

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

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Christians and the Federal Election 21 May 2022

DOGS are often portrayed as anti-religion. This is not true. Many DOGS members have a religious belief. But DOGS are opponents of entanglement of religion with the State through the use of taxpayer money for religious enterprises. In particular DOGS oppose public funding of sectarian schools.

That does not mean that people with firm religious beliefs should not have strong political convictions. It just means that they should be prepared to pay for them.

So, DOGS were interested to find that, on May 17, 2022, with four days to go to the Federal election, [George Browning](#), the president of the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network (APAN), and retired Anglican Bishop of Canberra Goulburn 1993 -2008 had the following article on John Menadue's blog, Pearls and Irritations at <https://johnmenadue.com/christians-and-the-federal-election/>

Christians and the Federal Election

By [George Browning](#)

May 17, 2022

Christianity and Christians cannot be neutral or disconnected from politics. Christianity is an incarnate faith. While it rightly gives central place to personal piety, Christianity is, at its roots, a way of life deeply immersed in the world for its justice, renewal and transformation. It is so because God, who took human likeness in Jesus, is prejudiced toward harmony and justice and therefore is on the side of the poor and needy, the downtrodden and voiceless. The divine agenda is nothing less than the transformation of human society into one where the first will be last and the last will be first. Christians pray: thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven.

For this reason, at the forthcoming federal election Christians have a solemn obligation not to vote for blatant self-interest but to vote for a person or party they believe will be most inclined to serve justice and common good, a sustainable future, not just in Australia, but throughout the globe.

Those currently in power wish to remain in power, an understandable but not necessarily virtuous aspiration. They are encouraging us to believe the direction we have been heading is the direction that should be maintained.

Let me come straight to the point. I do not believe a Christian, in good conscious, can support a political party wedded to neoliberal capitalism and self interest. My reason is simple, it is that neoliberal capitalism is a construct embedded in a flawed philosophical and quasi-theological position which inevitably leads to injustice and is incapable of addressing the 21st century crises faced by humanity.

Neoliberal capitalism is born from a post enlightenment position that contends the individual and not community is the fundamental unit of society; and on a broader scale that nations and national interest (nationalism) should shape international life. It is flawed because humans are social beings. None of us can live alone. None of us are capable of true independence. We are all interdependent.

We are who we are through others. Reflecting on the catastrophic slaughter of WW1, an international gathering of Christian leadership in 1920 contended that self-interest is the basis of human violence and disintegration and the greatest of all evils is national self-interest.

Neo-Liberal capitalism is founded on a quasi-theological position because of the obvious mutual interdependence, one could say marriage, that exists between the political and religious right. But the religious right is misleading its political friends and giving them false comfort. Priority given to individual identity is an entirely novel idea imposed by the religious right on scripture and is a novel thought to Christianity. Scripture contends we are as strong as our weakest members and that while each is unique, our uniqueness lies in the contribution with which we can gift the identity of the whole body.

“Church is the only society on earth that exists for the benefit of non-members” is attributed to both William Temple and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. If there is to be a marriage between Christianity and politics, it must be founded on the idea that our interest is developed through investment in the legitimate interest of others and that national interest must serve global best interest.

Neoliberal capitalism was given a huge kick along by Thatcher, Reagan and Howard and exaggerated to absurdity by Abbott and Trump. The philosophy has meant individual rights have triumphed over societal good. Individual rights and needs are transient, societal good endures across generations. Neoliberal capitalism wins at the ballot box through temporary hip-pocket incentives at the expense of long-term policy and reform.

This flawed philosophy has resulted in the privatisation of much that should have remained in public hands – not least the port of Darwin. We have seen the consequences play out in, amongst other areas, aged care, the prison system, and the inability of the electricity grid to be made fit for purpose as we journey towards decentralised generation of renewable energy.

We have seen this flawed philosophy play out in the decimation of the public service. The corporate memory and skill of the public service exists to serve the common good. It is almost beyond belief that neoliberal politicians and especially the Prime Minister deride ‘non-elected experts’ and insist that they, partisan politicians, are the ones to decide strategies, the merits of which can only be properly understood through expert technical, scientific, or modelling analysis.

This flawed philosophy has insisted the market makes the necessary adjustments and reforms that society needs. If this is the case, why have government at all? But at least it goes part way to explain why the current government appears to have no reforming policy on any of the crucial issues that confront us. For the three years of its latest term the government has presided over a policy void.

The market does well what it is designed to do – make maximum profit at minimum cost. But the market cannot address the appalling pay level endured by aged care workers or the inaccessibility of housing. Nor can the market determine the support that should have been given to the Pacific Island Nations. These and many other issues need value attributed to them independently of the market, values that undergird societal good.

Ironically the market can now make a major contribution to climate transition given it is cheaper to use renewables than it is to generate energy from fossil fuels. (The government, feeling stymied that its commitment to fossil fuels no longer has the support of business or the market, now abuses the very market principles it espouses by subsidising fossil fuels to the mining industry).

Finally, the extreme end of this flawed philosophy and quasi theology makes place for and gives comfort to conspiracy theories. People such as Craig Kelly and George Christensen have been tolerated, even protected, within the government. Can the Coalition parties be political platforms through which Christians can invest their energy and commitment? Yes, of course yes. But this can only be so with integrity if those parties free themselves from the flawed ideology in which they are trapped by the extreme elements in their ranks.

Wanting social equity, an environmentally sustainable world for future generations, transparency and accountability in government, compassion and empathy for refugees and asylum seekers, a voice to parliament, should be cross party aspirations. That they are not, is shameful and the reason for the rise of independent voices.

At the federal election we, people of faith must be bold enough to stand up for the divine agenda made manifest in Jesus.

DOGS COMMENT

Many Christians who are not of Mr Morrison's peculiar sect, might utter a sigh of relief after reading Bishop Browning's paper. And DOGS are also relieved – as far as it goes.

BUT

Like the Lib-Labs there is not a whisper from retired Bishops Browning about the current unequal funding arrangements between public and private schools. DOGS will take Bishop Browning and his Anglican Christians more seriously when they trumpet from the rooftops the extraordinary largesse from the current Lib-Lab governments around Australia showered upon their Anglican schools.

For example , according to Trevor Cobbold from Save our Schools,

Geelong Grammar Victoria has been overfunded by \$4.7 million;

Hailybury Victoria, by \$22 million

Ivanhoe Grammar Victoria, by \$ 10.4 million

Melbourn Grammar Victoria by \$7. 3 million

St. Peters Adelaide by \$ 11.9 million,

Hale, Western Australia by \$ 10.8 million

Trinity Grammar NSW by \$16. 4 million

To name a very few.

None of these schools cater for any more than 1% of the lowest income quartile of the population and some, none at all. All have more than 90%, and some 98% of students from the top two income quartiles of the population.

DOGS suggest it would be appropriate for Bishop Browning, given his Christ centred Christianity, and devotion to the common good, to address the greed, lack of compassion and the blatant exclusiveness and elitism of Anglican schools throughout Australia

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