



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 as we continue to discuss issues of social justice from a Christian perspective.

Infrastructure and taxes

As residents of New Zealand, we expect to have drinkable water, waste disposal, electric supply, internet access, etc in our homes; and when we go out, we expect the roads to be adequate for our vehicles and the pavements to be safe. We expect to be able to access hospitals when we need to, and to be able to send our children to school in safety. All these things and many more are our expectations as residents of a modern civilised 21st century nation. But we do not seem to be prepared to pay for the infrastructure that is essential for these services to be delivered to us.

For decades, political parties and local politicians that promise to cut taxes and rates and minimise government have won elections. Nobody likes paying taxes and rates, but we all expect the basic infrastructure to be provided for us.

From the 1980s onward, much of our infrastructure and the related services have been corporatised and subsequently privatised. So, taxpayers no longer have to provide them. Instead, we pay the companies that governments have sold them to. And those facilities that governments have either not sold or could not sell – such as hospitals and schools – have been starved of capital funds to update and replace their infrastructure.

New Zealand's conversion to neoliberalism in the 1980s was joyous and complete. Small government meant big tax cuts and corporatisation and subsequent privatisation meant that the Government was no longer responsible. It was almost paradise – low taxes and all the services we expect would be there. Plus, the market would sort everything out and as the rich got richer, there would be a trickle down to the not-so-rich (poor). Yes, as a nation we bought it, despite warnings from some that we were living in a fool's paradise. Over the years, successive governments of all colours have followed the small government, low taxes and market driven economy route. But now the swallows have come home to roost and the unseen but vital infrastructure that has been neglected is failing because of over 40 years of under-investment.

Recent problems in Wellington when waste pipes broke, and there was a fountain of freshwater in the middle of the street, are just visible examples of the impact of low investment in

infrastructure. Other examples can be found throughout New Zealand.

In the long run, low taxes leading to lack of investment in infrastructure will result in increased costs later. In addition, low taxes benefit the wealthy and do not benefit the poor, resulting in ever increasing inequality. Are we prepared to do something about it? Is the Government prepared to act? Is it time to evoke the concept of jubilee?

Twelve months on

From the April 2020 edition of Do Justice in an article entitled 'Economic Growth and COVID-19':

The dramatic developments in mid-March make it even more important to consider an alternative to the continuous growth agenda. We still live in a finite world, we still have climate change, we still have inequality. What are we going to do?

We then went on to discuss an alternative way of looking at the economy that puts sustainability and equity at the forefront of thinking. Over the last 12 months we have seen the successful combatting of COVID-19 coupled with urgent economic measures that appear to have softened the negative economic impacts of the pandemic. We now have a majority Government that claims to be reforming and progressive and wants to deal with 'child poverty' and does not have the constraint of any partner holding it back from taking radical action.

There have been some small indications that change may be coming. The increase of the minimum wage to \$20 per hour from 1 April is a step in the right direction as was the extension of sick days to ten a year. But indications are that many of the Welfare Expert Advisory Group's 42 recommendations will not be implemented by this Government. The main reason appears to be cost.

The Group was asked to develop *"a welfare system that ensures people have an adequate income and standard of living, are treated with and can live in dignity and are able to participate meaningfully in their communities."*¹ This takes the definition of a Living Wage and extends it to everyone, including those without earned income. In the October 2020 edition of Talking Cents, David Hall of the diocesan Social Justice Group explored how a Universal Basic Income (UBI) could be implemented. UBI is defined as: *"a basic understanding that the community has a*

¹ [Welfare Expert Advisory Group - Kia Piki Ake \(weag.govt.nz\)](https://www.welfare.govt.nz/)

responsibility to ensure that all its members can live with dignity and be able to contribute as their talents allow.”

This definition of UBI incorporates the objectives of both the WEAG and the Living Wage Movement with the emphasis on everyone having sufficient resources to live in dignity and contribute to their community. Hence, even though UBI was not included in the Labour Party manifesto for the last election, the objectives of the WEAG and support for a Living Wage were integral parts of the manifesto, so UBI could be something the Government could usefully explore.

The implementation of a UBI would be a major reform that would impact everyone in New Zealand. It should also have the support of the neoliberal ideologists in Parliament who argue for a smaller government, as one of the results would be a very significant reduction in the government apparatus as the Ministry of Social Development and some other government departments would no longer be required. If you would like a copy of the October 2020 Talking Cents, please contact David Hall at dissnorfolk@gmail.com

Climate crisis and the Climate Change Commission Report

The Climate Change Commission was set up in late 2019 with the task of providing independent advice to the Government on the actions necessary for New Zealand to meet the commitments made at the Paris Conference of 2015. Their first task was to prepare a report with recommendations for the Government by the end of May 2021. The Commission published a very comprehensive draft report at the end of January 2021 and asked for public comment.

The Social Justice Group accepted the Commission’s request, and a reasonably detailed response was forwarded in late March. This included responses to the 22 questions that the Commission asked in their main report. Our submission is available on the diocesan [website](#).

Our final comment to the Commission was:

The report overall is a particularly useful document with much detail that will be invaluable as we, collectively, determine how we are going to do our part in keeping temperature rise to less than 1.5 degrees. Our Government has shown, with the COVID-19 pandemic, that it is prepared to be guided by science. As we tackle the climate crisis, following the science will be even more important.

Christian concern about climate change and the environment is not new. Back in 1967 Professor Lynn White Jr. wrote in an article ‘The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis’² that “*the Western Christian worldview supports and encourages humanity’s aggressive project to dominate and exploit nature.... Humanity came to be seen as uniquely made in the image of God and as having ‘dominion’ or control over all the creatures of the earth – ideas based in the biblical creation stories (Genesis 1:26-30).*”

White argued further that Western Christianity has God requiring ‘man’ to dominate and exploit nature. Even some modern translations of the Bible have God telling Adam and Eve in Genesis 1: “*Fill the earth with people and bring it under your*

control. Rule over the fish in the sea...” (CEV Genesis 1:27). However, the same translation in Genesis 2:15 has, “*The Lord God put the man in the Garden of Eden to take care of it and look after it.*”

White makes it very clear that secularism is not the answer to the climate crisis; rather Christianity needs to change radically. He writes, “*What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny – that is, by religion... More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion or rethink our old one.*”

Dr Emily Colgan, Senior Lecturer in Biblical Studies at Trinity Methodist Theological College and a member of the Auckland Anglican Response to the Climate Crisis (AARCC) group, has recently produced a paper on this subject, ‘The Interconnectedness of All Reality,’ where she suggests that we should possibly start by taking more notice of the Genesis 2 story of creation rather than Genesis 1. Emily can be contacted on ecolgan@trinitycollege.ac.nz

New element discovered!

The following piece of satire has been doing the rounds of social media again recently:

Oxford University researchers have discovered the densest element yet known to science.

The new element, Governmentium (symbol=Gv), has one neutron, 25 assistant neutrons, 88 deputy neutrons and 198 assistant deputy neutrons, giving it an atomic mass of 312.

These 312 particles are held together by forces called morons, which are surrounded by vast quantities of lepton-like particles called pillocks.

Since Governmentium has no electrons, it is inert. However, it can be detected because it impedes every reaction with which it comes into contact.

A tiny amount of Governmentium can cause a reaction that would normally take less than a second, to take from 4 days to 4 years to complete.

Governmentium has a normal half-life of 2 to 6 years.

It does not decay, but instead undergoes a reorganisation in which a portion of the assistant neutrons and deputy neutrons exchange places.

In fact, Governmentium's mass will increase over time, since each reorganisation will cause more morons to become neutrons, forming isodopes.

This characteristic of moron promotion leads some scientists to believe that Governmentium is formed whenever morons reach a critical concentration. This hypothetical quantity is referred to as a critical morass.

When catalysed with money, Governmentium becomes Administratium (symbol=Ad), an element that radiates just as much energy as Governmentium, since it has half as many pillocks but twice as many morons.³

Do we have an isotope of Governmentium in New Zealand?

² [HistoricalRoots_of_EcologicalCrisis_\(1\).pdf\(exeter.ac.uk\)](#)

³ <https://blog.independent.org/2017/12/18/governmentium/>