

Euthanasia and us.

A sermon preached by Laurence New

Sunday 28 August 2022

During the debate about the IOM Abortion Bill 2019 some courageous members of St Barnabas Church chose to protest most actively.

Now St Barnabas is faced with a new challenge. The majority of members of Tynwald have agreed to introduce another Bill, **this time to legalise Euthanasia in the Isle of Man**. Already it is generating strongly opposed views. Four of us from this church witnessed the strength of feeling during the Requisition Meeting at Baldrine on 15 August 2022. The crowded hall was evidently divided about Andrew Smith's right to oppose the introduction of the bill in Tynwald on the grounds of his research and of his faith.. It was the relevance of his faith that generated the most heat.

The aim of my sermon today is to discuss with you where we as Christians should stand as this new debate hots up. That great saint John Stott, a double first at Cambridge and life-long evangelist, once said .
"Every Christian should be both conservative and radical; conservative in preserving the faith and radical in applying it."

So I say again "where should we stand?"

First we should be sure of three facts .

.Euthanasia is the intentional killing of a patient by act or omission as part of their 'medical treatment' when the patient's life is felt not to be worth living. Physician Assisted Suicide (PAS) falls within this definition.

. The vast majority of UK doctors are opposed to legalising euthanasia, along with the British Medical Association, the Royal College of Physicians, the Royal College of General Practitioners, the Association for Palliative Medicine and the British Geriatric Society.

. Presently Euthanasia is illegal in the UK and in the Isle of Man.

Secondly we should take the advice of Sir Winston Churchill who in 2012 said **"Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it."** So we need to look carefully at the **history** of the application of Euthanasia. I have chosen in four nations - Holland, Belgium, Germany and Canada. **In all four nations the initial intent was to limit euthanasia to "a last-resort option for a small number of terminally ill people"** But **we must notice what happened in each and every case.**

Holland. Since 2001 euthanasia has been legal for all ages down to 16. In the case of Children aged 12–16 years permission is required from one or both parents;. The law even allows physicians to proceed

if there is disagreement between the parents. There is no mechanism for refusing death to teenagers suffering depression and personality disorders. The situation in Holland is ironic since whereas so many Dutch people risked certain death to protect their Jewish friends and families from Hitler's Holocaust they appear to acquiesce when euthanasia is applied to their fellow countrymen, women and children on a significant scale.

Belgium. Euthanasia was introduced in 2002, but within four years eligibility was extended to include infants, teenagers, and people with dementia or Alzheimer disease.

Germany. Euthanasia was first legalised in 2014 . Within six years the Federal Constitutional Court, Germany's highest Court, recognised Euthanasia and suicide as a **constitutional right**. I quote **"The right to self-determined death is not limited to situations defined by external causes like serious illness, nor does it only apply in certain stages of life or illness. Rather this right is guaranteed in all stages of a person's existence."** End quote.

Canada. It is from the experience in Canada that we can see the dangers of the slippery slope most clearly. A very recent report in the 17 August edition of the Magazine CRITIC is titled "Canada's voyage down the slippery slope - Euthanasia is spiralling out of control." The author, Ben Woodfinden, remarks that Canada has always been seen as one of the most progressive nations in the world. But he continues 'The tragic events in Canada offer a warning to Britain and other countries considering going down a similar path. In 2015 the Canadian Supreme Court decided that *"the matrix of legislative and social facts have changed"* and concluded that *"the interpretation of constitutional rights must change with them"*.

The Canadian Supreme Court rejected specific advice presented by a medical expert from Belgium that the slippery slope would apply equally to Canada. The Court insisted that *"the permissive regime in Belgium is the product of a very different medico-legal culture from that in Canada"*. 'Unlike those barbaric Belgians,

enlightened Canadian legislators would prevent the creeping expansion by setting up a "carefully regulated scheme" The author concludes 'Yet just seven years after that decision, and in face of insistent warnings by all sorts of people including Christians and professional disability experts, the exact scenario dismissed by the Court has come to pass.' Unquote.

It would seem that the slippery slope is the invariable consequence of opening the Euthanasia door. It is chilling to consider that those same arguments and attitudes will characterise a future Tynwald debate.

So what should be our part in this approaching debate?

Reflecting on **Psalm 58**, our first reading this morning, John Stott', warned that we must beware of **'Double listening'**. *"With the Bible in one hand and today's newspaper in the other, some of us listen only to our broken world and we are left with anxiety; others of us tend to listen to the Bible but ignore the world and become irrelevant to it"*. This psalm does encourage Christians to be relevant to the world. However the prevailing

tone is one of confidence in God's justice. Evil will be punished, people guilty of abusing power will be held accountable, righteousness will be rewarded (vs 9-11).

Our second reading suggests that rather than campaigning we must concentrate on our primary commission. We read in Acts 17 that Paul, despite his great learning, and world wisdom did not get embroiled in the issues of the day in Thessalonica and Berea - and there were certainly many abhorrent practices going on there. Instead He concentrated on proclaiming the Gospel.

Our Gospel reading from Matthew 6 urged us first "To seek always the kingdom of God and all these things will be added unto you".

So how can we today here on the Isla of Man best **warn** the progressive majority? Should our position be to oppose the legalising of Manx Euthanasia entirely, or should it be to campaign vigorously to illustrate the diabolical consequences of loosely worded safeguards.

There are no easy answers. Perhaps as our next step we should devote a Thursday Fellowship to targeted prayer; Thursday 15 September provides just such an opportunity.

I conclude with John Stott's words of wisdom
" As Christians we should be both conservative and radical: conservative of our faith but radical in applying it". AMEN