

OPENING STATEMENT

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this Committee. I am appearing on behalf of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and the Archbishop of Sydney, and would like to reserve the right for the Bishops to further clarify any comments which I make today.

To begin with, we recognise that there are people of integrity and goodwill on both sides of the debate. But goodwill is not sufficient in itself to make good public policy.

Marriage is a natural institution whereby a man and a woman give themselves to each other for life in an exclusive sexual relationship that is open to the possibility of children. Marriage between a man and a woman is the fundamental family relationship across all cultures; the unique relationship on which society, and the extended family, is built. Marriage is a union that is publicly recognised and treated as special - distinguished from other types of relationships – because of its unique capacity to generate children and to meet children’s deepest needs for the love and attachment of both their father and their mother.

By contrast, although the community formed by a homosexual couple may involve genuine caring, affection and commitment to one another, it is not an inherently procreative community, because their sexual relationship is not designed to generate children. Marriage is not simply a loving, committed relationship between two people, but a unique kind of physical and emotional union which is open to the possibility of new life.

As Cardinal Pell states in his submission to this inquiry: *“The definition of marriage as an inherently procreative community does not exclude heterosexual married couples who cannot have children for reasons of age or infertility. They are still married because their sexual union is naturally designed to give life, even if it cannot give life at a particular point in time, or ever. Marriage between a man and a woman always has an inherent capacity for, and orientation towards, the generation of children, whether that capacity is actualized or not.”*

On this point, I wish to express my concern about a media statement of the 5th of April by Senator Hanson-Young, a member of this Committee. The Senator stated: “Cardinal Pell claims marriage is only to create children”

and went on to say that “By his logic, no person should be permitted to get married if they cannot or choose not to have children.” This conclusion clearly does *not* follow from His Eminence’s logic and is a clear misrepresentation of his submission. I seek the assurance of the Committee that oral and written submissions to this inquiry will be presented to the public fairly and accurately.

Unjust discrimination against any human being is always wrong. However, it is not unjust discrimination against homosexual couples to uphold marriage as being between a man and a woman. Marriage and same-sex relationships are essentially different realities. Justice, in fact, requires society to recognise and respect this difference.

The state has always recognised marriage as a public institution because the marital relationship makes a unique and essential contribution to the common good. The primary reason why nation states have been interested in marriage and why it has attracted public support is because of its procreative aspect, encompassing the generation and raising of children.

Implicit in this Bill is the judgment that for children to have both a mother and a father is an unnecessary and superfluous duplication. But it is contrary to everything we intuitively and sociologically know about effective parenting, to claim that mothers can ‘father’ just as well as men, and that fathers can ‘mother’ just as well as women. Fathers and mothers provide positive and distinctive contributions to child and adolescent wellbeing – for example, in the way good fathers teach children and adolescents to manage risk, stress and frustration, and the way mothers provide children with emotional security during infancy and give their daughters trusted counsel during puberty and adolescence.¹ To know and experience having a mother and a father is the right of every child, to be secured as far as possible.

Marriage is the union of a man and a woman and deserves the continued support of and recognition by the state. Its enduring character cannot be

¹ These distinctive aspects of fathering and mothering have been identified and documented in well-regarded child development studies such as Coley (2009), Sakardi (2008) and Parera (2004). See: RL Coley et al. “Fathers' and Mothers' Parenting Predicting and Responding to Adolescent Sexual Risk Behaviors.” *Child Development*, 80:3 (May 2009). A. Sakardi et al. “Fathers' involvement and children's developmental outcomes: a systematic review of longitudinal studies.” *Acta Paediatrica* 97:2 (February 2008). N. Parera & J. Suris, “Having a good relationship with their mother: a protective factor against sexual risk behavior among adolescent females?”, *Journal of Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology*, 17, 267-271 (2004).

legislated away. But if we change the legal meaning of marriage to empty it of its capacity for children, this will affect everyone's marriage and everyone's understanding of marriage. Marriage cannot be changed to become something which it is not, but altering people's perceptions of marriage will profoundly impact our culture for the worse.

Thank you for this opportunity. We would be happy to answer further questions from the committee.