



## Minding the Margins: Christians Must Look Beyond the Middle Class

By Janelle Vandergrift

Do you think you are part of the middle class? If so, join the ranks of the ninety-three per cent of Canadians who, according to *Environics Research*, claim they fit in the same bracket.

Of course, ninety-three per cent represents a majority rather than a true “middle” class. This self-reported figure may be due to the fact that those who are poor prefer not to label themselves as such while those who are rich may underestimate their relative level of wealth. Nonetheless, politicians of all stripes continue to highlight their support for the middle class in order to court these voters. As a result, recent political discourse has been consumed with who’s in and who’s out of the middle class and how well it is doing.

The problem is that this focus on the middle class assumes that Canadians vote primarily for their own interests, without

consideration of what is happening on the margins. Canadians (and certainly Christians) should be capable of more than just concern for their own bank accounts. We must look at the bigger picture.

If we do look to the margins, we see that poverty is alive and well in Canada. The poorest fifth of Canadians must somehow secure adequate housing and healthy food on \$15,100 per year (their average after-tax income). Even according to the most conservative measures, nearly three million people in Canada are poor. We are among the top ten developed countries with the worst poverty rates and it’s estimated that poverty costs us between \$73 billion and \$86 billion each year.

On the other end of the spectrum, the rich are only getting richer. According to *Canadian Business*, the number of billionaires in Canada grew from 23 to 69 between

1999 and 2012. During that time, the total wealth of the 100 richest Canadians went up over 75 per cent, surging past \$200 billion in total. Increasingly, wealth in Canada is being concentrated in the hands of a few.

Given the debate around the middle class and the growing wealth of the richest, our challenge is to interpret the issues of the day from a framework of “justice, not ‘just us,’” as CPJ co-founder Gerald Vandezande used to say. The middle class’ concern for their own interests is legitimate, but people of faith must put a particular emphasis on the needs of the most vulnerable and ensure their voices are heard amid the political noise.

Caring about the poor shouldn’t be a new message for Christians. The Bible is abundantly clear that we are required to stand against oppression and care for those who suffer. Churches have been outstanding in their efforts to support food banks and give to charities that address the immediate needs of those in poverty. But as remarkable as these efforts are, they are not enough. Until we address the many upstream causes of poverty, our communities will continue to face injustice and exclusion.

Canadians have the opportunity to show real concern for the most poor and vulnerable in our country, not just the middle class. We can shift our focus from an economy of continual growth and scarcity to an *economy of enough*. This requires an end to the greed that causes the endless pursuit of wealth and a recognition that there is in fact enough for people in poverty to no longer be poor.

So whether or not we fall into the middle class, Christians must become ambassadors of a new political vision that defines authentic security as the well-being of everyone, not just of some. And when politicians gauge our interests, they must know that we are mindful of the margins. After all, it’s in seeking the welfare of everyone that our own welfare will be found.

Janelle Vandergrift is a Policy Analyst at Citizens for Public Justice. A similar version of this article was published by *Christian Week* in June 2014.

## In Review

### Letters to Canadian Banks

In June, CPJ wrote to the CEOs of Canada's eight largest banks, commending them for introducing no-fee and low-cost bank accounts to low-income seniors, youth, and students. CPJ also called on the CEOs to extend these accounts to all low-income Canadians.

### 2014 Annual General Meeting

The 2014 CPJ AGM was on May 29<sup>th</sup> at Dominion Chalmers United Church in Ottawa. **Dr. Doug Gruner** from Canadian Doctors for Refugee Care delivered a keynote titled *The State of Refugee Care: A Prognosis for Public Justice in Canada*. CPJ's Public Justice Intern, **Ashley Chapman**, gave the response.



CPJ members elected six new Board Members: **Thea deGroot** of Sarnia, ON, **Monique Verhoef** of Calgary, **Wayne Groot** of Gibbons, AB, **Patti Fitzmaurice** of Winnipeg, **Jim Dekker** of St. Catharines, ON, and **Adrian Helleman** of Toronto. Our special thanks to outgoing members **Mark Huyser-Wierenga**, **Jake Kuiken**, **Carol Thiessen**, **Maylanne Maybee**, **Sister Sheila McKinley**, and **Lorraine Land** for their years of faithful service.

### CPJ on the Road

CPJ was one of the organizers of *Are We There Yet?*, a conference held in Edmonton in May. **Joe Gunn** organized the panel on *Faith, Community and Climate Change* and took part in the conference's concluding panel. For more information on the event, see Joe's article on page 11.

**Brad Wassink** led several workshops in Winnipeg. He took a group of young adults from The Welcome Home Redemptorist Mission through a *Living Justice* poverty workshop; hosted *The Green Church*, a discussion of *Living Ecological Justice* at St. Margaret's Anglican Church; and led a workshop on ecological justice for the Adult Sunday School at Aberdeen Evangelical Mennonite Church.

**Ashley Chapman** spoke on charity, justice, and advocacy at *People for Sale: Understanding and Challenging Modern Day Slavery*. The week-long course was organized by PACT-Ottawa as part of Carleton University's enrichment program for high school students.

### CPJ on the Hill



In May, **Joe Gunn** co-led *Faith in Public: A Public Theology for a Public Faith in Canada* in Ottawa alongside **David Pfrimmer** of Waterloo Lutheran Seminary. The course looked at opportunities for people of faith to create a more just and peaceful society. Students attended Question Period and met with several Parliamentarians, including **Senator Grant Mitchell** (pictured above), as well as **Dr. Andrew Bennett**, Canada's Ambassador for Religious Freedom.

**Joe Gunn** and **Ben Pasha** also met with Liberal MP **John McKay** in March to discuss environmental policy.

### Welcome to CPJ!



CPJ is excited to welcome **Thomas Coldwell** as our Communications Assistant for six weeks this summer. Thomas will be updating our popular *Advocacy Toolkit* and assisting in other communications activities.

## Editor's Note

Over the past two years, I have had the pleasure of working for CPJ as both Public Justice Intern and now as Communications Coordinator. Hands down, the best part of either job is getting out of the office, meeting with members, and hearing your feedback. Your positive comments encourage us to continue our work and your constructive comments guide as we re-examine it.

CPJ staff and board members can often be found throughout Canada speaking about poverty and ecological justice. I was recently in Winnipeg where I met with CPJ supporters and partners. I was also able to introduce CPJ to some new people such as Alisson Chubb who contributed our Groundings reflection on page 12. Already this year, Joe Gunn has been to Nova Scotia, southwestern Ontario, and Edmonton.

Our Annual General Meeting is always a great opportunity for members to reconnect and discuss the work of CPJ. This year we met in Ottawa. For those of you who couldn't make it, we've included an excerpt from Dr. Doug Gruner's keynote address on page 4.

CPJ is not able to get around the country as much as we would like. That's what makes *The Catalyst*, JusticeE-News (our monthly e-newsletter), and other communications outlets so critical.

*The Catalyst* is a publication exclusively for CPJ's members from across the country. You'll notice that in this edition we've started a new section for *Letters to the Editor*. This is your space to join the conversation by responding to the articles you read here. It's also a great opportunity to highlight the many public justice activities you are engaged in across Canada.

We hope you'll take advantage of this opportunity and contribute your voice to this public justice dialogue.

**Brad Wassink**



# Letters to the Editor

## Refugee Sponsorship

I appreciated your articles on refugees as well as poverty.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) provides funds to their own sponsored refugees according to the local Social Services model. In Alberta, the model is based on a formula, rather than individual needs.

Since housing has become so expensive, those who are unemployed (but employable) and in need of help are given very little to live on, requiring them to find shared accommodation (sometimes with parents) or a shack or RV in a rural setting.

The bigger cities provide free meals seven days-a-week, so it seems that Social Services in Alberta depends on these services when determining the amounts to give. However, housing allowances are sometimes provided on an appeal basis.

Due to the above, I have met government sponsored refugees with insufficient funds to pay rent, utilities, transportation, food, and other living costs to enable them to learn English and obtain jobs in a timely fashion.

Sadly, CIC seems very reluctant to discuss any of these serious problems.

**August Guillaume**  
Edmonton, Alberta

## Divestment & Creation Care

Your cover article on creation and our role rang some familiar bells. We were initially created out of the earth and ended up as co-creators. Quite a climb and a success story! But could we say that instead of us caring for the earth, Mother Earth has been caring for us all along as, perhaps, the weakest species?

In a First Nations story of creation, the creator called together the animals and plants that he had created and asked

them to look after this new creation he was about to bring out, since the humans would be new and helpless to live in nature (no fur, no skills etc.).

I also appreciated the article on the theme of disinvestment in your Spring 2014 issue. Nicole Armstrong's article on profiting from the wreckage is a very clear summary of the divestment issue. We at Trinity Saint Paul's Centre for Faith, Justice and the Arts have been working on climate change for some years and voted to disinvest, as the article informs your readers. We are happy to be in touch with others as a strong movement is being born. (gofossilfree.com)



Nicole perhaps did not know about Toronto350.org. In a real sense, 350.org is the global link for this campaign; there are other branches in universities across Canada. The University of Toronto students have petitioned the Senate of the University to disinvest all their investments from fossil fuels companies.

A Canadian network of people working on this needs to form and is, in fact, forming. There are many people involved who feel the extreme urgency. I trust you will continue to be part of it so more can benefit from your future articles and your well informed staff.

**Jim Kirkwood**  
Member, Climate Justice Working Group,  
Trinity Saint Paul's United Church,  
Toronto

## We want to hear from you!

Submit your letters  
to Brad Wassink at [brad@cpj.ca](mailto:brad@cpj.ca) or  
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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 stewardship.

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# The State of Refugee Health: A Prognosis for Public Justice in Canada

A shortened version of Dr. Doug Gruner's keynote address at CPJ's 2014 Annual General Meeting.

Most of you are likely aware of what happened in the late 1970s and early '80s with the boat people. I certainly remember because I was in grade eight and my parents, through their church, sponsored several families. These were mostly Vietnamese refugees and they simply fled their homes and got in boats hoping that nearby countries would take them in. Unfortunately, many of them died in these overcrowded boats that simply floated at sea for months and months.

Canada did step up and accepted many of these refugees. So, where are these refugees now? Well interestingly, where I work at Bruyère, one of my family medicine residents, her mom and dad were on a boat like this. Her sister is an architect. Her brother works in IT. And she is a physician serving Canadians. That is where refugees end up.

Now if this government has its way, there will be very few refugees coming to Canada any more. As most of you know, in 2012, the Federal Government implemented one of the most egregious policies ever by a Canadian government by cutting health care benefits for refugees.

## The Impact

These cuts have created mass confusion on the front lines, both on the part of health care providers and of refugees themselves.

Many bona fide refugees are not seeking health care because they are simply confused about what is available to them. Many refugees think they will have to pay for their visits and in fact most are expected to pay up front now.

Many doctors and hospital administrators are unclear on which class of refugee is entitled to what benefit under the new grid. So what ends up happening is that some doctors and walk-in clinics do the simple thing; they just turn them away.



It is important to highlight the situation for the designated countries of origin refugee. These folks will not have any health care unless their condition is deemed a risk to public safety or public health. A risk to public health means, essentially, that they have a communicable disease.

As far as public safety, what that means is that if a patient, say from Mexico (a designated country of origin), comes to the emergency room and they are suicidal they will receive no health care. No medication. No psychotherapy.

If, on the other hand, they are homicidal, a risk to us, they will get all the care they need.

## The Response

The response by the health care community has been unprecedented. I've been a physician for 20 years and I've never seen anything like this. We've had three national days of action with protests and rallies in over 20 cities across the country.

Doctors are also documenting the effects of these cuts. They have been lobbying government, liaising with media, and writing in medical and other scientific journals.

There are over 20 national health care organizations that have come out against these cuts. Seven of these organizations wrote letters as a group to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration on three separate occasions simply asking to sit down and discuss the evidence for this policy. The minister didn't even have the decency to respond to the letters. Not even a form letter was returned to us.

## The Cost

So let's look at the real cost of this policy change.

There's obviously the real human cost of this poorly thought out policy which will lead to human suffering.

There's also the moral cost to us as a nation as we fail to meet our international commitments under the Geneva Convention which clearly stipulate that any child living within our borders has a right to access health care regardless of nationality.

This policy is forcing refugees away from primary and preventative care and into the only other option they have: the emergency department, at ten times the cost. But the minister does not care about this cost since it is a provincial problem and a provincial cost.

## Evidence-Based Decision Making

I believe it is important for us to remind this government that we require more than simple conjecture and opinion with respect to our decisions on policy. But rather we require high quality evidence with respect to policy changes.

When I asked Dr. Danielle Grondin, the Director General of the Health Branch at Citizenship and Immigration Canada – the person who signed off on these cuts, what evidence the government was using in the creation of this policy, she was speechless. There was no evidence used in the creation of this policy.

Two years later this government is completely uninterested in any evidence as to the impact of this policy.

These cuts are inhumane and they punish an already vulnerable group who are here legally. These cuts are simply medically irrational and fiscally irresponsible. The right thing to do is reverse and rescind these cuts immediately.

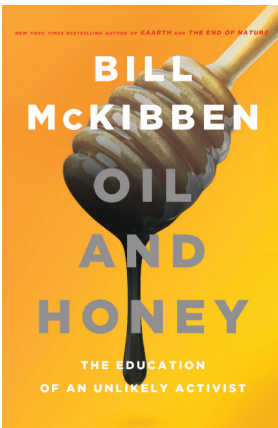
Dr. Doug Gruner is an Assistant Professor at the University of Ottawa where he practices and teaches Family medicine and Emergency medicine.





# Book Reviews

Summer book suggestions from Citizens for Public Justice



**Oil and Honey:  
The Education of an  
Unlikely Activist**  
By Bill McKibben  
Times Books, 2013

*Reviewed by Mishka Lysack*

First, a confession. I've re-read Bill McKibben's *Oil and Honey* not twice but three times. Why? McKibben's most recent book is a compelling and deeply engaging journey into environmental activism and creation advocacy. It's also timely, as public discussions about the environment, pipelines and coal, and accelerating climate change are on the rise.

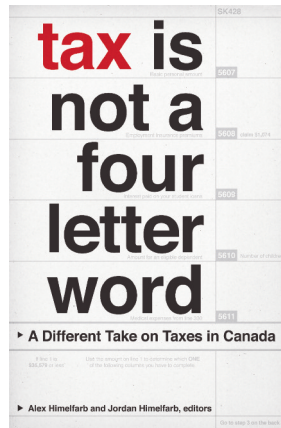
This book is also a fascinating, endearing, and, at times, amusing look into the mind of one of the best-known environmental activists of our time, tracing his activism from the summer of 2011 to the summer of 2013. In the face of worsening climate change and the overwhelming resources of the fossil fuel industry, he searches for alternative "currencies of movement": passion, numbers, and creativity.

*Oil and Honey* unfolds on two levels; the intensity of McKibben's advocacy and astonishing pace of his work is combined with a more contemplative and reflective account of his time at his home in Vermont and his new-found passion of bee-keeping. These two contrasting threads of the active and the contemplative weave and crisscross, each giving life and meaning to the other.

McKibben's activism is rooted in a Christian faith. Like the great environmental Biblical prophet Jeremiah, McKibben's writing burns with the clean flame of prophetic commitment and radiates a creation-centred spirituality refreshingly free of the hyper-individualism, otherworldly escapism, or disempowered apathy that can be detected in the contemporary church and society.

With the growing threat of climate change, McKibben provides us with an inspiring and thoughtful guide for how we can heed God's call to be effective creation advocates.

In a time of both serious environmental crisis and great opportunity, this book is a great gift to us all. It's a bold prophetic summons to the church to fulfill its vocation to protect creation.



**Tax Is Not a Four-Letter Word:  
A Different Take on Taxes  
in Canada**  
Edited by Alex Himelfarb and  
Jordan Himelfarb  
Wilfrid Laurier University Press,  
2013

*Reviewed by Dennis Howlett*

Who would have thought that a book about taxes would make for some very interesting summer reading? But *Tax Is Not a Four-Letter Word*, edited by father and son team of Alex and Jordan Himelfarb, is just that. This collection of essays covers a broad range of topics. It looks at how important our tax system is to the kind of society we create and how it can be used to reduce inequality and fight climate change.

While this book is a bit more academic than *The Great Revenue Robbery*, which Canadians for Tax Fairness published last year, it has a lot of depth and most of the essays are quite accessible to those without a degree in economics.

I would particularly recommend the following essays:

*The Introduction* by Alex and Jordan Himelfarb provides an excellent overview of taxation policy and its many critical implications. They explain how the anti-tax political agenda has led to cuts in government services, which make us all poorer and our society more unequal.

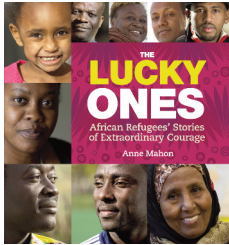
In *The Economic Consequences of Taxing and Spending* Jim Stanford gives a great primer on how taxes are collected and spent and what the economic and social impacts of this are.

Two chapters from Hugh Mackenzie, *Taxes and Public Services* and *Benefits of Public Services*, remind us that taxes are a very good deal for most taxpayers because they provide us with quality public services at a much lower cost than we would ever be able to buy on our own.

*Towards a Fair Canadian Tax System* by Marc Lee and Iglia Ivanova lays out how our tax system could be made fairer and how it could raise the revenue we need for governments to tackle the key challenges we face, such as growing inequality, climate change, and the need to ensure quality public services such as health and education.

Taxes are likely to become one of the key issues in the next federal election. Read this book and prepare yourself to be able to engage more effectively in the public debate.

# Book Reviews



**The Lucky Ones: African Refugees' Stories of Extraordinary Courage**  
By Anne Mahon  
Great Plains Publications, 2013

*Reviewed by Ashley Chapman*

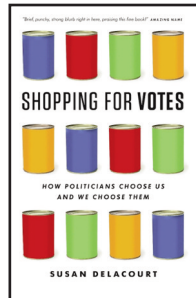
Imagine Edward Snowden working at your local 7-Eleven. It's not actually that far a stretch for those in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Anne Mahon's *The Lucky Ones* is named for African refugees who've found safety in the prairie capital, but their stories turn the title on its head.

Really, the lucky ones are the long-time Canadians who now get to learn from newcomers in the book like the daring whistleblower journalist who initially sold Slurpees upon arrival in Canada. The lucky ones are those who have never had to leave family, home, and country and flee for their lives.

The book's shocking first-hand accounts of survival will cause readers to bristle the next time they hear someone cast refugees as "fraudsters" or "just here to take our jobs." And reading about parents who were forced to run for the border without their children — let alone their passports — will cause people to question the government's dismissive terminology of "bogus" and "illegal" refugees.

While refugee advocates work to highlight Canada's draconian refugee reforms of late, the newcomers interviewed by Mahon primarily expressed gratitude for the Canadian system. Still, the book could have described current policy reforms that may change that story for Winnipeg's newer arrivals.

Also unfortunate was a painfully contrived first-person account written on behalf of a three-year-old girl adopted from Ethiopia. Including a chapter on international infant adoption in a book about African refugees is irrelevant at best and insensitive at worst, and it only took away from an otherwise valuable book.



**Shopping for Votes: How Politicians Choose Us and We Choose Them**  
By Susan Delacourt  
Douglas and McIntyre, 2013

*Reviewed Katherine Scott*

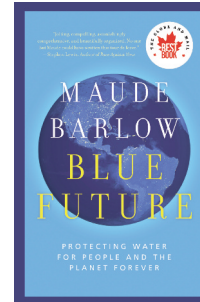
Susan Delacourt has written an illuminating and evocative book about the drift of consumer culture into Canadian politics — where voters no longer think of themselves as citizens but as taxpayers who shop among politicians for those who target their individual needs at the lowest cost.

*Shopping for Votes* tells the story of the "creep of shopping language into the political marketplace" as political parties have sought, over the past half century, to better understand and appeal to voters.

Political parties, no longer content to simply advertise themselves and their platform to the general voter, now actively work to identify what voters want and create products that appeal to their individual interests. According to Delacourt, the Conservative Party under Stephen Harper has most fully embraced political marketing, creating an electoral machine so precise in its micro-targeting that it knows exactly which voters are needed to secure victory, riding by riding.

The roll out of "boutique tax breaks," such as the Children's Art Tax Credit and the Firefighter Tax Credit, are part and parcel of Canada's new political world. The days of "big tent" parties are long gone.

Susan Delacourt has revealed the corrosive influence of market culture on the pursuit of the collective good. At the same time, she concludes, it's too easy to blame the political classes. Rather, we all must take some responsibility for our transformation into consumers of Canadian democracy and begin to demand clearer lines "between our civic life and shopping pursuits."



**Blue Future: Protecting Water for People and the Planet Forever**  
By Maude Barlow  
House of Anansi Press, 2013

*Reviewed by Sheila McKinley osu*

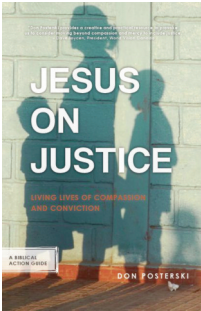
Maude Barlow's *Blue Future* is global in scope, incisive in analysis, and challenging at every turn. The third book in her series on water (preceded by *Blue Gold* and *Blue Covenant*) stands well on its own. Barlow alerts us to the devastating effects of the bottled water industry, industrial farming, mining operations, power generation, and a water-intensive consumer lifestyle, all of which seriously threaten what we once thought of as a limitless resource.

Each of the four sections of the book expands on a basic principle: water is a human right; water is a common heritage; water has rights too; and water can teach us how to live together. In the opening pages, she notes that "a majority of the world's people live within 50 kilometres of an impaired water source — one that is running dry or polluted." With great specificity she outlines the challenges we face and the changes we must make so that clean water and sanitation are accessible to all.

Interspersed with her accounts of ecological destruction, Barlow weaves the stories of real heroes: individuals, grassroots movements, not-for-profit organizations, and even countries and companies that are working passionately to reverse and avert disasters.

In the end, Barlow makes it clear that we must choose between protecting the commons or commodifying them; between cooperation or persistent, life-threatening conflicts and the resulting devastation. Faced with the enormity of the issues, she still aligns herself (and hopes we will too) with the mindset of Oscar Olivero, leader of the Cochabamba water revolution, who states, "I trust the people's capacity for reflection, rage and rebellion."





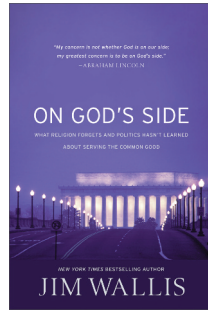
**Jesus on Justice: Living Lives of Compassion and Conviction**  
By Don Posterski  
World Vision Canada, 2013

*Reviewed by Karri Munn-Venn*

*Jesus on Justice* offers a clear and compelling illustration of our Christian calling to seek justice and love mercy by modeling our lives on Jesus. Understanding that “Jesus was a cultural maverick, a social revolutionary and a religious innovator,” this “biblical action guide” addresses a range of issues through the lenses of exclusion, prejudice, power, and advocacy. The 16 short studies are both encouraging and thought-provoking. The formulaic approach – introduction, history, scripture, current challenges, and prayer – makes the book clear and accessible. Posterski is creative in his invitation to contemplation and action, encouraging readers to “be courageous enough to be truthful with yourself” and “discern where your spirit is quiet and should be disturbed.” Each study stands alone and the collection works well together.

*Jesus on Justice*, on the whole, is a good, engaging, and compelling read. Most illuminating, however, was the introduction. Posterski begins with the tendency of churches to “magnify our distinctive Christian messages” and breaks down understandings of the Holy Trinity, the Gospel message, and the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ. Necessarily limited in its brevity, this exploration of the various Christian perspectives is particularly useful as we live out our faith in increasingly ecumenical and interfaith contexts.

The book contains a strong public justice frame (though not named as such) that emphasizes our rights and responsibilities as global citizens to contribute to and benefit from the common good. Anyone who appreciated CPJ’s *Living Justice: A Gospel Response to Poverty* will likely find resonance in *Jesus on Justice*.



**On God's Side: What Religion Forgets and Politics Hasn't Learned about Serving the Common Good**  
By Jim Wallis  
Brazos Press, 2013

*Reviewed by Brad Wassink*

In *On God's Side*, Jim Wallis delivers a thorough reproach of religious leaders across the political spectrum.

Wallis uses the common good to show that in order to solve the crises of our time, we need people of faith to get more, not less, involved in the political process.

In fact, Wallis is at his best when he is pointing to what he calls the “best big ideas” from both the Christian left and Christian right: those of social and personal responsibility respectively. It is especially important that his path towards the common good requires finding common ground between liberal and conservative Christians. Yet given the amount of criticism Wallis continues to receive from the Christian right, it’s clear that this is much easier said than done.

*On God's Side* includes explorations of many public policy issues, including poverty, homelessness, the environment, campaign finance, criminal justice, guns, gay rights, human trafficking, immigration, food and health, war and peace, the financial crisis, and education. While this can lead Wallis’ discussions to seem a mile wide and an inch deep, it also shows us how the common good relates to every aspect of our public life.

In addressing all of these issues, Wallis retells some of the big political news stories from the past few years. For some, he offers deeper analysis and insights. For others, he merely glazes over the issue while pointing to his personal friendships with the key political and religious players involved.

Yet while his focus is almost entirely on the American political system, Canadians should be mindful of his diagnosis as we see American-style politics creeping in here.



**Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power**  
By Andy Crouch  
IVP Books, 2013

*Reviewed by Janelle Vandergrift*

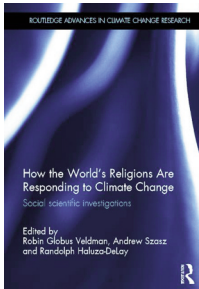
In *Playing God*, Andy Crouch defines power as the ability to “make something of this world” and the deepest form is creation. He argues that power is not essentially coercive and violent, though it can often be misused for domination. We can “play God,” Crouch suggests, by using our power redemptively (through institutions, for example) but we can also “play God” through injustice (playing gods in the lives of others) and idolatry (making gods). It’s up to us to discipline our power towards true image bearing.

Crouch unearths several assumptions we may hold about power that lead us to disengage, divest, and even underestimate our power instead of acknowledging it as a gift that is essential for image bearing. Crouch’s book is an apologetic, reorienting, and persuasive piece seemingly written for those who might be more apt to abuse their power through ignoring or underplaying it (“after all, power corrupts you know!”).

Crouch’s outlook on power is much too optimistic and hopeful. An essential part of this conversation is acknowledging where power is currently and historically situated, seeking ways to share it with the oppressed, and re-orienting how it is distributed. Given these vast and growing injustices and idolatries of our world, a more practical approach to addressing power imbalance would have been useful.

Nevertheless, the main take-away from *Playing God* remains: as we seek to reclaim and redeem power, our job as image-bearers is to acknowledge the power we have and use it for the common good.

# Book Reviews



**How the World's Religions Are Responding to Climate Change**  
Edited by Robin Globus Veldman, Andrew Szasz, and Randolph Haluza-DeLay  
Routledge, 2013

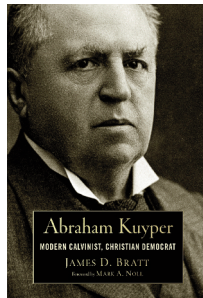
*Reviewed by Ben Pasha*

The issue of climate change has been a significant subject of alarm for many individuals. This has typically been a concern for those involved in the physical sciences. However, climate change has now grabbed the attention of different faith communities as well, due to the role ecological issues play in societal challenges like poverty and health care.

*How the World's Religions Are Responding to Climate Change* includes reflections from Christian, Muslim, Indigenous, Buddhist, and Hindu perspectives. This is also the first book of its kind to establish "religion in climate change." The book uses recent research to present an overview of what different faith groups are doing now and identifies avenues for research in the future.

For Canadians interested in what different faith communities are doing in the face of climate change, the most relevant chapter is the contribution by Mishka Lysack, a CPJ supporter who co-edited *Living Ecological Justice*. Lysack looked at different faith groups in Canada which included eight Christian denominations as well as other religious traditions like the Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, and Baha'i faiths. He then presents an overview of what has been accomplished to date and closes with solutions for what these faith groups have to do if they wish to better the environment.

Despite some of Lysack's stark criticisms, his recommendations for improvement suggest optimism for the relationship between faith communities and the environment moving forward.



**Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat**  
By James D. Bratt  
Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2013

*Reviewed by Joe Gunn*

Would reading 450 pages of Dutch social, political, and theological debates from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries help us further understand what CPJ means by "public justice?" Reading James Bratt's book leads me to a resounding "yes!"

Abraham Kuyper was a minister and professor who co-founded a new religious denomination and a university. As editor of two newspapers over 47 years, he authored over 20,000 newspaper articles. He also wrote pamphlets and multi-volume books. Kuyper effectively advocated for public funding of religious schools and encouraged the development of Christian labour unions (both included in early manifestations of CPJ's vision.) Elected to the Dutch Parliament (and later the Senate) this incredible man also served as Prime Minister of the Netherlands from 1901 – 1905.

Kuyper's main contributions to the social teachings of Calvinism revolved around his vision of "worldview" (the call to Christian cultural engagement) and especially his development of the concept of "sphere sovereignty," where the various realms of life – such as business, church, state, and family – had specific purposes and God-given integrity. Kuyper believed that "personal salvation is less an end in itself than a means to God's larger purpose of renewing the cosmos."

Sternly, Bratt warns us that "Abraham Kuyper was a great man, but not a nice one." Accordingly, we are exposed to Kuyper as an "idea" more than as a "person." That main idea is, "there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'"



**Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now**  
By Walter Brueggemann  
Westminster John Knox Press, 2014

*Reviewed by Genevieve Gallant*

In *Sabbath as Resistance*, Walter Brueggemann continues his extensive scholarship on the Old Testament and the prophets in order to share a prophetic message about the life-giving role the Sabbath can play in our society of 24/7 consumption.

The endless demands of today's economic reality, of achieving, accomplishing, performing, and possessing, leave us restless in the end. Brueggemann reminds us that this is not an unprecedented situation nor a new one.

This book is addressed to those who are weary and whose yokes are heavy. The great challenge is that to do Sabbath we need both enormous intentionality and communal reinforcement to resist the busyness and anxiety of our time. But it can be an act of testimony to alternatives and a resistance to the pervading values of profit if we can place ourselves in the memory of the covenant.

How we choose to live out the Sabbath today is left for us to decide. Brueggemann sets the stage for an excellent reflection of where we have come from, who has lead us here, and where we need to go. I appreciated his emphasis on the image of the God of Creation who embodies divine rest and who reminds us that "the well-being of creation does not depend on endless work."

Sabbath reminds us of how we are to live life by gift. It can be a pause that transforms and a reminder that what is needed is given, and will be given, a message we so frequently need to hear.



# Jobs, Training, and the Common Good

An interview with Mike Luff, who presented at the *Dignity for All* policy summit on Employment.



## Which groups in Canada typically face high levels of unemployment?

Too many workers are currently being locked out of opportunity and prosperity. This includes immigrants, Aboriginal peoples, women, persons with disabilities, at-risk youth, older workers, and less-skilled individuals (those with a high school diploma or less).

Faced with an aging population and increasing global competition, it is critical that we do everything we can to maximize the size and skills of our workforce. We cannot afford to leave anybody on the sidelines.

## How is Canada leading in education and training? How is it falling behind?

Canada's formal education system (K to 12) is performing relatively well. In addition, Canada has the highest level of post-secondary qualification among developed countries.

Unfortunately, Canada's record on training and skills development outside the formal education system is dreadful. Employer investment in training has decreased 40 per cent since 1993 and Canada is near the bottom of the industrialized world when it comes to public spending on training for unemployed workers.

## How does investing in 'human capital' contribute to the common good?

Improving the knowledge, skills, and talents of our workforce—what economists call our 'human capital'—by investing in education and training is essential to Canada's ability to out-compete and out-innovate the rest of the world. This contributes to the common good by helping to build a stronger economy, enhancing personal development, and strengthening social cohesion.

Research shows a positive relationship between education and training and increased productivity and economic growth. A strong economy is key to investing more in the public services and social programs that provide all Canadians with a basic measure of security and dignity and a fair chance to succeed (e.g. health care, education, community-based social services, and the Canada Pension Plan).

Training that is broadly-based—especially literacy and essential skills education—can enhance the ability of workers to participate fully in the life of society. Skills development can lead to more positive work and life experiences and change a person's mindset. With new and higher skills, people feel empowered and become more active in their communities.

## What are three key policies the Federal Government should enact to make significant gains in skills development?

First, public policy must be set on the basis of solid evidence. The Federal Government should increase funding to Statistics Canada so it can develop more detailed labour market data by occupation and at the regional and local levels.

Second, the Federal Government must invest in up-skilling the existing workforce. It should allow employed workers to access Employment Insurance (EI) benefits for training leaves. Employers would have to ensure the worker could return to their job when the training is finished.

This new program would help tackle working poverty by providing a path for low-skilled workers to move up into higher-skilled and higher-paid jobs. It would not add any new costs to the Federal Government's budget since the funding would come from the EI Operating Account, which is made up of contributions from employers and workers.

Third, the Federal Government must invest more in training programs for unemployed workers so they can upgrade their skills, find steady employment, and provide stability for their families.

## Public justice recognizes the important role not only of citizens and governments, but the private sector as well. For *Catalyst* readers who are employers, what are steps they can take to improve skills development among their workers?

It is essential that employers develop a *training culture* within their organizations by linking training to their core strategy, plans, and priorities.

In addition, while many employers recognize they have a responsibility to provide workers with firm-specific training, there are far too many employers that do not believe they have a responsibility to support the development of workers' skills more generally, such as literacy and essential skills. Employers are often concerned about rivals "poaching" their employees after they have invested in training and they seem to believe this possibility increases with investments in general skills that are transferable in the broader labour market. This attitude needs to change.

Mike Luff is a Senior Researcher for Social and Economic Policy at the Canadian Labour Congress, the umbrella organization for Canada's national and international unions which represents the interests of more than three million unionized workers.



# Defiance, Not Compliance: Turning the Other Cheek

By Leah Watkiss

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist an evil-doer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.” (Matthew 5:38-41)

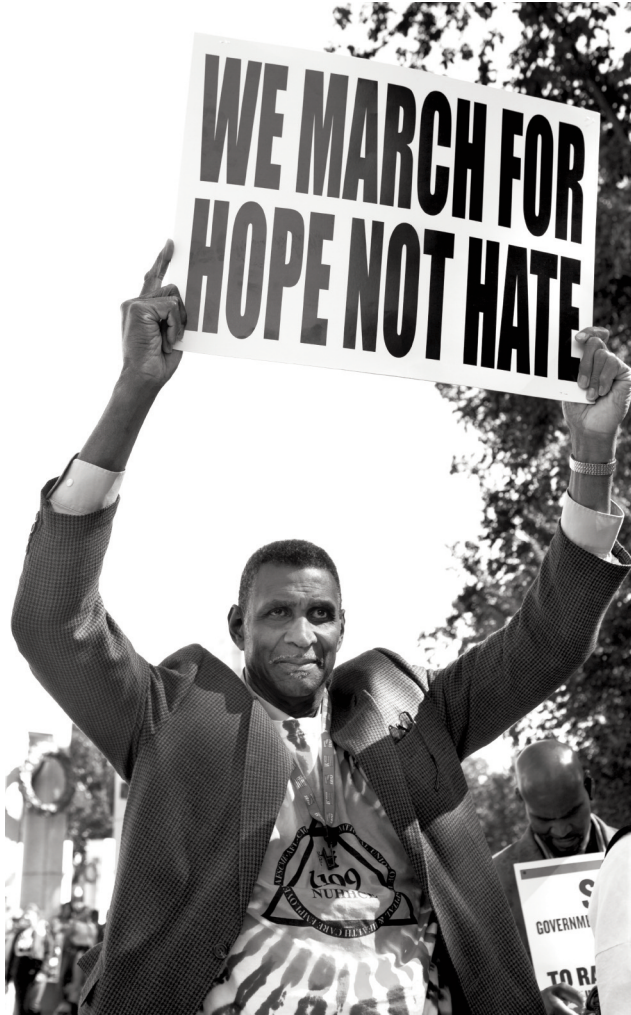
This quote from the Sermon on the Mount is often shortened to the cliché “turn the other cheek.” It is a convenient excuse for inaction; a rationalization for being passive and accepting whatever injustices or unfair treatment we witness or experience. It’s the equivalent of saying “just ignore them” with the naïve hope that whatever or whoever it is will just go away.

I used to wonder how Jesus, lover of truth and doer of justice, could tell us to sit back and accept lies and injustice in this manner. But then I was introduced to Dr. Walter Wink’s exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount in *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way*, and my life has never been the same.

Wink starts his exegesis by looking at the phrase, “do not resist an evil-doer.” He explains that a more accurate translation of this sentence is “do not retaliate against violence with violence” or “don’t react violently against the one who is evil.” This subtle yet powerful shift in language sets a whole new tone for what follows: rather than being told not to resist, the people gathered to hear Jesus are told not to resist *violently*.

Wink goes on to examine the phrase “if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.” Why, Wink asks, does Jesus reference the *right* cheek specifically? The answer is both challenging and enlightening. Jesus lived in a right-handed world where left hands were reserved only for unclean tasks. Therefore, we can assume that the person doing the hitting would have used their right hand. The only way to strike someone on the right cheek with your right hand is a backhanded slap. Such a blow connotes an insult, not a fistfight, and was a normal way to reprimand someone over whom you had power (e.g. masters to slaves, husbands to wives, Romans to Jews). To strike your equal in such a manner was socially and legally unacceptable, carrying with it a huge fine.

With this new understanding of the context Jesus was speaking in, picture the scenario with yourself as the oppressor. You are a wealthy, powerful person whose slave has displeased you in some way. You reprimand your slave with a backhanded slap. The response you expect is the response you have always received from your slaves – the response you yourself would



give if someone higher than you treated you the same way. You expect your slave to cower, submit, and slink away. Instead, your slave defiantly turns their other cheek and challenges you to hit them again. What can you do?

You would like to give your slave another backhanded slap to show them their place, but to do that you would have to use your left hand which would admit that your action is unclean. You could hit them on their left cheek, instead, but it would be embarrassing to hit your slave the way you should hit your equal. You’re confused. You don’t know what to do. Flustered, you could order the slave be flogged, but the slave has already made their point. They have shown you that they are a human person with dignity and worth. You don’t own them, you cannot control them, and they do not submit to your rule.

And so, in light of Wink’s insights, Jesus’ instruction not to resist evil and to turn the other cheek transforms from an instruction to accept injustice into a challenge to resist systems of domination and oppression without the use of violence.

Rather than ignoring an evil situation and hoping it will go away, Jesus is telling his followers to find creative, active, and non-violent ways to assert their humanity and God’s love in the world.

As a Christian voice for justice in Canada, it’s important that CPJ and its members embody this understanding of what it means to “turn the other cheek” in our lives and our work. We can do that by always looking for new ways to creatively, actively, and nonviolently challenge systems of exploitation and oppression that cause poverty, inequality, and environmental destruction. As Jesus’ example demonstrates, even when we have no social, political, or economic power, we can still find ways to stand our ground, take control of the power dynamic, and cause people in power to see us in a new light without using violence. To do so is truly to be a citizen for public justice.



Leah Watkiss represents Canada-At-Large on Citizens for Public Justice’s Board of Directors and does peace, justice, and ecological work for the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto.



# Economic Justice: Are We There Yet?

By Joe Gunn



Gerda Kits, Bob Goudzwaard, Joe Gunn, and Ron Kuipers speak at the conference's concluding panel. Photo credit: Daryl C. Kinsman

Conversations around contentious social, economic, and environmental themes are not always easy. Only inviting people who all think the same as you do is comforting – but rarely leads to stretching our knowledge base. Yet a recent conference in Edmonton set a hospitable table for dialogue on a range of political and socio-economic views, and it seemed to work.

CPJ helped facilitate *Are We There Yet? Economic Justice and the Common Good* along with The Centre for Philosophy, Religion and Social Ethics at Toronto's Institute for Christian Studies and The King's University College. The group of 150 participants included academics, social justice practitioners, business leaders, trade unionists, Aboriginal peoples, environmentalists, and politicians.

The keynote speaker, Dr. Bob Goudzwaard, framed the event brilliantly by laying out a Christian conception of economic justice and asking us to question if our own vision “goes deep enough for real change?” He called on participants to move beyond static concepts, like “poverty” and “wealth,” that define discourse about the current economic order. He wanted us to use more active terms like “enrichment” and “impoverishment” so that we would be moved to address the causality of these forces. For Goudzwaard, it is impossible to speak of economic justice without understanding ecological and intergenerational justice – words that are music to a CPJ member's ears!

Contrast this with the later remarks from the Honourable Diane Ablonczy, MP for Calgary-Nose Hill. Ms Ablonczy also drew on her Christian roots as part of her defense of the Conservative government's foreign aid policies. She advocated an end to making the poor “dependent” and repeated several references to aid skeptics, including mention of Robert Lupton's *Toxic Charity: How the Church Hurts Those They Help and How to Reverse It* and Dambisa Moyo's *Dead Aid: Why Aid is Not Working and How There is a Better Way For Africa*.

Indeed, such negative perceptions of aid may lie behind the Federal Government's decisions to cut international assistance to under 0.27 per cent of our GDP (far short of our 0.7 per cent target), to hold hundreds of millions of dollars in un-

spent aid back over these last years, and to refuse in 2013 to send the \$400 million in climate adaptation and mitigation financing for the UN's Green Fund that Canada has sent in each of the previous three years. What a stark contrast of discourse with Goudzwaard's conception of a Christian “economy of giving” as perhaps the highest example of a just economic system!

One questioner attempted to challenge the frame of our thinking, suggesting that how you perceive economic justice determines your response. If you think the poor just lack stuff, well then, you give them stuff. If you see the poor as lacking power, then power relationships have to be changed. Economic justice may be all about transformation – how to right broken relationships between neighbours.

Many of the workshops allowed further debate and further conversation. A panel of business leaders explained how they try to structure faithful enterprises in the private sector. A panel of lawyers, including CPJ's Board Chair, Mark Huyser-Wierenga, wrestled with restorative justice issues, noting how the poor are over-represented among incarcerated Canadians. Aboriginal speakers, unionists, and academics all wrestled with development issues in the Athabasca oil sands.

CPJ organized a panel on *Faith, Community and Climate Change* with Professor Randy Haluza-Delay of The King's University College and Sara Farid of Development and Peace. The panel attracted over 50 participants, including a visiting class of students. CPJ also spoke on the conference's concluding panel.

In Christian theology, we recognize that we will never “be there yet” in terms of achieving just earthly structures. Yet, our goal of creating communities of moral deliberation and action is why such conferences need to become on-going and formative events.



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

# Groundings

## Hanging Out With Jesus: Today's Christian and *the least of these*

By Allison Chubb

All of us who went to Sunday School know the kinds of people Jesus hung around with: the people looked down on by the dominant culture, those who were bad or different — or maybe just a bit scary. People like drug addicts, transgender people, and those struggling with mental illness. And what did Jesus tell us about them? “Whatever you do for the least of these, you do for me.” (Matthew 25:40)

But perhaps that isn't the version your Sunday School teacher was familiar with. Perhaps your church, like mine, had the idea that the marginalized people Jesus hung around with — tax collectors, prostitutes, and fishermen — were people who lived back then. After all, every Sunday School student knows that Samaritans and Centurions don't actually exist anymore. When I was a kid, I didn't even know Jewish people existed anymore! No, these were characters in a story which happened a long time ago, not part of the narrative of faith which governs our daily lives.

In my experience, the gospel story itself is often boiled down to a set of principles that I'm tempted to hide behind. In seminary, we studied the Creeds and the councils; Church history and dogmatics; atonement, reformation and consubstantiation. But rarely did we spend time studying the life of Jesus, the simple “wheres” and “whos” and “whats.”

In our hurry to make meaning out of Jesus' death and resurrection, we sometimes fail to stop and make meaning out of his *life*. Jesus did not just *happen* to stumble upon the underdogs of society on his way toward the cross. He didn't just *find* himself talking to the woman at the well that day. If anyone has ever lived life intentionally, it was Jesus, the one who dwelt among us to show us how to be truly human.

Perhaps the popular '90s slogan “What Would Jesus Do?” could become “Who did Jesus hang out with?” Jesus, both brother-human and God-among-us, believed that the people he spent time with mattered. Their concerns were his concerns. We often repeat Matthew 25: “When I was hungry you fed me... Whatever you did for the least of these, you did for me.” But Jesus went well beyond this. He lived with the poor in their poverty. He walked with those who were mentally ill in their illness. He entered the homes of the tax collectors. He sat and chatted with other kinds of society's unwanted and outcasts.

Most of us aren't accustomed to thinking of people in our lives as *the least of these*. We often assign this category to people



living far away. But every time and place has groups of people who are unwanted and unwelcome. It's part of our human brokenness.

One of my neighbours is a single mom from a northern First Nation. Her child doesn't identify with usual gender categories. My neighbour didn't finish college and she struggles with a serious mental illness. I can't imagine how many times she has been made to feel like she doesn't belong in my neighbourhood because she doesn't fit the model. Yet if Jesus came to my block today, I have no doubt that she is the person he'd choose to hang out with.

The people our culture calls “least” are the ones Jesus has called “great” in God's kingdom. They are the ones who have been given eyes to see and ears to hear God's in-breaking reign in ways which I cannot. They are the precious ones, the ones who go unnamed on our streets but whom Jesus calls by name. Remember Mary in the garden on Easter morning? To any bystander, she was just a poor nameless woman but when Jesus called her name, it was all that mattered.

Perhaps more than being fed, clothed, or visited, *the least of these* long to be called by name. They long for another to look into their eyes and see there the precious image of God, so dear to God's heart that Jesus spent his days on earth with people just like them. Once we know someone's name, once we begin to spend time with the people Jesus did, we begin to see their needs as they do. They are no longer a “cause” or an issue of tolerance or even human rights; they are our brothers and sisters.

And for my brother or sister, I would do anything.

Allison Chubb is an Anglican priest and chaplain at St. John's College in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She is passionate about connecting the postmodern search for belonging with the ancient call of the Church to be homecoming to all people.

