



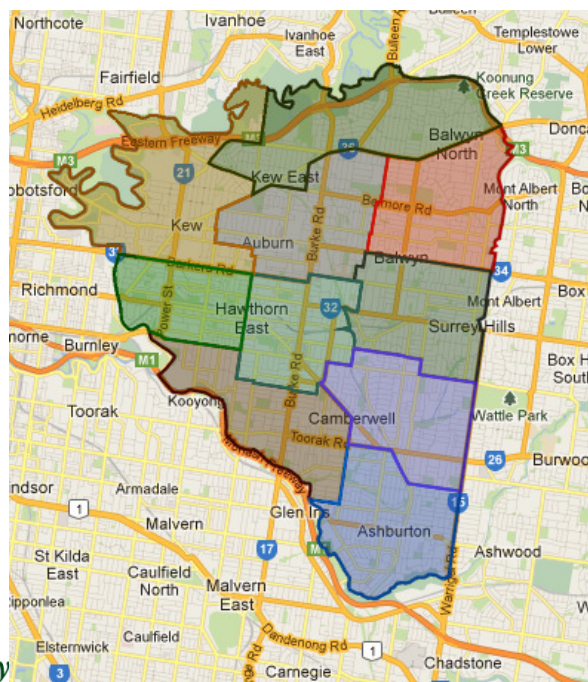
The ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF MELBOURNE The Social Responsibilities Committee September Newsletter 2013

The SRC Website:

<http://www.melbourne.anglican.com.au/Search/default.aspx?k=sOCIAL%20RESPONSIBILITIES%20COMMITTEE>

A LOCAL RESPONSE TO GAMBLING

St John's, Camberwell, has been working with churches of other denominations in the Boroondara Council area to encourage local pokie venues to adopt practices that minimise problem gambling.



Boroondara is not an area with especially high rates of problem gambling, compared, for instance with Brimbank, yet \$20 million is lost annually and all local churches and aid organisations feel the impact with families coming to them for assistance with debts, counselling and provision of food and clothing.

Five venues in the Boroondara municipality were approached: Club Hawthorn, The Harp of Erin Hotel, The Palace Hotel, The Riversdale Hotel, and The Tower Hotel. They were asked to introduce \$1 maximum bets, as well as pre-commitment technology, so gamblers would have to set maximum loss limits.

Representatives of the four churches involved - Our Lady of Victories Roman Catholic, St. John's Anglican, the Uniting Church, and The Salvation Army – made contact with each of the venues, with mixed results. While some of the venues were receptive to the possibility of working with local community organisations to provide support to problem gamblers after the damage has been done, all resisted the idea of implementing proactive measures to prevent damage from the outset.

Worshippers at the four churches will now send petitions and emails to all local members of the Victorian and Federal Parliaments as well as local councillors, calling on them to support these legislative changes. This ecumenical church group will also make a submission to the Boroondara Council to urge that the changes which the venues are resisting become council policy at the council's forthcoming review of its gambling strategy.

Productivity Commission research shows that 43 per cent of all poker machine revenue comes from the pockets of addicted gamblers. In the last financial year \$1.2 billion of these losses went into the Victorian Government's revenue. This represents tax savings for those who don't gamble but exploitation of those who cannot control their gambling behaviour.

Recent election statements show us the need for vigilance on problem gambling has not gone away. The coalition announced that in government it would assemble an advisory body from the gambling industry. Without counter-balancing voices from those in the community who pick up the pieces from problem gambling and who do the sociological research, this is the fox in the hen house. The coalition would also adopt a policy of voluntary pre-commitment – the ineffective alternative to mandatory pre-commitment, which is effective.

The Labour government is not much better on gambling policy. Mandatory precommitment and one dollar bets were a policy commitment until a change in the balance of numbers in parliament. Peter Slipper's move out of the Coalition meant they no longer needed Andrew Wilkie's support.

For more information on this initiative, please contact the Reverend Richard Wilson – 0417 014 595.

THE TENSION OF ETHICAL REASONING

In August Fr. Frank Brennan SJ gave the 43rd Barry Marshall Lecture at the Trinity College



Theological School. The theme was 'The public, the Church and asylum seekers'. This was Brennan in the role of an "honest broker" responding to Kevin Rudd's challenge for anyone wanting a different approach to the Government's policy – "what would you do to stop thousands of people including children, drowning off shore, other than undertake a policy direction like this? What is the alternative answer?" The lecture walks difficult line between "what is ethical and what works." I came away from listening to the lecture with mixed feelings. I had difficulty hearing the ethical in the midst of what works, thinking many things can

be made to work. However, reading this detailed argument restored the balance. I hope this very brief summary might encourage others to read it.

Brennan offers a six point response to Rudd's challenge, including a medium term negotiation of a regional solution especially with the Indonesian Government (upstream processing and protection of refugees, a "real queue"). In the short term the boats can only be stopped by a "some sort of shock and awe campaign." Whether this can be ethically justified is pursued by considering parallels in difficult ethical discussions of the use of nuclear weapons and the justification "if any for the use of torture." Brennan believes it can be justified – to save lives – a bipartisan approach, after completing necessary homework, with a clearer focus on the wellbeing of those seeking asylum than either of the major party offers at present, especially to do with "unaccompanied minors and other disabled people who have reached Australia". The proposals aim at something better than turning the boats back on the high seas, better than the Malaysian, Manus Island and Nauru 'solutions' and better than the unworkable 'No Advantage' test. In view of the numbers of people

arriving by boat Brennan is particularly concerned to make the distinction between asylum seekers in direct flight from persecution and other asylum seekers. The latter would be safely returned regional processing centres. After a minimum check all refugees that arriving in Australia would be released into the community, while the processing of their claims proceeded. For the lecture go to, <http://eurekastreet.com.au/article.aspx?aeid=37066#.Ug1TupJqI49>.

The lecture presented a proposal in the voice of 'public reason' while also invoking three theological themes: the 8th July speech by Pope Francis I at Lampedusa (a beacon for asylum seekers from Africa) "Yet God is asking each of us: 'Where is the blood of your brother that cries out to me?'"; a paraphrase of the Parable of Dives and Lazarus; and a quote from Morris West about what gives weight to pronouncements by religious leaders. I am sure all these all help motivate and orient Brennan whose proposal is in the voice of 'public reason' to obtain a hearing from politicians and a chance of making a positive difference to asylum seekers. "Those who speak with a Church mantle must speak with the voice of public reason. Therein lies the tension".

I'm not sure where that "must" comes from. I think Christians must speak in a way that can be heard by their intended audience – some famous scriptures to the contrary notwithstanding. I wouldn't make 'public reason' the criterion for such speaking because 'public reason' is deeply ambiguous, both from a Christian stand point and where it falls below its own best reasoning (see the next section). The Church's speaking in public cannot ignore the ambiguity - rather, let us bless the 'resonances' and challenge the 'dissonances'.

Brennan provided a lengthy challenge to those characterising asylum seekers as 'illegal', which is the voice of 'public reason' on both sides of politics. On the other hand, his language of administering "shock and awe" to those arriving by boat uses a form of public discourse recalls the dreadful cost administered to individuals and society in Iraq by a superpower. Do we want to go on being a little echo of that kind of power? We need rather an emphasis on the morality of making sure the most vulnerable people do not bear the heavy burden of 'detering' others could be based on the high standard of the land of the 'fair go', which would also promote exemplary treatment of asylum seekers, rather than their demonization.

The Pope wears the Church mantle and yet he does not confine himself to the voice of 'public reason'. Rendering Australia inaccessible to asylum seekers arriving by boat is a powerful way of stopping people coming by boat at the risk of their lives. It saves the blood of our brothers and sisters. It should be accompanied by raising the intake of refugees to a much higher annual level. Recently Tim Costello was asking just what number this would be. This is another way of saving the blood of more people fleeing real danger to their lives and must be part of being a 'good neighbour' with our neighbours. Brennan notes both points. The PNG solution as the particular way of rendering Australia inaccessible needed a longer lead time than politics demanded. It should have included signalling changes in policy to people in Indonesia. Brennan made the point verbally that when advertisements in all the papers in Australia were telling us about the new PNG policy nothing similar was being done in Indonesia. It would also include more effectively going after the people smugglers directly. If it is possible for our intelligence agencies to tell that asylum seekers are asking for their money back from people smugglers it is surely possible for us to go after the smugglers directly. I don't mean by buying back the boats but by enhanced law enforcement.

Brennan quoted Morris West. "The pronouncements of religious leaders will carry more weight, will be seen as more relevant if they are delivered in the visible context of a truly pastoral function, which is the mediation of the mystery of creation; the paradox of the silent Godhead and suffering humanity." Brennan then continued .. "Without trust between those whose consciences differ, we will not scale the heights of the silence of the Godhead nor plumb the depths of the suffering of

humanity; we will have failed to incarnate the mystery of God here among us. This mystery is to be embraced in the inner sanctuary of conscience where God's voice echoes within, to be enfolded in the relationships we share as the people of God, and to be proclaimed in our calls for justice in the public domain." Fair enough. But then, at most, 'public reason' may on occasion provide the flesh in which our incarnating the mystery of God takes place.

Having written all that I discovered the latest *Anglican Media* alert (thank you Roland!) with these words from Frank Brennan to the Australian Religious Press Association on September 7, "You are at your best when you understand the culture of which you are a part in the public square, but you're also at your best when you stand aside in a counter-cultural way to proclaim a Gospel which is truly revolutionary in the modern cultural context." Let us pray we will all be more often at our best in this matter.

NO TAXATION WITHOUT REPRESENTATION

The Victorian State Government is refusing to disclose the business case for the \$4-6billion East West road. The rationale for the refusal is the very familiar 'commercial in confidence' frequently used by the previous state government. There appears to be a widely held and informed assessment that the project is deeply misguided on a range of criteria, which articulate various aspects of the 'common good'. In addition the refusal of transparency is questionable, given (i) that it is tax payers' money that is being spent by our representatives in government; (ii) the principle 'no taxation without representation'; (iii) 'commercial in confidence' promotes a business consideration above the society and the way it governs itself, which is surely mistaken.

This lack of transparency (now taken for granted) is a decadent form of 'public reason'. It means taxpayers cannot be clear whether the terms under which such a very large project is pursued represents their interests or sectional interests. The proper representation of citizens is called into question. Our democracy is damaged. It gets 'hollowed out'. No amount of pointing to our fair elections and the peaceful hand over of power repairs or compensates for this damage. Under such conditions, how could any government retain democratic legitimacy?

This is of theological interest because in Genesis 1:28, Psalm 8, humankind has been given 'dominium' (sovereign power) over the earth but not over each other. How we cede some of this God given sovereign power to those who represent us is part of the manifestation of the image of God on earth, or its idolatrous caricature. Is this something church leaders could properly raise with the Premier at their next meeting or sooner? Would it not be worth a public statement by Christians to our political leaders – on the steps of Parliament - that we find this lack of transparency utterly unacceptable? Might this not help redeem 'public reason' in politics from its present parlous state?

ANOTHER 'TROUBLESOME' PRIEST APPEARS ON RECENT '7.30 REPORT'

In the lead up to the elections the Rev. Roger Prowd (Vicar, St.Stephen's Gardenvale) attended a local community meet-the-candidates. His question attracted the interest of the 7.30Report that was filming the meeting and was later shown on the ABC.

Roger's question was, 'Most people in the room and many others still think of climate change as the greatest moral issue of the day. Why is it that politicians do not discuss this matter within a moral framework but always place it in an economic framework?' One candidate replied by saying he didn't understand the question. The other candidate responded by loudly saying 'Don't lecture me

on morals.' The question touched on an intrinsically important issue, which in different ways is confirmed by the two responses.

We do see politicians grappling with ethical issues in speeches made during debates for a 'conscience vote'. We also saw moral perspectives at work in the bipartisan support for the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the Gonski report on education. A lot of Australians find this perspective absent from the responses to asylum seekers by both major parties. An ethical perspective is hard to find when discussing anything to do with the economy or anything that might impact on the economy. On the other hand it is very common for the 'good' of education to be spoken of wholly in terms of how it benefits the economy and helps an individual find work. This leaves out the wider 'good' for an individual's life as well as the common good (our commonwealth) that education should uphold.

The problem may partly be that the consequences of an ethical perspective could be as big or an even bigger challenge. For example, climate change requires we move away from a fossil fuel economy. What would an alternative energy economy look like (there are examples – see 'Beyond Zero Emissions') and what are the transition policies needed to responsibly promote this transition? Perhaps there are examples of the latter but they are not in mainstream public discussion. (One relevant example - a few years ago Brian Howe proposed transitional employment policies.) As a short test case, the next and last newsletter for 2013 will report on what statements on this transition policy we have found on various websites.

SOCIAL JUSTICE SUNDAY 29TH SEPTEMBER

- From the National Council of Churches

Social Justice Matters. "What does the Lord require of you?"

The Social Justice Network of the NCC has prepared materials for Christians in Australia on the following themes, available on the websites below:

1. Social Justice: The Biblical Foundations
2. Millenium Development Goals: A job that Needs Finishing
3. Taking Responsibility for Justice: The Case of Refugees
4. Disability, Spirituality, Accessibility
5. The Call for Leadership: the Prevention of Violence against Women and Girls

 [Social Justice Matters](#) ;  [Worship Resources 2013](#) ; <http://ncca.org.au/departments/social-justice>

- From the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

Lazarus At Our Gate, A Critical Moment in the Fight Against World Poverty,
Social Justice Statement, 2013-2014.

ANTI-POVERTY WEEK SERVICE – VCC SOCIAL QUESTIONS COMMISSION
1.15PM, 15TH OCTOBER, ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL.
PREACHER FR. JOE CADDY CEO OF CATHOLIC CARE.

Please send any other stories to the SRC Newsletter, sames@unimelb.edu.au .
Rev. Canon Dr. Stephen Ames
EO Melbourne Diocesan Social Responsibilities Committee