

Euthanasia debate will not go away

The good news is that the euthanasia bill of Bob Such MP was defeated in the SA lower house on 14 June. The bad news is that we are promised more bills providing lethal doses on request before the year is out, in SA and Tasmania and New Zealand. Dr Philip Nitschke has already offered to provide a mobile euthanasia clinic in Tasmania, delivering lethal doses of Nembutal to your door on request.

Canadian anti-euthanasia campaigner Alex Schadenberg (pictured) visited Australia in June to speak at several meetings. While Alex was here, back in Canada a Justice Lynn Smith decided that the law against assisted suicide was invalid. In brief, her reasoning was that since suicide itself is not illegal, assisted suicide should not be illegal. Section 15 of their Charter guarantees equality, and a person with a disability may not be able to suicide without assistance. Somewhat ironically, she also claimed the law violated the right to life guaranteed the charter, in that a ban on assisted suicide could drive people to take their lives while they are physically able to do so.

On 13 July the Attorney General of Canada announced that the Smith decision will be stayed and referred to the Court of Appeal. “The laws surrounding euthanasia and assisted suicide exist to protect all Canadians, including those who are most vulnerable, such as people who are sick or elderly or people with disabilities”, he said. See www.epcc.ca.



Also in July, The Lancet published an article alleging that euthanasia rates in the Netherlands have not increased since legislation was passed in 2002. There were 4,050 cases of death by lethal dose reported in 2010 (2.8 per cent of all deaths) and this was only slightly up from the 2001 figure of 3,800 (2.6 per cent of all deaths). However, when one reads the full article it emerges that “continuous deep sedation until death” occurred in 12.3 per cent of cases in 2010, and in 5.6 per cent in 2001. There has been a steady increase in this classification which in 2010 accounted for 16,700 deaths. Over the same period the number of deaths after “intensified alleviation of symptoms” also increased from 20.1 per cent to 36.4 per cent and in 2010 accounted for over 49,500 deaths. It is not clear how many of the deaths in these two categories involved the explicit intention to end life, but the implication is that some Dutch doctors are keeping the euthanasia figures low by recording deaths in these other ways. (Dr Peter Saunders, LifeNews.com)

On 27 June at its annual meeting the British Medical Association voted down a motion to take a “neutral” stance on euthanasia and assisted suicide. Outgoing BMA chairman Dr Hamish Meldrum said – “I think adopting a neutral position is probably the worst of all options. This would exclude us from the argument, an argument which would have a huge bearing on the working lives of doctors .. in 40 years of general practice I have almost always been able to support my patients when they were dying without having to actively end their lives.” (BMJ, LifeSiteNews.com)

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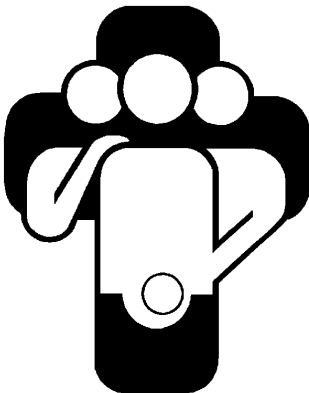
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Life News

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Oscar Wilde and the broken heart

Thomas Pietsch



Oscar Wilde has long been something of a pin-up boy for those celebrating their same-sex relationships. And, on the face of things, well might he be. His very public trial for sodomy scandalised London at the close of the 19th century due in no small part to the somewhat lurid details that emerged at the trial. Wilde’s long-standing neglect of his wife, his sexual relationship with the shady Lord Douglas, and his ultimate imprisonment have made him something of a martyr for the cause. But alongside this rather sensational life, Wilde left a literary oeuvre which reveals a much more complex grappling with same-sex attraction, chronicled superbly in Joseph Pearce’s biography, *The Unmasking of Oscar Wilde*.

Born in 1856, Wilde was secretly baptized by his mother at a Catholic Church but this was the extent of his family’s religious involvement. When Wilde befriended some priests in his youth, his father threatened disinheritance if he was confirmed in the Catholic Church. His university years in Dublin and Oxford were significant for Wilde as much for his religious yearning and sacred poetry as his well-known

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Editorial

In late September, the Sydney Opera House will be devoted to the annual *Festival of Dangerous Ideas*, sponsored by the St James Ethics Centre. Among the dangerous ideas is a presentation called ‘A foetus is not a person’ by Alberto Giubilini and Francesca Minerva, the two ethicists who recently suggested the killing of newborns was ‘morally irrelevant’. In my pocket Oxford dictionary, dangerous means something involving ‘liability or exposure to harm’ and which ‘causes peril’ in which case this presentation will no doubt live up to its bill. But I don’t think the festival employs this particular definition as its motivation. One imagines they mean dangerous as ‘daring’ and ‘bold’ and no doubt will all enjoy congratulating themselves for their bravery and intrepid thinking. But as Gerard Henderson has pointed out, where’s the bravery in supporting abortion? Instead, how about a presentation ‘Abortion is Murder’? That would challenge the very heart of our society’s assumptions, be unpleasant to trendy sensibilities and, by and large, live up the bill of being daring and bold. That would be a dangerous idea worth celebrating.

In this edition of *Life News* you will find updates on a number of pro-life issues as well as a reflection on Oscar Wilde and same-sex attraction. On the opposing page you will find details for this year’s *Lutherans For Life* Conference. I hope to see all of you there with some of your friends and family, especially those of you who live in Victoria. It promises to be one of our very best conferences, and is not to be missed! Note the RSVP date of October 20.

I close with the news that Pastor Tim Kowald has recently resigned as President of *Lutherans for Life* after many years of distinguished service. Pastor Kowald has been one of the most enduring and constant presences in *Lutherans for Life* as well as bringing formidable academic acumen to our endeavours. While you will hear more about this in future editions, for now we say thank you, Tim, for your immense service to our church. May the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, fill you with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Thomas Pietsch

MPs can’t agree on same-sex marriage

In June our federal House of Representatives committee decided not to reach a conclusion on bills to allow same-sex marriage, but proposed changes to the wording. It advised removing references to sexual orientation or gender identity, and moving to “The object of this Act is to amend the Marriage Act 1961 to ensure equal access to marriage for all couples who have a mutual commitment to a shared life.” Jim Wallace, director of the Australian Christian Lobby, noted the committee confirmed that there is no substantive discrimination against homosexual couples. “This confirms that the retention of the definition of marriage is rightly a matter of biology and that there is no discrimination that justifies it being changed”, he said. Leaders of Australia’s polyamorous community expressed their disappointment that the bills fail to provide equality for their threesomes and moresomes. On 18 June The Advertiser voteline poll asked “Should gay marriage be legalised?” and 842 callers (92 per cent) voted NO.

Also in June the Danish parliament passed a new law making it mandatory for all churches to conduct gay marriages. Individual priests can refuse to carry out the ceremony, but the local bishop is obliged to arrange a replacement for their church. The first gay marriages under this law began on 15 June.

On 10 July the Episcopal (Anglican) Church of the USA approved liturgical rites for the blessing of same-sex marriages. At their triennial general convention lay members and priests voted 171 -41 and bishops 111-41 in favour of same-sex blessings. The blessings are not technically a wedding, and activists are already planning that move in 3 years time.

When our Parliament resumes it seems likely that the current bills to allow same-sex marriage will not succeed. The risk then is that MPs who desire a compromise will vote to recognise homosexual civil partnerships – and that this will soften the public mind to accept same-sex marriage in a year or two.



Snippets

Dr Rob Pollnitz

Australia doubles aid for family planning in the Asia-Pacific

Our Foreign Minister Bob Carr has announced that Australia will double its aid funding to provide \$50 million towards reproductive health care and family planning services in the Asia-Pacific region. It is reported that the promotion of contraception will include the provision of both medical abortifacients and surgical abortion services.

At a Family Planning Summit in London recently the UN Population Fund, the International Planned Parenthood Federation and the (Bill and Melinda) Gates Foundation combined to promise over \$4 billion dollars to provide “reproductive health services” to the poorer countries. A cornerstone of this effort is the development of a new injectable contraceptive similar to Depo-Provera but able to be self-administered. Melinda Gates hopes her efforts will bring contraception to an extra 120 million women, with the focus being in sub-Saharan Africa and in Asia. Pro-life critics respond that these powerful hormonal contraceptives have complications, and that a better way to empower women long-term is through education. Others see a eugenic flavour to this effort to limit world population, an element of contempt for poor people in poor countries. Historian Matthew Connelly wrote in 2008 – “The great tragedy of population control, the fatal misconception, was to think that one could know other people’s interests better than they knew it themselves .. The essence of population control was to make rules for other people without having to answer to them. It appealed to the rich and powerful.”

(CultureWatch)

Surrogacy for all a booming billion dollar industry in India

Health officials in India estimate there are now more than 600 IVF clinics operating in India, free of any regulation. No-one keeps precise numbers, but the best guess is that over 2,000 babies were born to surrogate mothers last year – over half of them for singles and couples from other countries, mostly from Britain. At some clinics most of the clients are homosexual. Writer Kishwar Desai notes – “There are hospitals where women are kept for the whole nine months while they carry someone else’s child. There are good stories, where the surrogate is well looked

after, but I would like to make people aware of the sheer exploitation of it, the fact that these women are extremely poor. They may be paid three thousand dollars over the nine months. They may do this three or four times. They may be obliged to have a caesarean.”

(Bioedge)

Indian teenager dies after egg donation

Sushma Pandey, a 17-year-old girl in Mumbai, was poorly paid for her work in a scrap depot. She had donated eggs three times in 18 months at an IVF clinic, the Rotunda Center, for a payment of 25,000 rupees (about \$A430) each time. Two days after the third donation she had severe abdominal pain and she died two days later, presumably from

complications of the ovarian hyperstimulation involved in egg donation. The Rotunda Clinic claims to be a center of excellence and to be the first LGBT-friendly clinic in India. Its medical director, Dr Gautam Allahbadia, says the girl presented fake papers to show she was of legal age. The parents were unaware she was donating. The owner of the scrap depot was charged with culpable homicide but released when

evidence was lacking. The 75,000 rupees from the three donations has vanished. There are allegations of criminal gangs recruiting young egg donors with the promise of easy money. A bill to control reproductive technology is promised but seems years away from becoming law. (Indian Express)

First IVF mother dies in Britain

Lesley Brown, the woman who gave birth to the world’s first “test-tube” baby in 1978, has died in Bristol England after a short illness at the age of 64. She lived to see her daughter Louise give birth to a naturally conceived grandson, Cameron. Reproductive technology has come a long way in those 34 years. It is estimated that about 5 million babies have been born through IVF, and in many developed nations now some 3 per cent of births begin in an IVF clinic. IVF fans see this as a marvellous answer to the problems of infertility, and pro-lifers remain concerned at how IVF treats a baby as a commodity to be purchased, and at how many IVF human embryos are discarded in the search for a perfect take-home baby. (BBC News)



Snippets

Dr Rob Pollnitz

Five million march for Jesus in Brazil

The festival of Corpus Christi 60 days after Easter is celebrated as a national holiday in Brazil, and this year Christian churches organised the biggest march ever. The Estadao news agency said that 630 floats came from all over the country to Sao Paulo to take part in the multi-denominational march, with trucks providing rock gospel and hymns moving close to five million people to march in a procession that totalled over ten hours. (AFP)

Brazil has one of the largest Christian populations on Earth (mainly Roman Catholic) in a total of 203 million people. Australia has 22 million. We would need around 540,000 to have an equivalent proportion marching here. Given the spiritually impoverished state of our nation at present, I doubt if we could do it.

Higgs boson : discovering God's universe

Using the Large Hadron Collider in Switzerland the research team headed by Prof Rolf Heuer has confirmed the existence of the Higgs boson, the so-called "God particle" believed to be the last undiscovered element in the physical world of matter. Peter Higgs predicted the existence of this sub-atomic particle in 1964 as being necessary to provide matter with mass. Scientists say we may now learn how to alter the Higgs field to add and subtract mass. By subtracting mass we might be able to travel at the speed of light and reach Mars in about 20 minutes. (The Week)

Have you heard about the Catholic priest who was beginning the liturgy for Holy Communion when a Higgs boson came and stood alongside him? "Please return to your seat", said the priest. The response was "But without me you will have no Mass."

Pregnancy outcome in SA 2010 report released

In brief, the figures remain very similar to 2009, with the report for 2010 noting 20,002 births in South Australia, and there were 5,048 abortions reported. The average age of mothers has been rising slowly, to 30.1 years in 2010. The state's fertility rate continues to fall, to 1.84 live births per woman in 2010, below the replacement level of 2.1. It is 42 years since SA passed its abortion law, and our 1970 government assured us that it would be needed "for only a handful of hard sad cases every year". Perhaps a salutary

reminder about how laws that allow the taking of human life are liable to leak.

RU-486 prescribers in Australia double over the last year

The number of doctors providing medical abortion with RU-486 (mifepristone) has doubled over the last year, as reported to the Senate Estimates Committee. There are now 179 doctors authorised to prescribe

mifepristone in Australia – 76 in NSW, 44 in VIC, 25 in QLD, 18 in SA, 8 in WA and 2 in TAS. The Committee heard that mifepristone has been provided to 22,330 patients since being made available in Australia. A medical adviser said there had been reports of 126 ongoing pregnancies and 792 adverse events with the drug. Senators questioned health officials about the safety of mifepristone following the recent death of a young woman in Australia, reported to be from septic

shock after infection of dead foetal products remaining in the womb (worldwide there have been more than 30 reports of maternal deaths from a toxic shock syndrome with Clostridium sordelli infection in this situation). Another member of the Clostridium family of bacteria causes gas gangrene. Some prescribers continue to claim that RU-486 is safe for women in rural and remote areas to use at home without direct medical supervision. (Michael Woodhead@6minutes)

Queensland LNP government repeals Surrogacy Act 2009

The former Anna Bligh Labor government had passed a law saying that all adults, including singles and same-sex couples, have a right to a baby of their own. This law was focused entirely on adult rights and ignored the best interests of children. There is a large body of reliable social science evidence to indicate that children develop best when they are raised in a stable Mum and Dad family. A 2012 Galaxy poll showed that 86 per cent of Australians believe that children are best raised by their own biological parents, whenever that ideal is possible. Many people concerned with the rights of children appealed to the new government of Campbell Newman, and with the help of two Labor MPs who oppose the Act that law came to an end on 21 June 2012. To quote Dr David van Gend – "At last, a wrong against children has been righted". (kidsrightscount.org.au)



NOVEMBER 3, 2012
LUTHERANS FOR LIFE ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Prof. Nicholas Tonti-Filippini

(Associate Dean and Head of Bioethics at John Paul II Institute for Marriage & Family)
on 'To Love to the End: Decisions in Relation to End of Life Care'

Anne Webster

(Founding Director of Zoe Foundation Australia)
on 'Why is Adoption the Unchoice in Contemporary Australia?'

Dan Flynn

(Victorian Director of Australian Christian Lobby)
on 'From Lawyer to Lobbyist'

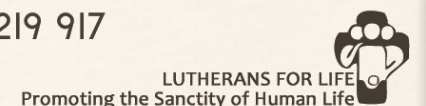
Katrina Haywood

on 'Journeying Through Unexpected Pregnancy'

Rev. Stephen van der Hoek

on 'Lutheran Foundations for Ethics'

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New Zealand Branch (Established in June 1991)
Contact Person : Dr Petrus Simons 04 476 9398

Sunshine Coast Branch (Serving the Sunshine Coast area of QLD; established in Aug 1992)
Contact Person : Mr Norm Auricht 07 5443 6849

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Oscar Wilde and the broken heart

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dandyism and aestheticism. Now full of devotion for God, now full of strong doubts, Wilde’s poetry of the time reveals the inner turmoil of his heart. In *E Tenebris* Wilde cries out:

*Come down, O Christ, and help me! reach thy hand,
For I am drowning in a stormier sea
Than Simon on thy Lake Galilee:
The wine of life is spilt upon the sand,
My heart is as some famine-murdered land
Whence all good things have perished utterly,
And well I know my soul in Hell must lie
If I this night before God’s throne should stand...*

The poem, first published when Wilde was 24, ends with the hope that ‘before the night’ he may behold ‘the wounded hands, the weary human face’.

But the wine of life proved irresistible for Wilde. His cultivated celebrity rose with literary successes and foreign tours and before long Wilde distanced himself from Christianity and his once-aching heart: ‘The Oscar of the first period is dead’ he proclaimed. Marrying a young woman with whom he was ‘desperately in love’, Wilde continued to revel in his place of honour among society, gracing the most illustrious dinner tables of Europe with his celebrated *bon mots*. But after two sons in the first two years of marriage, Wilde’s absences from home became more of the norm than the exception. He wrote prophetically to a friend that he would ‘sacrifice everything for a new experience’.

Wilde found this new experience in homosexuality. Initially he was partly seduced by a young admirer of his fiction and verse, but soon Wilde’s promiscuity grew of his own volition and he began to pursue some of his young disciples, which became a major theme of his first and only novel published at that time, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. That novel, rich with autobiographical insight, concludes with Dorian Gray contemplating his life of sin, excess and wretchedness:

He knew that he had tarnished himself, filled his mind

with corruption, and given horror to his fancy; that he had been an evil influence to others and had experienced a terrible joy in being so... But was it all irretrievable? Was there no hope for him?... Better for him that each sin of his life had brought its sure, swift penalty along with it. There was purification in punishment. Not ‘Forgive us our sins,’ but ‘Smite us for our iniquities,’ should be the prayer of a man to a most just God.

But Gray, for all his awareness of his sin, cannot bring himself to repent. The novel ends with a dramatic but failed attempt to kill off his conscience rather than confess his sins. While he argued in the press for the moral warning that the novel gave – ‘it will fill the cowardly with terror, and the unclean will see in it their own shame’ – many people found the hints of homosexuality and the chronicles of sin evidence only of the author’s perversion and immorality. The major bookseller W.H. Smith refused to stock it and Wilde’s reputation for immorality became more ensconced in the public eye.

For all the novel’s warnings, Wilde was incapable of fully heeding them himself. He became less discrete in public and rumours of his homosexuality began to spread. His plays, poems and essays of the time often bore witness to his own struggles and the religious sensibility that had been with him since his youth. But slowly his struggles seemed to get the better of him. After a string of homosexual lovers Wilde became entangled with Lord Alfred Douglas which was to become his most destructive relationship.

Promiscuity reigned and through Douglas Wilde was introduced to the world of homosexual prostitution. He kept company with increasingly dangerous young men, some of whom began to bribe him, threatening to expose his liaisons to the authorities. He spent more and more time at hotels, away from the family hearth, justifying this to his long-suffering wife as necessary for his artistic output. Again and again he would vow never again to speak to Douglas, only to welcome him and his insalubrious associates back a short while later.

The downward spiral was destined for a hard landing which came about via Douglas’ father, the Marquess of Queensberry. A ferocious and belligerent man (he



was the founder of modern boxing which still heeds the Queensberry rules) Queensberry continually warned Wilde to stay away from his son. When he accused Wilde of ‘posing as a Sodomite’, Wilde had him arrested and charged with criminal libel. Entering a Plea of Justification, Queensberry took the opportunity of listing fifteen separate accounts in which Wilde was alleged to have solicited boys.

The resulting trial was a disaster for Wilde. The court heard an overwhelming amount of evidence of Wilde’s homosexuality and there was little surprise when the jury delivered the verdict that Queensberry had been justified in calling Wilde a sodomite. Wilde was duly arrested, found guilty in a criminal court, and sentenced to two years of hard labour.

In the stillness of prison Wilde saw his life for what it had become and in his pleas for an early release confessed remorse for his ‘terrible offences of which he was rightly found guilty’, pointing out that these offences were ‘forms of sexual madness’. His long-suffering wife received his repentance with pity and forgave him, dismissing advice to divorce him. And it was in prison that Wilde wrote one of his greatest works, a letter to Lord Douglas that was posthumously released under the title *De Profundis*, the first words of Psalm 130. Part confession, part accusation, Wilde bemoans his ‘appetite without distinction’, his ‘desire without limit’ and his ‘perverse pleasures’. On one page he professes his desire to found an order for those who simply *cannot* believe in God: ‘The Confraternity of the Faithless’. But on other pages, he interprets his journey spiritually. ‘Sorrow remarries us to God’, he writes. ‘I used to live entirely for pleasure. I shunned sorrow and suffering of every kind. I hated both.’ But now, Wilde writes, he has come to see suffering as the place where God reveals himself. ‘Clergymen, and people who use phrases without wisdom, sometimes talk of suffering as a mystery. It is a really a revelation. One discerns things that one has never discerned before.’

On release from prison Wilde, who was prevented from seeing his children by law, applied unsuccessfully for a six month retreat at a Catholic house. He spoke to his Catholic friends of his yearning to be received into the Church but they urged caution, suspecting just another fad rather than a serious conversion. Before he had a chance to see his wife again, she died from a long-

“How else but through a broken heart / May Lord Christ enter in?”

standing condition. Destitute and forlorn, Wilde roamed around Paris succumbing to the solace offered by male prostitutes. Disgusted at himself, he complained to friends that ‘the cruelty of a prison sentence starts when you come out’ and that in prison he had been happy ‘because there I found my soul.’ Dame Nellie Melba, an old friend, was in Paris at the time and recalled a large, shabby man approaching her and saying, ‘Madame Melba, you don’t know who I am? I’m Oscar Wilde, and I am going to do a terrible thing. I’m going to ask you for money.’ She emptied her purse in the hands of the beggar.

Wilde spoke of going to a monastery and lamented his lost years. ‘Much of my moral obliquity is due to the fact that my father would not allow me to become a Catholic’, he told a journalist in Paris. ‘The artistic side of the Church would have cured my degeneracies. I intend to be received before long.’ But his profligate life caught up with him quickly. Admitted to hospital, his condition deteriorated in a matter of weeks. When the doctor gave him two days to live, a friend went looking for a Catholic priest with Wilde’s permission. Because of the secrecy and uncertainty of Wilde’s infant baptism, the priest administered conditional baptism. With signs, attempted words, and repetition of the liturgy, Wilde participated in the last rites to the full satisfaction of the priest that he was *compos mentis*. He died a few hours later.

It would be an anachronism to co-opt Wilde for either side of our contemporary same-sex marriage debate. But his life and work bear witness to the reality of a homosexuality which can be, ultimately, unwanted. Through Wilde’s struggle, the Church’s teaching on homosexuality as disordered can be seen finally not as a curse but as a precursor of redemption. It was the Church’s naming of sin and its proclamation of forgiveness in Christ that became the only true source of restoration for Wilde. As he put it himself in his last poem, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, written shortly after his release from prison:

*Ah! happy they whose hearts can break
And peace of pardon win!
How else may man make straight his plan
And cleanse his soul from Sin?
How else but through a broken heart
May Lord Christ enter in?*