

COURAGE MINISTRY

Article 98 – April 2017

Brendan Scarce

Courage and this generation: A dialogue

Introduction

Last week I asked a younger man involved in Courage activities what the Church could do for those who are same-sex attracted. I have summarized his comments as best I can below. For the purposes of this article I will call him Irenaeus and will include virtually all that he has written. While I would qualify some of his conclusions, it is important to listen with good will and ponder what another person sincerely believes.

A different age

Firstly: Irenaeus said that this generation sees the Church as irrelevant and not really having a voice. This is different from twenty years ago. Even for those without any concept of God.

Secondly: Irenaeus said that whenever people engage in sexual activity with a same sex person it eventually leads to death – the implication is Spiritual death, as well as physical.

Thirdly: The Gay Lobby makes it appear that if a person speaks about the negative (or destructive) elements of same-sex attraction, they are bigots and homophobic. However, Irenaeus says that we need to speak up and indicate that there is truly another way.

What teenagers are being told

Irenaeus says that: “teenagers now are being told that being gay is normal and that people are born that way. Consequently when some of these young boys (or girls) start experiencing same-sex attractions, they naturally assume that they are gay because that is what they have been told by society: (society meaning the education system and the mass media/Hollywood). Unlike past generations of same-sex attracted individuals, these children have grown up in an environment where there is no alternative opinion/viewpoint when it comes to homosexuality. They do not believe it to be unnatural or wrong in any way to engage in gay sex, etc. The reason they do not believe it to be unnatural is because they are the first generation to be fed this lie about 'being born gay'”.

A failure by the Church

Irenaeus has the following conviction: “The gay lobby groups have succeeded in crushing any alternative voice, and have now virtually criminalized any dissent (look at the recent Coopers beer saga). On top of this, this generation is also the

first generation to be raised without really knowing anything of the Christian faith, due to the Church's steady withdrawal from society and national debates over the past forty years. As a result, most teenagers now would not have the first clue about who Jesus is or what He represents. This is not their fault but rather a failure on behalf of the entire Christian Church (Protestant and Catholic)”.

Current Australian situation and milieu.

I agree with Irenaeus that currently in Australia there is less and less freedom to articulate a contrary view than that view espoused by the Gay Lobby. There are very few occasions where there is respect and grace when various issues are discussed. Irenaeus mentioned a recent occasion where there was a robust yet respectful dialogue between two Liberal Parliamentarians Andrew Hastie of Western Australia and Tim Wilson of Victoria. They debated the issue of the pulling of Coopers Beer from an hotel in Sydney's gay area because of a gay protest about the Company. After this interview the Gay Lobby was scathing of Hastie.

The influential power of the Gay Lobby: Coopers Brewery protest.

The main headline on page one of the Australian for Tuesday 28th of March was *Safety Fears at Christian charities* – written by the Political editor Dennis Shanahan. I include his article for us to see what we will have to contend with in the future as we work in the ministry of Courage.

The Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission yesterday agreed to keep the boards of the Lachlan Macquarie Institute and the Australian Christian Lobby off the public record because publication “could endanger public safety”. ...militant gay rights activists targeted marriage equality advocate IBM Australia for employing Mark Allaby, who was on [the Macquarie] Institute's board. Both organizations removed the details of their boards and staff from their websites last week, as gay activists increased pressure on IBM and started to circulate the names and jobs of the Christian board members...

Mr Hastie, who opposes same-sex marriage said “freedom of conscience, speech and association are being suppressed and dissent is silenced. Australians should be deeply concerned by these developments...If this is the pattern now what will happen if SSM is legislated ? What will happen to individuals, religious institutions, charities and schools who don't share in the new morality. Mr Wilson, who campaigns for same-sex marriage and freedom of speech said: “I utterly condemn the necessity for the need for this action. Freedom means freedom for everyone, including people of faith and also those who have been discriminated by them. This case is another reminder of the need for respectful dialogue”.

Political Correctness - Racial Discrimination Act 18C

One of the obstacles to speaking up and indicating that there is another way is the provision of the Racial Discrimination Act Section 18C of a Federal Law, which

forbids any comment that is likely to offend. There have been recent examples where students accessing an educational space on a University campus have been cited as causing an offence, because of a fellow student claiming the space was an exclusive place for a minority group. We have seen how this legislation was seriously misapplied against these four QUT students. The late cartoonist Bill Leak was complained against for drawing a cartoon that highlighted a current aboriginal situation in Western Australia.

Free Expression is a Civilising Force

In the Weekend Australian March 25-26 in the Enquirer section, page 24 there are two complementary opinion pieces by Frank Furedi and Brendan O'Neill that illustrate how to handle section 18C. I think we as Courage members and workers could take some of their ideas to hand – ideas that will help us to speak to our generation.

Ironically one of the virtues required is the ability to advocate intelligently and respectfully but robustly.

Frank Furedi argues strongly against hate laws. He writes: *The most important argument against the censorship of expression of hate is that it restricts legitimate speech and the freedom of expression. Throughout history, human progress has depended on the freedom to express dangerous and what were initially often perceived as offensive ideas.*

Brendan O'Neill's headline in the Weekend Australian: *Free expression is a civilising force* is enhanced by his well argued and logical comment: *Of all the bad ideas spouted by the intolerant new left, none is so obnoxious, so threatening to liberty and equality, as the idea that freedom of speech is bad for minority groups. Freedom of speech is not a threat to people-it is a threat to power and wrong.*

O'Neill maintains that it is our freedom of speech that allows us to deal with minority groups and their opinions. He asserts that those who are obnoxious ought to be free to assert their opinion but that we as hearers: *ensure our freedom to argue back and make a better society.*

The importance of self education and awareness of our cultural heroes

We ought to note the significance of Alexander Solzhenitsyn in his writings and especially in his Noble Prize literary award: *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. Other works by Solzhenitsyn such as *First Circle*, *Cancer Ward* and *The Gulag Archipelago*, are writings that eventually helped to bring down the USSR, primarily because of his courageous integrity. An honesty that caused the USSR Communist regime to exile him from Russia for eighteen years. (See Joseph Pearce's excellent biography: *Solzhenitsyn: A Soul in Exile*). In order to speak meaningfully, intelligently and winsomely to our culture we need to be abreast of

what our culture is thinking, acting and proposing. While some of the issues are long term we need to be courageous in challenging modern facets of our society. Ecclesiasticus 4:28 “Do not refrain from speaking at an opportune time, and do not hide your wisdom”. (JB version) is a constant reminder for me for me to act. Our Courage members have various gifts and while not all can advocate some can articulate as Irenaeus did. He is the inspiration behind this article. I will now report what my wife and I did last year in response to a long – held controversy.

An example of an encounter about a current controversial cultural issue

In 2016 year when I raised the issue of the abortion law reform in a group of twelve people - three saw my action as divisive and vexatious. It seemed to me that it was the non-religious in the room who complained. I wondered why the eight Catholics present were quite mute. Those who were unhappy with my comments were people I respected, but they probably have not heard a person speak in a strong, robust, yet respectful manner about abortion reform. Eventually my wife and I went to our local member of Parliament, who was the chair of the committee investigating the bills before the Parliament. We explained our severe reservations about the proposed bills in a manner that allowed us to be heard. I am concerned that in Australia we do not listen well to those with opposing ideas.

The preparation for the dialogue with our culture and generation.

Nonetheless Courage is not about debate – but is about how we now present ourselves in this culture with wise and shrewd understanding of issues that touch the heart of hearers. Our charity, love, compassion, humility peace and other virtues ought to inform our speech as St Francis de Sales writes in his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Part Three – The Practice of Virtue – nos 1-11, and 27-30, especially no.27, *Respect in Conversation*. I believe that respectful honest dialogue in most situations, even with hostile people is a way to fruitful outcomes.

To keep in our corner as in a ghetto is a waste of time. We need to be on the front foot - Not easy! But if we think of an opening batsman against fast and furious bowling – that is the perseverance and hard nosed approach we may need to have. See Saint John Paul's writings and encyclicals and even Pope Francis' excellent apostolic exhortations: *Evangelii Gaudium* articles 62-77 and *Amoris Laetitia*.

Conclusion

As citizens and God fearing followers we need to articulate ideas and a sense that is understandable and meaningful to our 21st century audience. What are the issues that require communicating meaningfully to our generation?

I have at some length mentioned particular secular forces and even institutions that as Courage members and the People of God we ought to notice, in order to assist

same-sex attracted men and women and families who are seeking help in their Christian lives. By understanding and appreciating our current culture we will be better attuned in our apostolic endeavours to minister compassion, mercy and love. Matthew 10:16 says it for me: *Remember, I am sending you out, like sheep among wolves; so be cunning as serpents and yet as harmless as doves.*

Courage is a ministry of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane
Enquiries can be made to Father Bob Harwood, the Chaplain on 0418 730 011
Email: Brisbanecourage@bigpond.com