

Hon John Anderson

Member for Gwydir

There has been no more powerful a civilising influence on Western society than the view that the peasant must respect the king and that the king must likewise respect the peasant — or as we Australians might put it, that “Jack’s as good as his mate”.

This concept stands in stark contrast to the way in which, if left to our own devices, power, wealth and position tend to determine the relative worth of the individual, with often tragic consequences down through the ages and even today for those who are not powerful, wealthy or privileged.

It has its genesis, of course, in the Judeo-Christian world-view that proclaims that each of us is loved and treasured beyond measure by a loving God who, indeed made us in his own image. If our Maker regards even the most unfortunate and lowly as invaluable, who are we to do otherwise?

This has given rise to the imperative, in Western society, to look to the needs of the poor, the powerless and the needy in our midst. Indeed in 2007 we celebrate the success of William Wilberforce, the great anti-slavery campaigner, in securing the end of the slave trade 200 years ago. His work and that of many others of clear Christian conscience powerfully reminds us of the importance of recognising the full humanity of those who are oppressed or downcast.

We need to redouble our efforts on behalf of those beyond our own shores in this most materially fortunate country.

Australia is a signatory to the eight Millennium Development Goals, with the objective of halving global poverty and its effect by 2015. That Micah Challenge and all involved should take up the challenge of supporting this objective is admirable. That there should now be a far more sophisticated understanding of the need for pragmatic reform rather than simple ideologically-driven political rhetoric is also a very good thing: governance reform, fairer trade, and the ending of corruption in many of the world’s most poverty-stricken peoples are integral to real and lasting aid. Furthermore, sensible co-operation “on the ground” between the aid sector NGOs, Governments both aiding and being aided, local communities and often the corporate sector will endure more rapid progress.

I wish Micah Challenge every success.