and fees on high-cost loans, and providing new remedies and penalties for non-compliance.<sup>1</sup>

There has been a need to put some significant restrictions on the various lending organisations that lend to the poorer in our communities; the Loan Sharks and the Pay Day Lenders in particular. But regrettably this legislation only deals with the symptoms of a much deeper underlying problem – poverty. Families whose only income is the dole or who work for the minimum wage maybe not even for a full week, go into debt to these institutions because there is no other way to pay the landlord and put food on the table for their family. They lie so close to the financial edge that it only takes one thing to go wrong and they are in trouble.

This legislation will limit the damage that the lenders can do but does not address the underlying problem facing many who use these institutions – Poverty.

Whilst there is general acceptance that private debt must be repaid one of the barriers to dealing with issues of poverty is that our Governments are reluctant to increase debt and the present Government has restricted itself with its Budget Responsibility Rules; rules that were agreed with the Greens when the extend of the underfunding of

government services by the previous National Government was unknown. Underfunding of Health and Education plus the problems around housing all contribute to poverty and need to be addressed urgently. The present Government wants to address these and other issues contributing to poverty but is restricted by the Budget Responsibility Rules. In addition, there was a promise not to increase taxes during this term of government.

In the short term the Government in the 2019 Budget should allocate large increases to Health and Education so that health workers and teachers can be paid properly even if this means breaking the Budget Responsibility Rules. Now a comprehensive Capital Gains Tax is off the table a complete reform of our regressive income tax system becomes even more urgent and could, in time, fund the increases in Health and Education spending.

A Universal Basic Income needs to be introduced as quickly as possible as this is possibly the most significant long-term initiative the government can make to address the underlying cause of poverty in New Zealand - lack of income.

Of course, such policies will provoke vocal reaction from various groups and political parties. We will hear all kinds of horrible examples of the impact of such policies. And there will be the cry of why the rush?

Oxfam in its annual survey of incomes and wealth in New Zealand states *“The wealthiest 20 per cent of households in New Zealand hold 70 per cent of the wealth, while the top 10 per cent hold half the wealth. At the other end of the household wealth spectrum, the bottom 40 per cent of households account for just 3 per cent of total wealth.”*

Over the last 30 years the average income of someone in the richest 1% has doubled, from just under \$200,000 to nearly \$400,000 (adjusting for inflation). In contrast, the average disposable income for someone in the poorest 10% is only slightly higher than it was in the 1980s. But not only are the top income earners taking more of the pie they are also paying less tax. Thanks to Rogernomics the marginal rate of income tax is now 33% compared to 66% in 1984 and applies at a much lower income - \$70,000 per year.

When the issue gets serious enough Governments can act urgently as we have just seen with Semi-automatic weapons. How much more serious must poverty get before the Government will act?

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/bills-and-laws/bills-proposed-laws/document/BILL\\_86627/credit-contracts-legislation-amendment-bill](https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/bills-and-laws/bills-proposed-laws/document/BILL_86627/credit-contracts-legislation-amendment-bill)