

the Catalyst

Citizens for Public Justice Summer 2015

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Justice Tour Visits Eight Cities Across Canada

By Joe Gunn

In April and May a delegation of leaders was hosted by ecumenical committees in eight cities across Canada, including many CPJ members, for Justice Tour 2015. They shared information about poverty in Canada and climate justice and listened to local reflections on engagement and advocacy.

The traveling church leaders included Rev. Willard Metzger, Executive Director of Mennonite Church Canada, Rev. Karen Hamilton, General Secretary of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC), and Rev. Susan Johnson, National Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. I was honoured to accompany the Justice Tour throughout the country, speaking in some venues and moderating events in others. The tour visited Vancouver, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Kitchener, Halifax, Montreal, and Ottawa.

In 2011, important interfaith statements were issued on poverty and climate change. Yet most people in the pews were never made aware of their content. CPJ, an affiliate member of the CCC,

has used these statements in various educational and awareness-raising opportunities, including our two books of reflections and action suggestions, to encourage the work of the churches and engage faith communities in further action.

These two priority issues for the CCC's Commission on Justice and Peace are especially strategic in 2015 with the civic engagement that will occur during the federal election and because of two key international events: the UN Climate Conference in Paris (December) and the UN General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals (September).

At events attended by over 700 individuals, the church leaders heard from dozens of experts, local politicians, and church members passionate about public justice issues. It was clear that people in the Canadian churches really care about poverty and climate change.

We heard a communal lament due to the breakdown of relationships: with God, with creation, and with each other. Canada, it seems, has changed, but there is

a yearning to revitalize communities. It was recognized that faith communities can and must play a role in changing the dominant discourse. They must be active in bridging cultures, re-establishing hospitality, and recreating community.

Yet throughout the tour, we also discerned the presence of hope. Along with all of the analysis we heard was a sense of urgency in the need for action and change. Justice Tour participants focused on the CCC's two priority issues (climate justice and ending poverty in Canada), because the 25 members of the CCC firmly believe Psalm 24: "the earth is the Lord's and all that's in it, the world, and those who live in it."

So where do we go from here?

Drawing on what was learned during the listening tour, a *Church Leaders' Pastoral Statement* will be developed and shared later this year for study and response from church constituencies, candidates for political office, and the public. Locally-led activities will follow the Statement, resulting in various engagement and advocacy plans, which will include meetings with candidates and the development of church resource materials – reflections, prayers, hymns, and liturgical activities. Canadian church leaders will participate in, and report back from, the UN meetings with international faith-based partners. A federal election resource, including sections on these two priority issues, has already been prepared for use by ecumenical committees.

Church leaders received these challenges in good faith during Justice Tour 2015, offering their valuable time and engaged attention to the many concerns expressed. The ecumenical participants and the many concerned persons who inhabit church pews are now invited to pick up the causes of poverty in Canada and climate justice and make them their own.

Joe Gunn serves as Executive Director of Citizens for Public Justice.

In Review

Ecumenical Election Resource

CPJ has collaborated with the **Canadian Council of Churches, KAIROS, Canadian Foodgrains Bank, Project Ploughshares, Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada, and the Church Council on Justice and Corrections** on an ecumenical *Federal Election Resource*. This joint bulletin addresses CPJ's core issues of poverty, climate change, and refugee rights, as well as the focus issues of our partner organizations.

As we always do in an election year, CPJ is preparing our own *2015 Election Bulletin*. All of our election resources can be found at cpj.ca/election2015.

CPJ on the Hill



Policy Analyst Karri Munn-Venn met with Liberal MPs **David McGuinty** (above) and **Kirsty Duncan** to discuss what the Liberal campaign platform will have to say about climate change. CPJ staff also met with Conservative MP **Brad Butt** as we continued to present our "National Anti-Poverty Plan for Canada" and NDP MP **Paul Dewar** to discuss how faith communities can respond to the Syrian refugee crisis.

CPJ's Executive Director, Joe Gunn, presented to the **Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology** on how health is impacted by poverty and inequality in Canada. He proposed a national anti-poverty plan as a way forward.



The Dignity for All campaign presented the **All-Party Anti-Poverty Caucus** with 4,000 postcards that call for a national anti-poverty plan. The postcards, as well as an additional 1,300 online signatures, were gathered during *Chew on This!* on October 17, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, in 36 cities across the country.

Welcome Elizabeth



CPJ is glad to have Elizabeth Keith with us this summer as our Outreach Assistant Intern. Elizabeth will be assisting us in our communications work as we prepare for the 2015 federal election.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission



Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission recently concluded in Ottawa. On May 31, CPJ joined with faith leaders, public officials, and other Canadians in the Walk for Reconciliation, an opportunity to learn from each other and build relationships. The walk was designed to transform and renew the very essence of relationships among Indigenous peoples and all Canadians.

CPJ on the Road

This spring, CPJ and Canada Without Poverty conducted workshops on our "National Anti-Poverty Plan for Canada" in **Charlottetown, Halifax, and across southern Ontario in Toronto, Hamilton, Port Colborne, Windsor, Sarnia, and London**. We will be travelling to Western Canada later this year. Contact CPJ to learn more.



Karri Munn-Venn was in **Quebec City** in April representing CPJ at the Act On Climate March and the Green Church Conference that coincided with the premiers' meeting on climate change.



CPJ's 2015 Annual General Meeting was held on May 28 at Talbot Street Church in **London, ON**. **Glen Pearson** of the London Food Bank delivered the keynote address. **John Klein-Geltink** and **Sue Wilson** gave the responses.

CPJ's Updated Advocacy Toolkit



An updated version of our popular Advocacy Toolkit is now available. There are two new sections on social media and engaging youth in advocacy work. Get your copy at www.cpj.ca/advocacy-toolkit.

Letters to the Editor

God's Call to Reconcile

God's focus in the world (or mission, if we use church-y words) is all about reforming and restoring relationships. This work is primarily done through God's communal life (the Trinity) and through the call to the church. If our primary focus or purpose is one of reforming and restoring relationships, then as Canadians we have no need to look further than our relationship with the Indigenous people of Canada. This is not about doing good or doing what is right. It is about doing God's work, which is ultimately what we are about as Christians in the world.



Mike Hogeterp, in his Spring 2015 article, "Reconciliation is Sacred Work," provides an articulate and well-written reflection of what that sacred work can be about and provides some practical ways to live within this reconciliatory and restorative life. We have hard work ahead of us but it is not insurmountable. If we listen to the voices of our Indigenous neighbours, we can hear God's voice calling, enlightening, and restoring us as one.

Bishop Elaine Sauer
Winnipeg, MB



CPJ's New Mission Statement

Jim Dekker's article ("Of Pigsties, Stewardship, and the Flourishing of Creation" – Spring 2015) brought out two factors that matter to me personally. The first is that when we talk about the environment we are talking about what is basic and essential for life itself. Sometimes it seems as though we have a colonist's attitude towards the earth – take everything quickly and then move on. But where do we think we are moving on to? It is within this place that we must find everything needed to survive and flourish. As such, this earth is to be taken care of, to be cared for.

Second is the concept of serving. And there's the rub. To serve means laying aside pride and self-interest. It means putting the welfare of someone or something else ahead of my convenience and my desires. This serving is to be done in an alert and assertive manner. Taking CPJ's new mission statement seriously means that we will need to give time, energy, heart, and money.

Valerie Kennedy
Edmonton, AB

We want to hear from you!
Submit your letters to:

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Citizens for Public Justice

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Citizens for Public Justice's mission is to promote public justice in Canada by shaping key public policy debates through research and analysis, publishing, and public dialogue. CPJ encourages citizens, leaders in society, and governments to support policies and practices which reflect God's call for love, justice, and the flourishing of creation.

CPJ annual membership fee

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Cover image: Willard Metzger addresses the Justice Tour in Ottawa.

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Time for Churches to Speak as One

Adapted from Glen Pearson's keynote address to CPJ's 2015 Annual General Meeting in London, ON.

We are living in the final days of what we might call the “long consensus” – that time stretching from the end of the Second World War until two decades ago, when leaders and citizens alike began pulling back from the public space. It was a gradual devolution, predicated on the belief that globalization, a lower tax demand, and the power of the individual would inspire a new generation of wealth and peace. Now, over 20 years later, despite the fact that Canada saw more wealth generated



than at any other time in its history, we find less and less of it going to those on the margins: aboriginal communities, people of low income, and even a fragile natural environment.

Governments at all levels failed to inspire communities to stick together through these times of global change and to jointly invest to insure that all Canadians had a chance for a better life. This dealt a crippling blow to our sense of social solidarity. The result has been that our federalism – the arrangement whereby various political jurisdictions share resources with one another to engender a rough sense of equity across the land – has been fragmented or torn. The wealthy class also bears much of the blame as the majority of its members sought to invest their growing wealth elsewhere while leaving a deteriorating social infrastructure at home. And then there is the failure of Canadian citizens to take democracy, poverty, environmental degradation, and their social responsibilities to one another seriously. We are all to blame for our present plight.

For faith communities this presents a rare opportunity to upgrade our **vision**. Now, more than ever, our solidarity with at-risk communities is required. Yet during my time in Ottawa as a Member of Parliament, it became clear to me that the notion of speaking truth to power was frequently undermined by fear. Religious organizations' feared having their funding or tax-exempt status cut if they spoke out too strongly against government's unwillingness to redress two decades of abandoning the public space and its respective responsibilities to it. In other words our vision was, in more ways than we care to admit, held captive by the very political elites we were meant to challenge – we granted to Caesar the things that were God's.

Admittedly, for faith communities, it is a difficult thing to challenge power these days because of our very own **vulnerability**. Churches numbers are in decline, societal leaders look less and less to faith communities for advice or partnership, and a more individualistic world worries less and less about collective accountability. We still have an important

message but find it increasingly difficult to sell. Members of faith communities continue to gather around activities of social justice, human rights, and environmental accountability, yet often fail to work together in sufficient numbers to alter the present equation or to influence society to take note of our re-energized communities. Faith groups incrementally gave over their compassionate influence to vast government programs following the Second World War. It is a tragedy of

significant proportions that they now have trouble coming together just as society requires their influence in significant measure once more.

All of this speaks to our crowning need of the hour – a prophetic and collective **voice**. Seen from a distance, the sounds coming from faith communities are those of voices, not a voice. Our inability to combine our efforts, not only at senior leadership levels, but among congregations themselves, has left us unable to rise above the clinical message of the free market and the endless soundbites of the political parties. Unless we find a way to collect our disparate voices into one national call, then our best days will be in our past.

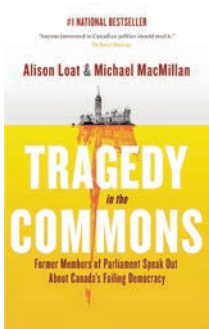
The days of the “long consensus” are now fading into history, and the present corporate influence is laying waste to vulnerable members of society and a fragile environmental order. Therefore, the time couldn't be more propitious for an ethical and prophetic voice to lead us to a new and more equitable place. The most powerful office in the land is neither the Governor General nor the Prime Minister, but the citizen, who through the authority of law, has the power to remake society and throw out politicians who refuse to comply with the leadership of citizens. But unless individual Canadians come together to fight for the society they want, equity will remain nothing but an ideal. It is now time for our faith communities to assume their collective leadership role in that battle and recover their own relevance in the process.



Glen Pearson is a former Liberal MP for London North Centre and a co-director of the London Food Bank.

Book Reviews

Summer book suggestions from Citizens for Public Justice



Tragedy in the Commons: Former Members of Parliament Speak Out About Canada's Failing Democracy
By Alison Loat and Michael MacMillan
Vintage Canada, 2015

Reviewed by Dennis Gruending

Alison Loat and Michael MacMillan run a think tank called Samara, dedicated to increasing the level of political participation in Canada. That's a steep hill to climb. Turnout for the federal election in 2011 was 61 per cent. Prior to 1993, turnout usually varied between 70 and 80 per cent. Canada is free and democratic when compared to many other countries, but opinion polls exhibit a deep dissatisfaction with our politics and politicians.

The authors decided that former MPs would be the best people to ask about what might be done to improve Canadian politics. They interviewed 80 former MPs, representing all five parties, who had served between 2004 and 2011. Many poured out their frustrations in two-to-three hour interviews.

Oddly and unconvincingly, most identified themselves as outsiders who had never intended to run for office but were reluctantly convinced to do so. A second common theme was their frustration over the controlling influence exerted by their parties and leaders, beginning with their nominations and proceeding to their time in Parliament.

The authors indicate, however, that when they asked MPs what could be done to change the practice of politics for the better most responded with "mere tweaks." Only a few suggested any institutional reforms and just two recommended electoral reform or proportional representation.

It would have been interesting to know how MPs believe they might best work for the necessary change on issues such as poverty, climate change, and the rights of Indigenous peoples. Yet there is virtually no mention of that by the MPs, at least none that is recorded in this book.

There are social movements and community leaders pushing our lawmakers to work for justice, equity, and a planet that can be sustained. Perhaps it is they who should be asked what can be done to change politics for the better.



This Change Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate
By Naomi Klein
Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2014

Reviewed by Karri Munn-Venn

Author and activist Naomi Klein has done it again. *This Changes Everything*, is at once thick with academic research and deeply grounded in human narrative. It is a profoundly personal account of coming to understand that climate change is *the* issue of our time.

Klein clearly and compellingly makes the case that a failure to address rising global temperature and our collective reliance on fossil fuels puts all other progress at risk.

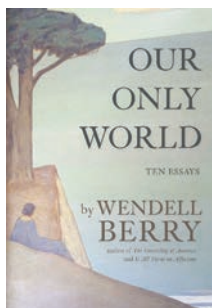
Her tremendously informative work has transformed how I see the challenges and opportunities related to climate change. She begins with an exploration of the far-reaching efforts of climate change deniers to conceal the reality of the climate crisis in pseudo-scientific rhetoric. Klein then goes on to expose the complicity of some mainstream environmental groups and eco-celebrities in exacerbating the problem and later outlines the extensive work and incredible resources poured into research on geoengineering the atmosphere. Finally, she delves into the vast social movements that have emerged around the world in recent years – Greek grandmothers, Canadian and American First Peoples, Ecuadorian and Nigerian environmentalists, and farmers around the world – and the unlikely alliances that have been formed in the face of developments that feed climate change.

Scattered throughout her book, Klein offers example after example of modern cities and remote communities shifting towards renewable energy and vastly reducing their reliance on oil, gas, and coal. Together these examples demonstrate that another way is not only possible, but profitable.

While I wholeheartedly agree with Klein that climate change is an issue that requires ever-greater public awareness and engagement, I disagree with her singular emphasis on grassroots movement-building. Action to address climate change is required on such a scale that individual and community understanding and action must translate into political advocacy and, ultimately, policy change. We need our political leaders – at all levels – to take a fresh look at the science, the social impacts, and the economics of climate change, environmental degradation, and renewable energy.

Coming together on these issues would indeed change everything.

Book Reviews



**Our Only World:
Ten Essays**
By Wendell Berry
Counterpoint, 2015

Reviewed by Janelle Vandergrift

Before reading it, I assumed *Our Only World* would focus solely on climate and environment issues. Instead, Wendell Berry weaves an analysis of today's social and environmental issues as one in the same.

Within ten essays, he manages to discuss work, forests, abortion, gay marriage, the role of the state, a U.S. Farm Bill, local economies, and more within a framework that emphasizes the need to look at these as part of the *whole* instead of on their own.

What are we to do about sustaining and improving “our only world?” On this, Berry believes that people must be engaged in solving the issues of our time on a local level. While he maintains his characteristic distrust of the state and a belief that “our ultimate reality is not political,” Berry suggests that we are not to give up our efforts for “better politics, better policy, better representation, better official understanding of our problems and needs.”

Berry's discomfort with politics as the be-all and end-all of our work in the world reminded me that public justice is truly much more than a political ethic. Public justice exists in our communities, in our families, in our culture, in our front and backyards, and indeed must be enacted within our whole lives.

Despite its fair warnings of our current destructive patterns, *Our Only World* is a hopeful read. It ends by encouraging us to live in the present, not resigning ourselves to “the end of the world as we know it” tomorrow. If all of us could live such a thoughtful existence as Berry, I have no doubt that our only world would be a better one.



Live Justly
By Jason Fileta,
Ronald J. Sider,
Eugene Cho, Kimberly
McOwen Yim, Shayne
Moore, Rene Padilla,
Nicholas Wolterstorff,
and Sunia Gibbs
Micah Challenge
USA, 2014

Reviewed by Monique Verhoef

I grew up on a steady diet of the phrase “where the rubber hits the road.” I recall it being used to say “let's get real” or “now we are talking about what really matters.”

Micah Challenge's book *Live Justly* is a “rubber hits the road” kind of book for those seeking to find traction in how to live out biblical justice as an integrated part of their daily lives. It is deeply rooted in scripture and the core beliefs that God is sovereign over all and that God loves justice. This book engages diverse learning styles to move the reader to consider living justly as an integrated act and expression of the love of God.

Designed to be a combination of thoughtful solo work processed in intentionally formed small groups, this study addresses six areas that are critical to a lifestyle of justice: prayer, advocacy, consumption, generosity, creation care, and relationships. The outcome, if one engages fully in the study, is a personal action plan around integrating justice as a lifestyle.

With a variety of readings from “boots on the ground” justice leaders, this study will serve as a great reminder for those who have already given thought to what it means to address systemic injustice and the many barriers people experience to full flourishing. Its true impact will come with some hard but well-guided work. Some of the practical activities and subsequent suggestions for action – calling your government representatives or looking at local and national poverty policies – are designed and delivered specifically for the American audience, but are, with a little effort, easily translatable for the Canadian context.



Glorious and Free
By Bryce Dymond
FriesenPress, 2015

Reviewed by Naomi Kabugi

Bryce Dymond reminds the reader that poverty is not entirely an issue for developing countries nor does one need to travel outside Canada to see it. Child poverty is a reality in Canada. The cycle of child poverty is a result of, among many other things, abusive homes, addictions, bullying, and mental illness. The story of *Glorious and Free* invites the reader to contemplate child poverty with an action plan not just to raise awareness about it, but to also contribute to programs that work towards eliminating child poverty in Canada.

In twelve chapters and 125 pages of short active stories, Dymond tells of his run across Canada to educate and raise funds for children living in poverty. It's his inclusion of his stories of frustration and encouragement, as well as personal love stories of friends and family that supported him, that make this great story of faith and hope so refreshing to read.

Glorious and Free and Dymond's national run capture the capacity and generosity of Canada's people and the scenery of its provinces, making it a great Canadian story. These are beautiful stories about people whose culture of kindness intersects with their rights and responsibilities as citizens to contribute to the well-being of all people, beginning with children.

This book is great for elementary school children and their families. With stories told from personal experience, children will be made aware of other children's initiative to participate in nation-building through simple ways that make a difference.

FOR THE LAST THIRTIETH YEAR, ADDITIONAL PEOPLES HAVE BEEN MAKING A COMEBACK - A REMARKABLE COMEBACK, FROM A TERRIFYINGLY LOW POINT OF POPULATION, OF LEGAL RESPECT, OF CIVILIZATIONAL STABILITY. A COMEBACK TO A POSITION OF POWER, INFLUENCE AND CIVILIZATIONAL CREATIVITY...
THE COMEBACK
JOHN RALSTON SAUL

The Comeback: How Aboriginals Are Reclaiming Power and Influence
By John Ralston Saul
Penguin Books, 2014

Reviewed by Michelle Nieviodomy

The Comeback is a timely book that captures an uncensored narrative of the current status of our nation. It depicts the relationship between Indigenous people and Canada. Saul brings to light numerous historical accounts framing the current reality of Indigenous people. While this reality is one of injustice and struggle, he sheds equal light on the remarkable stories of countless Indigenous people who characterize the strength, resiliency, courage, and gifts they bring to this nation.

Saul calls non-Indigenous readers into action for the integrity of our nation. This means acknowledging that we are all treaty people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. The narrative of injustice is the story of all people in Canada. He also calls readers into a deeper level of truth and understanding while suggesting there is no room for sympathy but rather a call to pursue justice and share responsibility. If our nation is going to write a new narrative, Indigenous people will play an integral role to rebuilding this country.

Saul has thoughtfully navigated a path through which non-Indigenous people could “embrace and support the comeback of the original peoples.”

As a Cree woman who deeply desires to see restoration not only for my own people but for all communities, I was glad that this book speaks to the desire for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to build right relationships.

I continuously witness truly awe-inspiring Indigenous leaders, youth, artists, and advocates. To have a non-Indigenous author acknowledge the strong voice and powerful example Indigenous people are in Canada is truly honoring.



Blessed are the Consumers: Climate Change and the Practice of Restraint
By Sallie McFague
Fortress Press, 2013

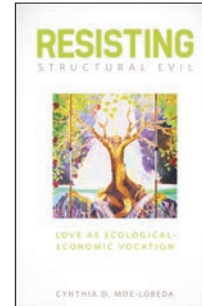
Reviewed by Sheila McKinley osu

Sallie McFague, Distinguished Theologian in Residence at Vancouver School of Theology, takes an uncompromising stand in *Blessed are the Consumers* as she challenges us to live simply. She attributes this time of ecological devastation and financial chaos to our “insatiable appetites that are literally consuming the world.” What she proposes is restraint so that abundant life might be possible for all. She approaches this idea from three perspectives.

First, she examines the practices of three saints: eighteenth century Quaker John Woolman, World War II era French philosopher Simone Weil, and Catholic worker movement founder Dorothy Day. These three have chosen particular ways of living alternatively so that they may contribute to the life of others and to earth itself. Second, she delves into the Scriptures that many of us skirt around – the ones about losing one’s life to find it and about putting on the mind of Christ who emptied himself. She offers profound insights into the parable of the Good Samaritan. Finally, she looks at the interdependence of all creation, the give-and-take that is woven into our very existence.

In the end, she dares us to say, “I have enough” and reminds us that *limit* is not a bad word. She challenges the religions of the world, and Christianity in particular, to be the “conscience of the planet” and to state that some self-emptying on the part of the well-to-do is absolutely necessary.

This is not a comfortable book to read, but it is an important one. Now, more than ever, is the time to respond to a new vision of the good life.



Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation
By Cynthia Moe-Lobeda
Fortress Press, 2013

Reviewed by Joe Gunn

In May last year, I co-taught a week-long course from the CPJ offices in Ottawa on “public theology” (offered by Waterloo Lutheran Seminary). We took students to visit the Assembly of First Nations and environmental groups, organized panels of Parliamentarians, interviewed Senators, and brought in speakers on topics from ethical issues in healthcare to tax policies. *Resisting Structural Evil* would have been the perfect textbook from which to base all our sessions.

Author Cynthia Moe-Lobeda asks Christians the provoking question, “What does it mean for we, the ‘uncreators,’ the ‘over-consumers,’ to love?” Of course, loving God means to love our neighbours. But Moe-Lobeda also ensures that Christian ethics addresses the systemic evil of colossal economic structures – moving well beyond personal piety as an adequate faith response to the challenges of modern life in North America. In short, she defines the Christian compulsion to “neighbour-love” as not only an interpersonal journey of discovery, but also an “economic-ecological vocation.”

She quotes theologian Sallie McFague saying, “We cannot love neighbour without reducing our consumption” – and then goes further. The life of the middle class in the developed world “requires a tectonic shift in moral consciousness.” Using examples of how our lifestyle and economic choices impact the possibilities of life for our neighbours in the Global South, she posits neighbour-love in a newer frame: it must also include a deep concern for the well-being of the Earth.

In short, this most-welcome volume adds depth and breadth to the readers’ conception of what public justice must entail.

Book Reviews



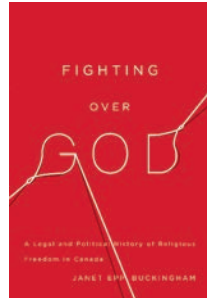
The News: A User's Manual
By Alain de Botton
Signal, 2014

Reviewed by Brad Wassink

Given the profound impact the news has on our lives – how we use our time, spend our money, and cast our votes – the media deserves much more focus in our public justice discussions. In 1984, CPJ produced the “Charter of Social Rights and Responsibilities,” a framework for how people of faith and various organizations, including the media, should engage in public life. It calls on the media to “present critical analyses of the situation of others, particularly the poor and minorities, to reflect the interdependence of our lives, and to present a wide range of viewpoints.” I think it’s safe to say that today’s news outlets are not living up to this standard.

Though Alain de Botton is a devout atheist, the solutions he proposes in *The News* would actually help move our media organizations closer to the vision CPJ laid out more than 30 years ago. Instead of stoking our fear and anger, the news should offer a more hopeful vision of society. Instead of doling out numbers and figures on various national and local issues, it should provide us with a better context through which to understand what’s really going on. And instead of boring us every time it reports on systemic, social problems, the news should excite us and engage us. It should make us care and inspire us toward social change.

De Botton himself sets a great standard as his writing is rich yet incredibly readable. Though his proposals are a bit idealistic, his challenge to us is nonetheless important: to think more critically about the news.



Fighting Over God: A Legal and Political History of Religious Freedom in Canada
By Janet Epp Buckingham
McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014

Reviewed by Kathryn Teeluck

In *Fighting Over God*, Janet Epp Buckingham offers a fascinating exploration of the historical role of religion in Canadian political life.

She begins her analysis by examining the status of religion before Confederation when religion, particularly Christianity, held a prominent role in every aspect of society.

The mid-20th century, however, saw a rise in secularism, and religion was increasingly removed from the public sphere. The implementation of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms brought the issue of minority rights to the forefront as the increase in religious plurality in Canada necessitated safeguards against the “tyranny of the majority.”

Buckingham’s review gives the reader a clear understanding of how the role of religion has developed in the political realm. Christianity has given way to the protection of minority rights, which helps us contextualize the controversial issues we see today.

Throughout the book, Buckingham references legal cases to underscore how changes in societal attitudes toward religion have required courts to establish a delicate balance between competing rights. Freedom of religion, she says, has become freedom from religion in the public sphere.

The most important point Buckingham emphasizes, however, is that dialogue between dissenting parties is far more productive than legal action when working towards the common good. She quotes Ole Riis who said, “A court verdict may answer the grievance, but it hardly paves the way for coexistence.”



Canadian Medicare: We Need It and We Can Keep It
By Stephen Duckett and Adrian Peetoom
McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013

Reviewed by Adrian Helleman

In this book, Stephen Duckett, an expert in public health, and Adrian Peetoom, an author and publisher who is well-known to some CPJ members, describe the current medicare system in Canada and also prescribe some much-needed improvements.

Canadians are rightly proud of their healthcare system and often contrast it with the American one. However, it is under threat from economic, demographic, and financial forces. This 50 year-old system is sustainable, Duckett and Peetoom argue, if some changes are made. Among other things, they advocate improved primary care, especially for chronic diseases; a better strategy for taking care of the elderly; the introduction of pharmacare; and improvements to the work culture in our hospitals. In the appendix, the authors list all their recommendations – more than 30 of them.

Canadian medicare can be sustained without crippling cutbacks or exorbitant taxes, but it does need fine tuning which requires both being cost conscious and providing proper care. The authors remain hopeful of success, even though they cannot guarantee it. Their prescription provides signposts that politicians and healthcare providers can follow since they are the ones who must implement the changes.

This book is exceptionally well-written by two writers who not only have academic expertise but also practical experience in the healthcare system. Their recommendations should be studied by everyone who uses it, and we must then advocate them to those who can make these changes. You and I are involved because the Canadian healthcare system is only as good as we collectively make it.

Changing the Climate Debate

By Karri Munn-Venn

There was a time not too long ago that climate change was a bit of a fringe issue. No more. It has moved into the mainstream.

This spring, major media outlets lamented the failure of the Canadian federal budget to even mention the climate. The largest energy companies in the world, including Suncor, have publicly called for a price on carbon. And 25,000 people took to the streets of Quebec City imploring provincial leaders to act on climate.

Then, at their April Climate Summit, premiers agreed to “implement measures to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions; strengthen pan-Canadian climate change cooperation; and make a transition to a lower-carbon economy.”

Soon afterwards, the federal government also made two significant climate announcements. First, it announced a new target to reduce GHG emissions by 30 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030. Then in June, Canada was party to the G7 leaders’ agreement acknowledging the urgency of the climate crisis and committing to “decarbonize the global economy in the course of this century.”

Finally, after great anticipation, Pope Francis issued an encyclical citing “an urgent need to develop policies so that, in the next few years, the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced.”

The terrain has shifted. Climate justice is no longer simply the purview of environmentalism and social justice.

There is growing awareness that everything is connected. We’re still a long way from the ambitious agreement required out of the Paris climate talks. However, a broad-based consensus is emerging: we must reduce – and ultimately eliminate – our use of fossil fuels to avoid catastrophic climate change.

Putting a price on carbon

While several measures would aid the process of decarbonization, what’s most urgently needed is a price on carbon.

British Columbia has led the way in Canada with a revenue-neutral tax on all fossil fuel sources. It currently sits at \$30/tonne. Since the tax was introduced in 2008, fossil fuel consumption in the province is down 19 per cent while its GDP has continued to rise.

Quebec, in turn, belongs to the Western Climate Initiative (WCI), a partnership to lower GHG emissions through a multi-regional cap-and-trade system. Under this system, a hard ceiling is placed on the pollution allowed in each sector of the economy.

Companies each receive GHG emission quotas that they can use themselves, or, where innovation and efficiency prevail, sell to others in the WCI. Ontario too has chosen cap-and-trade, and in April announced they would be joining the WCI.

Alberta was the first jurisdiction in Canada to put a price on carbon. Large emitters are charged \$15/tonne for emissions over a set amount, which amounts to an effective tax rate of a mere \$1.80/tonne, if applied to all emissions. Under Premier Notley, the province is expected to amp up carbon pricing.

Federal leadership

Federally, Canada remains an international outlier on action to address climate change. We’re set to fall far short of our 2020 target, our new target is the weakest among the G7, and the corresponding new measures are vastly inadequate.

Citing unique “national circumstances” – namely climate-related demands for heating and cooling, a large land mass, and a resource-based economy – our leaders claim to be doing as much as they can.

It simply isn’t enough. The only way to effectively reduce emissions would be to face the oil sands head-on. Regulation is imperative, as is ending fossil fuel subsidies. Most urgently, however, the federal government should introduce a harmonized carbon tax at a rate of \$30/tonne of GHG emissions.

This would be a solid start and a not-at-all-radical way for the market to send price signals to consumers that would result in cleaner economic growth. It would also generate about \$15 billion per year in government revenues.

The Government of Canada needs to lead on this issue. It is too important for them to do otherwise.

CPJ is preparing study, worship, and action guides for use in your faith community in the months leading up to The UN Climate Change Conference in Paris. We will also holding **Prayers4Paris** vigils in Ottawa and across Canada during the climate change talks. To learn more visit cpj.ca/climate or contact Karri Munn-Venn at karri@cpj.ca.



Karri Munn-Venn is a Policy Analyst at Citizens for Public Justice.

Churches Well-placed to Advocate for Refugees

By Elizabeth Keith

Recently, the Centre for Community-Based Research released *The Guide to Action*, a document that aims to activate church involvement in the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) program. It encourages churches to sponsor an individual or family trying to come to Canada from a dangerous situation, an incredibly important first step in the resettlement process, but certainly not the last one.



Refugee Action Protest July 27, 2013, Melbourne (Takver/Flickr)

The guide offers an excellent breakdown for churches not already part of this program of what is involved in sponsoring refugees and why churches are called to this ministry. Sponsorship is instrumental in assisting refugees in Canada. For churches that are looking to get involved, this guide is an excellent place to start. But for those already involved, there is more you can do.

Canada is known for its welcoming policy for newcomers, but with over 50 million displaced people around the world, private sponsors are taking on more work as the federal government starts backing away. The guide points to this lack of government involvement in refugee settlement saying, "Even though the Canadian government provides services to newcomers, there are gaps in which the church can play a role."

However, beyond just filling the gaps, churches are in a position to demand that the government do more. CPJ's own research report, "Private Sponsorship and Public Policy," released in September 2014, shows that churches or church-connected organizations represent 72 per cent of Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAH) in the PSR program, making them extremely important contributors on this matter. This puts them in a position to advocate to the government on behalf of refugees.

Section 3 of *The Guide to Action* explains how churches can do this. It defines advocacy as public support of a particular cause or policy, in this case a stronger refugee settlement program. The guide goes on to explain what is involved in advocacy, such as meeting with political leaders, sending letters and petitions, creating forums, and praying for government officials. After seeing firsthand the many struggles that refugees must face, private sponsors should be inspired

to improve this process so more people don't encounter the same barriers.

CPJ's research shows that there is a concern about the big picture here. All of the church-connected SAHs we surveyed expressed concern about various issues involving the federal government's role in the PSR program. Many of these concerns involve long wait times and processing delays. Due to the amount of preparation, both mentally and financially, many SAHs reported that these delays can affect momentum and engagement on the part of churches. "I am aware that our government cannot control some of the delays, but there are others that are within their power to change," one respondent said.

Another large concern is with the cuts to the Interim Federal Health program, which had previously provided healthcare benefits to refugees. With these cuts, sponsor groups are now paying for medical expenses themselves, costs that have ranged from hundreds to thousands of dollars. However, a more serious diagnosis, such as cancer, could cost tens of thousands and this number changes the willingness or ability of many churches to become sponsors. One respondent said, "We as private sponsors are losing our ability to sponsor those people we wish to help."

Other causes for concern are limited allocations, visa post-caps, and a lack of government consultation and communication on policy changes. "The government has no humanitarian ears and refuses to hear the pleas of SAHs and chooses to sponsor only those populations that have political or financial benefit," one respondent said.

The key to a system that is better for both sponsors and refugees is to push for improvements on all these issues. There are many ways that church-connected SAHs are already engaging with the federal government, including private or public letters, participating with the Canadian Council for Refugees, or meeting with politicians. Unfortunately with all these efforts, they still struggle to get a response. However, with more push from churches, this could change.

By advocating we can hope for better communication from the government, more efficiency and overall improvement in the PSR program, and, in the end, a higher quality of life for refugees and families. Once an improved system is in place, it will enable current SAHs to provide better support, encourage more churches to get involved, and hopefully narrow the gaps in the federal government's services.

Elizabeth Keith is Citizens for Public Justice's Summer 2015 Outreach Assistant Intern.



We Are More Than Taxpayers

By Janelle Vandergriff

These days Canadians are more likely to hear ourselves referred to as “taxpayers” than “citizens.” But what if we viewed ourselves as citizens first? We might stop asking “what’s in it for me?” and begin to ask “what’s in it for everyone?”

If our approach to public life is deeply rooted in our faith, we will consider not only our own personal rights, but the responsibilities we have to one another.

Christians can use citizenship as a tool for justice. We can love our neighbour through political means, we can use the tools of advocacy and press our politicians to follow through with their commitments, and we can vote. As citizens, we can also pay our taxes.

Taxes are a way to pool our resources and develop common infrastructure that can have a positive impact on us all. Taxes build our roads and bridges, pay for our police and firefighters, offer support for raising children, provide income security and housing for the poor, contribute to foreign aid, and help to ensure our environment is clean and safe. All of these things are much cheaper and more effective when we pay for them collectively.

Various governments and individuals have promoted lower taxes as the solution to all social problems without mentioning the risks. They leave out the good and potential of programs paid for with tax dollars. We often forget the fact that we are the ones who benefit from the services and infrastructure that tax dollars provide. Experts suggest that more than two-thirds of Canadians receive a benefit from public services greater than 50 per cent of their incomes.

As Christians, we are called to pay our taxes. Luke 20:25 includes the command to “give to Caesar what is Caesar’s.” Taxes are about giving back and contributing to the common good. We recognize that we are not solely responsible for the wealth that we generate, nor does it belong to us alone. We share a portion of the income that we have received as an expression of our gratitude and a contribution towards our community and collective care for creation.

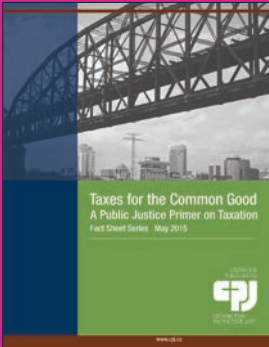
Taxes are also a part of caring for the poor. The Bible holds more than 2,000 references to poverty. Psalm 82:3-4 calls us to, “Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.” Christians, as citizens, have a role in pressing for justice and measures that prevent the causes of poverty. Part of that responsibility means encouraging government to promote justice and



fairness, recognizing that preventing poverty is more charitable than alleviating it. We should question if our government budgets and tax system reflects these priorities.

Recognizing the good that taxes can do is not to suggest that we be naive about their misuse. Taxes should not be used to line the pockets of any kind of political elite or merely benefit the wealthy. Taxes should not burden the poor. The use of our common purse must be transparent and there must be open and honest debate about its use. This requires accountability; active citizenship includes ensuring that government is doing the work it should be doing.

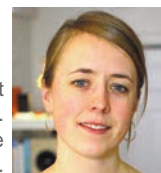
You know what they say (usually with a sigh): nothing is certain but death and taxes. But perhaps the negative assumptions behind this common saying deserve some second thought. Taxes can be a positive way for us to fulfill our Christian calling to do public justice. It’s time to expand the conversation on taxes and consider it within the context of citizenship.



"Taxes for the Common Good," CPJ's latest report on taxation in Canada, is available online at www.cpj.ca/taxes-common-good. This series of six fact sheets highlights the positive role taxes play in our society and summarizes up-to-date information on the costs and opportunities afforded by various federal tax policy options.

Public justice recognizes that citizens have both rights and responsibilities. We all have a right to live in dignity and to be respected by others. But we also have a duty to contribute constructively to society to ensure that others can also do so. CPJ believes it's time for a serious public dialogue about taxation that takes into consideration the vital ways that public revenues help us build a healthy, more vibrant Canada.

Janelle Vandergriff is a Policy Analyst at Citizens for Public Justice. A similar version of this article appeared in ChristianWeek.



Reflections from Justice Tour 2015

By Bishop Susan Johnson

Recently I had the opportunity to participate in Justice Tour 2015, which brought together people to share their concerns about poverty in Canada and climate change.

I wish everyone could have had the opportunity to visit those eight cities, participate in the 15 events, and meet with the hundreds of Christians and people of goodwill that came out to these events. I wish you all could have heard the creative ministry and passionate advocacy that is being done all across the country.

My favourite passage of scripture is Micah 6:8: “[God] has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” This passage serves as an excellent framework to reflect on my experiences from the Justice Tour.

Do justice

People are calling on the churches for moral leadership in the areas of poverty and climate change. We are being urged to move beyond charity to look at the systemic causes of both these issues. We are also being urged to see how much the concerns of Indigenous peoples overlap with both poverty and climate change.

These are huge issues and sometimes the enormity of the challenge can lead to paralysis. We need to help each other get beyond our fears and risk taking action. To do this, we need to work together, ecumenically, interreligiously, and with civil society.

We need to adopt simpler lifestyles and give up our addiction to oil. In Kitchener, Laura Hamilton, from Divest Waterloo, told us we need to act decisively now to choose life. Climate change is a complicated, slow motion crisis. Inertia and wishful thinking stops us from action. But there is hope. As Randolph Haluza-DeLay, a sociology professor from The King’s University reminded us in Edmonton, “lowering our standard of life may not lower our quality of life.”

Doing justice also means taking our duties as citizens seriously by being politically active. We need to vote and



Bernadette Lahtail, Executive Director of Creating Hope Society, speaks at the Justice Tour in Edmonton.

encourage everyone we know to vote. We need to boldly hold governments on all levels accountable. As Mayor Mike Savage told us in Halifax, “not our jurisdiction” is the biggest enemy of progress in Canada. We need to demand that all levels of government work together to provide workable, sustainable solutions to poverty, climate change, and Indigenous rights.

We must make use of the platforms we have, including our pulpits. Throughout the Justice Tour we were challenged to preach a call to justice in a more powerful way. By gathering for prayer and study, we can help each other find the courage to act boldly.

Love kindness

Even as we do justice, we continue our charitable work. On the Justice Tour, we were reminded that poverty in Canada has many faces – Indigenous people, the working poor, refugees and newcomers to Canada, Temporary Foreign Workers, the mentally ill, and the list goes on and on. We were challenged to work to destigmatize those who live in poverty.

One of the ways we do this is by listening to the voices of those with a lived experience of poverty, sometimes referred to as those with “first voice.” In Halifax, Valerie Getson reminded us that “statistics are human beings with their tears dried off.” She asked us, “When we say the poor, do we think of individuals?” In Ottawa, Tony Clarke told us “the cries of the earth and the cries of the poor are the voice of God in our time.” Are we listening?

Jesus certainly preached a lot about the poor. He also modeled for us what loving kindness means. He cared about the individuals he encountered as well as the many whose needs he only knew of. We need to balance our work for justice with the ongoing compassion of charity.

Walk humbly with your God

When asked which commandment is the greatest, Jesus replied, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39).

To walk humbly with God, we must also walk humbly with our neighbour and with creation.



Susan Johnson is the National Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.