



INFORM-ACTION

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Lenten Sacrifice?

As simplistic as it may first appear, we learn from an early age that *two wrongs don't make a right*. This simple yet profound axiom very quickly gets lost and forgotten when dealing with major events like those facing our planet today. We know how horrific the regime of Saddam Hussein is and how shocking and useless war is. We know that one arena of violence will not be solved by perpetuating other acts of violence; we know that the seeds of the next war are sown in the last one and yet here we are once again facing world leaders senselessly surging forth into war, aiming to secure peace and security by sheer force by military power.

The contrast and contradictions of the situation are stark. We have before us the *Coalition of the Willing* preparing their war strategies and mobilising troops while religious leaders all over the world are publicly, strongly and courageously opposing such action. At the same time thousands upon thousands of people are hitting the streets calling for peace. The challenges become significant when one tries to make meaning and find one's place in all of this; when one decides who to stand with and what to stand for.

A constant theme running through so much of the writing opposing war in Iraq addresses the inevitable catastrophic impact on the civilian population and on the environment itself. This is a key factor in opposing war and one highlighted by the Pope and many other church leaders. This factor is critical as any attack on a civilian population violates basic human needs and rights and invalidates any war being *just*. This, and the belief that in our day and age there exists the means to resolve problems without lethal force, are both significant insights in the current discussion of the catholic just war tradition.

The plethora of information before us bombards us with all the facts and figures that give a clear picture of the current situation in Iraq and the potential for a human and ecological

catastrophe if war is once again waged on these people and their land. In looking at the enormity of the situation feelings of powerlessness and helplessness can paralyse, but the challenge is to keep hope and embrace peace-making in a serious way; to seriously work to create a culture of peace and non-violence. The processes needed for this, call for a deep conversion of heart – a transformation of the roots of violence within self in order to be in right relationship with all. It requires a movement away from competition and winners and losers to establishing strong relationships that honour difference and call forth both a personal and social transformation – relationships that truly believe and show that *two wrongs don't make a right*. This requires as much focused strategising, energy and resourcefulness as that of going to war.



As Lent 2003 approaches, amidst the background of imminent war, we have a choice and challenge to honestly engage in the transformation of our hearts and our world. It requires enormous honesty, courage, faith and the support of others on the journey. It requires conversion and the journey requires sacrifice. Thomas Merton gives encouragement to that journey in these words: *the norm of sacrifice is not the amount of pain it inflicts, but its power to break down walls of division, to heal wounds, to restore order and unity.*¹ Is this the challenge of Lent 2003?

¹ Cordaro, Tom. *To Wake the Nation, Nonviolent Direct Action for Personal and Social Transformation – Thomas Merton on Nonviolence*, p. 7.



The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council have released a very good Discussion Guide: *The Church Speaks on War and Peace* - <http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/index.shtml>. If you don't have access to the web and would like a copy, please contact the SAO and a copy will be posted to you.

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SAO 2003

The Social Action Office has entered a new phase of its life in carrying out political ministry. On February 6 this year, Marlette Black pbvm facilitated a planning process with staff and about fifteen SAO Partners and Congregational Leaders. This was an energising experience that tapped into the grassroots reality of issues and provided some clear directions for 2003.

The named strategic priorities for 2003 are:

- **Living sustainably** – in particular land clearing and freshwater
- **Housing** – in particular family homelessness and CSHA
- **Creating a Culture of Peace** – this was identified as an area needing much thought and exploration. Such issues as the global climate of fear and misuse of power, developing a culture of peace, and non-violent ways of living, were identified.

This planning session also provided an opportunity to clarify the SAO's purpose and vision.

Over recent years the number of people and organisations associated with and networked to the SAO has increased significantly. A major contributing factor to this is the SAO's use of information technology, especially its website and the

fortnightly SAO BYTES. As there are only two staff members (Annette and Pierre) on the ground in the office now, the SAO in 2003 wants to create new paths for actively involving SAO PARTNERS in its ministry.

At the planning session it was decided to move away from having a group called the Inter-Congregational Social Action Group (ICSAG), which no longer truly reflects the membership of the group, to having **SAO PARTNERS** which includes members of religious congregations and anyone else who wants to network and participate in influencing public policy for the common good in the tradition of biblical values and Catholic Social Teaching. So you are invited to register your interest in either continuing to be or becoming a SAO Partner. The SAO staff needs and welcomes the active participation of all SAO PARTNERS in order for this important ministry to grow and develop.

AN INVITATION... If you have not filled in the enclosed form *on-line*, please register your interest by filling in the form and returning it to the SAO office. Together we can make a difference for the sake of the common good of all. Thank You.

Brisbane Peace Rally

The SAO initiated an opportunity for people to walk in the Peace Rally March 'under' the banner *Catholic Women and Men Religious Hands up for Peace*. Due to the tremendous crowd it was very difficult for people to find, let alone get to, the banner but many did. From the first-time rally-goers like Zita Thompson rsj to the well seasoned, it was a wonderful time of being in solidarity and being caught up in such a unique experience of wanting peace for all. Wonderful things happen at events like that and those who walked with the banner had a great experience of meeting two very supportive and entertaining Dutch guys, Jan and Albert, who ended up carrying the SAO banner the whole way to the Gardens! They told us they were of no particular religious persuasion but were happy to join this catholic group – they learnt a lot about contemporary religious!

The media showed the many rallies in the capital cities around the country and the globe, but it is important to remember the effort and enthusiasm of the smaller but none the less significant rallies in the rural and regional towns throughout the country. Together we make a difference.





Water has been identified by the Social Action Office and SAO partners as one of the strategic priorities for 2003. 2003 is the *International Year of Fresh Water* (IYFW) and together with other water related issues confronting our planet it was obvious that this be a priority.

The need for a sustainable management of water

The *International Year of Fresh Water* was officially launched at a ceremony in New York in December. The aim of the year is to raise awareness of the importance of protecting and managing freshwater. Water availability in quantity and quality will be a growing concern in many countries and access to water will increasingly be a source of conflicts in the future.

At the same time, Australia is experiencing one of the most severe droughts of its history, with severe impacts on farmers and ecosystems. Actually, some areas of the country, especially in central Queensland, have received the lowest rainfall on record. Of course, it has been said that this was an exceptional year. But clearly, new approaches in water management must be found if we want to optimise the allocation of that invaluable resource between all the uses and users. Major cross-border issues regarding water have to be further addressed at a national level, particularly the water allocation of the Murray-Darling Rivers.

The answer to water management is not only technical, as in finding new irrigation methods and more appropriate farming systems or more efficient washing machines. Moving towards a more sustainable management of water resources implies reforms at an institutional or policy level. For some time now, water reform has been on the agenda. The Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) Water Reform Framework is an attempt to coordinate action at a national level and to design a national policy for the sustainable use of water resources. This goes from water pricing to the allocation of water property rights to research into new technologies and integrated catchment management. At the moment, the House of Representatives is conducting an "Inquiry into future water

supplies for Australia's rural industries and communities". The Committee in charge of the inquiry was recently in Brisbane, listening to farmers' associations, catchment associations, water boards and other groups. Pierre attended the two hearings.

In light of this, the rationale behind the SAO's choice of freshwater as a strategic priority is quite obvious. Water management is a huge matter interweaving complex social and environmental issues. As a resource, it can consist in surface water (rivers and lakes) or groundwater; the Artesian Basin is a specific form of groundwater. The exploitation or the contamination of each one of these forms of water comes with their own characteristics. Because of the scarcity of the resource there is competition between different users: between regions (like in the case of the Murray-Darling system), between agricultural, industrial or domestic uses, between different industrial or agricultural uses (e.g. cotton, dairy farming, or fruit, etc.), between corporate and small users and so on.

Freshwater is also a living environment for plant and animal communities in rivers, lakes and wetlands. So there is competition too between humans and nature. The COAG water framework explicitly mentions the need for legitimate allocations of water for the environment. The ongoing diversion of water for human needs, but also the increasing regulation of stream flows, have had adverse effects on river ecosystems and wetlands. And we must underline here the deep connections between water flows and salinity or land clearing.

So, what about the Social Action Office?

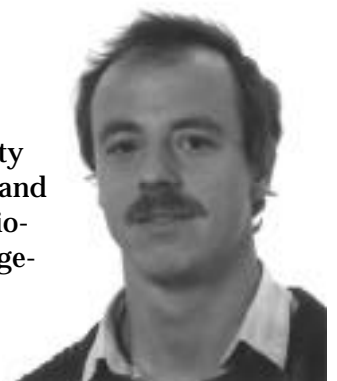
The SAO is in the process of refining its focus on water. A preliminary research is underway and will be done as much as possible in networking with groups working in the same direction. The expertise and support of SAO Partners in furthering this refinement is sought. If you are interested, please make contact with Pierre regarding this: pierre@sao.criq.org.au or ph 07 3891 5866.

Welcome Pierre

Pierre Scholtes (happily) started working at the SAO as the new Research Officer in January. He is an agricultural scientist from Belgium.

Pierre has work experience (teaching and rural development) with Church organisations in Central Africa and in Chile. He worked for ten years as a researcher in a Faculty of Environmental Sciences in South-East Belgium. His main research fields included land use management in rural areas, agriculture and the environment, particularly the socio-economic dimension of rural and environmental issues, and the environmental management of development projects.

Pierre now lives in Brisbane with his wife and three children.



SOPHIA CIRCLES 2003

- Thursday 5.30pm 20 MarchWorld Water Day
- Monday Noon 28 AprilNew Life
- Thursday 5.00pm 22 May Peace
- Thursday Noon 19 JuneWorld Refugee Day
- Wednesday 5.00pm 17 JulyWinter Times
- Thursday Noon 28 August I Have a Dream
- Wednesday 5.00pm 1 October Whiteness
- Thursday Noon 30 OctoberLiving Sustainably
- Tuesday 5.00pm 25 NovemberCelebrating the Year

Book Review

STUPID WHITE MEN

For those who have seen *Bowling For Columbine* this book by Michael Moore will be required reading. Moore studied for the Catholic seminary and has a strong commitment to social justice out of the gospel tradition. In his inimical “take no prisoner” approach, Moore confronts head-on the underlying issues of poverty, racism and injustice in the American context. As befits the man, his writing style is immediately engaging, confronting and, at times, hilarious. Unlike other more erudite publications, *SWM*’s message is accessible and very readable.



The title itself is derived from his contention that the major wars and violence of the last 500 years are in fact caused by white males, not people of dark complexions. Starting out with how George W Bush came to power, Moore goes on to detail the backgrounds of the Bush Cabinet and their past involvements with the oil and automotive industry (one member has an oil tanker named after her). From here, he critiques American foreign and domestic policy. At times his comments are scathing and his wit, razor sharp. Other issues tackled include the gap between rich and poor, American insularism and capital punishment. Make a point of reading the introduction to see how the book found itself No. 1 on the New York’s bestsellers list after September 11 2002 through the actions of one librarian. Order your copy soon as it keeps selling out. But don’t be surprised at the reaction from others in the shop when you pronounce the title!

Jim Darcy cfc

For Your Calendar



2003 - International Year of FreshWater

MARCH

- 1 Landcare Month commences
- 1 International Treaty to Ban Landmines 1999
- 2 Clean Up Australia Day
- 5 Ash Wednesday
- 6 Michelangelo born 1475
- 7 World Day of Prayer
- 8 UN Day for Women’s Rights and International Peace
- 10 Tibetan People’s National Uprising 1959
- 14 Albert Einstein born 1879
- 18 5000 march in Hobart against native forest woodchipping 1995
- 19 St Joseph, husband of Mary
- 20 Sophia Circle 5.30pm Justice Place - *World Water Day*
- 21 International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
- 21 World Forestry Day
- 21 Autumn Equinox
- 22 World Day for Water
- 23 World Meteorological Day
- 24 Archbishop Oscar Romero martyred 1980
- 25 Death of Caroline Chisholm 1877

APRIL

- 4 Martin Luther King Jr assassinated 1968
- 7 World Health Day
- 9 Death of Mary Potter 1913, founder of LCM Sisters
- 10 120 Nations sign treaty banning biological warfare 1972
- 12 Holocaust Memorial Day
- 13 Palm Sunday - beginning of Holy Week
- 14 First presidential elections elect Xanana Gusmao as President of East Timor 2002
- 14 First Meeting of Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Committee 1987
- 14 Death of Rachel Carson 1964
- 15 Leonardo da Vinci born 1452
- 17 Starcke, Cape York protected 1994
- 18 Good Friday
- 18 World Heritage Day
- 20 Easter Sunday - Resurrection!
- 22 International Earth Day
- 25 ANZAC Day 1915
- 26 Death of Nano Nagle 1784, founder of Presentation Sisters
- 28 Sophia Circle at noon Justice Place - *New Life*
- 30 Vietnam War ends 1975



MAY

- 1 Joseph the Worker
- 1 International Workers Day
- 4 Freedom Ride begins to expose illegal segregation practices in the American South 1961
- 6 Aung San Suu Kyi freed from house arrest 2002
- 8 Death of Trugannini in Tasmania 1876
- 9 Dan Berrigan born 1921
- 10 Nelson Mandela’s Inaugural Address as President of South Africa 1994
- 11 Mother’s Day