



## THE COST OF PEACE AT CHRISTMAS

The 2005 film *Joyeux Noël* ('*Merry Christmas*') about the World War I Christmas truce of December 1914, is a fictionalised account of an actual event that took place. The film offers an insight into what happens when we recognise another person's humanity and see them as they are, instead of the unknown enemy.

When we look at the stories of Jesus in the Gospels, we see that a miraculous part of his ministry was in seeing people for who they were. He stops the people stoning the woman caught in adultery saying "let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to

throw a stone at her" (Jn 8:1-11). He overturns the idea that justice is about an eye-for-an-eye. Instead he says, "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt: 5:38-45). This is at the heart of the Christian message – that loving one another can be costly, but ultimately love and forgiveness are the only ways to overcome evil, as that is what breaks the cycle of violence.

Pope Benedict XVI put it well when he said: "For Christians, nonviolence is not merely tactical behaviour but a person's way of being, the attitude of one who is so convinced of God's love and power

that he or she is not afraid to tackle evil with the weapons of love and truth alone. Love of one's enemy constitutes the nucleus of the 'Christian revolution.'

We have the opportunity at Christmas of re-assessing what is important in our lives – what new things do we want to give life to? What gifts do we have to offer? What things do we want to put behind us so that we can live our lives out of a place of love and non-violence?

May Christmas be a time when you have a sense of the hope that comes with the true power of peace.

## PROGRESS ON SEA BORDER WITH TIMOR LESTE

In October 2016 we requested you write letters to the federal government urging them to reach a just settlement with Timor Leste on a permanent sea boundary and granting Timor Leste access to vital gas resources to fund things like hospitals and schools.

In early September, the Australian and Timor Leste governments declared they had reached an agreement on “the central elements” of a sea border in the Timor Sea and a framework for the oversight of the Greater Sunrise gas deposit.

Xanana Gusmao, the leader of the Timor Leste delegation in the negotiations with the Australian government, described the agreement as an “historic agreement that marks the beginning of a new era in Timor Leste’s friendship with Australia.”

The final agreement is expected to be completed by the end of October 2017.

Thanks to everyone who wrote letters in support of a just settlement on the sea border.

For a number of years we have invited you to write letters and send postcards to companies to stop cotton from Uzbekistan being used in their products.

The Uzbek regime continues to force people to plant and pick cotton. This disrupts schools and universities and hospitals, as teachers and medical staff are forced out into the fields. Every year there have been deaths as those forced to work in the fields lack proper training. Farmers are forced to sell the cotton at a price the regime sets, with the regime then selling the cotton into the world market and pocketing the profit.

This year, after international pressure, university students, teachers and medical workers

were recalled from the forced labour in the fields in some districts on 22 September 2017. While forced labour continued in other parts of Uzbekistan, the removal of at least some people from the forced labour regime shows that international pressure is having an impact.

The regime has also tried to cover up the use of forced labour by requiring people to sign statements that they have voluntarily signed up to pick cotton, under threat of losing their normal job or expulsion from school or denial of social security payments.

Thanks to everyone who has previously taken action in response to actions we have issued on the problem of forced labour in the Uzbekistan cotton fields.

## POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS IN COTTON INDUSTRY IN UZBEKISTAN



## UPDATE ON PAYDAY LENDING

In July 2017 we asked you to write to the Australian government urging them to introduce laws to rein in payday lenders and consumer lease companies as a priority.

The draft legislation has now been released for public comment.

Thank you to everyone who wrote letters in response to the action.

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In mid-August the Commonwealth Bank ruled out providing any loan to Adani for the mine.

The Indian multinational company Adani wants to build one of the biggest coal mines in the world in the Galilee Basin in Queensland.

The mine involves dredging 1.7 million tonnes of seafloor

from inside the Reef's World Heritage Area, sending a coal ship superhighway through the Reef, and destroying habitat for dugongs, dolphins and turtles.

Thanks to everyone who wrote letters to the banks on this issue.

## COMM BANK RULES OUT LOAN TO ADANI



## TAX REFORMS PAYING OFF

Our campaigning is having an impact! The Government has introduced a number of laws and provided the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) with over 1,000 staff to address tax cheating by multinational corporations. Company and superannuation taxes have increased to \$79.8 billion in the 2016-2017 financial year, a 21.8% increase over the 2015-2016 financial year.

The ATO released an analysis in mid-October that found in 2015, large corporations in Australia cheated on an estimated \$2.5 billion of tax payments. With the recent reforms, this should be much less in the future.

In the last year, the ATO issued notices for the payment of \$4 billion from multinational corporations who had cheated on their taxes in Australia, with nearly \$3 billion owed by seven very large multinational corporations.

The ATO won a court case with tax cheat Chevron and

as a result, an additional \$10 billion will be paid by corporations that otherwise would have used Chevron's tax cheating tactics. The money is enough to build 10 hospitals, 200 big schools and Sydney's light rail network. The court ruled Chevron had to pay \$340 million for the taxes it had already cheated on. Chevron had not paid any tax on its profits in five of the last seven years.

The new laws mean US-based technology corporations Apple, Google, Microsoft, IBM and Facebook have acknowledged an additional \$7 billion in taxable sales in Australia. In the five years to 2011, Apple only paid \$171 million, but as a result of our campaigning, they paid \$630 million in tax between 2011 and 2016.

The head of the ATO, Chris Jordan, told a Senate Committee in late August that, "We have not only cleaned up the past and any back tax owed, but critically, we have locked in future arrangements."

To get ahead of new avoidance schemes, the ATO has required any corporation with more than \$250 million in revenue to alert the ATO of any

position they are taking on paying tax that the ATO might question as "contestable". Failure to do so will result in a fine.

The New Zealand government has now started to introduce similar tax reforms there.

The next challenge in our campaign will be to continue to challenge company assumptions about what constitutes taxable income. For example, Google accepts over \$1 billion of its revenue comes from advertising by Australians and that it must pay tax on it. Facebook reports only \$326 million in advertising revenue in Australia because it only counts Australians who book through the Melbourne or Sydney office. Facebook continues to claim that when Australians buy advertising from it, most of the sales take place in Ireland. The Irish government has a long history of assisting multinational corporations to cheat on paying their taxes.

Thanks to everyone who wrote letters and signed postcards in support of reforms to stop multinational corporate tax cheating.

# TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF ENOUGH – HOW CAN WE LOOK AT ‘PRIVATISATION’?



The Public Purse Whoop90 (Own work) [CC BY-SA 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)], via Wikimedia Commons

By Cath James and Mark Zirnsak

Between 1987 and 2013, Australian governments sold off public assets worth \$194 billion. Victoria has experienced more privatisation than all of the other states combined. Successive governments sold off the Commonwealth Bank, the domestic and international airlines, naval dockyards, defence-related aircraft factories, communications satellite systems, the natural gas pipeline system, the national railway service, serum laboratories, the management of superannuation funds for public sector employees and a housing network for ex-servicemen.<sup>1</sup>

The privatisation of electricity and public transport in Australia have been major failures. Electricity prices have risen dramatically. Removal of the secure, low-cost supply to regional areas has hurt Australians living outside the major cities. The general cost of electricity has been inflated by the huge expansion in marketing and managerial costs.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Henrike Brussaard, Bronwyn Price, with the support of Prof. Rob Watts (RMIT University). *The Blind Men and the Elephant: Getting the picture clear on privatisation*, Melbourne Unitarian Church, June 2016. <http://melbourneunitarian.org.au/index.php/issues-campaigns/369-impact-of-privatisation-in-australia>

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

In effect, what has occurred is simply the redistribution of wealth and control from the public to the private.

One theological lens we might use to see how the church could respond to this is a ‘theology of enough’ The nature of God can be seen as one of abundance; the outpouring of God’s creative energy, God’s abundant love, forgiveness and mercy. While this abundance is freely given, we need to respond to it and be focused on God for it to be realised.

Jesus says, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” (Jn 10:10). How might we understand this? Jesus warns against all sorts of material greed. “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal” (Matt 6:19). At the end of this passage it says, “You cannot serve God and money.” (Matt 6:24)

Jesus also tells the story of a rich man who builds bigger and bigger barns to store up his crops. God responds by saying ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ (Luke 12:17-18)

So while the abundance is there, it is not in the accumulation but in the sharing that it is realised. In the early church, as described in Acts, ‘no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common.’ And ‘There was not a needy person among them.’ (Acts 4:32-35)

In Australia, one of the principles that underlies our taxation system is redistribution. It is a recognition that we can’t work for our whole lives, and there is a need to not only redistribute some of that wealth, but to ensure a safety net and build roads, schools and hospitals.

The guiding principle of the Sabbath, the pinnacle of creation, also informs our understanding of the God of abundance. The word ‘Sabbath’ comes from a Hebrew word meaning ‘rest’. To rest is completely at odds with the ideology and policies behind privatisation, which can be traced back to the influence of neo-liberalism. Neoliberalism came to prominence in the 1970s due to a confluence of social, political and economic factors.<sup>3</sup> The 1960s saw the rise of post-modernism, which

<sup>3</sup> David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.1.

questioned what was 'normal', 'true', 'superior' or 'just'.<sup>4</sup> In a world where we cannot agree on what is 'good' and what is 'bad' because it is all a matter of personal or cultural perspective, measurement offers a solution. Thus more is better than less and to grow is progress.<sup>5</sup> Neoliberalism was able to combine this valuing of growth with the personal value of freedom.

In the neo-liberal model, caring for children, socialising with friends, getting married, going to church, designing a welfare program, giving to a charity (which were previously seen as social, ethical, ritualised, faith or irrational activities) are now calculated strategies for the maximisation of private gain.<sup>6</sup> Even the idea of rest has been marketised. *Entrepreneur* ran an article in June 2016 called, 'The Secret to Increased Productivity: Taking Time Off'<sup>7</sup> In the Sabbath understanding, rest is 'to be kept holy'.

Government is often spoken of as a completely stand-alone institution, especially in church circles. The reality is that government as an institution is a place of struggle between different ideological positions, of those elected to government and those interests in society they represent. For any part of society to take no interest in government is, in effect, to surrender it to other parts of society that wish to use it to pursue their ideological aims. Thus when we as a church say we take an interest in the well-

being of people and society, we also need to see our role as engaging with government to influence policies and outcomes consistent with the Gospel vision for society we wish to see.

Despite the significant number of public assets sold off, services outsourced and public/private partnerships entered into, governments are still considering privatising more of our public wealth. Increasingly, church community service agencies are dependent on government revenue to provide services for those in need in our society. In a culture of privatisation, there is a risk agencies end up towing the line

**JESUS SAYS, "I CAME THAT THEY MAY HAVE LIFE AND HAVE IT ABUNDANTLY."**

of the government of the day in order to secure funding because they don't want to jeopardise the ability to deliver services to people who need them or cut back on the staff that work for the agency. Further, agencies often feel they have no grass-roots base to pressure government, reducing their belief they have any real ability to influence the decisions of the government of the day. Thus, rather than opposing the ideology driving these policies, agencies are more likely to get caught up in discussions about the size of a cut to their service or where the money is to come from and unwittingly reinforce the principles driving the cuts, meaning they will continue.

As an employee of a UnitingCare agency notes:<sup>8</sup>

*Having delivered services under DSS Employment contracts for 10 years, we can attest that the competitive market has significantly reduced collaboration and partnership models. Due to the competitive star rating system, we have been driven to create efficiencies and this has meant poorer outcomes for clients because we have had to have higher caseloads, are unable to add work outside of the contract and the measures do not capture or reward the additional outcomes for clients.*

*Clearly there is no easy or cheap path back from decisions already made regarding privatisation. However, we can choose not to further privatise services.*

At the 2017 Synod meeting, the Justice and International Mission unit had a proposal passed seeking an in-principle agreement to no further privatisation of human services unless there is a demonstrated ability to provide better outcomes for the people needing the service. This needs to be without the exploitation of those employed to provide the service. This we see as a small step towards ensuring that all people have life and have it abundantly, rather than a wealthy few.

<sup>4</sup> William Davies, *The Happiness Industry*, (London: Verso, 2015), 145.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.* p146.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p.150-151.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/237446>

<sup>8</sup> UnitingCare Australia, "Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Introducing Competition and Informed User Choice into Human Services", July 25, 2016, 13.

## THE PERILS OF DRUG TESTING UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE

In our last mailing we invited you to write to cross-bench Senators to oppose the federal government's plans to drug test people who are unemployed and compel them into treatment services (where they exist) under threat of having their financial support cut off.

The head of the Australian Medical Association, Dr Michael Gannon, said the proposed legislation was "mean and non-evidence based" and would not help people who had problems with drugs.

In early August 2017, the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) President Dr Catherine Yelland also expressed opposition to government's plans. "In reality, it is applying a blunt instrument to a very complex problem. It won't help these people and it won't motivate them to seek treatment. What it will do is cause extreme harm to a highly vulnerable population."

The RACP also expressed concern that the Bill will allow people with drug or alcohol dependency to be punished if they miss appointments with Centrelink or related to job seeking, even if they were seeking rehabilitation or help.

If you did not get a chance to write a letter from the last mailing, it is not too late to do so.

## UPDATE ON ILLEGAL LOGGING

In February 2015, we invited you to write to the federal government asking them to not water down the current laws stopping illegally logged timber coming into Australia.

Illegal logging impacts on biodiversity and the livelihoods of millions of people. Each year people who oppose the logging are killed by those profiting from the illegal trade.

Some Australian timber businesses and importers have lobbied to scrap the laws or at least fatally weaken the law.

Since that February 2015 letter-writing action, the Justice and International unit has backed up your letter writing and postcard efforts with lobbying the government to maintain the law as it is.

On 5 October 2017 the federal government announced it would keep the law as it is with only one change. The proposed change is that timber products certified under the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and Programme for Endorsement Certification (PEFC) schemes will be assumed to have been legally sourced. This change means that an importer or processor will only need to check that the certification is valid and does not need to do any further verification.

The weakness is that occasionally FSC or PEFC certified products are illegally sourced and businesses no longer need to do a basic check to see if this is the case.

The unit will continue to lobby to have this change blocked by the non-government parties in the Senate.

Thanks to everyone who took action to stop the watering down of the illegal logging regulations. It had a significant impact on curbing the government's proposals to weaken the regulations.

## LATROBE VALLEY COAL MINES PAY FOR CLEAN UP

In July 2016, we invited you to write to the Victorian government to ask them to close Hazelwood and plan for a just transition for the Latrobe Valley. The Victorian government has just announced they are raising mine rehabilitation bonds to the full cost of cleaning up Victoria's coal mines.

This \$337 million increase boosts the chance that the Latrobe Valley mines will be rehabilitated to a safe standard and ensures that the public won't be left with the cost.

The three coal mines in the Latrobe Valley are enormous holes in the ground - many times the size of the Melbourne CBD and up to 200 metres deep. Making them safe from fire and collapse, let alone a space that creates something positive for the community, is a huge challenge.

Please write to Ministers Lily D'Ambrosio, Wade Noonan and Jacinta Allan to thank them for fully implementing the recommendations of the Hazelwood mine fire inquiry and helping protect our community and environment.



# SUPPORTER PROFILE

## REV DR SALLY DOUGLAS

*Sally is the minister at Richmond Uniting Church where she has been for over the last three years. She talks with Cath James about her faith and social justice.*

**SD:** It was rather a shock to find myself becoming a minister as I had completely left the church in my 20s. I continued to explore contemplative Christian practices during this time and about year after I got married, I had an experience where I felt called to ministry. In my Period of Discernment a big part of this discerning was whether I could come back to the UCA. My first placement was looking after six congregations in Daylesford and the surrounding area. In amongst that I gave birth to twins. When I finished this placement I completed a PhD in biblical studies and early church theology. Before that I was a teacher. I taught at Collingwood English language school, although most of my days were spent in Broadmeadows working with children who had recently arrived in Australia with no English at all. I was teaching intensive ESL. The school in Broadmeadows was very under-resourced. For example it didn't have a sick bay, but the kids were excited by homework and books. Once we took them on an outing to Williamstown and one girl kept saying, 'very nice, very nice'. It was the first time she'd seen a beach.

**CJ: What inspires / informs / motivates you in your desire for justice?**

**SD:** It's hard to avoid Jesus' call to radical community. He keeps transgressing the idea that we just need to look after our family and those we love. He reaches out to the woman caught in adultery, the non-Jewish woman at the well, those condemned as outsiders, the people on the margins. It's as if we are asked to be re-born into a new family – one that has no borders, where all people are our brothers and sisters. Jesus reminds me that it's not just about me being generous with what I have left over, it's a call to try and make available to others what's been given to me by chance of birth. I try to live my life in a way that recognises the dignity of others so, for example, trying not to wear clothes that are made with another person's blood, living in a non-grasping way. Our culture is consumerist oriented and it's so sad to see people participating in these temples thinking that this is all that there is to life, because these temples ultimately don't satisfy. I want to step out of that paradigm.

**CJ: What are some ways Richmond Uniting have engaged with social justice issues?**

**SD:** We serve at a local, national and global level: We offer our spaces to organisations such as Jesuit Social Services to provide programs, we help to manage an ecumenical food centre in Richmond, and we make financial contributions to national and international projects. At the moment, we are supporting Uniting World for their water sanitation project in PNG. We have also offered art exhibition spaces for people in the Broadmeadows detention centre and people dealing with mental health issues. Homelessness and the proposed Medically Supervised Injecting Centre are very real local issues for us and as a church we have developed a policy around people sleeping rough – that we will not seek to move them on and we are advocating for a Medically Supervised Injecting Centre.

**CJ: Anything else you'd like to tell us?**

I do barrack for Richmond and have since I was a child!

## JIM UNIT STAFF NEWS

Congratulations to Denisse and Brett who have welcomed their new baby Sienna Paz into the world.

While Denisse is on maternity leave we have welcomed Jenna Mizzi who is doing some research on a short-term basis and Chris Rummery, who will be doing social justice research on a one year contract.

Our prayers are with Jill who is recovering from heart surgery and who will be most likely on sick leave until the end of the year.

Decisions regarding the final number of social justice staff, the new structure they will be part of and the focus of the social justice work should be completed by the end of the year.

The existing staff of the Unit would like to thank you for the support you have given to the social justice mission of the Synod over the years and hope you will continue to do so.

We wish you a peaceful and joyful Christmas break.

### 2018 MAILING DATES

Due to the re-structure we are unable to provide mailing dates and JIM unit event dates for 2018 at this stage.

## ADVENT PRAYER

God of hope,  
who brought love  
into this world,  
be the love  
that dwells between us.

God of hope,  
who brought peace  
into this world,  
be the peace  
that dwells between us.

God of hope,  
who brought joy  
into this world,  
be the joy  
that dwells between us.

God of hope,  
the rock we stand upon,  
be the centre,  
the focus of our lives always,  
and particularly  
this Advent time.

Source:[http://www.faithandworship.com/pryers\\_Advent.htm](http://www.faithandworship.com/pryers_Advent.htm)

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