

Courage Ministry
Article 99 – June 2017
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How do we speak with biblical wisdom to our Australian culture?

Introduction

In Courage article 98 of April 2017 “Irenaeus” a Courage member provided some relevant insights about communicating meaningfully and intelligently to our modern generation. It was a passionate exhortation and I thought it necessary for Courage people to ponder, to feel and appreciate what one of our reflective Courage members had to say about the issues of same-sex attraction. Irenaeus drew our attention to public controversy about the gay lobby group and the pressure placed on those who advocate the biblical perspective on sexual morality. In this article I will include a comment by Irenaeus about lifestyle. After which I will draw on the opinion of Christian leaders and a political commentator that will help us to understand the depths of current culture animosity towards Christian values and morals.

Episcopal encouragement for Australians to provide a Christian perspective

Since the April 98 article I have been pleased that three Australian Archbishops have spoken about negative elements in our society that want to silence a Christian viewpoint. I will quote the episcopal statements which will encourage and help us to prepare for the dialogue with those who hold contrary and adverse opinions.

As reported in Catholic News – Thursday 30th March. Sydney Archbishop Anthony Fisher said it was 'deeply concerning when people of Christian faith are forced to avoid going on the public record with their deeply held beliefs. It is part of our culture that Australians of all faiths or no faith have the opportunity to contribute to full and open discussion on all issues without intimidation, coercion or bullying'.

Sydney Anglican Archbishop Glenn Davies has slammed the multinational corporations who surrender to those attacks as 'weak kneed'. He said it was an appalling indication of the state of national debate in Australia.

If religion is worth its salt, it is other person-centred. These social media attackers, they are all 'me'-centred- its all about me and protecting my point of view and anyone who disagrees with me has to be vilified or ostracized or marginalized in such a way that the whole society goes against them. That is an appalling un-Australian aspect which we need to address and needs to be knocked on the head by government. Multinational companies need to take a stand on this and show a little steel in their backbones, not be so weak-kneed in regard to addressing the issue and standing firm for their values.

Archbishop Julian Porteous as reported in CathNews - 18th April 2017 and the Weekend Australian, April 15-16, 2017

Archbishop Julian said: ...'so called diversity organizations and committees' in the corporate sector was being used to threaten people's religious beliefs. Far from promoting authentic diversity...the organizations have become the means to impose a particular social agenda.

...To compel employees to submit to and be bound by a political agenda unrelated to the commercial success of their operations is a very disturbing and undemocratic development, he said.

Chief executives of some of Australia's leading companies, including Qantas, Telstra, IBM, Pricewaterhouse Coopers, ANZ, AGL and SBS signed a joint letter to pressure the Prime Minister to legislate for same-sex marriage. It is one thing for corporations to seek to promote community projects and initiatives... it is quite another thing for them to be promoting radical social agendas in such a way that employees are pressured to act against their conscience or ...publicly stop their involvements in projects outside their work commitments that are an expression of their deeply held religious commitments.

Religious beliefs must be able to be expressed

Archbishop Porteous continues: It is ironic that initiatives claimed to be about promoting diversity in the workplace have the opposite effect, reducing the diversity of views in the workplace. It is quite appropriate for corporations to promote a diversity of views among their employees based on mutual respect and understanding. Such a commitment would encourage all employees to express their particular social views and engage each other in a respectful way. This clearly is not happening. These initiatives are aimed at preventing authentic diversity and instead mandating conformity to the social agenda of the particular corporation. ... For society to be truly democratic, citizens must be able to express their deeply held beliefs, in particular, religious beliefs. To allow corporations to practically deny a citizen the ability to participate in a community organization that promotes the good of religion smacks of totalitarian. Corporate bullying must be called for what it is and our society should establish legal protection to the right to religious freedom.

Is there a lack of commonwealth protection for religious freedom in Australia, the Archbishop writes. I am not sure of this as yet but the intimidation by minorities has gained weight as a number of minorities claim victimhood and damage to individuals' mental health. This opinion is used to lobby and force changes in social policy.

Paul Kelly (Editor-At-Large) The Australian – as reported April 15-16, 2017

I was very encouraged by these courageous actions by our episcopal leaders. We need this voice because as Paul Kelly wrote in the Easter Weekend Australian – Christian perspectives and voices are being curtailed by hostile anti-Christian forces within Australia. We as Christians have to be forearmed and ready for competent and intelligent advocacy of our values and virtues. I have read Paul Kelly's books (The Hawke Ascendancy & The End of Certainty) and commentaries for years and have a deep respect for his incisiveness, clarity and ability to demonstrate the issues at hand.

He writes: ...Christian tradition faces erosion in Australia from an array of forces - the failure of its churches and clerics, the march of secularism and the rise of an alternative progressive morality...The upshot is a society in confusion and dispute over the meaning of virtue. For much of its history, Australia, along with other Western nations, was a society that agreed on core values arising from Christian tradition and this was a unifying factor during bitter disputes over class, income and economic organization. But as the Christian tradition weakens and the progressive morality rises, our society is divided at its heart, a process that few want to discuss...

Recent examples of the growing intolerance within Australia

I have always been interested in Politics and studied it at University level for two years. Four years ago I actually joined a political party and have proposed the occasional motion about abortion and refugees, asserting that in Australia we ought to debate these issues in a respectful and rational manner. A number of people said that I was being divisive and one said I was vexatious. My reply was that I was not divisive and that I respect those who made these comments. I stated that in Australia we do not discuss these issues and I wanted to voice them so that we could cope with diverse opinions without being embarrassed or anxious about the tension caused. I also spoke at a regional meeting of this party about not enforcing a conscience vote on members - stating that our conscience is an intrinsic and inherent fundamental human right that no one can compel. The look on a number of faces indicated the disbelief about what I was proposing.

On a recent ABC, Q&A episode I was momentarily disheartened about how we might improve our public debate on controversial issues. The audience saw the disrespectful and hostile interchange of views about Islam, expressed by the young Muslim woman, Yasmin Abdel-Magied and Senator Jacquie Lambie. Tony Jones the compere seemed to have no power to halt the row. I am concerned that we now have more intolerance, since many show little respect to those with opposing ideas.

The Preparation for the dialogue with our culture

Despite these warnings about our culture – we have a real challenge and opportunity to begin a way that is wise and shrewd. If Courage members and supporters are to have an influence we need to be enlightened about what is occurring and learn to speak in a way that is engaging, understandable and insightful. We might have to do more research about the underlying reasons for persistent intolerant behaviour. We need to see what the Bible says and what Saint Francis de Sales, who is a man of great gentleness writes in his classic work: *Introduction to the Devout Life. Part Three: The Practice of Virtue. No.8. Gentleness*. His way is the way of gentleness. It would seem madness – but I believe we need the medicine of gentleness and mercy in whatever we do. The 2016 Year of Mercy was a grace filled time in the Church's ministry to the World.

Conclusion

Within Courage we acknowledge the power of the the tongue for good. Here are certain scriptures that we can reflect on for our pursuit of holiness and efficacy in showing the love and mercy of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

1 Cor 16:13-14, *...stay firm in the faith; be brave and be strong. Let everything you do be done in love.*

Ephesians 4:29, *...let your words be for the improvement of others, as occasion offers, and do good to your listeners.*

2 Cor 1:3-4...*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, a gentle Father and the God of all consolation, who comforts us in all our sorrows, so that we can offer others in their sorrows, the consolation that we have received from God ourselves.* (This beautiful exhortation was our theme at the Oceania Courage Conference in 2009).

Ecclesiasticus 4:23; *Do not refrain from speech at an opportune time. (JB)*
Do not refrain form speaking at the crucial time. (RSV)

Courage is a ministry of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane

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