

**Title:** The culture of death – and what we must do to counter its insidious advance

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There are many challenging issues in our world that require our prayers and our action. Poverty, hunger, injustice, conflict, abuse of power, natural disaster – the list can go on and on. We probably don't do too bad in Australia. We live in a lucky country – there is no place I would rather live. But there are insidious forces at work in our society that threaten to bring us down and require our attention, such as the erosion of marriage and family as the bedrock of society.

It is my belief that the greatest threat is the blurring of what it means to be human and to be created in the Image of God. The outworking of this is explained in *The Culture of Death* below. Presently the battle for human life is on throughout Australia with a euthanasia bill before federal senate, physician assisted suicide in Victoria, abortion through to term in Victoria and soon to be in Queensland. And these issues will be before us again here in WA and other states too.

But a related threat of great importance in all these issues is the encroaching restriction on being able to voice our concerns re these matters, to limit our freedom of speech.

What must we do? We must defend our right to speak, to confront and challenge where necessary. We must not be silent while we have the opportunity. We need to educate. Christians, the general public, children, especially politicians. On specific issues and also generally re a Christian worldview.

Primarily as Christians we need to bring people to Christ. But we also need to speak to issues involving our culture and say what needs to be said as God's people and watchmen:

"Go down to the palace of the king of Judah and proclaim this message there: `Hear the word of the LORD, O king of Judah, you who sit on David's throne--you, your officials and your people who come through these gates. This is what the LORD says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place. (Jeremiah 22:1-3).

Sometimes we win by educating politicians. The win in the West Australian Legislative Council voting against cloning (a first in reversing the process) was a great example. But most of the time – even with extremely, almost irrefutable, arguments – we lose the vote in parliament.

Why? There are a number of factors:

- *Wilful ignorance.* So many times letters on issues that will be decided by a conscience vote, therefore requiring personal consideration, have just been forwarded on to "the person responsible for this portfolio".

- *Blindly following public opinion* as expressed by opinion polls. This seems laudable but it is also important for politicians as representatives of the public interest to be fully informed in the outworking of complex issues. Economic policy is an obvious example. Euthanasia is another.
- *Personal agendas*. Because politicians are often there with specific views and agendas, sometimes being elected because of this and assisted in the election process e.g. the female politicians of Emily's List.

With members of Emily's List being elected to parliament with specific agendas e.g. unrestricted abortion through to term, it is not enough to reason and persuade in regard to legislation. We need numbers. We need members in parliament who will represent a godly worldview. We need Christians to run for pre-selection in major parties and we need Christian parties that will actively promote Christian values.

To achieve this we need support. Prayer support most of all. Then practical support in leaflet distribution, educating our Christian friends in particular, handing out how-to-vote cards at voting booths etc. We also need financial support. We have a core group of faithful financial supporters for CDP that helps the office to run as well as many volunteers, some like our President who put in many hours a week. But elections are costly. We have already printed much advertising material but the essential costs for election are still unmet. Basically, we have to raise \$100,000 in two weeks.

I have recently been listening to Bonhoeffer's story, produced by Focus on the Family's Radio Theatre, and am (once again) amazed at the reaction of the German people and the church "it can't happen here". And, in the words of Bonhoeffer, do we "shrink into our sanctuaries of private virtuousness" or do we speak out or at least support those who are prepared to speak out. ("Bonhoeffer: The Cost of Freedom," by Focus on the Family Radio Theatre. 3CD set, superb quality.)

### **Threats to marriage and family, freedom of speech and freedom of association.**

The threat to marriage continues with proposed legislation for rights for homosexual partnerships. Even promoting marriage as being the exclusive union of man and woman is seen as being vilification of homosexuals.

You have probably heard of the judgment in NSW this year re homosexual adoption:

*Gay couple wins \$10,000 in foster care case*

By Bruce McDougall April 25, 2008 02:35am Article from Daily Telegraph.

A gay couple have won a landmark discrimination case after being banned from becoming foster parents because they are homosexual. The couple, whose identities have been suppressed, took legal action when their application to become foster carers was refused by a welfare agency linked to the Uniting Church.

<http://www.news.com.au/story/0,23599,23593862-2,00.html>

In England you cannot refuse homosexual couples who want to occupy your bed and breakfast. And a Catholic adoption agency in USA has shut down because it was not able to refuse adoption for homosexual couples.

We are at serious risk in our Christian Schools and churches, church playgroups and kindergartens of being hit with similar penalties and being forced to employ people that we would not otherwise consider. There have been many instances overseas now where Pastors have been fined and even jailed for upholding sexual purity and including homosexuality in the impure.

Speaking truth is not a defence. See [www.thebeltoftruth.org.au](http://www.thebeltoftruth.org.au) for some comment on this. See the leaflets available at [www.chooselifeaustralia.org.au](http://www.chooselifeaustralia.org.au) including the marriage leaflet.

### **The Culture of Death**

- A culture where choosing to die and the killing of others is seen as a solution for misery.
- A culture where some lives are seen as more worthy than others.
- A culture where personal autonomy is exercised in rebellion against an intrinsic sanctity of life and a “natural” life span.
- A culture that accepts the killing of 80,000 un-born children every year the vast majority of which are for reasons of maternal choice and seen as an extension of contraception.
- A culture in which it becomes progressively easier to think of, then justify, then carry out “mercy” killing, firstly on the person who requests it and then to relieve the suffering of others for whom it is considered their suffering to be incompatible with quality of life.
- A culture that accepts without thinking the elimination of embryos and killing of the un-born that are less than perfect – e.g. Down Syndrome, or even easily correctable abnormalities such as cleft lip.
- A culture in which the intrinsic value of all human life is increasingly replaced by an objective assessment for the individual, then for society. We have then come to the point – where we have been before – in evaluating whether a life is worthy to be lived.
- A culture that accepts that cloning human beings is OK as long as we don’t implant them and they are destroyed before 14 days.
- A culture that accepts that it is OK to create human life for the sole purpose of research that will result in the death of that life.
- A culture that accepts the mixing of animal genetic material with human even though any “life” thus created would also be destroyed before 14 days.
- A culture where embryos are discarded because they are deemed unsuitable for tissue donation to an existing sibling or other relative.
- A culture where society expects and the individual – particularly the elderly and infirm – feels a Duty to Die because it is better for their relatives or for society.

- A culture in which it becomes progressively easier to consider the value of one human life compared with another, where it becomes thinkable to transplant organs necessary for life to function from a person inevitably close to death – or even subject to capital punishment – to the premature termination of that life when it is considered to be of lesser value or “unworthy” or to no longer exhibit “personhood”.

Note that in this progression, having departed from the absolute – the intrinsic value or sanctity of all human life – we adopt criteria capable of varying definition: mercy; suffering; quality of life; value of life; proximity of death; personhood. These definitions vary from person to person (consistent with living in a society with recognition of autonomy), from society to society, and from government to government.

The relative value of life and consideration of personhood and therefore whether a human organism can be considered truly human then becomes the primary consideration in this culture. It is easy then to justify destructive research on spare embryos left over from artificial reproductive technology (ART or IVF) – embryos that are going to die anyway – and then justify the deliberate creation of embryos for that purpose. And if we consider that this is justifiable before the time of implantation then why not – in a culture that has already accepted early abortion as just an extension of contraceptive technique – use actual organ tissue (instead of stem cells) from a more mature foetus that is still not yet a person.

And, as we know, there are prominent bio-ethicists already arguing that a new-born baby does not exhibit self-awareness and is therefore not yet a person therefore it is justifiable to terminate this baby’s life up to around four weeks of age – or even longer if this child for reasons of defect does not exhibit self-awareness. And there would seem to be no valid reason for not using this child’s organs for another instead of wasting them.

Further, it has been argued, it is less discriminatory to terminate the life of a new-born than to terminate, say at 34 weeks, because a diagnosis of abnormality can be made with more certainty to avoid the situation where a late-term abortion is carried out and the diagnosis is then discovered to be erroneous.

For some reason, when considering late-term terminations, it is considered to be less stressful for the mother to have the baby born dead e.g. by breech extraction with delivery of a collapsed head after suction of its contents – such termination known as “partial birth abortion” – than to just simply “terminate” that pregnancy by induction of labour with delivery of a live infant. This philosophy well illustrated by the case in Victoria where the child with alleged skeletal dysplasia was killed – executed – at 32 weeks by an injection into her heart and then delivered dead.

Personhood of the mature embryo is also dependent on the mother’s view – even a changing view – as to whether the baby is wanted. If, after an abortion procedure, the baby is (accidentally) born alive then, as it is no longer wanted by the mother, it should not be alive and it is therefore justifiable somehow to put “it” on one side until it dies.

Similarly, there is the obvious inconsistency – with obvious disregard for any acceptance of the yet-to-be-born baby as a person – between chosen abortion and the baby being killed in utero through an attack or an accident involving the mother, such distinction being accepted by some courts in bringing to justice the persons responsible for the attack or accident, compared with the total lack of accusation if it was the mother’s choice.

Finally, the true agenda of the “right to die” lobby becomes clear with the following:

Dr Nitschke in *Killing Me Softly* says that anyone should have the right to kill themselves, including troubled teens, prisoners and the elderly who are sick of life. “Instead of doctors -- or politicians or legislation -- calling the shots, dying will become democratised. This heightened level of autonomy will open up new choices to the ordinary person ([The Australian, Aug 7](#))

Ludwig Minelli head of Dignitas claims that suicide and assisted suicide are human rights:

“If the Right to Suicide is a Human Right... we must accept that, in order to make use of this right, there must be no legal requirements other than that the person has the mental capacity needed to decide to end his or her own life. Conditions which insisted that somebody must be terminally or severely ill would interfere with the essence of that Human Right. Human Rights are, inherently, unconditional.” (Assisted Suicide Backers Mislead the Public by Wesley J. Smith August 11, 2008, <http://www.lifenews.com/bio2542.html>)

It is indeed a culture of death when it not only becomes a right to die at any chosen point along the life-span for any chosen reason – a philosophy that is already apparent in some parts of our society and in our young people if things get too hard, I’ll just kill myself – but also to insist on assistance in that by the medical profession and to have legislative backing.

Add to that the threat that is already with us that doctors who, for reasons of conscience, will not offer services that are legally permitted should not be doctors:

If people are not prepared to offer legally permitted, efficient, and beneficial care to a patient because it conflicts with their values, they should not be doctors (Professor Julian Savulescu, Oxford Uehiro Centre for Practical Ethics, *BMJ* 2006;332:294-297 February 4).

and we have a culture that not only insists on death on demand as a moral and legal right, but also where doctors refusing to assist are liable to de-registration.

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### **Foundational Truth: In Response**

- Human life has intrinsic value in all states of dependency and disability from fertilisation to life’s natural end. The Image of God, however much it may be blurred or distorted by circumstance or choice, is present in all people.
  - Killing should never be seen as a solution for misery.
  - In the field of medical ethics we must not sacrifice one human life for another.
  - We must never create human life with the intention of its destruction.
  - There must be no confusion! We must not devalue human life!
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