



Do Justice

"Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God." Micah 6:8

A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues

Welcome to the July edition of Do Justice as we continue to discuss issues of social justice from a Christian perspective.

Who is my neighbour?

Jesus' call to love our neighbour is recorded in all four gospels; it goes to the heart of social justice. Luke reinforces this when he writes about the 'expert in the law' who asks Jesus, "Who is my neighbour?" Jesus responds by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan. St Paul reinforces Jesus' teaching when he writes in more than one of his epistles that, in the sight of God, "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free" (Galatians 3:28). Jesus, quoting Isaiah 61, speaks about setting the oppressed free in the synagogue in Nazareth. So, why is racism such an issue when about one third of the world's population claims to be Christian, following the teaching of Jesus?

No one was particularly surprised when yet another black man was killed by police in Minneapolis on 25 May 2020. It was just one more in a long list of killings of black people by white police in the USA. Even the initial protests did not seem unusual but then they went on and on and the ethnic makeup of the protesters became much more diverse. Protests took place in many countries and thousands marched on Sunday 14 June in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, and Hamilton. Anglicans, particularly some of our young people, marched in support. What is happening in the USA is a continuation of the racism embedded in American life since the first slaves were shipped from Africa to America in 1526.¹

Can we continue to look at what goes on in the USA and think that it cannot happen here? After all, we have good race relations here in Aotearoa, don't we? The fact is that over 50% of all those in prison are Māori when they only make up about 17% of the population.² Twice as many Māori young people are regularly stopped by the police compared to Pākehā New Zealanders. Can we really believe that there is no racism in Aotearoa?

It was 400 years ago last year when the first British owned and operated ships started to transport black Africans across the Atlantic to provide labour for the plantations of Virginia and the Carolinas. These plantations were on land taken from the indigenous peoples of America without any proper compensation. This was colonialism. Two hundred years later, the

British started to colonise New Zealand, thankfully without the use of slaves, although the way many of the indigenous Māori were treated was not much different from slavery.³ Also, slavery was not uncommon in the Pacific Islands and white "entrepreneurs" based in New Zealand were involved and profited.⁴ Some in New Zealand take comfort that, compared to most of the other former British colonised countries, we have Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the Waitangi Tribunal, and treaty settlements that acknowledge the wrong done to the indigenous Māori. But still, over half of those in prison are Māori, Māori incomes are significantly less than those of white New Zealanders, more Māori babies are taken from their parents by Oranga Tamariki than from any other ethnic group, and so on and so on...

Even more significant is the regular cry from some politicians and others whenever a programme is proposed that favours Māori, or any other disadvantaged group. We are told that it is unfair; we are "all New Zealanders" and should be treated the same. Let us be honest and call this racism, for that is what it is. You may be my neighbour, and you may be poor and hurting because you did not get the same education as the rich white New Zealander, you may be stopped by the police because of your race, etc. But you are my neighbour and Jesus makes it crystal clear that you should be loved. As Christians, and as a Church, we are called to love our neighbour without qualification. To love even if that means the Government and society provides more support for the disadvantaged sections of our community than are provided for the better off. We still have a long way to go in New Zealand to get rid of racism in all its guises.

It is worth remembering that Jesus was a victim of racism. He was a Middle Eastern Jew living in a colonised part of the Roman Empire; an empire controlled by white people, that sucked resources from its peripheral colonies to the centre in Italy, that ruled by force and taxed the people harshly. Has much changed?

Covid-19 and the stock market

We commented in last month's Do Justice about the stock market and how it responds to a world crisis. At various times in the past, stock markets dropped in value and many investors lost their fortunes when things turned bad. Such recessions or depressions were also very bad for the workers who lost jobs. This

¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery_in_the_United_States#First_enslavements

²https://www.corrections.govt.nz/resources/research_and_statistics/quarterly_prison_statistics/prison_stats_march_2019

³<http://www.theprow.org.nz/maori/slavery-in-colonial-times/#.XwPsgW5uJmV>

⁴<https://www.mz.co.nz/national/programmes/sunday/audio/201825485/new-zealand-and-the-pacific-slave-trade>

time seems to be different as the New Zealand stock market recently recorded its highest value ever and many other of the world's stock exchanges are trading at or near historic highs. What is happening?

Financial people will tell you that the value of an individual stock is what the market believes the stock will return (earn) over the coming months and years. It is a sort of forecasting. The various stock exchange indexes are just a collection of values of individual stocks. So, despite an almost complete shutdown of economies around the world and rapidly increasing unemployment, particularly in the USA, companies and corporations are going to earn as much or more than they have in the past; that is what the high indexes mean. So, according to the stock exchanges around the world the rich will continue to be rich and only the 99% will suffer.

Investors appear to be thinking that profits will not be impacted by Covid-19; company managers will take whatever action is necessary to ensure that profits are maintained and increased. An example of this is the decision of The Warehouse Group to make over 1,000 of their staff redundant by closing a number of their branches, despite the Government having provided around \$67 million to protect the jobs of the Warehouse's workers. Robert Reich, a former US Secretary of Labour, regularly writes about socialism for the rich and capitalism for the poor. This is a good example.⁵

Sometime in the future it will be necessary to look at all the Government's sources of income and possibly change tax rates or even introduce new taxes. That could be a good time to look very critically at the rate of corporate tax which is currently less than the marginal tax rate of anyone earning more than \$70,000 a year.

Maybe some form of progressive corporate tax system should be introduced with the big profitable companies paying more than the small and medium size enterprises (SME).

The Police and the public

In both New Zealand and the USA, much has been written in recent weeks about the relationship between the public and the police. Thankfully, the NZ Police have decided not to continue with their experiment with armed response teams that had been trialled in South Auckland, Waikato, and Canterbury over recent months. Public opposition was strong, and the new Police Commissioner listened.

In the USA things are different. All police are armed at all times. And the relationship between police and the public, particularly in poor and ethnic communities, is strained to say the least.

The founder of modern policing in the UK, and virtually around the world was Sir Robert Peel, a 19th century British Prime Minister and Home Minister who completely reformed the London police. Yes, it is possible to completely reform a police force! British police are commonly known as "Bobbies" or sometimes "Peelers" in recognition of Sir Robert's work.

Sir Robert developed nine principles for policing as follows:

- 1. The basic mission for which police exist is to prevent crime and disorder as an alternative to the repression of crime and disorder by military force and severity of legal punishment.*
- 2. The ability of the police to perform their duties is dependent upon public approval of police existence, actions, behaviour and the ability of the police to secure and maintain public respect.*
- 3. The police must secure the willing cooperation of the public in voluntary observance of the law to be able to secure and maintain public respect.*
- 4. The degree of cooperation of the public that can be secured diminishes, proportionately, to the necessity for the use of physical force and compulsion in achieving police objectives.*
- 5. The police seek and preserve public favour, not by catering to public opinion, but by constantly demonstrating absolutely impartial service to the law, in complete independence of policy, and without regard to the justice or injustice of the substance of individual laws; by ready offering of individual service and friendship to all members of society without regard to their race or social standing, by ready exercise of courtesy and friendly good humour; and by ready offering of individual sacrifice in protecting and preserving life.*
- 6. The police should use physical force to the extent necessary to secure observance of the law or to restore order only when the exercise of persuasion, advice and warning is found to be insufficient to achieve police objectives; and police should use only the minimum degree of physical force which is necessary on any particular occasion for achieving a police objective.*
- 7. The police at all times should maintain a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and the public are the police; the police are the only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the intent of the community welfare.*
- 8. The police should always direct their actions toward their functions and never appear to usurp the powers of the judiciary by avenging individuals or the state, or authoritatively judging guilt or punishing the guilty.*
- 9. The test of police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder, not the visible evidence of police action in dealing with them.*⁶

It is interesting to read these principles that seem to be as applicable today as in 1829 when the London Metropolitan Police was formed. Peel acted because of a breakdown in trust between the people and the authorities when the two most common sentences for anyone found guilty of any crime, however small, were execution or transportation. It would be good if every politician who comments on law and order first reads and understands Peel's principles.

⁵<https://www.facebook.com/watch/RBReich/2334883970114482/>

⁶[https://www.patheos.com/blogs/slacktivist/2020/06/01/sir-robert-peel-never-came-to-](https://www.patheos.com/blogs/slacktivist/2020/06/01/sir-robert-peel-never-came-to-america/?utm_source=Newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Christians+For+a+Better+C)

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