



CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE
OF MELBOURNE

media release

21 July 2017

Statement of Archbishop Hart Ministerial Advisory Panel Report on Voluntary Assisted Dying

The Archbishop of Melbourne Denis Hart has expressed dismay following the release today of the Ministerial Advisory Panel Report into the legalising of Physician Assisted Suicide in Victoria.

Archbishop Hart said “I urge all Victorians to look closely at what is being proposed. I am proud to be a Victorian but this report makes me very concerned for the future of our elderly and most vulnerable citizens. We need to see this report and its recommendations for what they are and so I am taking this opportunity to bring this vital matter to the public’s immediate attention.”

Archbishop Hart said “I commend efforts to strengthen and better resource Palliative Care but that is a minimum necessity. While the report recommends what it calls safeguards, the truth is that these safeguards are never going to be enough and that there are no flawless medical procedures. All procedures and interventions can have complications. I have watched supporters of this proposal and they are going out of their way to convince us that assisted suicide is acceptable, seeking to lessen our human, moral and natural distress because of suicide.

It seems that on the one hand we are seeking to lessen suicide in our society – an admirable aim – but here we have this report looking to normalise it. When viewed from the perspective of the whole Victorian community these two objectives cannot be reconciled

Evidence world-wide is that once such legislation is passed, that is only the beginning of the impact and the far-reaching effects extend even further.

The legislation will impose extraordinary and unreasonable responsibilities on our medical professionals who will be called upon to determine which patients are eligible and how the safeguards are to be applied. This then becomes a matter for decisions by medical practitioners and not the patients for whom they are required to care.

The report while making clear the number of individuals whose assistance will be required for each case of “assisted dying” including two and in some circumstances three medical practitioners, two independent witnesses, a contact person, pharmacist and a further witness if the lethal medication is administered by a medical practitioner fails to properly consider the impact and support required by all those whose assistance is required in each case.

While such legislation has passed in a small number of places around the world, the overwhelming majority of efforts to pass this type of legislation have failed, including more recently in the United Kingdom, in the States of Maine, Hawaii and Maryland in the USA and closer to home in South Australia and Tasmania.

My fellow Victorians – please seek out the facts on this matter and I am confident that once you have carefully examined the issue, you will see that here we have a situation where we will be asking doctors to assist someone to commit suicide. A doctor is there to promote health and protect life – not to fast-forward death.

I am deeply saddened that this matter is before us at all and I hope and pray that Victorians will urge their MPs to reject the Bill when it comes before the Parliament.”

Regards,

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The front page headline of an article in last Sunday's Age read:

"Church's threat to gay couples"

It continued to state:

"Australia's Catholic Church is threatening to fire teachers, nurses and other employees who marry their same-sex partner if gay marriage is legalised, in a dramatic move led by the country's most senior Catholic. Archbishop of Melbourne Denis Hart, speaking exclusively to Fairfax Media, pointedly warned the church's 180,000 employees they were expected to uphold its teachings "totally", and defiance would be treated "very seriously"...

This is what he did say:

Dear Friends,

I did an interview with a Fairfax journalist on Thursday 17 August, with Shane Healy present.

Q) What exemptions will the Catholic Church seek if same-sex marriage becomes law ?

1) Exemption on religious and conscientious grounds so that priests are not forced to officiate as weddings of same sex couples

2) Exemption on religious and conscientious grounds, so that the Church is not forced to make premises available for same sex marriages or functions

3) A similar exemption on religious and conscientious grounds for those supplying goods and services.

4) No restriction on the ability of the Church to teach about marriage as between a man and a woman. Our parishes and schools exist in order to teach the Catholic faith. It is most important that we be able to do this.

Q) What will happen if a same sex person is working at a school or parish. Will they be sacked ? That matter is best dealt with at local level. Remember it is most important that our parishes and schools exist in order to teach the catholic faith – and they must do so.

Please note that I did not mention hospitals! And I did not make any threat about sackings. The heading to the article, and the "leap" to hospitals was not done by me!!

God bless!

+ Denis J. Hart

Archbishop of Melbourne

www.cam.org.au



22 August 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We Catholics in Australia love our nation.

Indeed, so much of what is cherished as good in our society is, in fact, the fruit of Christian culture.

So, we want our 'story' to continue to be heard in all the great debates about the foundations of our society. Our voice is not the only voice but it is an important one.

One such debate currently concerning us all is the issue of same-sex marriage.

We have always sought to contribute to our society as good citizens. We strive to act and speak out for the common good especially for the poorest and suffering among us.

We seek to cherish the dignity of the human person and support all in need: especially families, our indigenous brothers and sisters, migrants, refugees and all who need the compassion and mercy of Christ.

We pledge ourselves to continue to do everything we can to contribute to the common good of all Australians. As Catholics, we want to build up and strengthen our great diverse multicultural community here in Australia.

Our point in relation to the current debate about same-sex marriage is simple. We make it in good faith according to the demands of our consciences.

The Catholic Church, along with other faith traditions, teaches that marriage is a natural institution established by God to be a permanent union between one man and one woman, intended towards the formation of a family in which children are born and nurtured.

Any legislation that changes this definition of marriage recognised by all the major cultures of the world demands careful consideration by all Australians.

It is vital that we Catholics vote, so that our viewpoint can be heard on this vital public issue.

Its outcome will affect our society and families profoundly in the future.

We understand that ours is not the only viewpoint in our diverse society. Many do not agree with it. Many people see this as an issue about ensuring equality for every and all relationships.

Yes, human rights are important. But so are human responsibilities. We are responsible for the impact of our decisions on future generations.

Therefore, we ask all to consider the profound implications of possible legislation that will embed this desire for equality of relationships in our laws.

This debate on same-sex marriage raises profound questions about who we are. Fundamental issues are at stake.

Why do humans exist as male and female? Is that distinction simply marginal? Is it simply a social construct?

Do our children also have rights? We are all children of a male and a female. Should not this be a central consideration in our decisions about the way children should be ideally nurtured and educated in our society.

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We understand that these are complex issues. But certainly, no legislation should be enacted without a deep public conversation in which we all engage about such issues that goes beyond slogans and soundbites.

In a pluralist community, we maintain that respect for *difference* should be as important as a demand for *equality*. Things can be equal in all respects without having to be uniformly the same.

We sincerely believe that there is a core and fundamental wisdom and truth in the traditional definition and understanding of marriage that should not be ignored and is worth keeping for the health and future of our society.

As Pope Francis has pointed out: ‘The family is threatened by growing efforts on the part of some to redefine the very institution of marriage, by relativism, by the culture of the ephemeral, by a lack of openness to life.’¹

Some will naturally be disappointed in our stance. Some even question our right to speak and follow our consciences.

It is entirely possible future legislation about same-sex marriage could infringe fundamental human rights of freedom of religion and conscience. It could result in restrictions on the right of ministers of religion and religious bodies and organisations having the freedom to teach, preach and speak about marriage between persons of the same sex being contrary to their religious or conscientious beliefs.

We as a church affirm the dignity of all those who identify as having a same sex orientation. Like all human beings they are created in the image and likeness of God. They have a right to expect to be loved and welcomed and not subject to unjust discrimination.

So where do we go from here?

In all our conversations and encounters, let us imitate Pope Francis, who asks us to be humble and never judgemental.


In that spirit, the Catholic Church will continue to teach and preach the truth that marriage is a union of one man and one woman and encourage all people of good will to embrace the fullness of that truth.

We will also work to promote and strengthen marriage and families.

We will strive to uphold the dignity of every human person, including persons who experience same-sex attraction, welcoming them as our brothers and sisters.

As Catholics concerned for the common good may we join all our fellow citizens of Australia in an active and respectful engagement in this critical public conversation.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

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ARCHBISHOP OF MELBOURNE

¹ Address of Pope Francis to Meeting of Families, Pasay City, Manila, Philippines, Jan. 16. 2015