

CONFERENCE ON BRIDGING THE SECULAR DIVIDE

Religion and Canadian Public Discourse Session on Poverty and Inequality

Remarks by Hon. David Kilgour, panel moderator

McGill University

Montreal

May 27 and 28, 2013

At a conference at Carleton U. in early 2011, Rob Rainer, Executive Director, Canada without Poverty, stressed:

- There is a 21-year difference today in the life expectancies of residents of Hamilton's wealthiest and poorest communities.
- Poverty is "like poison to the brains of a child raised in poverty".
- The yearly cost of keeping a female offender in prison is about \$330,000; about four fifths of them are there because of crimes of desperation, says the Elizabeth Fry Society.
- Among the current barriers to progress on combating poverty: ideological battles between individualism and community values, racialization of poverty issues, with immigrants increasingly victimized by poverty and some Canadians think taxes are too high, forgetting that they pay for schools, social services and many other features of advanced democracies.

What do some of the world's religions say about poverty and inequality?

Jesus: "Blessed are the poor, the gentle, those who mourn, those who hunger and thirst for uprightness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted in the cause of uprightness."

Buddha: "Poverty with dignity is better than wealth based on shame."

Judaism: Bernardo Kliksberg asks why Judaism has been a faith leader in pushing for the examination and resolution of the key problems of development? He suggests that the answer lies largely in the Old Testament.

Dalai Lama: The Dalai Lama has called on the media to help raise public awareness of poverty and the environmental issues, saying political leaders would then follow. "The gap between rich and poor is growing, it's huge...This is not only morally wrong, but practically it's a source of the problem. We have to reduce this gap."

The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, could have led a life of riches, had he wished. He, however, preferred a life of poverty. He did not wish to change his life style in any way.

Our time is very short, so permit me now to introduce our two panelists, who will each speak for about ten minutes:

JULIA BEAZLEY

Julia Beazley graduated from Queen's University in 1997 with a Bachelor of Science (honours) in Biology and Psychology.

She has worked full time for the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) since 1999. She works as a policy analyst at the Centre for Faith and Public Life in Ottawa, researching, writing and speaking about issues related to domestic and global poverty, homelessness, human trafficking and prostitution. She has been involved with the StreetLevel Network since 2003, and has served as Chair of Advocacy for StreetLevel for two years.

Julia brings with her more than ten years experience working with homeless and street-involved youth and adults, and a deep understanding and concern for those who live on the margins of our communities. She is a single mother to a wonderful little boy, who keeps her very busy. Julia lives and works in Ottawa.

David Pfrimmer

Dr. David Pfrimmer has been the Principal-Dean and Professor of Applied Christian Ethics since mid-2005. An ordained pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, he has served in parishes in Kingston and New Hamburg, Ontario.

David was the Executive Secretary for the denomination and for close to twenty-five years served as Director of the Lutheran Office for Public Policy. He has served as Chairperson of numerous ecumenical and multifaith organizations, including the Canadian Council of Churches' Commission on Justice and Peace, and was a founding member and Chairperson of the Interfaith Social Assistance Coalition.

He has represented the ELCIC on a wide range of ecumenical and multifaith coalitions that have addressed issues of economic globalization, social and health policy, peace and disarmament, human rights and aboriginal rights. He has represented the ELCIC on the governing council of the Lutheran World Federation and has been frequently a member of numerous election observer, human rights, and ecumenical delegations.

Dr. Pfrimmer teaches at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary on the campus of Wilfrid Laurier University. His research has focused on a history of Canadian ecumenical social justice movements in Canada since World War II, reclaiming the vocation of government and developing a new understanding of the "public."

Julia, you have the floor...