



SPC News

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Shaping a just society: a place for a Christian worldview?

Peter Whiting

At Social Policy Connections, we take as our main objective "to help bring the social involvements of the churches into contemporary policy debates, and shape a just society". In Australia at this time of a declining influence of a Christian worldview in favour of an aggressively secular one, such an objective may seem a bit "quaint" or even simply "misguided". Does the voice of the churches, tainted as it has become by the church moral and governance failings highlighted by the Royal Commission, still have a valid place in Australian life?

Some people take the notion of the separation of church and State most literally, and argue there should be no place for the church view in the polity of the State. They argue Church moral teaching should be solely for the "private" formation of the individual.

The articles and presentations we publish on the various SPC media platforms argue to the contrary. Benedict XVI succinctly represents the position:

"A just society must be the achievement of politics, not of the Church. Yet the promotion of justice through efforts to bring about openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good is something which concerns the Church deeply." (Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, #28.)

The Christian emphasis on the communitarian notion of the 'common good' stands in obvious distinction to the liberal, secular emphasis on the individual. Even in her famous 1987 interview that "there's no such thing as society", Margaret Thatcher acknowledged there were individual men and women and families through whom the State must operate. It is our aim at SPC to inform and advocate so that these individual men and women and families can become promoters of a just society, and together prevail on their representatives to enact policies and legislation that look to the demands of the 'common good'.

In this April newsletter, we bring you articles asking some of the key questions which should be asked by the community and its elected representatives. Peace in and between communities and countries is an essential precondition to a fully just world, and requires a strong moral underpinning committed to the common good. **Paul Rule** comments on a critical new look at the Just War theory, with a new emphasis on non-violence and a

primary pursuit of peace. **Caesar D'Mello** argues for active non-violence as a means to sustainable peace.

We are at a time when we see the Australian public – and the government – looking to give less to the needy than ever in other parts of the world. The aid sector fears the next budget will see further cuts in overseas aid, as the budgeting calculus embraces cuts in company tax rates. Public commitment to overseas aid NGOs is in decline, after adjusting for inflation.



Mitchell Toomey, Director UN Sustainable Development Goals Action Campaign (SDG Action Campaign), at the Global Festival of Ideas for Sustainable Development at the World Conference Center (WCC) in Bonn March 03 2017.

Libby Rogerson comments on two recent summits addressing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Speakers at the summits acknowledged that Australians know little of the SDGs, and insisted that, while the goals are achievable, this will require a process for engaging the general public, increased collaboration and funding.

The treatment of asylum seekers and refugees has received regular criticism in SPC publications. Recent government announcements on reduced support payments are an unwelcome development. **Spencer**

Zifcak identifies a range of government policies being applied globally which have created the unfolding international tragedy. Alarming, he concludes there is not one adverse policy or action that is not being used by the Australian Government. **Daniel Ghezlbash** argues against Europe adopting Australian and US policies for managing the refugee and asylum seeker situation. To do so, he argues, would inflict a mortal wound on the universal principle of asylum.

Rob Stewart looks at the current push for reduction in corporate tax rates, and concludes that linking private sector wage increases to public sector funding cuts is bad policy and bad politics.

The writers mentioned above are not necessarily Christian, or explicitly reliant on Christian thought. But, collectively, they raise key justice issues of which the public should be aware, and express conclusions that fit within the Christian worldview of a just society in which the common good is served by good policy, and informed by fruitful dialogue between civil and Christian thinking.



Why do the critical Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) receive so little attention in Australia?

Libby Rogerson

Most Australians know little or nothing about the SDGs; even the Minister stated "many do not understand the SDGs, why we have them, and what they are for". The President of UNAA, Major-General Michael Smith, was harsh in his criticism of the SDG process in Australia, saying "people don't know about the SDGs, they think they are just for poor people". He then went on to note that there is no PR campaign for the SDGs, no national plan, and no SDG champions. UNAA has written to all politicians, asking that the SDGs be embedded in all government policies.

In a similar vein, Marc Purcell, the CEO of ACFID, urged government to model the implementation of the SDGs at home and have a national plan, while Sharon Smee from the International Women's Development Agency argued for gender equality and recognition of the SDGs across all policies.

Just War or Just Peace?

Paul Rule



Kurdistan Kurds want peace. Jan Sefti. flickr

A little-noticed revolution has occurred recently in Catholic thinking about war and peace. Effectively, Just War calculus has been abandoned for a new emphasis on non-violence and a primary pursuit of peace.

Active non-violence & the Sustainable Development Goals

Caesar D'Mello



Projections on Sustainable Development Goals & 70th Anniversary of the United Nations. United

The SDGs call for a fundamental transformation in the economic, social, and political

life of the world blighted by conflict, discord and inequality. While some voices propose violence as an answer to intractable issues, Pope Francis has urged us to foster "non-violence as a style of politics for peace". To succeed in this, we need to "revitalise the tools of non-violence" which can help establish a climate for sustainable solutions.



N. MELZER
34th Session of the Human Rights Council. UN Geneva. flickr cc.

Government policies globally, and the torture of refugees

Spencer Zifcak

Such policies vary from country to country, but a clutch of the most harmful may readily be identified. These include repression and detention "designed to discourage new arrivals, the criminalisation and deterrence of irregular arrivals, the separation of family members, inadequate reception conditions and medical care, and the denial or excessive prolongation of status determination or habeas corpus proceedings, including expedited returns in the absence of such proceedings". As a particularly traumatic form of migration-related confinement, the report singles out long-term, off-shore detention on isolated islands or extra-territorial enclaves.



Why Europe shouldn't follow Australia's lead on asylum seekers

Daniel Ghezlbash

Australia's harsh asylum policies have been [touted as a possible solution](#) to Europe's so-called refugee crisis. Politicians in the [UK](#), [France](#), [Holland](#), [Denmark](#), [Austria](#) and [Belgium](#) have advocated for an Australian-style approach aimed at blocking asylum seekers from accessing Europe. But, for a few reasons, Europe should be wary of following this lead.



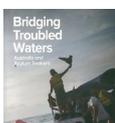
A living wage. Siân for London. flickr cc.

Wage rises in the neoliberal new world order: bad policy & bad politics

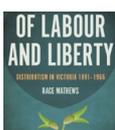
Rob Stewart

If proposed tax cuts are passed, there will either be offsetting increases in taxes elsewhere in the economy, or cuts in public spending in areas such as education and health, or both. If the tax cuts are not passed and you don't receive a pay rise, don't blame your boss. Blame the Labor Party. Forget the fact these are salad days for the corporate sector. Forget that, in the past, factors such as productivity, profitability, and company growth were key indicators of affordability of wage rises in industrial and enterprise bargaining. These factors are no longer enough. That's all in the past. We now live in the neoliberal new world order.

Books for sale through SPC



Bridging Troubled Waters: Australia & Asylum Seekers. Tony Ward. A project of the Yarra Institute for Religion & Social Policy. Special SPC offer \$25.



Of Labour & Liberty: Distributism in Victoria 1891-1966. (Monash Publishing.) Race Mathews. \$30 plus postage.



Bonded through tragedy, united in hope. The Catholic Church & East Timor's struggle for independence. A Memoir. (Garratt Publishing.) Therese and Jim D'Orsa, with Hilton Deakin. \$25 plus postage, or at the SPC office.