

Public Policy Fail

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Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. (Philippians 2: 3-4)

The Failure of Public Policy

How has our society arrived the point where wide-spread abortion is tolerated, and a beneficial view of euthanasia is promoted in parliamentary bills? Why was a romantic view of same-sex marriage given media endorsement and such a prominent focus in politics? Why is sexual experimentation promoted, often in the context of unwittingly promoting violence against women through the implicit endorsement of pornography?

To contrast though, there is a common abhorrence about sexual trafficking of women overseas, and often at least a public concern about the plight of refugees.

While there are many reasons, a key is the valuing, and now enshrinement, of personal experience over community and public good.

Distant 'causes' foster an intellectually based public good approach, simply because they rarely impact personally. In contrast, those 'causes' closer to our personal experience, while usually a private matter, are now deemed public because experience dictates that if it is valid for me, it is valid for all.

The campaign for same-sex marriage was based around the desire of some individuals to make recognition of their relationship equal to what had been the normal understanding of marriage. The Uniting Church Assembly's agreement with this change is one that was based on and now enhances

individual beliefs and actions. It allows a situational theology dependent on the policy of the minister or church council of the day and illustrates well the issues arising for any group that jumps on the bandwagon of the wider sexual libertarian agenda. What happens when a minister and church council disagree? What will happen when different congregations on the same property have different views? What happens when the neighbouring church in a parish arrangement comes to a different view? There is no real 'unity in diversity' when the diversity is so distinct that it is contradictory.

This individual and situational focus is now very evident in politics. Over the last few decades there has been an increasing failure of political leaders to put aside their personal views when considering matters of public policy. This has been vividly illustrated by the never-ending litany of bills to introduce euthanasia. Pro-speeches are fundamentally based around personal story and personal experience that pushes public policy to situational ethics and individual views, rather than public debate about what is best for the whole country.

Of course, personal experience will always be a part of debate and argument in terms of the law and often new laws arise from a particular personal event or situation. How can a nation develop public policy based on different and conflicting personal experiences?

For example, euthanasia proponents promote individual cases, rather than looking at the overall picture and the sad implications of state endorsement of sanctioned suicide or even 'helpful murder'. In reality it leaves the focus and decision with the individual, and the individual is given leave for action. This is an irony in Australia as the state moves to sanction what it had previously given up as not being in the best interest of public policy, namely capital punishment.

While Australia is not of course a theocracy, Christian virtues underpin our law and practice, and these virtues help to oppose the libertarian orientation, and maintain a focus on the public good, rather than individual desire.

I encourage our political leaders to put aside their own desires and interests and again seek the public good – to consider what is the good for the country, rather than the individual.

Simply, a nation ignores its history and heritage at its peril. If Australia increasingly distorts, rejects and blurs its common base for developing public policy, citizens could end up being judge, jury and executioner.

