



Welfare after the Welfare State

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Welfare after the Welfare State:

Reimagining Social Christianity

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Introduction

It is time. It is time to take stock.¹ It is time too for those of us committed to the goals of social welfare to admit that the Australian welfare state, whether interpreted as a labourist, social Christian, social liberal, or social democratic achievement, is largely exhausted as a viable cultural and political project. The welfare state once thought to be the answer to modern society's social question, neither meets the needs of the poor nor promotes social equality. Most damning of all, it no longer calls forth public participation in the furthering of the common weal of a political community called 'Australia'. We have apparently lost a common, normative vocabulary for securing and sustaining such a project. If peoples do not necessarily perish without visions, institutions certainly crumble without common purposes and compelling stories for sustaining their traditions. We can all lament the turn away from social equality as a political project, yet few among us have found new ways to make welfare attractive to others so as to harness the creative energies of wider publics.

While the still "actually-existing welfare state" continues to provide and distribute social rights and benefits, and while too it will continue to maintain a range of interested social policy elites and public groups who contest for welfare rights, dollars and resources, it is increasingly becoming a lean and mean affair. The rapidly widening gaps between the nation's richest and poorest correlate with the decline and split of a large middle class. The growing gap between poor and rich is even more disturbing if one measures it not only in terms of income and wealth but also as

disparities in mobility, education, skills, and information access. As Australia becomes less egalitarian, so too wanes its citizens' collective commitment to sustain a common political culture of social equality and fairness. Bigotry, fear and restlessness become the dominant social emotions of the "casino economy". In such a setting, the next ten years promise intense debate about the "right to work" when the endemic nature of long term unemployment that confronts a significant proportion of the population suggests that there are insufficient things to occupy them. Yet too the feasibility of a universal system of guaranteed basic income is questioned by economists and politicians who complain that there is never enough in the state's coffers or that the global economy will not allow it. While the questions of full employment and income security continue to haunt social policy debates, their very terms are themselves suggestive of the exhaustion of our historic attempt to construct a just political community at the level of the nation state in and through its agencies.

The creation of the Australian nation-state has been a peculiarly communitarian venture involving a collective vision of government as the most suitable vehicle to reconcile and arbitrate class conflict, provide the infrastructure and investment for major capital works, deliver social security and promote social equality. That this project is largely drawing to a close at the time of the centenary celebrations of Federation makes this a propitious time for the Church to engage in a sustained critical effort to reimagine the commonweal in normative and political terms beyond the welfare-state. Such a revisioning involves a recovery of the particular historic contributions by Christians and the churches to the development and practice of the various institutions that together have constituted the welfare state. This story of the historic role of the Australian churches has not been sufficiently appreciated by the churches themselves let alone the wider public. If we are to sort out the gains and losses, the benefits and costs of the welfare state we need to revalue the creativity and the errors of

all those individuals and groups that contributed to its rise in the first place. To move forward in any radical commitment to the gospel ethic of loving our neighbours as ourselves necessarily entails that we look back at our own traditions, in loyalty to its glories, candid criticism of its failures, and confession of its tragic mistakes.

It is too readily forgotten by critics of the foolishness of social Christianity who focus only on their imputed belief in progress, natural law, disinterested service by the state, naivety in the face of human iniquity, of bureaucratisation, etc., that most of these generations of Christians conducted a whole range of social projects and experiments: missions, worker and consumer cooperatives, charity, social work, university settlements, country holidays, national parks, the National Trust, workers' education, etc. One needs only to think of the history of the Brotherhood of St Laurence and its intimate links — personal, ecclesial and intellectual — to the revival of Anglo-Catholic monasticism and radical Christian socialism, experiments in university settlements and cooperativism in its beginnings; its subsequent developments in linking domestic welfare concerns to national issues and international development; and finally, its professionalisation of welfare services and the development of a specialist social policy unit. All of these experiments are startling for their intrinsic modesty but ambitious vision, their tenacious commitment yet lightness of touch — for they were the brainchild of reformers not revolutionaries. That some of these dreams and practices were lost in the labyrinth of the state is no excuse for our own generation not to remember, think again, and try our own hand. That they suffered the blindness of their own generations' prejudices and follies is no excuse for our own myopia.

If my sense is correct, that the welfare state as we have come to know it over the last fifty years is finished as a political project, then we need to proceed to reassess and reinvigorate the church's

own location and purposes in civil society. I wish to begin — and to invite others to do likewise — the constructive task of thinking again about specifically Christian contributions to our political and economic life. In particular, I wish to suggest that the distinctive character of *Christian politics* is the practice of *pluralist and associational democracy* and the particular difference of *Christian economics* is the practice of *gift-exchange*.

By undertaking both tasks in tandem — that of thinking the grammar of welfare beyond that of the welfare state and recounting the story of social Christianity in the making of the welfare state — the church can rediscover itself as a public space, a site for social experiment and innovation. Rather than behave as a sectarian ethnic enclave or else entertain dangerous fantasies of becoming a perfect society of the Pelagians, the church I would like to see develop is a “complex space” (Milbank, 1997) and network of Christian seekers and doers that through the everyday practices of “radical generosity”, “free spirited” democracy and the exercise of a “flair for tradition” (Shanks, 1995) can live for the sake of the whole of society — one that moves between the times of promise and gift. This is a church that would bear witness to divine plenitude extended in and through all God’s people, by and through the practice of radical generosity and friendship “unto this last”. To call the church to these twin tasks is not then a call to inwardness away from the challenges of imagining and creating the humanly just society but is rather to call us to challenge the power politics, amoralism, technocratic reason and utilitarian economics that inform the globalization development project today — a project that has so rapidly eaten away the material sustainability of the welfare state project. The degree of difficulty and the scope of the ambition of these tasks are great, but it is time that we faced up to them. No other group in contemporary society is going to do it for us, and certainly not the state. It is time then that the Christian churches took stock and critically reassessed their own role and contribution to civil society.

This lecture has four main parts: I start by attending to our own standpoint and situation as the church, proceed to outline a fantasy about an Anglican social justice initiative for the centennial celebrations of Federation of Australia in 2001 before turning to a general analysis of the Australian welfare state and the churches' contribution to it. I then conclude with some suggestions for reimagining social Christianity.

“23 Archipelagos”: Anglican Pluralism and the Australian Commonwealth

The Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia, Keith Rayner, was recently reported to have stated that the Anglican church is in grave danger of becoming an ethnic sect, while Donald Cameron, formerly an assistant Bishop of the Diocese of Sydney, claimed a few years ago that the Anglican church is superbly placed to respond to the challenges facing Australia — that is, the Australia of the 1950s. Both comments are not without empirical backing. That the Anglican Church is an ethnic enclave is undeniable in a country of multicultural hues. That the Anglican Church in Australia has too readily presumed that it deserved to be the leading culture in national public life by right of inheritance and thus has succumbed to the sins of complacency, thoughtlessness, atavism, and somnambulism in the face of change, is also beyond doubt. Yet, the Anglican church's weaknesses can also be usefully thought of as potential strengths but only if we are first prepared to engage in a sustained reflection about our historic tradition and the ways in which Anglicanism has developed in this place we call “Australia”. Rather than import Anglicans from other parts of the

post-colonial map of the now expired British empire or embark on another “Decade of Evangelism”, it would serve the church better to reflect on its own trajectory as the Church of England to the Church of England in Australia (1961) and the Anglican Church of Australia (1982), by seeking to renarrate and reinterpret its complex, ambivalent and rich traditions in comparative, historical, sociological and theological terms. Such an exercise might encourage us to see historic opportunities to become a post-colonial, post-ethnic church that neither denies its past nor nostalgically seeks New Jerusalem in “England green and pleasant land” and rediscover its contributions to the social, economic and political life of this nation.

To be Anglican and Australian for the better part of this century has been to be rich, at least middle-class, professional, Anglo-phone and Anglo-phile, civilised, capitalist. Politically it was to be temperamentally conservative or, if liberal, to oscillate on the pendulum swing between liberal and social democrat, always with a strong sense of the cultural nature of public life and capitalist markets. Here, I am not engaged in generalised swearing as beloved by leftist politics of resentment, simply description. Nevertheless, generalisation can be misleading. There is a world of difference between, for example, the Anglican traditions of Sydney and Ballarat, Perth and Melbourne, even as these differences mutually inform the identity of their respective ‘other’ because they are each required to hammer out the nature of its traditions and differences in and through the fora of the national church.

The national church provides a constitution, a general synod, a common prayer book, and a number of tribunals and commissions to do with faith and order, and church and society. Yet, the national identity of the church is a belated and precarious achievement and now perhaps ill-fated since the secular liberal nation-state system struggles with the consequences of its own

successes and limits in a borderless world. As John Denton, ex-long term Secretary of the General Synod Office, once said: "the Anglican Church of Australia is 23 archipelagos without a centre". What liberal nationalism once deemed as an inherent weakness might now be recognised as wisdom deeply reflective of Anglican political theology and theological politics (traditionally called 'ecclesiology'), namely, belief in pluralism of authority and democracy as found in federalist and associational structures. Pace the Roman system of church governance, there is no imperial centre from which all local groups obtain their direction and to which they owe their primary allegiance, nor, pace Protestantism, is there an unmitigated privileging of the local community in the name of individual believers and their rights. The role of the national church in such a structure therefore is not only to be a parliament of contending voices but also to offer symbolic order to persons in communities that recognise a common wealth and a common good born out of parallel traditions, histories and interests. And what are those things held in common?: nothing less, I would suggest, than a common understanding of the doctrine of the church. In the complicated, violent history of the rise of the modern British nation state and of the rise and fall of the British empire is a story about a national church that shared in the spoils of victory but has also managed to bequeathed with it traces of democratic and pluralist forms of political authority and association, contributed to the formation of non-tyrannical forms of government and witnessed to the possibility of more egalitarian socio-economic structures and processes. It is these intimations and traces of voluntary association, democratic politics, social equality and generous economic modes of exchange that need extension and development.

What has this rather tendentious reading of Anglicanism and the Australian Anglican church got to do with the future of 'welfare after the welfare state'? What I wish to state in the boldest of terms

is that the Anglican church has within its own structure, traditions and identity the resources to construct a powerful and creative welfare culture but that these resources lie largely dormant because Anglicans — laity, clergy and bishops alike — have failed to grasp critically, historically, theologically, the radical nature of their own political community — *ecclesia as koinonia*. Should we seek to do so over the next few years, we might begin to see the flowering of new Anglican cultures that can offer welfare as wellbeing, material and spiritual, to a range of peoples and communities without prejudice to creed, colour and class. In other words, any critical reflection about the welfare state and the common good must first be conducted as a critical reflection about one's own tradition and setting. Conversely, engagement about our own historic tradition has the potential to open up new horizons for Anglicans as Australians constructing a public good in the public sphere. Let me put this in less abstract terms by trying out a thought experiment for your consideration. In the spirit of science fiction, which offers a perspective on the present by projecting our problems and dilemmas in a futuristic setting, I call this thought experiment "2001, or an Anglican Jubilee Complex Space Odyssey".

2001, or an Anglican Jubilee Complex Space Odyssey

The year is 2000. After three years of intensive discussion and engagement at all levels of the life of the national church from the parish pump through to the Diocesan synods, across the houses of the laity, clergy and bishops and culminating in General Synod endorsing a comprehensive program of action and reflection, the Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia has announced an "Anglican Jubilee" in the year of 2001 as its contribution to the centenary celebrations of the federation of the Commonwealth of Australia. Pointing to the foundation of the Australian political and legal compact in 1901 as preeminently a 'common wealth' and in recognition of the church's own entanglement in this process the church has decided to embark on an ambitious program of wealth redistribution. Observing the relative wealth of the greater majority of Anglicans in Australian society and noting too that the state has largely reneged on its public responsibilities to ensure the public distribution of commonwealth, having privatised its public utilities and largely subcontracted out its social and human services to voluntary and for profit agencies, Anglicans throughout Australia are planning a year out from the private pursuit of material accumulation for its own sake and have instead commenced preparation for giving over time to contemplation and public reparation. As a symbolic gesture towards the amelioration of growing inequalities within Australian society over the past decade, the church has decided to follow the biblical injunction of the jubilee year, whereby, as outlined in Leviticus, every fifty years, there is a general

redistribution of property and land to mitigate the effects of cross-generational inheritance and the accumulated effects of uneven economic development between households.

Each Anglican family/independent income unit is invited by the church to donate possessions and/or shares or money to nominated recipients. The recipients are to be the 3 million Australians living below the poverty line today. The location and identification of these recipients are to be obtained via social surveys of the Anglican Parishes of Australia undertaken by Anglicare and the General Synod Office on the basis of Census material and that of Department of Social Security lists. The giving is to be in the first and last place from person to person, family to family, parish to parish, so that interpersonal links are established between givers and recipients, enabling the bonds of community and obligation and the intertwining of narratives to be furthered. It is to be hoped that the initial contact made in the year of the Jubilee might provide a basis for ongoing communication. The mediation process however is to be managed by the various instituted bodies of the church. The redistribution program of the donated goods, capital and money, for example, is to be managed and coordinated by designated Anglican welfare agencies and Diocesan bodies throughout Australia.

The gifts are not to be cast-offs that are disposed in the process of refining the giver's own process of accumulation — as is commonly the norm of most donated goods to welfare agencies in the past — but are to entail renunciation on the behalf of the wealthy. Typical gifts should include the kinds of items usually stolen from the rich by the desperate and typically the subject of insurance claims such as recent model cars, white goods, computers, TVs, videos, etc or else monetary gifts that might include debentures, shares etc in profitable ventures. The question of need is not to predetermine the kinds of gifts offered and the recipients are free to use and dispose of the gifts in the way they

see fit, without any influence on the part of the giver, or of the church.

Each gift in fact is to be purely so, a freely given product of *caritas*, born of *agape*, a part of an exchange economy whereby givers understand themselves as having already received as from a God who endows our world with plenty. It is accepted that some of the nominated recipients might choose to reject the offer, even after opportunity has been provided for full and frank discussions between prospective givers and receivers. By way of guidance to its members, the General Synod has recommended a target of 0.5% of the annual net income and/or the assets of Anglicans over and above any of the other financial and capital commitments they might normally commit to the church and other voluntary agencies and charities. The spirit of the Jubilee is the redistribution of wealth not merely the extra-curricular giving over and above normal resource commitments. It is to occur in 2001 in the midst of our complex, overcommitted, broken lives in which we never feel rich enough. It is therefore not a promise, an IOU, but a one-off gesture made here and now.

The church itself will not be giving away 0.5% of its property but instead will dedicate an equivalent proportion of its resources to coordinating, managing and regulating the successful process of the Jubilee year and the pursuit of managing community and property connections established through the process in subsequent years. By way of example, the Primate and each of the Bishops of the 23 dioceses of the national church will make public their own individual gifts on the first day of the year. These contributions will come out of their private wealth not from funds or assets provided by virtue of their public office. Other Anglican clergy and laity are encouraged to do so also. Likewise, anonymity will be preserved if requested, as the process is not the big noting of givers but the encouragement of renunciation and the social economy of charity.

The church acknowledges that this is probably the most severe act of public renunciation ever asked of its members in its history in the antipodes and concedes that through this program it could lose a significant proportion of its membership, clearly disaffected by its principles, or who, like the rich young man who approached Jesus to ask what he needed to do to enter the Kingdom of God, are unwilling to count the cost of Christian discipleship in this way. Nevertheless, the General Synod noted that as an institution bound up in the colonization process, the Anglican Church of Australia sees itself as one of the key beneficiaries in the process of nation-building over the past two centuries and wishes to make a prophetic act of public Thanksgiving, and reparation for the dispossession process of indigenous peoples this involved. It also wishes to further the Church's mission to enrich the lives of all Australians through the delivery of effective worship, education, health, and welfare services: all dimensions of Australian culture in which the churches have been played important historic roles — responsibilities that the Church does not wish to relinquish even as it confesses that it has not always fulfilled them honourably or fittingly. Other denominations are invited to match this initiative through programs of their own or else in their absence, Christians of other traditions are welcome to join in the Anglican Jubilee.

It is still only 1997 and the idea of an Anglican Jubilee to commemorate the centenary of Australian Federation is but a figment of my underdeveloped imagination. I present it here merely as a fantasy of what welfare politics might entail in the future if the church was to take the demise of the national welfare state as we have known it since WWII as a challenge to recuperate its own vision as a political community, living out of the order of the divine gift. Of course, criticism of the proposal would I imagine be immediate, widespread and sharp. To some Anglicans, for example, the proposal would be too collectivist when to such critics Christianity is not about rational solutions to

the question of social inequality but about the salvation of individual souls. Christian charity is not something to be organised by the church but rather, they would argue, is the free gift of individual Christians in response to God's grace. Altruism is the business of moralising humanists, not Christians, and collectivist solutions create more problems than they purport to solve. To these critics, there is nothing wrong with liberal democratic capitalism *per se* so long as the churches ensure the inculcation of the Protestant work ethic and the central importance of the nuclear family to social solidarity.

For others, however, the Anglican Jubilee proposal would be seen as too individualist, suffering from the moralism of gestural politics instead of addressing directly the difficult structural obstacles to social justice and equality. The politics of solidarity and partial charity for these critics are no substitutes for the social reform of the state to meet the needs of its citizens. According to this critique, we do not need a common culture or communities, and we certainly do not want a return to the bad old days of paternalistic and meddling charity organisations imposing middle class, patriarchal values on the working class poor. To these critics, there is nothing wrong with social democratic politics that a social democratic party in power could not fix, if only the churches would support them to get on with the job.

Both critiques are correct in that the proposal has both collective and individual dimensions. That this is so without apparent contradiction is because both critiques fail to recognise the proposal's radical difference — one which offers an intimation of an alternative social order that would embody a politics of associational democracy and an economy of gift-exchange. As an alternative means of political action and life, this modest Jubilee proposal is arguably Anglican in that it looks neither to the state nor to the market for the furtherance of social solidarity and the amelioration of social inequality. It involves all three houses

(laity, Diocesan bishops, other clergy) and four institutional levels (General Synod, dioceses, parishes, agencies) of the Anglican Church of Australia. It is a prophetic word to individual Christians appealing to them as participant members of the church to become involved in a social project for the reconstruction of a wider "society", the shape and form of which remain an open question. It does not ask them to go forth as heroic individuals into a political vacuum but invites them to participate in a public project within a clearly defined institutional setting, with a collective social purpose. It is a democratic, because negotiated, process with plural and open-ended outcomes. Because the project directs the attention of the church's members to the inextricable entanglements — material, discursive, ethical, spiritual — of church and society as political communities, it opens up new horizons of hope, however, modest and flickering these might prove to be for the reconciliation of profound conflicts woven into the tapestry of a nation called Australia.

As well as imagining an alternative political practice, the Jubilee proposal is predicated on an economy of gift-exchange, of charity, of free, generous givings-away rather than on a competitive economy of profit-making, a command economy of rationalised planning, or on a punitive management of controlled social security payments that measures the worthiness of the recipient and demands something in return in defined and measurable outcomes.

I hope this little fantasy about an Anglican Jubilee leaves it clear that I am not advocating a return to paternalistic charity as the exclusive domain of the church but rather am attempting to uncover a forgotten social imaginary of associationalism that reveals the affinity of the church's political structures to the creation of a just and participatory polity and sustainable economy for all communities. Because we have forgotten this distinctive tradition of Christian politics and economics we have impaired

our capacity to develop a cultural politics for furthering the welfare of all citizens that does not also stunt human liberty. Because we have tried to overcome the faults of the churches' moralism in the past and shifted the responsibility of social welfare to the secular state, we have forgotten that an economy of gift-exchange institutes a different social order of things and persons; our forgetting has relegated the charism of *caritas* to the private order of households and professionalised (thereby rationalised and bureaucratised) philanthropy. Instead of charity we encourage moralistic altruism, and with it the language of deserving and undeserving poor, of illegal immigrants, dole cheats and welfare rorters who become objects of state surveillance and neighbourhood watch committees, and a common culture of social ignorance and bigotry.

The Ends of the Australian Welfare State

But what then is "welfare"? Put simply, it is wellbeing, faring well. It is no coincidence that in the course of our everyday lives we say "farewell" to each other when we part to go our separate ways. The term 'welfare' first gained its powerful moral currency in its syntactical link to 'state'; with the historic rise and fall of the welfare state, so too the term's currency has been greatly debased. It is commonly appreciated that William Temple was probably the first person to use in public discourse the expression 'welfare-state' but what is less commonly known is that as early as 1929 he was using the term publicly in opposition to the concept of the 'power-state'. Reflecting on the experience of World War I (and therefore parenthetically also on the rise of modern Germany and

Bismarck's powerful authoritarian, corporatist form of welfare-state married to an aggressive and militarist nationalism), Temple in 1929 saw the welfare state as a state which seeks to promote both substantive human freedom and the common good. These goals, however, could not be secured by the state without a common culture based on the Christian principles of human personality, fraternity, service and sacrifice. Even then, the first political task was the overthrow of the idea of the power state:

The war was a struggle between the idea of the State as essentially Power — Power over its own community and against the other communities — and of the State as the organ of community, maintaining its solidarity by law designed to safeguard the interests of the community. The Power-State might have yielded to sheer pressure of circumstances in course of time; but it is contrary to the psychology of the Power-State to suffer conversion; it was likely to fight before it let a Welfare-State takes its place. (Temple in Nicholls, 1989: 50)

This is a more interesting and important insight than the popular legend that the welfare-state came about as a result of the experience of planning for war during WWII; that the sense of common purpose and common good was generated from this formative struggle by both the state and its agencies and the people gave rise to a renewed sense of the positive possibilities of planning for the goal of domestic wellbeing in the post-war setting. This is certainly true of William Beveridge's "New Jerusalem" rhetoric in his 1944 "Full Employment" plan for Britain which had an echo in the more prosaic hopes of Australian architects of the welfare state such as the public servants, HG Coombs, Percy Curtin and others. But Temple tells only part of the story: the struggle for the development of a policy package, for the making of the modern welfare-state, was in fact a long and slow development involving arguments about political ideals (frequently couched in explicitly theological language), social experiments in voluntary associations and at all levels of

government (but importantly at the local level), as well as the experience of great depression and mass unemployment and the technical breakthroughs of Keynes in economic policy to address this problem.

The story of the British welfare state is well-known and not least the place of Christians as advocates and architects. The development of the national welfare state correlates with the sweep of various forms of social liberalism and socialism of two generations of Church of England clerics and laity, transforming the Church "Tories at Prayer" to the "Society that saw a social problem and wrote a paper about it".² What is less appreciated are the parallels and peculiarities of the Australian experience.

What has been the Australian national welfare state story? Even among Anglicans who might be aware of the traffic between the metropolitan church and its colonial progeny, there is perhaps a serious undervaluation of the importance of the churches, and in particular of social Christianity and of social Christians to the development of the Australian welfare state. The Australian story has a number of unique features, not least the curious fact that the initial colonization process was partly a consequence of the failure of the "actually existing welfare state" of eighteenth-century Britain to control its unruly, underemployed and pauperised classes.

Transportation solved a domestic problem but it generated a fresh set of problems in the New World. The denial of the existence of Aboriginal peoples and then as citizens in the new state, meant that aborigines were by default made subjects of welfare. Because they were denied their humanity, however, so too their means of securing a livelihood was destroyed. The Australian welfare state for aboriginal Australians has meant a history of expropriation, imprisonment, family separation, and social marginalisation. Only since aborigines obtained citizenship rights in 1967 have

there been legal and political bases for negotiation about the terms on which the Australian nation-state has been established and the possibility afforded for a post-welfare state economy created by and for aborigines.

The Australian Churches played highly ambivalent roles in the colonization process. On the one hand, Christian missionaries were significant in saving some aboriginal populations from genocide yet in the process radically altered their cultural identities in patronising and manipulative ways. The Australian colonial churches were also important in the establishment of a rudimentary set of health, welfare, educational and legal institutions, yet squabbled incessantly over their relative entitlements to land and resources. The sectarian propensity of the colonial churches towards inter-denominational rivalry was a major contributing factor to the secularist nature of the Australian constitution and education system, even if the churches were granted the crumbs of having some control over the university residential colleges.

The story of the colonial period is complex yet the role of the churches in the construction of the national welfare state is probably more so. The churches were important in at least four ways: 1) the construction of arguments for the recognition of social welfare rights and needs of all Australian citizens; 2) the fight for the rights of workers *qua* workers in the establishment and institution of the social wage concept; 3) the promotion of the ideal of universal education especially in the education of the working class; and 4) the development of the non-State welfare sector. In the arguments about citizenship and the need for a strong centralised welfare state at the level of the nation state, the importance of the social liberal Anglicans such as Bland, Portus, Burgmann and others in the first half of this century is only now beginning to be acknowledged even as their work as reformers in the field of education and worker's education has been more

widely respected. The establishment of the basic wage concept as based on the needs of a worker and his wife and children as secured by Judge Higgins in his famous Harvester Judgement 1907 is generally recognised as inspired by Pope Leo XIII's Social Encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* of 1890 on the worker question. Finally, the central place of Christian organisations, voluntary associations, self-help groups and parish welfare agencies to the development of the modern national welfare state has been more regularly studied by historians and historical sociologists yet curiously underappreciated by Christians themselves. That this is the case might be due in part to the emptying out of voluntary traditions of association and welfare into the post-war welfare state. With the secularization of the voluntary agencies, a theological and ethical vocabulary for their work was also forgotten.

Another way in which the story of the Australian welfare state can be retold is in noting the religious affinities of key social reformers and political leaders to that of their arguments, policy initiatives and programs. Here the significance of social Catholicism in the labour movements is evident throughout the twentieth century, not least in such figures as Mannix, Scullin, Santamaria, Chifley, Calwell to name a few. Anglican social liberals viewed the welfare state as the basis of modern citizenship and therefore were affirmative of the state's positive capacity to meet the social rights of its citizens. Anglican social reformers were more given to advocating and participating in government initiatives in education and welfare than their Catholic counterparts who were more readily inclined to participate in the labour movement itself, especially trade unions. In particular, many Catholic activists and thinkers were attracted to corporatist arguments, and they promoted the principles of subsidiarity, workers' needs, and rural settlement. As Peter Beilharz (1994) has observed, the twentieth century Australian social compact has largely been the achievement of the labour movement in both its industrial and

parliamentary arms, and the organic intellectuals of the labour movement have been mainly Catholics and communists. The declining force of one and both sources of intellectual ferment with the end of the Cold War coincides neatly with the loss of direction and ideas in the labour movement in general.

Now that this era “has but passed us by” we can see that the distinctive form of the Australian welfare state has been what Francis Castles (1996) has called the “the wage earners’ welfare state” whereby welfare is directed not to citizens as such but to workers and their families through the “politics of domestic defence”. Australia’s national welfare state has until the mid-seventies gradually developed six component parts or frames: 1) protection of local industries through the imposition of high tariffs on imports; 2) the development of public industries especially in the provision of social infrastructure, public utilities, transportation grids and risk capital investment to establish manufacturing industries; 3) the establishment of a central industrial and arbitration commission to fix the basic wage and social wage concepts, arbitrate and conciliate capital-labour conflicts, and secure cross-industry and occupational working conditions and safety standards; 4) a “white Australia” immigration policy in the name of securing a common culture that defends worker rights and jobs; 5) a commitment by the government to ensure “Full employment” levels; and 6) a means tested, “safety net” social security system for the unemployed, the disabled, the aged and others who were without familial sources of assistance.

The brief flirtation with social democracy under Whitlam also signalled the beginning of the end of the “wage earners’ welfare state”. It was at this time in the early seventies that tariffs were cut by 25 per cent and the white Australia immigration policy was superseded by an explicit embrace of multiculturalism. Social democrats thought they could be cultural globalizers and

economic protectionists; the shock came to Labor supporters in the eighties when Hawke and Keating embraced economic globalization too. Now we have neo-conservatives thinking they can be cultural protectionists and economic globalizers. Meanwhile the traditions of social Christianity, labourism, social liberalism remain muted, in contrast to selective libertarianism.

Reimagining Welfare after the Welfare State

Since the end of the sixties and the first half of the seventies, the failure of the American war effort in Vietnam, its rapprochement with China, and the oil crisis tripping up the global economic order that favoured OECD countries, world development strategies have shifted from a “National Development Project” to a “Globalization Development Project” (McMichael, 1996). Whereas the former project focus was on national economies predicated on a liberal nation-state system and buttressed by the United Nations, GATT, a global monetary order secured by the American Dollar as standard bearer, IMF and the World Bank, the latter is dedicated to free trade, flexible international labour markets, a global communications and transport technologies order, an integrated but free financial system — in short, to a borderless world of infinite and increasingly abstract capital accumulation. Such a development project — first economic, but also cultural — remains for the time being a game for power elites and the symbolic analysts — out of the reach of the greater majority of persons even as it reshapes all of our lives in ways unimaginable even 20 years ago. It is committed, as Marx and Engels predicted, to chasing markets all over the world, as ‘all that

is solid melts into air”, in the name of an even more invisible substance than air — money, our ultimate fetish that connects and reorders perversely and whimsically each to all, and all to each. It is a project which is also a game of high (global) stakes: ecological and economic. “Risk” becomes the systematic basis of its operation and not merely a factor to be controlled. Instead, risk is now the originating pulse of many financial market games that almost denies human agency (Capling and Crozier, 1997). Postmodernist cultural studies and communication theories, new age religions and chaos theory in physics parallel this apparent paradigm shift in the practice of global financial management. With the persistence of seemingly intractable ecological and poverty problems associated with the economic globalization development project comes too the assorted baggage of apocalyptic doomsayers and fundamentalist prophets and populist reactions alike.

In this context and in one important sense, the welfare state as an empirical reality — as the stuff of liberal democratic government with responsibilities to its populace — is not finished; social policy will continue to need its own analysts and practitioners, just as groups of all kinds will continue to contest the nation state for their own rights and needs to be recognised.³ This is especially true of a nation of only 18 million people. But note the difference. After social democracy, nation states are less committed to planning for the needs of their citizens than to managing the regional impacts of the externalities of neo-liberal financial systems. By raising the spectre of welfare after the welfare state, therefore, I am not saying that the welfare state itself is dead — not yet — but rather the welfare state, as political and normative project, is already near extinction. As the politics of domestic defence as practised in Australia and the more generous politics of social democracy as briefly flirted with by the Whitlam government, no longer work, we must first frankly face this predicament. Here I want to recover our sense of what welfare can

be through a recollection of what it has been, a recognition of the changing historic circumstances of the welfare state, and the possibilities of reconstructing a politics-of welfare. Even if we wish to stay within the terms of social policy as instituted by the rise of the national welfare state, if we do not rethink the terms of welfare as grammar we cannot hope to sustain the institutions of the actually existing welfare state in the face of the forced march of economic rationalism, public choice and social contract theories, and their ilk that has taken place over the past twenty years and from which no Australian public institution has been granted exemption. This trend has an added poignancy for the Australian churches and their welfare agencies as they too have succumbed to these very same processes and too readily imbibed their new age remedies and tonics of managerialism, downsizing, etc. There is something odd about a church that reduces its eschatological horizon to that of predictive planning and rational choice theory.

But in another sense we can accept that the welfare state has ended for the simple reason that it is finished as a *political* project; it has few defenders, few actors, and a normative vocabulary which no longer compels or invites public participation. The will to social reform is waning. Social democrats do not convince because they continue to presume that shifting the deckchairs on the good ship state is a meaningful exercise when the metaphors of ships and chairs in any case mislead. The very ideas of a national economy and a national culture are no longer empirically convincing. To use these terms then is to obfuscate the need for alternative social imaginaries, and renewed forms of social knowing and acting. Moreover, social democracy has emptied out its own moral vocabulary in the course of developing a few economic and social policy techniques that no longer seem to civilize capitalism, let alone empower citizens to participate in a common project. As the storm troopers of the Victorian *grand prix* state have come frogmarching through our hospitals, schools, community centres,

who among us has been able to offer a confident set of arguments and political modes of action to resist them? We are beginning to feel like Abraham plea-bargaining with God to save the city as we search for at least ten good people.

The globalization development project is the leading edge of a rupture from within the globalizing propensities of industrial capitalism, whereby the process of industrialising the peasantry of the world, dragging them out of the countryside into the cities, is now supplemented and overlaid by a rising epoch of consumer capitalism, whereby the rich elites of all nations are forging new identities and participating in trans-national financial, service, and technological markets. While most of humanity is still locked into the enforced rhythms of the Protestant work ethic imposed by industrialisation, consumer capitalism is creating in its own image new polymorphous people, cultures and networks. Because this is the leading edge of capitalism in the late twentieth century it is largely our new global *sitz im leben*. It contains at least five defining characteristics which might be deemed as unique in human history, that: 1) empties out the meaning of claims about human identity and needs; 2) undermines our capacities to develop meaning and wisdom; 3) breaks the historic nexus of work and wealth and thereby renders the former without economic let alone social purpose; 4) redefines space by privileging the mobile, the abstract and the universal over place, the interpersonal and the particular; and 5) as a result of the foregoing characteristics it breaks the social, political and economic interdependencies of rich and poor so that for the first time in history on a planetary scale the poor can be despised by the rich and punished by them for their putative responsibility for their own circumstances.

The first characteristic of the emergent epoch of consumer capitalism then is that it empties out the meaning of theories of human identity and need: all anthropological theories of human

identity and need are rendered superfluous: eg., in what sense does anyone need videos, TVs, computers? Is the search for spiritual wholeness a higher or lower need than that of using a mobile phone or eating a Mars bar to help us “rest, work and play”? Social policy analysts in the sixties such as Runciman and Townsend developed the concept of “relative deprivation” to index the more complex set of social, political and economic needs and rights of citizens if they are to participate effectively, fairly in an advanced industrial capitalist system. It is a clever policy tool but a grossly inadequate response, conceptually and morally, to the nature of advanced consumer capitalism. As a culture of desire which propagates infinite and heterogeneous needs, consumer capitalism has made those needs increasingly abstract, dissociated and disembedded. We can no longer name what it is that we desire, only we need more at greater speed and higher levels. As Johnny Rotten once snarled: “Dunno what I want, but I know how to get it”. We are all made members of a refined culture of addiction. The only peoples to be excluded from such an everlasting feast are those with insufficient credit lines. In welfare policy, as both the Tory and the radical critics of the welfare state have rightly noted, the concept of relative deprivation encourages a culture of resentment and endless entitlement — of escalating expectations that can neither be met by the state (the Tory radical whinge of the old neo-conservative!) nor in the long term by nature in a world of non-renewable resources (the radical Tory critique of the ecological movements).

Second, consumer capitalism as a cultural order undermines our capacities to develop meaningful hierarchies of value: truth/fiction; reality/fantasy; nature/artifice; immoral/moral and so forth. One example will have to suffice here. In the seventies the question of “What’s wrong with plastic trees?” was once asked in the context of a debate on the verges of yet another LA freeway. Whereas citizens of industrial capitalist culture place a compensatory love on nature as spiritual source of renewal,

denizens of postmodern culture live after the “death of nature”, where the aesthetics of authenticity are rendered redundant. The question of real or plastic trees seems meaningless, especially to those who no longer have a life-world encounter with “real trees”. In any case the choice can be a matter of whim and credit line.

Third, the new globalization project and consumer capitalism render our work (what we do) without original or teleological purpose: wage labour severed the connection between vocation and need in the individual worker, now post-fordist, post-industrial and consumer capitalism has sundered the worker and his/her work from economic purpose also. For the first time in history we have a situation where capital accumulation is not dependent on human labour. Labour theories of value are declared obsolete. The vision of postwork societies — utopian and dystopian — is now a reality for some and a growing prospect of the twenty-first century.

The forced march of economic rationalism through Australian public institutions is not an example of the political “stupidity” of our nation’s powerful elites (as claimed for example by Hugh Stretton in last year’s Sambell Oration) but a reduction of moral value to technological processes and all human purposive activity subject to quantification and calculation. Government has been given over to the politics of modernistic monument building, eventism and populism coupled with a worship of risk-taking and money as embodied in the “casino economy”. Appeals to “the people” (rather than to citizens) are not merely polemical devices but are evidence of an anti-democratic commitment to the pursuit of power for mates only and the manipulation of voters through the pseudo-science of opinion polling (a highly refined weekly undertaking). Kennett and Howard represent two sides of the same coin of radical toryism: radical economics coupled with populist politics. While Kennett is both an economic and a cultural radical, Howard is still a cultural conservative. Populist

politics begets its own and in recent times we have seen how Pauline Hanson and the "One Nation Party" symbolises the politics of fear that has been encouraged by the absence of public debate about the rapid and radical transformations of Australian natural, political, cultural and economic landscapes by the globalization development project embraced by Australian governments since 1983. The "yellow peril" that fuelled the White Australia Policy over seventy five years returns again this time though in an already multicultural civil society.

In this sense, consumer capitalism's reorganisation of space, disembeds people's experience of local places and short circuits the long and complex process of storytelling that is necessary to all democratic political communities that consist of many different voluntary associations and cultural identities. Democracy requires that we relate our stories and listen to the stories of others, shifting through our traditions and pasts to find common grounds for working and living together in and through public life. The reconciliation of differences and conflicts is a politics of recognition and entanglement. As the growing intensity of debates over indigenous rights *vis a vis* European Australian conquest and settlement suggest, this is a painfully slow process that should not be circumvented and repressed by the demands of global markets for primary resources.

Ironically enough for the dominant European settler population, economic globalization is rapidly rendering all Australians nomads; one does not need to be a nostalgic romantic for localism to see how place has been reconstructed in recent times. While some cities and regions are stripped bare, new regions are constructed just as rapidly. Our Prime Minister castigates Australians for being reluctant to move to seek a job even as mass migrations are taking place across Australia from south to north and from east to west (*The Sunday Age* 29th June 1997, p. 1). Mobility and innovations in communications technology are

making new demands on interpersonal relationships based on family and place. Notwithstanding the creativity of the longstanding tradition of the parish to adapt to and appropriate urban industrial transformations of village life, the appeal to community in our own times will require experimentations in complex space whereby flows, networks, and virtual spaces will play an important part in the experience and expression of Christian community.

Finally, consumer capitalism redefines the relationship of rich and poor: where the poor were once industrial workers — peasants made proletariat who were needed to help produce wealth, in consumer capitalism the relationship of rich to poor is no longer one of exploitation and oppression, but that of seduction and repression. Psychoanalytic categories are now needed to describe the way the world's poor are seduced into participating in the money economies of neoliberal regimes of global capital and repressed if and when they fail to perform according to the rigours of these regimes' demands. The poor can be derided, excluded and forgotten by the rich because they are deemed responsible for their own fates, and as failures in the free market. Because poor, they are forced to copy the movements of the rich, not as tourists and symbolic analysts, but as immigrant vagabonds and refugees (Seabrook, 1985; Bauman, 1998).

The main criticisms of social democracy and the national welfare state to date have focussed on the failure of its economic and social policy regimes: the end of Keynesianism, etc. More sociological readings have also indicted the professional middle class. Debates over bureaucratisation (Weber) and professionalisation of knowledge (Mannheim to Marcuse) as applied to the welfare sector have led to a growing recognition that state based strategies for the amelioration of inequality are fated to fail. The past twenty years have witnessed an intra-middle class struggle over the welfare state which has been largely won by the privatising

economic liberals. The public middle class has retreated from their own best selves, no longer believing in Matthew Arnold's "sweet reason", and instead cashing in their children's labour rights by taking voluntary redundancy packages and setting up private research consultancies. Internal to the logic of professionalism and the rise of professional society has been the decline of professional ethics. The decline of the welfare state is as much about the middle class and the renegeing on cross-class allegiances and compacts as it is about the historic decline of the industrial working class as actors and clients. Post-fordist welfare is now delivered though the high corporatism of TNCs and the mafia style organisations of regional entrepreneurial capitalist firms that run on the principles of family loyalty and of honour and shame. Given that the world now trades in drugs, guns and money more than any other commodities should it be any surprise to us that the moral economy of the gang and the extended family as gang are predominant?

When these sociological insights are framed comparatively and historically, the wider epochal shift to consumer capitalism as world-system and globalization as a development project is of grave consequence for understanding the Australian experiment in the social welfare state. That this epochal shifts is not a inexorable sign of human progress is already evident. While the national welfare state has been a story of gains and losses, one conclusion that we must draw, however reluctantly, is that it is not designed for addressing these profound shifts in the global order. The way forward however entails a recuperation of the traditions that made the welfare state as a social imaginary possible in the first place. It implies that we rediscover what welfare might mean when shifted from its close proximity to the state, first in our syntax and then in our lives. It will of course entail a full scale civilizational analysis of global political and economic orders but I leave such an altogether massive task for another time and place for others to undertake. To identify some of the distinctive marks

of a project for our participation is a more pressing and ultimately more significant project in any case.

Reimagining Social Christianity

I have typified our epoch and world-system as one of a globalizing consumer capitalism — and I have done so from a largely historical sociological perspective; the theological dimension of my argument is present but not yet made explicit. Yet, most modern Christian social reformers had explicit theological reasons for their engagement in social reform and named capitalism as the presenting problem, an economic system predicated on a constellation of anti-Christian meta-discourses. At its most fundamental level it was viewed as a problem of rival metadiscourses, rival world views, rival ways of living in the world: Christianity versus capitalism, the Gospel of Christ versus the Gospel of Mammon. Some of the more percipient saw that socialism, fascism and communism were Christian heresies but that capitalism was undiluted paganism. Mandeville's early eighteenth century parody, *The Fable of the Bees*, is capitalism's Gospel proclaimed at its dawn, whereby an economy of private vice is viewed as having a paradoxically virtuous public outcome. Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) simply added in the political theology of the equilibrating "invisible hand" of the market. Tories, radicals alike have since sought to combat and remedy this one-sided theological anthropology and Gospel of Mammon. Christian Tories sought solutions to the social question of modern capitalism in trumpeting the virtues of pre-modern forms of socio-economic organisation, frequently advocating various forms of agrarian corporatism and patriarchal, militaristic nation states. This tendency has been evident in Christian

democratic parties and Catholicism in Europe and in Australia. Christian radicals were more readily attracted to the array of modernist utopias on display by anarchists and socialists alike, ranging from social democracy through Fabianism and to Bolshevism. Christian Tories sought resistance and pleaded that the world should turn back. Christian radicals sought either appeasement or transformation. Where Christian communists sought the overthrow of capitalism and its supersession by command economies, socialisation of the means of production, and communist society, Christian Tories sought reconciliation of humanity to imputed natural law (Catholicism) and the orders of creation (Lutheranism). Despite their mutual hostility fostered by the long Cold War of this century, the antinomies of Toryism and radicalism contain analogies as much as contradictions. Fascism and Bolshevism, extreme right and extreme left politics, are not opposites but siblings, overarching ideologies and stories with tragic political consequences.

Christian democratic socialists and social democrats, however, generally disavowed the will to totality characteristic of both the right and the left, seeking rather a politics of domestication and social compensation for the barbarities of capitalism. If capitalism could never be entirely domesticated, it was hoped that at least it could be kept on a leash. Hence the enthusiasm for chaps like Keynes, Tawney and Hobson, and later Galbraith and Crosland, economists and political thinkers who could offer social and economic policies to civilise capitalism. Hence too, the enthusiasm of social liberals and democratic socialists for the labour movements on the one hand and on the other, for obtaining control of the state via parliament, as the dual means to the end of social equality, liberty, order and cross-class solidarity.

The leash has been broken again, and for better or worse, we must face the prospect of life after the politics of social democracy and the welfare state. We are, as Goethe understood, caught up in a

Faustian bargain, a tragic trajectory of global development that pushes all humanity to worship at the altar of Mammon. It is as Peter Beilharz recently sardonically quipped "Civilising Capitalism? Game Over: Insert Coins". Capitalism as global culture now more than ever presents itself in its rawest terms: as system, it institutes greed, violence, infinite and heterogeneous wants. These wants are by their very nature constituted by insatiable and ultimately unnameable (ineffable) and disembodied (because abstracted) desire. Consequently, physical force, money and natural mishap are deemed to be the only forms and means of limitation. This is why, with the collapse of communism and the loss of confidence in liberal and social democratic political regimes, there is a notable void in our public discourses about substantive social imaginaries which can offer alternative hierarchies of value to that of global consumer capitalism. People seem to imagine their place in the world as a matter of pure luck, blind chance and ultimately tragic fate. This is why too, our governments increase the size of their law and order sticks (as they frantically boost the appeals to the virtue of nuclear family life) while assuming that enough carrots (candy sticks) are on offer by the putatively autonomous marketplace.

Industrial capitalism contains rich traditions of resistance both in its raw industrialisation stage by peasants and proletarian movements and to the twentieth-century totalitarian technological dimensions as embodied by the megamachine of military-scientific-industrial complexes typical of the modern nation-state and the TNC. The more protean, polymorphous forms of capital accumulation and exploitation have yet to find either a poetics to capture public imagination or any movements of resistance to match that of the previous one hundred and fifty years. This I think is the challenge facing us all today. In the so-called new social movements such as peace, feminist, ecological and ethnic and sexual identity movements we have rudimentary forms of political resistance. In their protean and polymorphous forms,

they are indicative of the times as much as they offer prophetic pointers forward. Insofar as they are grappling with these problems and endeavouring to find an alternative ways of being in the world, Christians should be seeking to learn from them and to participate as critical fellow-travellers in their open-ended pursuit of alternative social imaginaries to consumer capitalism.

It is not simply a matter of panaceas and policies, of revolutions or apocalyptic; we need something both more modest and more ambitious than utopian blueprints and Molotov cocktails. We need renewed social imaginaries, renewed ways of fashioning our ways of being in the world, and of making and doing in the world. Renewed rather than new, because we are most radical when we best know our own traditions, and to be radical today is to resist the dehumanising and life-denying forces and ideologies of our times, to conserve, in the fullest sense of conservation, life-preserving traditions. Our central challenge of our times is not simply to survive but to institute ways of living that put the tragic fatalism of Faust to rest once and for all. For this we new ways of expressing what we have been searching for all along. As William Morris once put it in the mouth of the thirteenth century revolutionary English priest, John Ball:

...I pondered all these things, and how [people] fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and other [people] have to fight for what they meant under another name — ... (Morris, *A Dream of John Ball*, 1886, 1955,p.28)

If we live in the twilight of the dreams and projects of social reform conducted at the level of nation-states, we live too with a grim recognition of the profoundly tragic consequences (intended or not) of our most progressive illusions and hopes of the last two hundred years. We are perhaps slower to realise that liberal capitalism as globalizing culture and economic system is not the secret *telos*, the end of history as Francis Fukuyama and would be

Christian baptisers (Michael Novak) would have us believe. It is rather that the Gospel of Mammon has a hold over our imaginations. Of all the modern Christian social reformers, perhaps John Ruskin appreciated this problem most intensely:

...Mammon, though we narrowly take it as the power of money only, is in truth the great evil Spirit of false and fond desire, or "Covetousness, which is Idolatry." So that Iconoclasm — *image* - breaking — is easy; but an Idol cannot be broken — it must be forsaken; and this is not so easy, either to do, or to persuade to doing. For [people] may readily be convinced of the weakness of an image; but not of the emptiness of an imagination. (Ruskin, *Munera Pulveris*, 1863, 1898:210-211)⁴

Christianity is a particular historic tradition, or rather constellation of historic traditions, which invites our participation to live in the world in particular ways, by and through worshipping God not Mammon. All Christians then are called "to seek to do and to persuade to do" accordingly and we do so by knowing our traditions afresh and seeking new ways to articulate what we know we need to do. This has two dimensions: *political theology* which articulates what we know and believe about the world in the light of our worship of God, and *atheological politics* which articulates what we know the church to be as the means by which we believe the world can be sustained and the whole of creation ever renewed. Here too, I self-consciously use the word "political" to emphasise the connection between believing and doing, thinking and acting that is central to all cultures. We do not seek rationalist utopias nor do we live by blind fate. We are rather practitioners and poets of a tradition — a tradition sustained by "the priesthood of all believers" who live between the times of promise and of gift and therefore live out of the divine economy of plenitude for all eternity.

In short, we are continually confronted with the task of intertwining our political theology with our theological politics,

whereby our participation in the church calls us to rethink our lives in relation to God and our worship of God calls us to rethink our participation in the church in relation to the world. Participation in the public space called the church (*ecclesia*) places us in between the times, between the remembrance of Christ as our future, and expectation of our future as promised to us by God through creation and the resurrection of Christ. The Church then is *neither* a sectarian enclave, a space allocated for individuals to pray in solitude to their god, *nor* a perfect society that must be replicated by secular organisations. It is rather a site which can and should be both cosmopolitan in our vision and networks and parochial in our lifeworld in the proper senses of both terms.

To put this in less abstract terms let me briefly outline this process with respect to the Christian concept of welfare after the welfare state. When outlining the history of the rise of the Australian welfare state I endeavoured to weave into the master narrative the ways in which Christians and the churches have contributed to it. To imagine welfare after the welfare state requires the retelling of how social Christians spoke and wrote of the welfare God in their prayers, hymns, theologies and ecclesiologies, just as we endeavour to speak of God in our terms for our own times. At their best, Anglican theologians from the mid-nineteenth century through to the first half of this century proclaimed the triune God revealed in and through the incarnation Christ event. In doing so they made the connection between the Christ as the exemplar of love to the call to love of neighbour in the Christ event, thereby revealing an ethic of social action for all humans in history towards the Kingdom of God's love. In other words, the theological politics here contained a social ethic not of work or power but of love. From S.T. Coleridge and F.D. Maurice through to William Temple and Michael Ramsey, there exists a distinctive tradition of Anglican Trinitarian theology that denies the Hobbesian god of transcendence on the one hand and on the other

the Spinozian god of pure immanence — for both Hobbesian and Spinozian theologies lead to political absolutism in the name of radical individualism. The Hobbesian God of absolute transcendence leads to a life for the poor that is “nasty, short and brutish” while the Spinozian God of absolute immanence preaches a Gospel for the rich to live in the eternal present at one with an undifferentiated and divinised Nature. Both political theologies leave no room for peaceable difference because they naturalise violence as intrinsic to all existence. Whereas Hobbes imagines God as tyrant, Spinoza’s God is rendered powerless to obviate the natural order of things. Hobbes’ absolute, transcendent God is the Father of totalitarianism, Spinoza’s absolute, immanent God is the Mother of New Age libertarianism. Libertarianism and totalitarianism are antinomies, two sides of the one coin which can lead to their political coexistence as much as to a violent oscillation between the two.

This tradition of English Trinitarian theology also rebutted the sacrificial and individualist elements of Atonement Christology and sought to articulate the “essence of Christianity in the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man”. The sexism of such phraseology did not obviate their concern to assert the radical equality of humans before God and the passionate identification of God with creation, the eschatological hope in the Kingdom of God, and the concomitant politics of solidarity that this entailed. At its worst, however, this kind of incarnational theology resulted in what H. Richard Niebuhr put famously: “a god without wrath [who] brought men without sin into a Kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross”. It led to a theological politics that conflated citizens with saints, and civil society with the state, while in their political theology they too readily separated principles and policies, the sacred and the secular, the private and the public, rendering the former categories idealistic and therefore impotent in the face of the “realities” imputed to be contained within the latter categories. We might not

share the social Christians' assumption that the state offers an answer to the social question, but we can still accept their belief that "the triumph of the Christian idea of God will never be complete as long as economic and political despotism prevail" as the North American social Gospel leader Walter Rausenbausch warned during WWI.⁵ We need then to reimagine the church has a complex social space in which experiments in social life can be undertaken to answer the substantive social questions of our age. Part of that reimagining is the task of political theology as God-talk in the context of the life of the church.⁶

The paucity of critical reflection in Australia about political theology and its dialectical relation to theological politics, in thinking the content of faith as form, and the form of our faith as content, has led to a general impoverishment of Christian understanding among church goers and a grave ignorance and distortion of Christianity by the general populace. One of the reasons for the apparent disdain our politicians have for church pronouncements on social justice is that they — like most Australians — can no longer see what churches themselves are doing on these matters. The churches, they insinuate, are without a constituency and a credible argument. The construction of a social imaginary to unfettered capitalism and political despotism should, therefore, not only be a theologically informed vision and entail substantive arguments about alternative economic and social policies⁷ but also include the undertaking of modest experiments by the churches themselves.

Modest projects and experiments are never in themselves answers to the social questions of injustice and inequality, but they can always represent new beginnings, new possibilities for a wider and contagious politics of hope. It is not for nothing the New Testament images of the Kingdom of God and the church were of the beacon, leaven, salt and the seed. As the brilliant contemporary Anglican theologian, John Milbank, has rephrased

Paul's call to the Corinthians we are but "fools for Christ", living out of the rule of charity, of giving, endlessly giving away, "it being given that God is love" (Milbank, 1995:154). We are fools because we give ourselves away:

...not for a cause, not to a city, not to a place, only as links in the continuous, non-teleological chain of givings-away. Fools, because indifferent to worldly circumstance, whose *reality* under the *sign* of the cross is transposed: slavery is freedom, self-giving; freedom is slavery, our bondage to the truly desirable (Milbank, 1992, 345).⁸

Why, such a contagion of public foolishness by Christians in response to divine plenitude might even tempt our bishops throughout the 23 Dioceses of this place called "Australia" to participate too. Then perhaps my fantasy about an Anglican Jubilee (or something better still) might be transformed into a modest social project whereby new visions of the social might prove attractive to other groups, associations, communities and networks across the globe. After all that was the nature of social projects in welfare that first made the hybrid project of liberal democracy-welfare state-capitalism a reality in the first place. If we are to move forward in hope we must also continue to look back with thanks for past achievements and in sober recognition of the losses and horrors of past failures bequeathed to us as present dilemmas. "Only seek to do and to persuade to do what is at hand" for the welfare of all God's creation in the knowledge that our lives are from God to God; this has been the apparently simple slogan and eternally complex task of Christian social reform in the past. It remains our calling too. Such is the divine comedy. May you all fare-well.

APPENDIX

How might the Churches Respond?

What kinds of projects might be generated by our churches today? What kinds of social experiments can and are being tried by our churches today? Let us ask these questions as responses to the five challenges outlined earlier as characteristics of our current epoch of consumer capitalism, taking each in turn:

- 1) identity and needs: How might parishes create cultures that offer alternative everyday life regimes to that of the rhythms of consumer culture or highly mobile careerist corporatism? Australian "society" still desperately seeks ways of organising care-giving to the dependent, to meet the competing needs of families, and to entrench a more just and fair (therefore more flexible) sexual division of labour. In what ways are the churches offering a complex social space for "persons in community" to address these pressing issues? Many parishes have traditionally housed Sunday schools and kindergartens and some today accommodate child care centres, but in what ways are parishes becoming sites of critical reflection and action for and about family life in the late twentieth century? Which churches encourage open discussion about life-choices, sexualities, and the human life-cycle? The church offers rituals for sacramentally marking baptism, marriage and death, but are parishes also offering liturgies to mark the rites of passage such as adolescence, divorce, travel, etc.?
- 2) meaning generation: The Anglican Church has a rich array of theological resources expressed in and through its prayers, hymns, liturgies but in what ways are its members being encouraged to hold the pain and suffering of the world in its worship times and spaces, to open up in solidarity with those struggling for a more just and fair social order? In what ways is the church encouraging the virtue of discernment about the political and economic order of civil society in which the church itself is placed? The churches have massive investments in the provision of education but what thinking has been undertaken with respect to the counter-cultural values of Christianity and the awkward social fact of the cultural elitism of many Church schools?

- 3) work as purposive activity: In a post-work society, how might the church generate work as purposive activity for its youth ? What is the meaning of Christian vocation in a world in which identity formation and life-disciplines do not subsist in peoples' jobs?
- 4) locality and mobility, community and networks: The Christian churches have one of the most successful, sustained and comprehensive global networks in the world and in history. Yet most Christian lay people's worldly experience of the church does not extend beyond the local parish boundaries. Many of these same people participate in contemporary organisations and corporations that linked them to far flung places and peoples. How might the Church be experienced and imagined by lay Christians as a complex space that connects them to others and not just their neighbours? The church has always been good at linking its clergy and theologians to each other throughout its regional levels and across provinces but in the twentieth century it has been left largely to the ecumenical movement to bring laity together. In a world of ecological, health, poverty, refugee, international labour movements and technological challenges, it is a grave omission of the Church not to seek ways to actively improve its communication networks so as to facilitate the meeting of Christian lay experts in their respective fields.
- 5) inequality: In a post-welfare state society, how might the church go about the creation of adequate housing for people? What experiments in cross-class, cross-cultural, and cross-faith encounters are being developed by the churches in the late twentieth century to match those developed one hundred years ago in the university settlements, workers' education and health programs and overseas missions?

Above all, how might the church encourage open debate about social welfare and the perennial experimentation in the practices of giving, cooperation and associationism? How many churches organise themselves in democratic fashion to further collective decision making processes, enskilling members in conflict-resolution techniques and empowering all to participate in civic life? As I have tried to suggest via the Anglican Jubilee proposal, the quintessentially Anglican

theological principle and practice of politics, is that of "associationalism", that doctrine of social organisation which understands individuals as 'persons-in-community' who participate in voluntary associations. To associationalists, voluntary associations are the basis of democracy and the democratic state, not the state as the legitimation of civil society. Voluntary associations serve the flourishing of the individual human personality and the welfare of all citizens more effectively than either state forms of collectivism or free-market individualism.⁹

The Brotherhood of St Laurence, with its rich traditions of social Christianity, is well placed to respond to these challenges and questions. While it is not my role to make recommendations and nominate policies the implications of my argument here suggests a few initiatives that the Brotherhood might care to explore and take the lead:

- 1) reconnecting the local and the global dimensions of social justice by developing a sponsorship scheme to send young volunteer Anglicans abroad to work with the poor on innovative schemes — a kind of 21st century extension of the university settlement ideal;
- 2) refocussing on the poor and the changing meanings of poverty in Australia and not just in terms of income and wealth inequality, moving beyond the concept of "relative deprivation" by connecting the issue of poverty to the question of ecological limits — this project could be modelled on the Brotherhood's Future of Work project;
- 3) identifying and promoting community development schemes in areas of Victoria which are economically and culturally depressed — the key here would be to nominate "social entrepreneurs" to facilitate the process. There are role models here on offer by the Church of England, Demos Foundation, and the Jubilee Network in England, and in Australia by Ernesto Sirolli's work with the Institute for Science and Technology Policy at Murdoch University and with the Western Australian State government in the late eighties;
- 4) promoting the training of Anglicans in the everyday skills of

practical democracy through conflict resolution and consensus decision making techniques workshops in Parishes, theological colleges, and among clergy in their decisionmaking settings; and last but by no means least,

- 5) continuing the hard work of social policy agenda setting in the fraught areas of family policy, taxation, employment, social security and so forth.

Whereas the key buzzwords of modern social Christianity have been fellowship, cooperation, community and ecumenism, today the watchwords are solidarity, stakeholding, partnership, networks, negotiation and innovation.

NOTES

- ¹ Time to thank Wes Campbell, Rowan Ireland, Jim Minchin and Kerreen Reiger for reading an early draft of this lecture and offering many helpful comments. Thanks too to Ian Barns and Peter Beilharz for being ever thought-provoking conversation partners. Needless to say, had I taken more notice of the accumulated wisdom of these friends and colleagues and others too numerous to mention here, this lecture would be considerably better for it. Finally, thank you to Michael Challen, Executive Director Brotherhood of St Laurence, for inviting me to give the 16th Sambell Oration. It is a special honour to give this lecture in memory of Geoffrey Sambell, a significant Australian church and civic leader, whose influence touched many people's lives, not least my own.
- ² Maurice Reckitt, the Anglican socialist, said this of the social liberal Christian Social Union, an influential group within the Church of England.
- ³ Some of the issues that need to be addressed over the next decade I have already flagged above and are being attended to by the Brotherhood of St Laurence's Social Policy Unit, namely: taxation

reform, the future of work/employment, the aging Australian population and the rise of welfare dependency ratios at a time of declining sources for government revenue, the argument over welfare for work versus universal minimum income provisions, horizontal and vertical equity that are intrinsic to family policy debates, and health-system and education issues, etc. The next decade promises intensive public debates on work for welfare versus income support schemes along with a focus on the education systems offering skills training.

- 4 The degree of difficulty was a factor in Ruskin's own despairing descent into madness. His whole life project was directed towards a total project of Christian reinscription of modernity in its entirety from the arts across political economy, natural sciences, a reimagining project of the modern labyrinth of complex technological systems run by the meta-logics of secular and utilitarian reason as Christian complex space. Ruskin's failure is instructive, not least for because he largely worked alone. (His successes too are worth recalling not least for his influence on the arts and crafts, heritage, urban design, ecological and labour movements in Britain and Australia.) Ruskin came to recognise that no appeals can be made to external forces for the redemption and liberation of human societies (whether they be called the Laws of nature (Evolution), History or Society (Progress)), or that there existed specific carriers of new emancipatory consciousness (whether believed to be the proletariat, women, blacks, the poor, born again Christians) who can redeem the world. And so it is that we can only seek to do and to persuade to do what we believe is for the ultimate good of the one and the many. In recognising this he also despaired of finding communities (networks, groups) prepared to join him in this task of persuasion and experimentation.
- 5 The Niebuhr and Rausenbusch quotes are from Nicholls, 1989.
- 6 In recent times, this has been a major theme in the work of American theologians and philosophers who work under the rubric of communitarianism, from John Yoder to Stanley Hauerwas, from Alasdair Macintyre to Charles Taylor, and more popularly from Christopher Lasch to Michael Walzer, and from a feminist

theological perspective, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Sally McFague. In Europe, Jurgen Moltmann has been an important figure in Lutheran circles while John Milbank, Kenneth Leech, Andrew Shanks and Rowan Williams represent the English Anglican stream. See also John Gray (1997). To the best of my knowledge, the only Australian writer to worry about the connection between the notion of the common good in the post-liberal public sphere from a Christian perspective has been Ian Barns. I recommend his work to the reader, for he is endeavouring to reconnect our God-talk in relation to our God-worship and our God-walk. He has interwoven the talk of God as Three Persons in One with a doctrine of Creation, and rethought what these critical insights mean for how we worship, work and live corporately.

- ⁷ Such has been tried out by John Cobb, Douglas Meeks, Max Stackhouse and Garry Dorrien and others in the United States of America, by John Atherton in England and in Australia by Robert Simons. There is of course important traditions of Church social justice statements this century, whether these be synodical, papal, episcopal, or ecumenical.
- ⁸ The gift relationship in these terms is neither a response to predetermined problems of suffering and evil nor based on a sense of duty for these lead to the politics of resentment and perpetuate slave morality (Nietzsche) but rather in the first place is a response to the plenitude of divine love — of a recognition of the essential goodness of human existence and that creation is an ongoing, dynamic process that continually contains within it intimations of divine glory and constantly drawing us out to participate in the divine economy of gift-exchange. Christian political theology outlines the nature of God as a triune, confederate God in eternal fellowship, of eternal self-giving through creation. Christian theological politics is the ritual reenactment of this divine reality in the Eucharist, through the development of ecclesial politics that disperse authority and resist all forms of accretions of power for the sake of domination and exploitation, and in response to God's bountiful love our politics of peaceable difference constitutes a practice of *charity*. This is not a calling to naive romance, to self-induced ignorance, but it does mean that we refuse to concede that

tragedy, evil, loss and scarcity have any ultimate meaning. Paradoxically, a free spirited life in God's grace gives us the courage to continue to suffer and resign ourselves to the experience of loss, and to pray and work for the good of all God's people, "unto this last". As Andrew Shanks so poignantly put it in *Civil Society, Civil Religion* (1995), "radical generosity" is the fruit of the spirit of God the creator, "free-spiritedness" is the liberty exemplified by and given to all through Jesus Christ, and our "flair for tradition" emanates from God, the Holy Spirit.

- 9 This important tradition largely emerged out of English Anglican reflection forged out of the experience of social experiments in workers and consumer cooperation in the nineteenth century and in a rethinking of church- state relations at the beginning of this century. Its critical insights have been occluded by the reliance of social liberals on the state to provide the means for the securing of the rights and needs of the working poor.

FURTHER READING

The following references are a small selection of readings I have found useful and which might be of interest to readers seeking a deeper knowledge of arguments about the future of the welfare state and of social Christianity.

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The 1997 Sambell Oration was delivered by Dr Trevor Hogan, Sociologist, Latrobe University, Victoria. Taking as his starting point the diminution of the welfare state and the greater need for social justice as a consequence, Dr Hogan issues a timely and provocative challenge to the Anglican Church: one which is relevant to all Australians.

The challenge is to create a political culture based on social justice. Dr Hogan presents an imaginary scenario of how democracy, inclusiveness, and a fresh look at the distribution of wealth could occur.

According to Dr Hogan, models of social justice have historically been an important aspect of Christianity and have contributed much to the welfare state. While not denying the need for continuing state intervention, he advocates the need for new models of social justice to be recast for today's world.

In calling for the Church to be a site of experimentation and innovation for social justice, Dr Hogan not only invokes the spirit of Christian socialists of the past, he provides the basis for a timely, stimulating and much-needed debate.

The G T Sambell Oration is an annual public lecture, established by the Brotherhood of St Laurence to commemorate the work of former Executive Director, Geoffrey Tremayne Sambell.

Archbishop Sambell's deep and longstanding concern for social justice led him to explore the causes and solutions to poverty which today form an important part of the Brotherhood's work.

Each August an oration is held to further the enquiry into social justice issues, following the tradition established by Geoffrey Sambell.

If you would like to be notified of future Sambell Orations please call Public Affairs at the Brotherhood of St Laurence on 9483.1383.