

96. Church and Nation: The report of the Church and Nation Committee was laid on the table and received.

The Rev. S. Slucki submitted the deliverance.

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The deliverance as a whole was approved as follows:

That the Assembly:

- (1) Thank the immediate past Moderator-General, the Rt. Rev. Robert Benn, for his championing of the issues of the Church and Nation Committee during his term of office, as evidenced by his issuing of statements, media releases as well as general support to the Committee.
- (2) Thank Ms Karen Forman, NSW Media and Communications Manager, for her help in preparing, disseminating and publicizing the work of the Committee via statements, media releases and letters in consultation with the Moderator-General.
- (3) Thank the Rev. Michael Wharton both for technically maintaining the Committee's website and publicising its work via Pres E-News.
- (4) Receive and adopt the statement on the responsible use of alcohol which reads:-
 - (a) Despite its abuse by many, the Assembly affirms alcohol as God's Gift when used in moderation (1 Tim 4:4, 5:23, John 2:1-11).
 - (b) Respects the position of total abstinence, taken by many Christians, on theological, ethical, practical and health grounds and does not wish to offend their consciences by this declaration in accordance with the principles of Romans 14.
 - (c) Warns, with all seriousness, of the perils of drunkenness for both the body (Prov. 23:20-35) and the soul (1 Tim 6:10).
 - (d) Urges those addicted to alcohol to seek the help of organizations that specialize in the treatment of such addictions, recognizing that Christ's Power is able to break any sinful pattern through His Spirit.
 - (e) Urges Sessions, Deacons Courts, Committees and Boards of Management to make their facilities available to such organizations that specialize in the treatment of such addictions.
 - (f) Urges Christians to develop a definite attitude to alcohol by,
 - educating themselves and their families on the effects of alcohol and the consequences of alcohol abuse,
 - noting that self-control is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5.22-23)
 - adopting either temperance or total abstinence in their personal and family intake of alcohol,
 - being constantly aware of how their attitude to alcohol affects their witness to others.
 - (g) Urges Christians, privately and in public, to be models of responsibility and sobriety where they choose to be consumers of alcoholic beverages (Titus 2.11-14).
 - (h) Deplores the fact that alcohol is being consistently abused within the community with devastating results such as death and injury on the roads and in the workplace, addiction, violence, domestic disruption and misery, poverty, problems in pregnancy and damage to personal health.
 - (i) Urges concerted action by state and federal governments, in consultative partnership with insurance companies, aimed at curbing the abuse of alcohol in the community by:
 - restricting advertising of alcoholic beverages in the media;
 - facilitating sources of sports sponsorship and associated advertising funding, alternative to marketers of alcoholic beverages at sporting

- events;
 - placing clear health warnings on alcoholic beverages;
 - imposing equitable taxes on the sale of alcoholic beverages that adequately cover the financial cost to the community of alcohol abuse;
 - applying taxation proportionately higher according to the percentage of alcohol content of the beverage;
 - regulating tightly the institutions that sell alcoholic beverages, including the hours in which they operate;
 - encouraging or offering insurance policies with conditions that promote abstinence or temperance in the consumption of alcoholic beverages.
- (5) Instruct the Committee to:-
- (a) upload the statement on the responsible use of alcohol onto its website and
 - (b) forward the statement to the church via Pres E-News
- (6) Receive and adopt the proposed statement on marriage which reads:-
That the Assembly:
- (a) Declares that marriage is a divine creation ordinance relevant for all mankind (Gen 2:23-24).
 - (b) Declares that marriage, rightly defined, is a public commitment between one man and one woman, to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life.
 - (c) Affirms its understanding that the purposes of marriage are to promote lifelong love and companionship between the spouses, to provide the most favourable and stable environment in which to conceive, give birth to and nurture children and to promote the health and stability of society.
 - (d) Reaffirms its long-held opposition to the redefining of marriage so as to include partners of the same sex.
 - (e) Encourages teaching and ruling elders and other pastoral leaders to teach the distinctive, Christian, covenantal view in preparing couples for marriage.
 - (f) Calls on all involved in de facto heterosexual, domestic relationships to solemnise those commitments by means of marriage (Hebrews 13:4) and appeals to all pastoral leaders to persist in calling on them to do so.
 - (g) Recognises the value to both the church and the world of the celibate, single adult life (1 Corinthians 7).
 - (h) Commends chapter 5 of General Assembly of Australia's Constitution, Procedure and Practice 2006 Edition, "Determinations on Marriage and Divorce", to the consideration and study of all ministers, elders, pastoral leaders and members of the church. (<http://www.presbyterian.org.au/PDF/GAACode%20Book2006.pdf>)
 - (i) Urges church members to show understanding and compassion for people whose lives have been affected by marriage and/or relationship breakdown, including divorce.
 - (j) Commends the Federal Parliament on its continued affirmation of the legal definition of marriage as being between one man and one woman, to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life.
- (7) Write to the Prime Minister and Federal Leader of the Opposition asking them to reaffirm the commitment of their respective parties to the definition of marriage as defined in 6(b).
- (8) Instruct the Committee to:
- (a) upload the statement on the responsible use of alcohol onto its website and
 - (b) forward the statement to the church via Pres E-News
- (9) Commend the Victorian Church and Nation Committee for conceiving, organising and hosting the inaugural colloquium and encourages the arranging of further such colloquia.

- (10) Note the Committee's submission to the *Freedom of Religion and Belief in the 21st Century* Project and the National Human Rights Consultation.
- (11) Endorse the paper "A National Agenda for Religious Freedom" prepared by Professor Patrick Parkinson of the Sydney University Law School and strongly urges all political parties to commit themselves to guaranteeing the basic five freedoms noted in that paper.
- (12) Commend the work of the Australian Christian Lobby (ACL) as it seeks to firmly, faithfully and constructively engage with our nation's political and other leaders: commending Christian values in the public square.
- (13) In relation to the National Curriculum:
- (a) Views the development of a national curriculum for schools as a difficult and complex undertaking and reserves its right to make submissions to the process through its Church and Nation Committee.
 - (b) Considers that curriculum be only one of the components of education and sound teaching, other elements including social interaction and development, critical thinking and recreational and aesthetic development.
 - (c) Instructs the Church and Nation Committee to monitor the development of the national curriculum and to report to the 2013 General Assembly.
 - (d) Authorises the Church and Nation Committee to take up matters directly with education authorities relating to the importance of recognising Australia's Christian heritage and the religious and moral components within the proposed national curriculum.
- (14) In relation to the Freedom from Slavery Day.
Commends the participation of congregations in the Freedom From Slavery national day of prayer on March 13th, 2011 which is part of the NOT-FOR-SALE CAMPAIGN.
- (15) In relation to the Canberra Declaration.
Invites members of the Church to give consideration to individually signing the Canberra Declaration:

The Canberra Declaration

The Preamble to the Australian Constitution contains the words, "Humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God". As Australian citizens we continue to declare that we too put our trust in Almighty God.

For centuries, to speak of Western civilisation was to speak of Christian civilisation. The two were in many ways synonymous. The values that we have cherished and sought to strengthen are in large measure founded on the Judeo-Christian belief system. The many freedoms, advantages, opportunities, values and liberties which characterise the West owe much to the growth of Christianity with its inherent belief in the dignity of the human person as created in the image of God and the code of behaviour that flows from this belief.

The Canberra Declaration follows on from the 2009 Manhattan Declaration and the 2010 Westminster Declaration. It declares that when Christian values are respected and allowed freedom of expression, not just confined to so-called sacred spaces but in the public arena as well, society is richer and healthier.

We wish to emphasise three areas that demand particular attention in our contemporary Australian society, namely religious freedom, marriage and the family, and the sanctity of human life. Were we to undermine any one of these values, the social fabric of our nation would be seriously weakened, to our personal and collective detriment.

Religious Freedom

Religious freedom includes freedom of conscience and freedom of speech. The importance of these freedoms is shown in countries where they are threatened or absent. Police states and totalitarian nations inevitably begin with the curtailment of basic liberties, including religious freedom and the right to speak one's mind and conscience. This includes the right to change one's religious beliefs.

We affirm the basic necessity of freedom of conscience, having the liberty to speak publicly about one's faith and beliefs, and having the right to practise the religion of one's choice. If these freedoms are removed – even in the name of supposed benefits – the prized values of democracy and liberty are seriously undermined.

In Australia today these freedoms are being restricted by laws which, although appearing positive on first reading, have the potential to lead to unintended and unacceptable consequences. These laws include anti-discrimination legislation, hate crime laws and legislation on religious and sexual vilification – each of which may be interpreted in a way that effectively works as a barrier to religious freedom and freedom of speech.

Thus the signers of this declaration affirm the fundamental right of Australians to religious freedom and freedom of speech, and we oppose legislation which denies such freedoms. We likewise oppose laws subjugating our nation to foreign powers and instrumentalities which restrict these freedoms.

Marriage and Family

Another vital package of values and social benefits is the long-standing institution of the natural family resulting from marriage between a man and a woman – as affirmed by the definition of marriage in the Marriage Act: "...the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life". No other social institution has done so much good for people and for nations, yet marriage is being undermined, to the detriment of children, individuals, and society itself.

Lifelong marriage between a man and a woman guarantees children their biological birthright to a mother and a father and has a proven track record of providing them with protection, education, welfare, support and nurture. No other arrangement has improved upon the benefits of marriage.

In the face of competing alternatives and moves to redefine marriage, we affirm the importance and social utility of marriage between a man and a woman and the families formed thereby.

Human Life

The third important set of values revolves around the sanctity of human life which is being undermined in much of the Western world, through abortion, euthanasia, and some of the new reproductive technologies.

We believe that all human life, being made in the image of God, has intrinsic and equal value from conception to life's natural end.

The very heart of a humane and civilised society is based on the way it treats its most vulnerable and innocent members including the unborn and the disabled. We therefore insist on the right of all persons, including those who are vulnerable or dependent, to protection from conception to natural death. We will support, protect, and be advocates for such people, since to do anything less is to weaken our humanity and despise our personhood.

We will not comply with any directive that compels us to participate in or facilitate abortion, embryo-destructive research, assisted suicide, euthanasia, or any other act that involves the intentional taking of innocent human life.

Conclusion

Religious freedom, marriage and family, and the sacredness of human life have provided the foundations enabling Western democratic societies to flourish. We erode these foundations at our peril.

The faith which is at the heart of many of the values and strengths underpinning the Australian nation now compels us to speak up in their defence.

For the future of this nation, and for our children's future, calls upon all like-minded citizens to support and sign this declaration.