

In this Essay I wish to address the question posed;

From a Biblical perspective what are the most important issues that this panel – chaired by Dr. Don Brash – will have to address to ensure that New Zealand citizens have a safe, healthy, productive, viable, lawful and fulfilling future?

In the chase to enjoy the same living standards of Australia we have allowed our sights to rest too low, and perhaps focus on the wrong target. While Australia is ranked higher than New Zealand according to the Internet living standards poll¹, it is by no means 'the land of milk and honey' by which to establish the 'promise land' benchmark of 21st Century living. That goal is a distraction at best. Before we go any further we must ask ourselves what the goal is. Is this merely an economic issue that policy will correct or does the concept of quality of life require a holistic worldview perspective change?

From the perspective that we live in a world created to function according to principles laid out by a designer, I want to propose that the issues to be addressed by this panel are worldview issues in regards to people, while the standards of living are the byproducts of an ideology and not the objectives in themselves; they will not be improved by policy alone.

Through considerate relationships founded in the Designer's Worldview, I believe we will not only supersede Australian living standards, but New Zealand will be seen as a global leader in regards to quality of life.

Worldview Issues

If our goal is to increase living standards, we either have to change the way people think, the system they operate within, or both. We certainly have to address what we mean by 'standards of living' and what that may look like from a Biblical perspective.

Are we talking about greater access to debt? Higher GDP? Maybe we seek fancier cars or basic services?

Kiwis are naturally inventive. They are said to be capable of fixing anything with a Number 8 wire and some Kiwi Ingenuity; it is debated if that is the case anymore. There is no doubt that New Zealanders have made their mark on the world in many areas of life, Sir Edmond Hillary is a fine example of an accomplished Kiwi, Peter Jackson and Burt Monroe would join him. The drive to achieve is evident and the ability to follow it through is also a reality.

If the problem is not with the people's ability to succeed then where is it? Perhaps the expectation of success the Kiwi has isn't the same as the Ozzie...

¹ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_Development_Index

If we define our worldview as the way we see and order our world according to what we value, we then have to decide what worldview would give us a better quality of life than the Australians enjoy before 2025 as the question proposes, a distracting bench mark to say the least.

New Zealand currently operates on a view that values time and profit margins, perhaps best described as an economic or consumer worldview. People are seen as commodities to a large degree where we employ on credentials and target performance with an objective of efficiency rather than how pleasant the employee might be or perhaps how they are kind to the world around them, although the latter is becoming more of a box to tick in an eco-concerned world. When was the last time you heard of someone being employed in any business environment because they were a good listener or spent time with their kids? Not even the church demands those attributes today. We buy our groceries on the basis that we save money, rather than on quality and we develop policy along those lines also.

From a Biblical Perspective, that worldview is the problem. The World was not designed to run economically on profit margins. It was meant to operate in balance and relationship, it was designed to be enjoyed, taken in, taken care of and in return it will provide all we need to live well.

Milton Friedman², a renowned free market economist, concludes that there are four ways to spend what you have. You can spend your money on yourself, your money on someone else, someone else's money on yourself and someone else's money on someone else. In each of these ways of relating to the world around us we know that from an efficiency point of view spending your own money on yourself will offer the best value. When we spend other people's money we do not value it as much because we haven't worked for it. When we spend that money on someone else we not only don't value it well, we also don't worry too much about the value it offers the other people who receive it. Just think of what you ordered when you bought your own lunch last time and then what you ordered when you had the company expense account for lunch. The most inefficient way to spend money can be seen in the welfare system, public education and state run health systems where people spend other people's money on other people. That's not to say it isn't important to have those institutions, just that they are inefficient and lower in quality when operated in that way.

We have designed our public school system to produce workers, not thinkers,³ who will fill the gaps. If we want better solutions we need to stress better thinking. We can see the perspective as vaguely stated in the vision statement by the Ministry of Education,

² "Milton Friedman - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia."

³ News item about literacy and graduate success vs dropouts

“Building a world-leading education system that equips all New Zealanders with the knowledge, skills, and values to be successful citizens in the 21st-century.”⁴

So what then constitutes a successful citizen? I think the reason for this essay makes the point that their expectations cannot be delivered in the way they currently operate. Friedman would add,

“Public school should compete with private schools. Why should they be given a monopoly and recruit tax’s from all people regardless of whether they use the system or not?”⁵

We have encouraged less quality and more consumerism. Our tax system encourages a middle-earning Kiwi⁶ and discourages earning high wages or operating small business.⁷

There has always been a ‘tall poppy syndrome’ that discourages exceptional operators and high achievers and it is reflected in Government policy as noted above.⁸

This consideration of Friedman’s doesn’t stop with finances however. The principal is the same for relationships and social justice as well.

This worldview perspective assumes that Kiwi’s are not capable of making wise decisions individually or that they should be allowed to spend their earnings as they see fit. It also assumes that equality is a material notion. The result of which is apathy. When there is no reason to work harder or be more efficient, no one works harder or becomes more efficient, it is the default human position.⁹

The Worldview I want to propose acknowledges that we are all individual stewards of this creation,¹⁰ responsible and accountable, and are designed to both participate in community as stewards of others as well as care for the earth we inhabit. There are real risks, rewards and consequences for our actions.

⁴ “Ministry of Education - Home.”

⁵ *IdeaChannel.tv*, vol. 4, see 26th minute.

⁶ A kiwi on \$60,000 per annum is better off rejecting a pay rise that will put them over the threshold of \$70,000 and paying more tax, remaining a lower paid and utilized employee while discouraging achievement.

⁷ Kiwi Saver means it is compulsory for employers to pay out more profits to workers enrolled in the scheme which effects wages and business efficiency. The problem is not with Kiwi Saver; it is with compulsory dictatorship of another’s earnings.

⁸ Tax brackets that encourage ‘average’ income earners and exports of the best produce leaving the mediocre for Kiwis to consume.

⁹ Insert a biblical quote about apathy and laziness

¹⁰ Stewards of creation insert

If we consider that, “as a *man thinketh* in his heart, so shall he be”¹¹ we can extend that to understand that the type of people in the family establish the type of family, the type of families establish the community and the type of communities establish the nation. What we are dealing with then is a worldview that starts with each person and how they view themselves within the world around them.

The Biblical Perspective

Reflecting on the question of a ‘Biblical Perspective’ I want to consider a historical event where what we are looking for took place.

In the book of Genesis it tells of a man named Joseph.

Joseph was sold into slavery by his own family and taken to a foreign land but he was faithful to God. There were three critical points that we should consider here. Firstly he understood who he was as a Hebrew and a Created man of God.

Secondly through this understanding of who he was and how he was accountable, he related to the people around him according to the rules that guided him. He did not need to preach, but through the way he lived among foreign people he was highly regarded.

Thirdly he was a steward of his environment. Because of how he lived and conducted himself he was given responsibilities in Pharaohs kingdom where he acted as a steward of his environment.

The pattern here shows us that he used what he had to first sustain himself in body and mind, he then used what he had to benefit those around him faithfully as he saw fit. Once he had done that he was given the responsibility to manage the resources of others and then he was given the responsibility to manage the resources of others to benefit others. Following Friedman’s consideration of how we spend what we have, we can see that Joseph has offered us a faith example of how to do it correctly.

If we continue with the story we see that the entire nation of Egypt became a very powerful nation. Because of Joseph’s faithful diligence Egypt fed the surrounding nations and was well regarded, it was a super power in its day.

We must remember in all of this that his brothers hated Joseph and he was preyed upon by Pharaohs wife and thrown into prison for something he did not do. Living well does not come without some sacrifice.

To Conclude

We have explored how chasing Australian standards is perhaps not the right goal for New Zealand and that what we need to address is the Worldview that motivates us

¹¹ Allen, *As a man thinketh*. From Proverbs 23:7

instead. We see that this starts with individual freedom and accountability and in using the example of Joseph we are reminded that sometimes change takes time and requires suffering and sacrifice.

Kiwi's have everything in their grasp to live well and better if the representatives would make more room for individual Kiwi's to contribute as citizens of a country which they are responsible and accountable for. If that were to happen then better living standards here should take no time at all.¹²

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¹² The example of Hong Kong serves here as an example of economic freedom resulting in tremendous economic gain at all levels. See "Hoover Institution - Hoover Digest - The Hong Kong Experiment."