

**Australia - Launch of Poverty and Justice Bible Parliament House, Canberra  
Address by The Honourable Kevin Rudd MP, Prime Minister.**

Distinguished guests, one and all. If I could also begin by acknowledging the First Australians on whose land we meet, and whose cultures we celebrate as the oldest continuing cultures in human history.

What do Thomas Jefferson, Jim Wallis, and the Poverty and Justice Bible have in common? They've liked defacing this great book. Let me explain how.

Thomas Jefferson, as we've studied the history of the American Revolution, was a great 18th century deist. One of his great accomplishments, of course, was to ensure that the Constitution of the newly founded American Republic did not entrench any single religion. As an 18th century deist however, Jefferson was sceptical about the bible's supernatural claims. It takes a particular mind, however, to do what Jefferson then did, which was to then physically cut out of the bible any reference to the supernatural.

The Jefferson bible, if you've ever seen it, is distinguished literally, waved in the breeze, full of holes. Jefferson, by the end of that exercise, was content with the document he had produced. I thought this reflected a particular obsession, until I met Jim Wallis, from Sojourners.

Many of you in this room would know of Jim, the author of many books on politics and Christianity in the United States. He's a good friend of Tim, he's a good friend of mine, and his most recent, one of his more recent books, God's Politics, the thesis of which is that God, in the American political context, if not more broadly globally, is not owned by any particular political position, either of the left or of the right.

The story goes that when Jim Wallis began his work with Sojourners, a magazine which I still read, he and his colleagues then sat down in Washington D.C., and again took out the bible and decided to ensure that they would cut out all the reference to God's injunction to social justice. And so they began, as it were, the reverse Jefferson exercise - cut, cut, cut, cut, cut - and again you have this Bible swinging in the breeze.

Of course, the point of Jim Wallis and his colleagues was to demonstrate to the American Christian community at large that this was an incomplete document. If you excise what I understand to be thousands of references in both the prophetic literature of the Old Testament, and of course in the Gospel, the Acts, and the Letters, in fact you have a somewhat decimated document.

But again, it takes a mind of a particular quality to actually sit down - think about it - with your own bible at home, physically cut out what do you do on the reverse side of the page?

Hopefully you and I would think about that. So there you have a commonality of, shall I score, intellectual discipline on the part of Thomas Jefferson, up there with Jim Wallace - and then these people, those who put together the Poverty and Justice Bible.

Because they actually have come up with the world's best compromise - don't cut out, just colour in, and I think that reflects a marvellous history and pre-school training. I don't know about you, but I was always much better at colouring in than cutting out. I've never managed to stay within the lines. Every time I'd go to pre-school with kids who were four or five, they always managed to stay within the lines unlike myself. I always used to just go over the edge. But this actually overcomes the Jefferson and Wallis challenge, because you don't have the problem of cutting out and then creating a problem for yourself on the reverse side of the page. It's just coloured in.

But when you actually flip through this, as I did last night at The Lodge, and see the extraordinary shadings of orange all the way through, it catches your eye, and I'm sure that's what those who have put together this particular edition of the Bible have had in mind.

Malcolm Turnbull and I have been asked to do many things in our life. Launching a Bible has not been one of them. I know those in the political class are often assumed to be arrogant, and have a view of themselves as being something extraordinary. I have to say to you that neither of us wrote this one. That's one of those odd things you get asked to do.

If I could reflect for a moment on the organisations who are here with us this morning, and who are party to this great enterprise. Firstly, of course, to World Vision itself. World Vision, founded in 1950, now in 90 countries across the world, providing assistance to 100 million people across the world, including 2.4 million children, employing 22,500 staff. A budget of .7

billion. Nearly 400,000 Australians support World Vision each year through child sponsorship and the Forty Hour Famine. I asked Tim just before I came up what was its Biblical inspiration, which parts of the Bible. And he referred me to John 10:10, and John 10:10 is not the one you said it was Tim! He told me it was about the fullness of life - let me read to you what John 10:10 actually says: 'a thief comes only to rob, kill, and destroy'. Oh, I'm sorry, it's the next part. That's alright, I was just taking the Mickey out of you mate. "I came so that everyone would have life, and have it fully." Never challenge a Baptist when it comes to the Scriptures. "That they might have life, and might have it more fully", which of course leads to the injunction of World Vision that the world's children might have life, and have it more fully. This therefore is its inspiration, and this therefore, is its execution - faith, without work, is dead. The other organisation we honour here today, are of course, the Micah Challenge. I won't challenge what's in the sixth chapter of Micah in the eighth verse; I'm assuming that you've got that right, Tim? Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God. And Micah's prophetic challenge, of course, is echoed down the ages, of course in the ancient time from which it was written, and the conditions of the time, but also the decades through the centuries. And so it does today. And the work of Micah Challenge is also significant in Australia in the five years in which it's been operating. Launched in 2004, now campaigns in 40 countries, Micah Challenge has formed a coalition of more than 30 Christian aid and development aid agencies in Australia, embracing Catholic, Protestant and Pentecostal traditions of the Christian faith. More than 101,000 Australians have signed the Micah call in Australia, a personal statement of commitment to work to the ending of global poverty. And the Micah Challenge is of course running the Voices for Justice campaign that's brought to Canberra 270 people from every state and territory, representing churches and schools in cities, regional and country areas. Of course, the work of World Vision and the work of Micah Challenge, in so many respects would not be possible were it not for the work of a third organisation, which we honour here this morning, which is more ancient than either of them - the Bible Society of Australia. Of course, the Bible Society of Australia was founded in 1817, back in the days of Lachlan Macquarie, and will soon celebrate its 200 years in this country, and began producing Bibles in the Indigenous languages of Australia and New Zealand from as early as 1827, when it produced the Bible, a New Testament, in Maori.

And this is where the three great institutions come together. One, of course, is the propagation of the Bible itself. And the second, organisations like Micah Challenge, and of course World Vision, which take their inspiration from the saying 'faith without works is dead'.

Of course, for those of us engaged in national political life, our work on policy is incomplete unless we are working arm-in-arm with the great organisations of the Church and charitable sector. All of you in this room know full well that there is a limit to what Government can do. All of you know full well that, when it comes to dealing with poverty, at home and abroad, this is often done best when you have a creative and effective partnership between the resources of Government and the compassion of Church and charitable organisations.

And that's what we see writ large across the world, and that's what we see writ large for the work of these two great institutions. In Australia, what we have sought to do in recent times is to put our shoulder to the wheel by lifting Australia's contribution to ODA around the developing world. This is the right and necessary thing to do, and I'm pleased that in doing it we've had the support of the Opposition in Australian politics, because, when we confront the challenges we have with poverty at home - they are great, and they must be attended to: problems of homelessness, problems of simple destitution, problems of absolute isolation, and alienation.

Problems abroad however, cannot be ignored. Remember, it was Wesley who said 'the world is my parish'. And so it is for us as well.

Therefore, by lifting what we seek to do around the world, and by also putting our shoulder to the wheels of other countries in pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals, our objective is to make a real and quantifiable difference.

The Christian traditions from which you all come are many and varied. But I think all of you in this room would agree with one thing: it is not simply and exclusively some individual, pietistic retreat into yourself in pursuit of some microscopic spirituality. No, it's not that. It is a tradition alive in the fact that faith without works is dead, and that the Christian doctrine to which you all

aspire, and which you all believe, is one that is both about individual spirituality and a parallel commitment to social justice.

Which brings me in full circle back to this tome which we launch today, the Poverty and Justice Bible.

I congratulate those who have put together this extraordinary work. I congratulate those who have seen fit to assemble a version of the Bible which draws starkly to people's attention the challenge of Micah, the challenge of John, the challenge facing us all as an informed community of faith.

May it be an inspiration for many more Australians to contribute to the worldwide fight against poverty and injustice, and a better and fairer future for people of all nations, all colours and all creeds.

And it's therefore a great honour for me to join with all of you here in Canberra today, for the launch of this Poverty and Justice Bible.