



INFORM-ACTION

Newsletter of the Social Action Office - Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes Queensland

An Extraordinary Journey

If we all only knew our place in this universe and thus take our rightful place and role, I think life on this planet would be very different – a far healthier balance of things. I have just recently listened to Jesuit Bill Stoeger, an astrophysicist and one of the scientific staff members of the Vatican Observatory, take me (along with everyone listening to the lecture!) through one of the most extraordinary journeys I've ever taken. I have read, heard and reflected on the universe story many times before but Bill's presentation just "hit" me with a deeper sense of who I am in this story – who we are on planet Earth. Bill's imparting in words of his unbelievable knowledge of the universe as well as taking us into images of galaxies, nebulae, stars and planets moved me to a new position – of maybe going deeper into the reality of my/our place and role in this whole story.

When I later reflected on this lecture I did so in the light of some current events and situations facing us. I thought of only days before this being in the thick of a rally of 30,000 workers who were protesting about the new Industrial Relations legislation. I was moving through the crowd that day asking people to sign our petition to the Senate. I spoke with a lot of these people and no doubt basically all they want is happiness, justice and fairness – and this is under threat. In one way, I doubt if many would have a clue of this universe story yet in another way these people are probably far more in touch with the essence of what brings life and happiness than a lot of the those in government who are negatively re-framing in legislation some of the core values of this country – if only they would listen to both – their own spirits and those pleading for justice!

The morning of that lecture I heard on ABC radio the latest alarming statistics for Australia regarding our greenhouse gas emissions. The UN report showed that Australia's greenhouse gas emissions rose by 23.3 per cent between 1990 and 2003. The fact that this data can go ignored and

we don't sign off on the Kyoto protocol is alarming. It is even more alarming that the Federal Environment Minister Ian Campbell says the UN report only tells part of the story and dismisses the data! I also heard that day, the cry of our Pacific Island neighbours who face the prospect of becoming environmental refugees – people who can tell us very directly that it is *our* per capita contribution to greenhouse gas emissions that cause *them* to be in such dire straits – they, whose per capita emissions are negligible! They are ill-equipped to deal with the situation and are pleading with

us in their words: *who will be a Good Samaritan for us? Who will assist them on the road that they know they have to take in order to survive physically? Who will be with them as they face not just losing their land – their island homes – but their way of life, their traditions, their culture? Will Australia be generous? Will we be generous enough?*

2006 is the 20th Anniversary of Pope John Paul II's visit to Alice Springs which will hopefully put Reconciliation back on the agenda for non-

Indigenous Australians (especially Catholics). Will we be big enough, generous enough to travel this journey in *a new way* – to go to new depths in facing our white privileged position on this planet? Will we learn a new humility in knowing who we really are and our place on this planet? Will non-Indigenous Australians rise to the challenge of John Paul II's message to do all we *need to and have to*, to make this message a reality for Indigenous Australians?

*"You are part of Australia and Australia is part of you.
And the Church herself in Australia
will not be fully the Church
that Jesus wants her to be
until you add your contribution to her life
and until that contribution
has been joyfully received by others".*

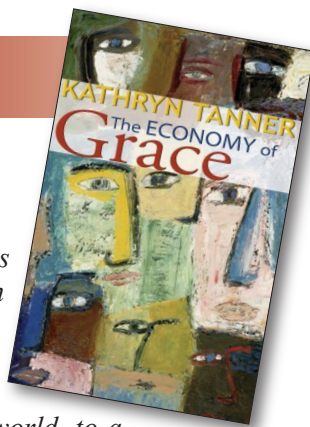
Annette Arnold rsj
SAO Director



Book Review

The Economy of Grace by Kathryn Tanner

Kathryn Tanner says: *Christianity has the potential to offer a whole new vision of economic life, one opposed to the inhumanities of the present global economic system and offering direction in trying times, a practical path to a better world, to a brighter economic future for everyone. It might not seem that way. It might not seem that Christianity has had very much directly to say of a systematic nature about economics, and that that's the end of the story – no vision of another economy here.*



These words of University of Chicago theologian Kathryn Tanner, give us some idea of the content of her latest book: *The Economy of Grace*. Kathryn Tanner offers us a serious and creative proposal for evaluating economic theory and behaviour. She finds in the Christian story a strong and unyielding concern with economic matters and specific principles of economics and economic justice that can be brought into conversation with global capitalism today. At the heart of that story is the reality of God's gift of grace, a non-competitive relationship that models a very different type of economy. She develops the idea of a theological economy that is centred around this concept of gift. She begins by finding fault with other theological treatments of economics and suggesting that money and grace are formally related. She notes also that the attainment of goods is not a zero-sum proposition. She then suggests that a theological economy of gift should include the concepts of unconditional giving, universal giving, and non-competition within the community. This stands in contrast with critiques of capitalism offered by a reading of Locke or gift-exchange theorists.

Finally, Tanner suggests practical ways that a theological economy can change the global capitalist economy. She offers concrete proposals for a theological economy and ways to make it work to modify and perhaps replace the present global capitalist configuration. Kathryn gave the Rollie Busch Memorial Lecture here in Brisbane this year and the transcript of it can be downloaded at <http://www.trinity.qld.edu.au/data/Rollie%20Busch%20Lecture.pdf>

Annette Arnold rsj

2006 Date Claimers

The first SAO gathering to fine tune planning for 2006 will take place on **SATURDAY 28 JANUARY** from 9.00am to 12 noon at Justice Place. Please RSVP by emailing Helen on sao.admin@sao.criq.org.au or phone (07) 3891 5866. **All welcome.**

Australian visit of Peter Henriot – Brisbane 18 May 2006. Well-known Jesuit Peter Henriot, currently the Director of the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) in Lusaka, Zambia, is being brought to Brisbane by Edmund Rice Education. Peter Henriot is probably best known for such writings as *Catholic Social Teaching: Our Best Kept Secret* and *Social Analysis*. The workshop Peter will run will be on *Social Analysis*. The Centre where Peter currently works is a research, education and advocacy team that promotes study and action on issues linking Christian faith and social justice in Zambia and Malawi. Look out for final details in the New Year.

Landmine Action Week 2006 – PLAN AHEAD – get your staff, community or school involved. Landmine Action Week will take place from 20 to 26 May. The SAO will once again take this opportunity to raise awareness of the ongoing pressing issues around landmines as well as to raise funds to support the campaign here in Australia. You might like to put this date in the work calendar and pick a day that week to have an Odd Sock Day. Watch out for more details. If you are in a school you might like to learn about and join the school-based project **Bombs Begone:** <http://www.bombsbegone.org/>

Farewell and Thank You

As a member of the Social Action Office Reference Group I wish to acknowledge the work of **Annette Arnold** who steps down as Director of the SAO in December. Annette's leadership skills combined with a commitment to collaboration and partnership generated a number of successful campaigns during her six years with the SAO. These campaigns across policy and election issues provided community resources that will continue to inform the choices of members of religious congregations and others in the Church who seek to make action of behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel. At the core of Annette's work practice at Justice Place in Woolloongabba was a warm hospitality to staff, friends and visitors. The other memory I will treasure of Annette is her awareness and love of the issues and history that have affected Indigenous peoples in Australia. I invite readers to join me in thanking Annette for her leadership and presence at the SAO and wishing her blessings and grace for the new adventures of faith that lie ahead.

Tony Robertson



IR Update:

MONEY OVER HUMANITY – A SHIFT IN VALUES TAKES TIME

In my first foray into the SAO networks I have been amazed and heartened at what our SAO partners and friends have achieved in terms of outreach. The response to the SAO's industrial relations campaign has been astounding, for something so quickly conceived and executed. It has reached its high point for 2005 with over 4,000 signatures collected and over 5,500 postcards sent to key Senators. The Briefing Paper has been widely read and generated much comment and controversy when republished on Margo Kingston's Web Diary (web blog for those up with the jargon!). Letters have been written to local members and published in newspapers, and submissions written to the hastily convened and poorly resourced Senate Inquiry. If our sole aim was to ensure a substantial inquiry then at this point we have not met that aim.

The SAO has grave concerns about the lack of due process in this and other legislation before the Parliament. The Howard Government announced a four or five day inquiry prior to tabling the legislation in the House of Representatives on 10 November. By now you may have heard that the Bill comprises over 670 pages with an extra 600 or so pages of explanatory memoranda! So much for a simpler workplace relations system! The Bill was given less than two days debate in the House of Representatives with Opposition MPs only having access to the detail of the Bill the same morning of the tabling. The detail is much worse than we thought it would be and appears to be not only a direct assault on workers and their unions, on their ability to organise to protect their rights and interests in the workplace – but on the democratic process and our way of life as well.

The Government has, at every opportunity, cut off debate on the detail of the complex legislation, maintaining that 6 months debate on broad principles and policy is sufficient. It has barely paid lip service to our democratic process. There are over 4,500 official submissions to the Inquiry but it is doubtful that Senate Committee members or the public will

have been able to review or even read them all in the time allotted.

On 15 November, the National Day of Community Protest about the IR changes, the SAO staff and several SAO partners rallied along with over half a million other Australians. The Minister Kevin Andrews tried to dismiss the overall turnout on the day as *small!* Religious leaders from different faiths expressed their concerns via a Sky Channel link up with Cardinal George Pell saying these reforms *go too far*.



In a way these draconian laws and changes being wrought by the Howard Government are providing a point of convergence for people in the community concerned with justice and the deeply held value of the

fair go that Australians have long prided themselves on. And while the impact of the changes for some will be more akin to a slow burn, the

immediate hardship and distress that these changes will bring about in the lived experience of a broad range of ordinary people may also provide the impetus for our community to revisit the development of a grassroots democracy and a society based more in the values of compassion and justice than in a dehumanised economism gone too far.

Whether we move towards greater compassion and a more inclusive community with shared values or whether we go down the American road towards even greater individualism, divisiveness and substantial numbers of working poor is a key question. There is a choice here but ultimately it is ours to make.

Angela Ballard
SAO Project Officer

Keeping the Campaign moving....

yourrightsatwork
worth fighting for

Banner source: <http://www.actu.asn.au/>

The Social Action Office has made a decision to closely monitor the impact both the Work Choices and Welfare to Work legislation will have on Australians. Please see the enclosed separate sheet for details of how to register to be part of this ongoing work...

HOLIDAY READING



The SAO has a very good little library and people are always welcome to borrow books and videos from it. You might like to consider borrowing something to read over the holiday season (that's if you are on holidays!).

Either come in and browse or give the office a ring (before 22 December) and we can post items out to you. Books that we have published a book review on are part of the collection.

SAO HOLIDAY CLOSURE

As usual the SAO will close over the Christmas/New Year period. The office will be closed for holidays between 22 December 2005 to 23 January 2006.

2006 International Year of Deserts and Desertification

Desertification is one of the world's most alarming processes of environmental degradation. The issue is often obscured, however, by a common misperception: that it's a "natural" problem of advancing deserts in faraway developing countries. In fact, desertification is about land degradation: the loss of the land's biological productivity, caused by human-induced factors and climate change. It affects one third of the earth's surface and over a billion people. All countries and civil society organisations have been encouraged to undertake special initiatives to mark the Year and preparations are now well under way around the world. For more information visit <http://www.iydd2006.org/>



After another wonderful year of work together, we wish everyone many blessings of great peace this Christmas. May the gifts of this Irish Christmas blessing be yours:

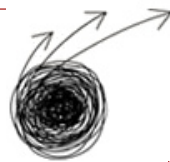
*The light of the Christmas star to you.
The warmth of home and hearth to you.
The cheer and good will of friends to you.
The hope of a childlike heart to you.
The joy of a thousand angels to you.
The love of the Son and God's peace to you.*

The SAO Team: Annette, Angela, Cathy and Helen

For Your Calendar

2005 International Year of Microcredit

www.yearofmicrocredit.org/



DECEMBER

- 1 World AIDS Day
- 2 International Day for the Abolition of Slavery
- 2 Maura Clarke, Ita Ford, Dorothy Kazel and Jean Donovan killed in El Salvador 1980
- 3 International Day of Disabled Persons
- 5 International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development
- 7 Proclamation of *Gaudiam et Spes* 1965
- 10 International Human Rights Day
- 11 UNICEF established by the UN General Assembly 1946
- 11 International Mountain Day
- 18 International Migrants Day
- 18 Steve Biko born in South Africa 1946
- 21 Native Title Bill passed by the Senate 1993
- 23 Wik decision 1996
- 29 International Day for Biological Diversity

2006 International Year of Deserts and Desertification: <http://www.iydd2006.org/>

JANUARY

- 1 Mary, Mother of God - World Day of Peace
- 1 Peace Pilgrim set out on lifelong pilgrimage 1953
- 8-13 Annual Islamic Pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj)
- 9-12 Second International Conference on Environmental, Cultural, Economic and Social Sustainability - Vietnam <http://s06.cgpublisher.com/>
- 10 The UN General Assembly first meeting 1946
- 15 Martin Luther King Jr born 1929
- 21 World Hug Day - Give hugs, not bombs
- 22 Vietnam Peace Treaty signed 1973
- 25 2nd Vatican Council promulgated by Pope John XXIII 1959
- 26 Aboriginal Tent Embassy established in Canberra 1972
- 28 SAO planning meeting 9.00am-12.00pm
- 30 Mahatma Gandhi assassinated 1948
- 31 Thomas Merton born 1915

FEBRUARY

- 2 World Wetlands Day
- 5 Cape York Heads of Agreement signed 1966
- 7 Helder Camara born 1909
- 11 World Day of the Sick
- 12 Freedom Ride Against Racism to NSW country towns commenced 1965
- 15 Over 10 million worldwide rally against war 2003
- 21 International Mother Language Day
- 25-26 Deserts and Desertification Conference, Hindmarsh SA - Contact: sasose@adam.com.au