



## **Grand beliefs – radical responses**

**The Right Reverend  
Michael B Challen**

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BROTHERHOOD OF ST LAURENCE  
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**GRAND BELIEES —  
RADICAL RESPONSES**

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The Thirteenth Sambell Memorial Oration  
delivered by

**The Right Reverend  
Michael B Challen**

on  
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at  
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Melbourne.

Brotherhood of St Laurence  
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## INTRODUCTION

Back in the 1961 recession, the then Archdeacon Geoffrey Sambell was, among his many titles and responsibilities, the Director of a group of five inner city parishes known as the Melbourne Diocesan Centre. (In 1969 it was renamed the Anglican Inner-City Ministry or AIM.) As Director he came one Sunday morning to St. Luke's North Fitzroy where I was the Priest-in-charge. I vividly recall him thundering in his sermon about the current social tragedy that 2.7 per cent (Department of Labour and National Service, 1961) of the total work force was unemployed. What I suspect lay behind his strong statement was his experience while a sales representative for the South Melbourne firm of Myttons in 1931 seeing men queuing for work or for soup or for both. It would seem that it was this experience of being personally confronted by fellow men in such chronic and basic need which caused him throughout his years of energetic, diverse and prophetic ministry as priest and bishop to engage with society at its points of need and require the Anglican Church to go and do likewise.

It is right and it is good that the Brotherhood of St Laurence has this annual oration honouring its second Director who, through his vast vision, prodigious work and impatience, challenged individuals, the Church, the welfare sector and governments to work for a more inclusive, just and compassionate society.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence has devoted the orations for 1992, 1993 and now 1994 to the issue of paid work. The Prime Minister, when announcing the formation of his special Employment Opportunities Task Force (25 May 1993), said:

We cannot be complacent about high unemployment. I have said that reducing unemployment and assisting the long term unemployed is the Government's first priority. If we do not do all we can to mitigate the extent and the effects of unemployment, we betray large numbers of our fellow Australians, our children and our own ideals.

At the 1992 oration the then Federal Minister for Science, the Hon. Barry Jones, outlined not only the current employment situation and its causes, but what might the future hold for us all. The place paid work is to have,

either in the weekly schedule of a person or in the value system of our society, could well change. Nor need it be the primary means for the redistribution of the nation's wealth. Education would not be focused on the needs of the individual but rather on the needs of the community. Individuals could develop a new focus in life by participation in and recognition by the community (Jones, 1992, p.25).

Last year an Aboriginal leader, Ms Lillian Holt, who is the Principal of the Aboriginal Community College, Port Lincoln, urged us to place ourselves and our work in a comprehensive context in order that we might see and experience the connectedness in life and be truly integrated persons rather than limiting ourselves by some ethnic/tribal and/or economic idol:

None of us can afford to be isolationist. In breaking down, we may break through. We need an all-encompassing, dreaming track for Australia; with new vision, values and vitality. People need to be revived, not profits. How we go about it will depend on each and every one of us all, collectively and individually. However, the new debate has to incorporate questions such as human dignity, justice, equality, wholeness, and universality. And an enrichment through diversity, as opposed to the old cultural clashes through the use of difference (Holt, 1993, p.8).

Through this 13th oration, and the third devoted to the place of employment, my purpose is to hold up some teachings of the Church and consider what practical implications they have for the Church as it engages with our contemporary society, which continues to experience various social and economic stresses. I wonder what Geoffrey would thunder forth now in response to the level of unemployment being not a mere 2 per cent (so-called frictional unemployment) but rather 10 per cent, which most economists attribute to both the outcome of the 'normal business cycle' and also of the basic structural changes taking place in the economies of all OECD countries, as well as some factors arising from our own situation.

## THE EMPLOYMENT SITUATION

The current level of unemployment, based upon the number who are registered with the Commonwealth Employment Service (July 1994) is 833,900, or 9.5 per cent of the work force. The key and disturbing features of this statistic are:

The number of people unemployed for more than one year is 304,100 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, June 1994).

The number of families with one or more children aged 15 years or less with no member employed is 347,800 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, June 1994).

The more vulnerable age groups are those 15-24 years old and those 45 years or more.

According to the 1991 Census, 31 per cent of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are unemployed, with 60 per cent of these being unemployed for more than a year.

The experiences of paid employment for both men and women is frequently through part-time and not full-time work, and is increasingly on a casual basis at that. Furthermore, there has been a growth in low paid jobs since June 1976, and a widening differential between those who are highly paid and those who are low paid.

In summary, the longstanding assumption that paid work will be available and when achieved that it will yield a comfortable income, no longer holds. We have an increasing proportion of wealthy, salaried people, signs of the emergence of working poor and large numbers with no paid work.

The devastating human situations summarised by these indifferent statistics have become so extensive and pressing that Australians, rather than seeing work as something to be put up with 'to get a quid', now openly talk about employment being necessary for a person's self-esteem, for participation in and belonging to society and for a sense of purpose. While these purposes may be expressed in elusive terms, they are real for unemployed people. Allow me to quote some statements made by particular unemployed people

who participated in the Brotherhood of St Laurence's project *Existing but not living* (Jackson and Crooks, 1993):

'It just makes me sick. It is so frustrating, and it has such socio-economic boundaries. It dictates where you can live, it dictates how much rent you can pay, it dictates how much you can spend on your kids' birthday presents and it dictates your life ... It obsesses you. It owns you. Unemployment owns you.'

'You don't live when you're unemployed — you exist.'

'The thing is too, when you're not working you're sort of out of the mainstream. You feel like you're just on the outskirts of everything. You feel as if you're on the edges of things. You miss the constant being with other people.'

'All these years we've given our kids everything they've wanted. All of a sudden we felt like an insect that was going to get walked on — he hit the bottle. We fought, the kids got upset, I walked out with a black eye.'

'Having a job means having choices.'

'I need another \$100 a week. I don't mind doing two or three part-time jobs, if I'm going to be a good part of the community then I need a good wage. But I need to survive at this stage and that's all I'm trying to do at this stage, and I'm entitled to survive, I feel. ... I just want to work, I wouldn't give a damn if I worked 16 hours if I had money you know. I just want to get up in the morning and say "yeah, I'm going to work" and not have to worry about putting that dole form in again.'

It was these statements backing careful reflection by the Brotherhood's research staff that led it to declare in its submission to the Prime Minister's Expert Committee:

... there are three important reasons why a substantial reduction in unemployment should be the main focus of Australia's economic policy — human dignity and fulfilment, social cohesion and equity,

and economic strength and stability (Brotherhood of St Laurence, 1993).

A former Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, writing in the midst of the Great Depression in England, declared that:

... the worst evil of unemployment is its creating in the unemployed a sense that they have fallen out of the common life. However much their physical needs may be supplied the gravest part of the trouble remains — they are not wanted. It has not been sufficiently appreciated that this moral isolation is the heaviest burden and most corrosive poison associated with unemployment; not bodily hunger, but social futility. Consequently it is no remedy to pay the unemployed as much as the employed (Temple, 1942).

Unemployment then does not cause only a poverty of income, but a poverty of personal significance. For such people, employment has become not merely a matter of economics, it has become a spiritual issue. The needs of unemployed people are forcing us to acknowledge what the Church calls the sacramental nature of reality.

## GRAND BELIEFS

If life is sacramental not only at the points of human need but also at the occasions of human fulfilment, what has the Church to say either about these life-threatening and life-bearing experiences, or to people who are having these experiences?

The Christian Faith arises from the interpretation of certain events in history. These events, their impact and their subsequent significance for the resulting communities of faith, are recorded in the Old and New Testaments, of which the Church provides a summary declaration in its creeds.

Christians find that these illuminating events of God in history give every human being a basis for identity, integration, purpose, hope and fulfilment at various levels of life, namely the individual, the familial, the societal and the cosmic while in the midst of the promises and threats that go with existence. They are therefore 'grand beliefs'. They are grand in scope; they are grand in vision; and, for the believer, they are grand in fact. For example, what could be more exciting to a person on his or her personal quest to discover, or what could be more reassuring to a person who feels alone, or what could be more reassuring to the aware observer of human history, to know that God has come into this ambiguous area of time and space and shared in the common lot of us humans and thereby subsumes all people and all things into His creative purposes. While you may not believe in it, you have to admit that this doctrine of the Incarnation is simply grand.

As we consider the problematic nature of employment in Australia, tonight, I do so in relation to two particular grand beliefs of the Church, namely, 'the human being' and 'the Kingdom of God'. I choose these two since the experiences of the unemployed person raise the issue of 'personal worth' and the causes of unemployment raises the issue of 'societal relationships'.

### **The human being**

While people outside the Jewish and Christian tradition will be aware of the stories of Creation to be found in the first three chapters of Genesis, they are not necessarily informed about their purpose or subtleties.

Genesis Chapter 1 proclaims that God is and God is the creator of all that is. The crown of His created order is the human being with each one, whether female or male (Genesis 1:27), made in His image. Humans are of intrinsic worth, no matter what their external features may be, because each one shares in the nature of God. The worth of each person does not lie in their photogenic appeal, in their intellectual capacity, in their technical attainments, in their economic productivity, or in their social acceptability. Nor does it lie in their employment status. She or he is of worth because she or he is. And she or he is, because God is.

This understanding of the human being consequently promotes the intrinsic worth of the individual as such. However, when it is so fostered without reference to the rest of Biblical revelation and Christian understanding it leads to a socially unhealthy, individualistic outlook. Perhaps this is in part why Christian theology became confused with certain aspects of Plato's philosophy and resonated so easily with the individualism fostered by the Enlightenment (17th century et seq.). But the writer of Genesis asserts that humans are made in the 'image of God'. It has taken many centuries of reflection upon the actions of God in history, especially through the life of Jesus the Christ, to unpack what that exciting description means. Christians, in accepting a Trinitarian view of God, are to understand that God is neither alone in Himself nor is He indifferent to His Creation. Edwards (1992) in his contribution to the discussion paper prepared by the General Synod Doctrine Commission, *A theology of the human person* (p.6), states:

That God is triune is of the highest significance for an understanding of the human person. The divine image does not characterise human beings in isolation from each other. Rather it characterises us as beings who are individual and social. It is human beings in community, male and female together, who are in the divine likeness. Living in society is not something foreign to humanity or even a secondary matter, a kind of afterthought for beings who are essentially complete in themselves. Interaction with other human beings and social involvement are fundamental to our existence, and they are in accord with our creation in the image of the triune God.

We are dependent on other people for our survival from the moment of our birth. We need them also so that we can learn language and

learn to live and interrelate as human beings. The experience of love and human warmth from a young age is vital to our development as persons. And there continues to be involvement with other people for almost all human beings throughout our lives. Those who lack such involvement may well feel a deep sense of loneliness and deprivation. The experience of family life and of participation in groups with which we share some interest or commitment are significant for us. And participation in civic and national life is also a matter of importance. For Christians, moreover, being members of the church is part of our Christian existence. To live in Christ is to share membership of the body of Christ. It is good to recall that even Christian hermits remain part of the church, and very often members of Christian communities. To consider humanity only as individuals is to abstract from the reality of what it is to be human. The social aspect of human life is as essential to the development of human beings and to an understanding of humanity as is the personal individual aspect.

Thus an individualistic view of the person leading to an atomistic perception of society is not consistent with the Biblical declaration about the exalted nature of us human beings.

### **The Kingdom of God**

A common way by which we arrange, control and give meaning to various aspects of life is through relationships. Tom is the son of the smithy who makes arrows. Mary is the teacher of Year 3. John is in charge of the overseas accounts. Joan belongs to Metropolitan Golf Club. Dennis is a member of the Brunswick branch of the Labor Party. These relationships can be also defined by different academic disciplines such as physics, chemistry, history, sociology, politics or economics. Henry Marcuse (1972) in his book *One dimensional man* describes how human beings have allowed themselves to be discussed, manipulated and unconsciously defined in terms of technologically driven consumerism and thus reduced to one dimension.

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke speak to the important place 'relationships' have in our thinking and action through their integration of

the 'Kingdom of God' and the 'Kingdom of heaven'. While there are far more references to the 'Kingdom of God' (71) than to 'gospel' (16) in the New Testament, the phrase has not been incorporated as readily into formal or informal theological conversation or thinking. However, writers like Maurice (1958), Schweizer (1910), Bultmann (1957), Dodd (1935), and people within the Ecumenical Movement have brought its place in the Scriptures and its vital insights into appreciating the relationship of God to the world of time and place back into prominence.

A recent and convenient exposition of this complex doctrine from an Anglican viewpoint is to be found in one of the preparatory papers for the Lambeth Conference 1988 entitled *For the sake of the Kingdom* (1986). (See also the Conference's official report, *The truth shall make you free*, p. 157.)

The Kingdom of God is not a piece of geography brought under the control of the Church. Nor is the Kingdom of God the Church, although certainly the Church is to be a witness to and an instrument of the Kingdom. Nor is the Kingdom of God a particular socio-political arrangement — yet it is to be concerned with the development of a just society.

Nor is the Kingdom of God something only in the future, for Jesus is reported by Mark saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel' (Mark 1:15).

Nor is the Kingdom of God complete now, for Jesus instructs us all to pray 'Your Kingdom come'. Nor is it only in that other remote ephemeral realm for Jesus said, 'But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you' (Luke 11:20).

Scholars now conclude that the Kingdom of God is to be understood as 'God reigning' which has its application to the past, the present and the future. But how the God who is love reigns needs careful thought for it is quite apparent that the Christ who ushered in the Kingdom through His own Person did not achieve His purposes in His preferred way every time during His 33 years on planet Earth.

The reigning of God who is love is to be understood as that creative dynamic He establishes in His cosmos and in every human being. Out of love, He invites us into Himself and unto one another. Through this love, He attracts us and disturbs us in order to experience the fullness of our divine origin,

divine nature and divine end whether we be responsive, indifferent or rebellious. The commitment, persistence and potency of His love and way of love are revealed in the birth, ministry, suffering, death, resurrection and Person of the Christ. Now that surely is a pertinent grand belief; certainly not just a distant, dusty dogma!

As Jenkins (1976) said in *The contradiction of Christianity*, the Kingdom of God 'is the biblical, pictorial and poetic way of referring to our understanding that the energy and activity of God which is at work in the world is the energy and activity which constitutes the pattern of the final future'.

If all this be so, then the basic reality and relationship in life is the love of God. It is divine love which gives freedom, direction, purpose, cohesion, hope and fulfilment. It is this relationship, the Kingdom of God, which is to be the ground, the critique and the power of all other relationships whether familial, societal or cosmic.

## **RADICAL RESPONSES**

Our Lord has created events and has given us understandings which together are the source of excitement, joy, relief and wonder. The Christian doctrines of the 'human being' and the 'Kingdom of God' are truly two grand beliefs within the total body of Christian Faith. They are both a stimulus and an imperative for action to those who dare to embrace them. This motivation, may I emphasise, does not lie in abstract notions which are merely the material for optional, intellectual speculation. The motivation arises from the discovery that these items of dusty dogma are concise summaries of God — given revelation as to how things are — what is the true nature of humans and what is the fundamental relationship undergirding the universe and history. Properly understood, these grand beliefs speak to the fundamentals or roots of our existence. Faithfully apprehended, they inescapably lead to radical responses. These revelations then urge us to give such direction and shape to our society whereby each person knows and can express in everyday living his or her intrinsic worth within an inclusive, supportive and just set of relationships. As the love of God urges us, how might the Church respond to this current issue of chronic and profound unemployment within Australia?

There are four lines of action I suggest we Christians may and ought to pursue. Perhaps the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne might consider these as it develops its mission policies for the next 20 years.

### **Reclaim the social**

Extend the context of the social analysis or the 'language of discourse'. Most of our citizens receive information about our current economic and social difficulties through the paragraphic reporting of the newspapers and television channels. These popularised reports primarily concern themselves with the performance of various economic indicators such as the value of the Australian dollar, the difference between export and import activity, the level of inflation, the registration of motor vehicles, the level of retail activity and housing construction, month by month.

This preponderance of reports about economics in our media has three effects. Firstly, it gradually conditions the unreflective person to allow his or her perception of life to be shaped primarily by economics. Secondly, it presumes that personal and social benefits will flow naturally, quickly and equitably to all citizens. Thirdly, it does not help the uninformed person to see or make the connections between economic and social goals. The media, with the special responsibility of informing the public, need to be encouraged to widen the context within which economic issues are analysed and debated.

Furthermore, there is an assumption among many of our decision-makers that social concerns and social goals cannot be addressed until the economy has been put right as if social programs, far from contributing to the economy, are a drain upon it. The independent and reputable economist Daryl Dixon has estimated that our unemployment level of 900,000 costs Australia \$15 billion to \$18 billion each year. And again Julian Disney in a recent paper (1993) spoke of the mutual benefit economic and social development generate and how foolish it is to separate one from the other:

When properly understood, economic and social development are largely complementary in that effective pursuit of one will commonly have a beneficial effect on the other. Economic development, for example, is essential to produce the financial resources and jobs which are necessary to maintain and enhance social development. On the other hand, social development is essential to provide the human resources, infrastructure and community cohesion which are necessary to achieve genuine and sustained economic development. This relationship may be only a marriage of convenience but it is indissoluble and might as well be made as harmonious as possible. Its importance is frequently overlooked by people who, for example, see national goals overwhelmingly in terms of narrowly-defined and short-term economic growth. They apparently fail to recognise that many of Australia's competitive advantages for attracting overseas investment are due largely to our relatively advanced degree of social development. This applies, for example, to our political and social

stability and our relatively well-educated work force. These attributes cannot be achieved merely by economic growth.

In the last analysis, we are to be concerned not only about the generation of the nation's wealth but also its distribution, by employment, throughout the nation. If not, we promote a dangerously divided nation. Given these points, then it behoves us all to expand the terms of public discussion about our economy.

We can do this by being more informed about the issue. Then we seize any opportunity that arises in our meeting with people, socially or otherwise, to expand the thinking of those who reduce the human being to an 'economic man'. We promote a healthy suspicion of the increasing use of such terms as 'consumers' instead of 'citizens', 'industries' instead of 'services', 'user pays' instead of 'equity and accessibility', 'labour force' instead of 'people'.

In the following extract from a recent OECD newsletter (June 1994), note how people are regarded as impotent objects within or irresponsible observers outside of a mechanical system. In reporting on a meeting of government ministers, economists, social scientists and corporate leaders who were discussing the 'persistent problem of unemployment' in OECD countries, the newsletter advises that:

As ways to strengthen social cohesion, the group saw some positive factors. To begin with, a number of self-correcting mechanisms may be at work. Disparities may begin to shrink as the share of young people in the labour force declines in the next 10-15 years, because their relative scarcity should help to push up their wages. The average level of education in the work force will rise as older, less educated workers retire, and this should contribute to a more even distribution of earnings.

It is this language which at the least desensitises the reader and at the worst fosters moral irresponsibility. It reduces those people suffering from economic constraints to 'things' subject to fatalistic processes and assumes a perspective which breeds passivity and disempowerment in all as if we human beings have not actually created the economic systems.

The insidious influence of such myopic and systemic talk needs to be offset by expanding our language of discourse. Parishes could well conduct workshops on 'recovering the news talk'.

Those of us who do have access to various publics have a special responsibility to ensure that the very language we use is not only intelligible but expands the intellectual framework within which these social-economic needs and responses are to be considered. To that end, it was heartening to read the recent leading article of the *Sunday Age* (31 July 1994) headed 'Keep people at front of debate'. It is this broader vision and understanding that the economy exists for the person and the people which needs to get into the body of the paper and into our own conversations with others.

### **Rethink human worth and community**

The world's nations have been for too many years dangerously divided according to whether the economy of a particular one was predominantly socialistic or predominantly capitalistic. However, events in recent years have shown that either system has dramatic flaws accompanying their blessings. Unqualified socialism stultifies imaginative thinking and personal initiative; it produces inefficient and unresponsive bureaucracies and authoritarian powers. Excessive forms of capitalism promote competition which gives little place to those who are disadvantaged; it produces destabilising swings in economic activity; it forsakes non-economic goals for purely monetary gain; it promotes greed and social indifference and, ironically, subtle authoritarianism also.

Few of us would rejoice in the condition of society in either the now Commonwealth of States or in the USA. The social gaps between various groups of people are so great, an alternative needs to be found to both of these time-tested and painfully inadequate forms of social order. We need an arrangement which is a practical outworking of those two key doctrines of the person and the Kingdom of God. We need a social order which acknowledges and develops both the intrinsic worth of every human being and her or his fulfilment through social interdependence. We must break out of the limiting and so simplistic typology of either capitalism or socialism. At this time of economic planning, perhaps the Churches could initiate a think-tank of concerned community leaders and relevant experts to explore how Australia might give shape to itself in order to minimise

either individualism or collectivism and further a more lively experience of human worth and community.

At the same time, the Church through its own life could express and promote the possibility of community as it interacts with the local neighbourhood or region. It needs to leave behind those programs that are defensive, introverted, isolating and sect-like to embrace the more Anglican tradition which readily witnesses to the action of God in secular society as seen in experiences of love, reconciliation, fulfilment, creativity and justice. In other words, the local community of faith needs to give support to and rejoice in those agents of love, justice and humanity outside its own fellowship. Such a commitment brings with it profound satisfaction and a widening of our appreciation of God's nature and ways, leaving behind the deadening effect of the survival mode.

What did Jesus say? Did he not say, 'Whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, will save it?' (Mark 8:35).

### **Stimulate understanding and communication**

The uncertainty that currently lies within employment and its basis in the future impacts upon every citizen. It is important that as many school leavers, young and mature adults as possible be informed about the changing nature of the so-called labour market in order that they are practically and psychologically prepared, and to know why it is likely to continue to be problematical.

This coming October, the Brotherhood of St Laurence will be releasing for public use its discussion kit: 'The future of work'. Our intent is to promote a discussion on this life-critical issue in as many parts of Australia as possible among ordinary citizens. We look to the Churches to help us promote this learning. We believe it is valuable in itself. It could well lead to some fresh thinking as to how we might generate jobs, how unemployed people and their families may be supported while the breadwinner is re-entering the work-a-day world and generate a climate in which unions, business and Governments might be free to contribute more readily and effectively and on a sustained basis to the generation of adequately paid jobs.

## **Pay fairly and responsibly for the future**

The Brotherhood of St Laurence in its submission to the Federal Government proposed an integrated range of provisions ranging from stimulation of the economy to create jobs, interim job creation through various and necessary public works and services, preparation of people for employment and adequate income support with minimal regulatory interference for those still seeking jobs. These programs would require additional revenue for the Government. For that reason, the Brotherhood proposed a 'job levy' which would be terminated once the level of unemployment had been substantially reduced. Unfortunately, the Government declined to adopt the levy. As a result its own employment programs may not be adequate in scope and their ongoing funding in an economically and socially responsible manner is not assured.

Vincent Fitzgerald (1993) in his official report to the Federal Treasurer, demonstrated that Australia has a lower total tax burden than the average for all OECD countries. In 1990, only the U.S.A. and Turkey had a lower tax as a proportion of national output, and now Australia has the lowest tax ratio. The Brotherhood of St Laurence believes that both Australia's economy can bear and Australians will accept a higher tax regime if the additional revenue is directed to enabling people to have jobs.

While there are arguments that an increase in taxes can be a disincentive to either an individual or a business, it needs to be kept in mind that people are not entirely driven by raw self-interest and that funds for the improvement of various elements of infrastructure and the maintenance of social stability are to the advantage of businesses.

If the wealth of the nation and the key means of its distribution becomes defective through increased unemployment, then the other methods of distribution, namely taxation, and the social wage, need to be enhanced.

Our politicians, however, do not have the will to so act. It is for Australian citizens, knowing of the plight of their unemployed mates and their own relatively lower light tax burden who need to ask for taxes to be increased sufficiently. The Church could certainly initiate an education program which will lay the basis for an informed request of our Governments and foster an electoral climate that makes the increase politically acceptable.

## CONCLUSION

These four suggestions to the Church for action are intentionally radical because they hopefully address the philosophical assumptions and values as well as social structures or 'roots' which are the cause of much of our present social, economic and political stresses. But they are certainly not radical in the sense of being unusual. From the dawn of time, human beings have insisted on both their individual worth and gregariousness. The task has been to express these qualities within differing historical and social settings. Our own context is undergoing profound changes from which arise possibilities of both promise and threat with considerable ferment, if not turbulence, on the way.

To this and within this situation the Church proclaims and is to live out its grand beliefs, 'God made man in his own image' and 'The Kingdom of God is at hand'.



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Born and educated in Melbourne, The Right Reverend Michael Challen served in the inner-city area of the Diocese of Melbourne for 12 years and was an active member of the Brotherhood Board prior to moving to Perth in 1971. He was Assistant Bishop of Perth from 1978 to 1990. Until his consecration in 1978, Bishop Challen was Director of the Diocesan Home Mission Department and was instrumental in the establishment of the Health and Welfare Services in Perth. He also chaired the Commonwealth Government's Social Security Advisory Council and the Advisory Board for the West Australian Welfare and Community Services Review.

In 1989 Bishop Challen was made a member of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Pastoral Delegation to Namibia. During his 11 years with the Inter-Church Committee for Aboriginal Affairs either as Chairman or member, he successfully promoted Aboriginal justice issues in the Church and generally assisted Church people to make links between the Christian faith and secular life.

Since returning to Melbourne, Bishop Challen has chaired the Diocese of Melbourne Social Responsibilities Committee and currently the National Anglican Caring Organisations Network. He is also a member of the General Synod Social Responsibilities Commission.

Bishop Challen was appointed Executive Director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence in January 1991.

Since his arrival at the Brotherhood two key projects have been commenced, the 'Future of work' project in response to continuing high levels of unemployment, and the 'Prevention of youth homelessness' project which will develop strategies to encourage young people to live at home. Bishop Challen has also heightened the profile of the Brotherhood by taking an active role in the media on significant issues of social justice.