

# ***INFORMATION, ETHICS AND THE PUBLIC GOOD***

***OCTOBER 2015***

## **SUMMARY OF 6 PRESENTATIONS**

***GRAHAM MILLAR***

Here are some of my impressions from these speakers.

**Jim Cunningham** welcomed us to St Andrews on The Terrace, which has had a tradition of speculative theology supporting social justice inquiry and action since 1840.

**Jan Rivers**, founder of PUBLIC GOOD and organiser of this conference pointed to the poor public debate in New Zealand on key issues because of the lack of good public information available. Even major political parties do not have their manifestos online in an easily searched format. What would NGPs and citizens like in a plan for open government?

Jan said that last year's conference on Democracy, Ethics and the Public Good helped to improve synergy between individuals and organisations and hoped that this would occur again.

**Chris Longhurst** gave us a philosophical perspective on INFORMATION FOR THE COMMON GOOD. Greek and Roman philosophers gave logical reasons why freedom of information is a natural right. Because humans are good, social, free and rational, KNOWLEDGE is an intellectual good, especially truth.

The human capacity to know needs access to information to make right decisions.

Democracy can respect privacy, but should not have secrecy.

**Valerie Morse** was clear about the relationship between Knowledge and Power. In a packed 20 minutes, she talked about the way in which governments and corporates increase their power over citizens by massive collection of private data which can be analysed and used to control, to punish and to make profit. Their claims that this will improve services to the vulnerable have not changed prisons or child poverty.

The GCSB and SIS, she said, are trying to create a new image but it is window dressing. Their reviews are simply improving their image and expanding their powers. National Security is the excuse for the establishment to suppress those who disagree with them and strengthen their power.

Valerie said that we must build collectives to work for change, and dream big.

**Alistair Thompson** of Scoop Media agreed with the need for collective action. Scoop tries to pursue truth and oppose secrecy, to tell the public what is being withheld, and to fully attribute the sources of information. The NEWS CRISIS is partly due to the collapse of advertising revenue destroying journalist jobs. Access to news is not a legislated public right in New Zealand.

Scoop's OPERATION CHRYSALIS is building a collective foundation based on Truth : the real state of things, Trust: becoming not-for-profit, and Sustainability : getting organisations to pay graded subscriptions to use Scoop information.

*From these Friday night presentations our appetite was whetted for quality public information.*

**Jeff Kelly Lowenstein**, speaking on journalism via Skype, said that different countries have differing legislation re open information. In many countries journalists are controlled and punished. There are challenges for not-for-profits in the current environment, yet many are doing a great work. It is important to join national and international networks. The time is rich in possibilities.

**Phil Stevens** speaking about the poverty of economic information, said that it was important to bust common economic myths. The neoliberal consensus: free market, deregulation, no welfare, privatisation, and individualism, leads to SauerKraut debt-fuelled economics.

There ARE alternatives.

These speakers help us to see that Information is often used as a means of social control. We believe that information can be used as a means of social change.

