ON POINT
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Draft bills fail to protect religious freedom

Pastor Campbell Markham, who has suffered at the hands of the Tasmanian Human Rights Tribunal, drew on his experience to identify five core issues with Attorney General Christian Porter's draft Religious Discrimination Bill.

1. The draft is reactionary rather than principled. Section 8 (the so-called 'Folau clause'), states that an employer restriction upon an employee's statement of belief outside of the workplace "is not reasonable... unless... necessary to avoid unjustifiable financial hardship to the employer." Protection is given, then removed if the employer can prove unjustifiable financial hardship.

Similarly, Section 41 states that a statement of belief does not "contravene subsection 17(1) of the Anti-Discrimination Act 1998 of Tasmania." This references the Julian Porteous case.

Markham noted, "Laws that react to hard cases, rather than being built on basic principles, are bound to be too narrowly focused, too prone to pleasing whatever interest group is loudest at the moment".

2. Civil courts will have to make theological judgements. Section 3 states that an object of the Act is "to ensure that people can, consistently with Australia's obligations with respect to freedom of religion and freedom of expression, and subject to specified limits, make statements of belief." Markham then observes that Section 5 defines a statement of belief as a statement that "may reasonably be regarded as being in accordance with the doctrines, tenets, beliefs or teachings of the religion."

Australian judges will be required to decide what constitutes the orthodox belief in question. Markham comments, "The need to determine a statement's 'accordance' with the speaker's purported 'religion' will require a curious new Inquisition, which no one expects (according to Monty Python)."

3. The Bill fails to protect Christian businesses from being coerced against their conscience. Section 10 provides that "Religious bodies may act in accordance with their faith", but then excludes from this "a body that engages solely or primarily in commercial activities", such as "a Christian bookstore, or a Muslim florist, would not be covered by this definition", or any other situation where a person of faith is being required to do something against conscience.

This section reflects how very little consultation has occurred and how little effort to truly understand people and institutions of faith has been put into this. The Religious bodies being protected in Section 10 derive their ethos from the community of faith that has established them. Why should the members who carry and preserve this ethos not be protected outside the walls of the institutions that rely upon them? Faith after all is not in the letter or in the institution but in the hearts of the believers. If we destroyed all the written statements of faith would we have destroyed the faith? That has been attempted numerous times…

Interestingly, there is a case right now in the UK in which an Employment Tribunal judge has ruled that a Christian doctor's belief in Genesis 1:27 - that He made them male and female - is "incompatible with human dignity" and not "worthy of respect in a democratic society".

4. Religious freedoms will be placed under the uncertain protection of a "Freedom of Religion Commissioner". Section 36 states that

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Failures of draft bills

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a proposed Freedom of Religion Commissioner will have the power, "by notifiable instrument," to grant "to a person or body an exemption from the operation of a provision of Division 2 or 3." Division 2 pertains to discrimination in work, qualifying bodies, registered organisations, and employment agencies. Division 3 covers education, access to premises, provision of goods, services, and facilities, and accommodation. Markham again: "In effect, the whole substance of the Act can be set aside at the discretion of the Commissioner" and, "Nothing will prevent a future government which is hostile to religious freedom, hard as such a government is to imagine, from appointing a like-minded Commissioner who might exempt the Act into irrelevant nothingness."

5. The Bill attempts to transform a human right into a legal right. "The Bill's Outline says that the Bill "will not create a positive right to freedom of religion." Practically, it does precisely that. According to Markham, "the Bill legislates for what I can and cannot say, and how I can and cannot act. It does this with good intentions, to protect me from harm. But at a tremendous cost."

Campbell reminds the reader that "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion" as per Article 18 of the ICCPR.

The Religious Discrimination Act will in effect transform a human right into legislative permission which the government can take away.

FamilyVoice Australia National Director Charles Newington said, "Along with Campbell Markham, FamilyVoice challenges the government to go back to the basics: freedom of conscience, expression, and assembly. The humanity and just character of our nation rises or falls with these freedoms."

- Read Campbell Markham's entire article on Mercatornet.com

FREE SPEECH THREATENED IN VICTORIA

A Victorian MP has seriously threatened free speech and the proclamation of the Christian gospel.

Fiona Patten, former prostitute, co-founder of the Eros foundation – lobby group for the pornography industry – and leader of the Reason (formerly Sex) Party, has introduced a bill into the Victorian upper house to amend the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act which "prohibits conduct that incites hatred, serious contempt, revulsion or severe ridicule of a person or group."

Patten's changes to the act would substitute "race" with "protected attribute" and "incites" with "likely to incite". Her bill would also add to 'race' and 'religion' - gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics - as protected attributes, and provide penalties of up to 6 months jail.

In 2002, two pastors, Danny Nalliah and Daniel Scot, were accused of offending three Islamic converts at a church seminar on Sharia Law. The pastors were tried under the (brand new) Racial and Religious Tolerance Act and initially found guilty.

The case dragged on for five years. The two pastors, who were eventually acquitted by the Supreme Court, suffered death threats, threats to property and children, and legal fees of $600,000.

Morgan Begg, of the Institute of Public Affairs, warned the Patten's laws are "vaguely worded and contain no objective standard."

"Each judge will have their own view on what is 'likely to incite hatred' or 'severe ridicule'. This bill not only infringes on the freedom of speech of everyday Victorians… but the media, too."

What's also important to consider is the impact this law could have on churches and the Christian community. The bill has been referred to a lower house committee for examination, but if the bill eventually passes, portions of the Bible may become practically illegal.

In other FamiyVoice news, VoiceforChange's new campaign in defense of the unborn '365Life' has expanded rapidly, with many volunteers signing up to hand out pro-life cards every day! We now have '365Lifers' in five states. You can find out how to join this easy and exciting program by contacting Peter Stevens, 0413 467 831, vsd@familyvoice.org.au.

SA DEVELOPMENTS

Prostitution, surrogacy, abortion and euthanasia remain current concerns that can be remedied by improved Christian influence, reports South Australian State Director David d'Lima.

In a previous era, prostitution legislation was soundly rejected in the upper house of State Parliament, but in recent years such legislation has received overwhelming support. The nature of the prostitution trade has not changed, nor have the various arguments against its decriminalisation. What has changed is the character and quality of MPs. This unfortunately has occurred while the churches have not refreshed and renewed the parties and hence the parliament.

Nevertheless, at FamilyVoice we continue to urge our supporters to encourage lower house MPs to reject the bill - and it can be defeated if enough concern is raised.

We also recently urged our supporters to express concern about proposed changes to surrogacy legislation which would effectively deprive more children of an upbringing by a mother and father. Let's continue to pray about that matter.

The life issues of euthanasia and abortion are yet to be debated, but on a positive and practical note, FamilyVoice provided the administrative support to enable 85 volunteers to assist the Great Expectations pro-life stand at the recent Royal Adelaide Show.

All the reports were positive, as children, teenagers and families gained a deep awareness of the humanity of the unborn.

Our prayer is that the pro-life message, shared with young women especially, will protect them in the future and help them to always welcome God's gift of new life.

Government considers age verification filter

A Federal Lower House Committee is enquiring into age verification restrictions on accessing pornography online, following pressure from child-protection groups including FamilyVoice Australia.

"We are grateful to the 18,000 concerned supporters who signed our petition urging the government to enact this sensible measure to protect children from harm," said FamilyVoice National Director Charles Newington.

A recent ABC News report described a 16-year-old girl who requires a colostomy bag following severe damage to her bowel, as a result of anal acts imitating graphic online scenes.

A recent study of 2,000 students at three private schools in Sydney found a third of children aged eight and under have attempted to access sexually explicit material online during the past six months.

The House of Representatives inquiry is considering the merits of UK legislation that aims to require age verification before online porn can be accessed. The model creates civil penalties for suppliers of online pornography who do not verify the age of their customers, and it mandates ISP-level blocking of non-compliant sites.

To make a submission, visit the Parliament of Australia website, or phone the Committee Secretariat on (02) 6277 2358. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs is accepting written submissions by 25 October.

Ricky Chelette in WA

In September, FamilyVoice WA held a free seminar with international sex and gender identity speaker Ricky Chelette, from Living Hope (Texas). Over 140 turned out and were enthralled with Ricky's insights on 'Why people are same-sex attracted'. DVDs of Ricky's talk are available to order from FamilyVoice for $20 each, plus $8 postage.



WA State Director Darryl Budge Interviewing Living Hope (Texas) Executive Director Ricky Chelette

'Kill Bill' follows abortion law

The issues currently before FamilyVoice in NSW include the impending Religious Freedom and the Reproductive Health Care Reform Bill 2019 (the Bill which has become known as the 'Kill Bill'). "I am actively meeting with NSW MPs on both these issues and have held a series of meetings with the Attorney-General Hon Christian Porter MP on the Religious Discrimination Bill 2019," reports NSW FamilyVoice Director Greg Bondar.

The NSW Annual State Conference was held on Saturday 14 September on the theme 'Church and State' which was a huge success with Channel 7 News covering the talk by State MP Tanya Davies and showing highlights of the our conference. Davies outlined the flaws of the Reproductive Health Care Reform Bill 2019, including the fact that NSW Parliament only allocated two-days for the Upper House Review of the Bill whilst the review into animal cruelty was allocated 5 months highlighting the injustice and lack of due process afforded to the abortion bill. The talk by Senator the Honourable Concetta Fierravanti-Wells at the conference was a powerful message on the importance of ensuring that religious freedom in Australia becomes a reality.

Book your tickets now to the NSW Annual Fundraising Dinner to be held at NSW Parliament House on 25 November 2019. Contact the FamilyVoice office for more details.



Rev Fred Nile MLC, Tanya Davies MLA and Greg Bondar on 7 News

UK actress sacked for quoting the Bible takes legal action



Actress Seyi Omooba secured the lead role in a stage version of The Color Purple in the UK. But one day later, she received a tweet with a screenshot of her Facebook post from five years earlier asking if she still stood by her comments.

In September 2014 she wrote on social media: "It is clearly evident in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 what the Bible says on this matter. I do not believe you can be born gay and I do not believe homosexuality is right…"

Omooba was subsequently sacked from the role and has had difficulty obtaining other work in the field.

"I'm heartbroken," she said. "If I'm unable to get back to the stage, then I feel there is no point. It's the only thing I have ever wanted since I was a young girl."

UK legal aid centre Christian Concern said that the case raised the question of whether anyone "can express opinions and interpretations of art, literature and drama in ways that are contrary to LGBT ideology".

Euthanasia: An evil and unnecessary choice

By John Stonestreet & Roberto Rivera



Six years ago, Sean Tagert of British Columbia was diagnosed with ALS, better known as "Lou Gehrig's Disease."

An ALS diagnosis is essentially a death sentence. There is no known cure. People with ALS eventually lose control over most of the muscles in their bodies–including the ones that enable them to breathe.

Despite his grim diagnosis, Tagert decided to live as long as he could for the sake of his son, who was six-years old at the time. For five years, he advocated on behalf of ALS patients and became a symbol of someone who refused to give up.

Then, last month, Tagert informed his friends he had decided to opt for physician-assisted suicide under Canada's Medical Assistance in Dying law.

Why? Tagert didn't give up because he believed the fight for life was no longer worth it. He gave up because those who could have helped him refused.

Totally-paralyzed and requiring a ventilator to breathe, Tagert required full-time care in order to live at home with his son. But government medical officials would only provide 20 hours of care a day. Thus, he could only get 'round-the-clock care by moving to a group facility nearly five hours away from his home, and his son.

Tagert appealed this decision that was separating him from his boy. Officials never responded!

A Facebook post in Tagert's honor put it this way: "The few institutional options on hand . . . would have offered vastly inferior care while separating him from his family, and likely would have hastened his death."

And so, in Tagert's mind, physician-assisted suicide had become the least horrible option.

His death has set off shock waves throughout Canada.

Dr. Leonie Herx, a palliative care specialist and opponent of Canada's euthanasia law, is harshly calling her country to task: "We need a public outcry around peoples' right to access care, to support them in choosing a right to life rather than just a right to death… We need to ensure [physical] needs are met before we get to a place where people are feeling like death is the only option."

Of course, government officials first failed Tagert by making physician-assisted suicide legal in the first place.

The Medical Assistance in Dying Act, like all pro-death legislation, sent a crystal-clear message that euthanasia is an acceptable alternative to palliative care. Inevitably, this will lead to decisions in which life is priced out, compared to the cost of resources. When the resources are scarce, the "right to die" will become the "duty to die." In Tagert's case, "scarce" was about $200 a day.

This scenario, as the disability-rights group "Not Dead Yet" has pointed out, isn't limited to Canada. What happened in British Columbia can happen in Belgium, and in Oregon, and in New Zealand, and in Colorado, and anywhere physician-assisted suicide is legal.

In fact, the U.S. likely spends less on in-home health care services than Canada. As Pew Research has reported, "Medicaid and private insurance plans offer scant or no coverage of home visits" for patients with "serious, debilitating conditions who are not hospitalized or in hospice."

Are we ready for this, Church? It took a couple of decades for pro-lifers to catch up on all the ways we could protect preborn life. Are we ready for the fight against legalized euthanasia? Are we ready to protect the vulnerable after birth? The Church has learned to support expectant mothers, to make apologetic arguments for when life begins, to offer ultrasound insight into the womb. What do we now need to learn about palliative care, debilitating disease, and family support? How do we help those who lack the resources to keep themselves alive? How do we get creative? Do things like medical sharing hold promise? Will we support faith-based hospices like we support pregnancy resource centers?

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WA Action: FamilyVoice reports that the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill will begin debate in the Upper House on October 15. We encourage you to contact and meet with Upper House members urgently. Use our tool, FamilyVoice.org.au/say-no-to-euthanasia to contact your Upper House MPs.

EXTRACTS

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We seek to proclaim the goodness and truth of the Triune God as revealed in His Holy Word the Bible, in the person of Jesus Christ, God the Son, and in creation. We promote God's wise ways for a healthy society where marriage is honoured, human life is respected, families can flourish and fundamental freedoms are enjoyed.

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