

Sandy Grant's open letter

Dear Friends,

Like me you may have received the [Australian Christian Values Checklist - 2007](#) Federal Elections. It is not produced by the CDP (Fred Nile group), but it has been distributed by them (for obvious reasons once you read the results).

It claims to list the parties' positions on "issues of concern to Christians" and, by its title, to represent Christian values. I find the checklist distressingly imbalanced.

I was not going to comment before the election, but seeing as this checklist was distributed to some at church last Sunday, I feel I must comment. I have consulted about what I have written here with our other staff, and also with a couple of laymen, such as Peter Kell, CEO of Anglicare. They have concurred with my remarks. Please note that I am not making any recommendations about whom you should vote for.

I agree with the majority of the values advanced in the checklist. I want to see marriage promoted over de facto cohabitation. I would be happy with the provision of free pre-marriage education vouchers. I oppose same-sex 'marriage'. I oppose destructive embryonic stem cell research, euthanasia, and abortion (in almost all circumstances). I am in favour of freedoms of religion and speech being preserved.

However, my reason for disappointment is as follows:

1. It is simplistic and reductionistic

It is simplistic because the checklist gives very brief descriptive phrase for each 'value', with the options of only or tick or cross, with the possibility of a question mark). This is insufficient for often complex issues.

It is reductionistic because it seems to assume that the expected 'Christian' response on the 27 items it lists are always the only possible Christian approach.

For example, some thoughtful evangelical Christians have considered that it might be reasonable to consider a relationships register to register dependent partnerships (including of homosexuals) so long as it was clearly distinguished from marriage, for the sake of enabling simple justice in inheritance rights and so on. Such Christians would agree with item 9 but not necessarily with item 10.

Likewise, items 24-25 assume that a medical harm-minimisation approach cannot be a legitimate Christian response to illicit drug abuse and that zero tolerance is the only possible Christian approach. Again I am not convinced by this and nor is a conservative Christian GP I spoke to, who specialises in drug rehab.

I am happy to provide evangelical reading material on the two examples I have given above.

My reasons for deep distress at this list is as follows:

2. It entirely omits important Christian values

This means it runs the danger of being sub-Christian.

The most obvious omission is the entire absence of anything to do with caring for the poor and marginalised.

The Bible repeatedly states this as a key Christian value. For example, Galatians 2:10 urges us to “continue to remember the poor”. Or consider repeated warnings to care for the poor in Proverbs (e.g. 14:21, 14:31, 17:5, 19:17, 21:13, 29:14, 31:20 etc). The OT Prophets denounce Israel’s people for their failure to care for the poor as well as for idolatry and sexual immorality (e.g. Amos 2:6-7, 5:11-12).

James 2 makes it clear that failure to help the poor in practical ways is a complete failure of faith. Indeed James 1:27 states that religion God accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. If one was being harsh, it seems a bit like the Australian Christian Values Checklist only cares about the second half of this verse.

When I pointed this out to someone who gave me this brochure, he agreed it was an omission. But is that good enough? Can Christians simply forget the poor with our input into policy-making? The poor are not just another group that can be justifiably forgotten while we pursue 27 other ‘Christian’ values.

I will be blunt: this is a disgraceful omission. I believe the groups that produced and distributed this checklist should repent of their carelessness for the poor in this public statement of Christian values. Christians cannot just ‘overlook’ concern for the poor.

Other omissions

There are other disturbing omissions.

For example, nothing is said about immigration and refugees. See the Christian imperative to offer hospitality to strangers (Rom 12:13, Heb 13:2), and the injunction upon the people of God to be welcoming and just towards refugees/foreigners because the Israelites had been in such a situation in Egypt (Ex 22:21, 23:9; Lev 19:10, 24:22; Deut 10:18-19, Job 31:32).

There is also nothing about industrial relations, noting concerns that fair employment conditions should be preserved for workers, especially those most vulnerable to exploitation. Consider James 5:1-6, esp. v4. Consider also the concerns expressed by our Archbishop Jensen in the area of industrial relations.

I could go on. There was nothing about care and just treatment for the indigenous or the disabled or the mentally ill. There was nothing about improving levels of overseas aid (despite much Christian concern in this area, for example from the Micah Challenge). In this year of the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade, there was nothing about opposing human trafficking. Many Christians would also argue that what was said about the environment was totally inadequate.

No doubt some of you can think of other significant omissions.

See following post for conclusion...

Conclusion

This Christian values checklist includes many issues worth raising from a biblical worldview. I also will continue to defend biblical standards for sex and marriage and the sanctity of life and so on. But I must conclude that the Australian Christian Values Checklist 2007 is simplistic, reductionistic, and unbalanced. In particular, it is deeply distressing to me that our biblical duty of care for the marginalised and poor in our country (let alone the world) is so woefully neglected.

This checklist therefore should only be used with great caution, and with additional factors considered, such as those I have mentioned above.

To end on a positive note, I would suggest that Christians would do far better to consult the Australian Christian Lobby's website, which has a more comprehensive survey of parties' views on a wider range of issues of concern to Christians, including not just family, sexual exploitation and civil liberty issues, but also matters to do with poverty, refugees, industrial relations, the environment, and indigenous issues.

You can consult [their website](#).

Please realise it is not as simplistic as a list of ticks or crosses for each party.