

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 620#

ARCHBISHOP HART MISTAKES RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR FREEDOM TO DISCRIMINATE.

Archibishop Hart of Melbourne demands religious freedom for Catholics and Catholic school teachings on sexuality. He also argues against those questioning Catholic discrimination in employment in Catholic institutions. <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/opinion/extend-tolerance-to-catholic-teachings-too/story-e6frg6zo-1227551283364>

Strangely, Hart does not fall back on the religious freedom clause – Section 116 – of the Australian Constitution. But then, the Catholic Church is not about ‘freedom of conscience’ or **freedom ‘from’ religion**. He starts his article, ‘Extend tolerance to Catholic teachings too’, in *The Australian* of 1 October 2015 with that very odd, selfish freedom, namely ‘freedom of choice’.

He claims this basically selfish ‘freedom of choice’ is a ‘universally accepted, fundamental rule of civilised society.’ But in his discussion of ‘freedoms’ he makes no mention of ‘freedom of conscience’ although he refers to religious freedom as ‘*the right of individuals and organisations to follow the dictates and teachings of their faith without unfair and unjustified interference.*’ The Catholic church has not changed. For Hart, Religious freedom refers to ‘the dictates and teachings’ – of? The Pope? Archbishop Hart himself?

For Denis Hart the Reformation and the Enlightenment have never happened.

The particular issue that is troubling the Melbourne Archbishop, and Catholic school administrators is the threat of Tasmanian Greens who are questioning, in the courts, a school text which they believe discriminates against same sex couples. He is also concerned that in Victoria the Greens are preparing a parliamentary bill to remove exemptions for religious schools from discrimination laws in staffing and enrolments under the Equal Opportunity Act.

DOGS would fight alongside Denis Hart for genuine religious freedom and freedom of conscience, and above all, freedom from establishment of religion through State Aid. But Hart’s Catholic alongside other religious schools take billions of dollars in State Aid. And the Andrews Government have just delivered them a further \$200 million! This is the direct result of a pre-election deal between Labor and private school organisations last year to legislate a link between private and public school funding. The Andrews Government delivered on the deal in February with the Education and Training Reform Amendment Act. It guarantees that state government funding of private schools is at least 25 per cent of state government funding per public school student.

Hart talks about the right of Catholic schools to operate in line with religious beliefs. Yet, for 26 days, Denis Hart's church argued in the DOGS High Court case in 1979 that Catholic schools were not 'religious institutions' and were no more religious than State schools!

HART CANNOT WORSHIP GOD AND MAMMON. Nor should he have his cake and eat it at taxpayers' expense.

Taxpayers should demand that heavily subsidised Catholic schools – and all religious schools - be open to all, with discrimination for none. Any school that takes State Aid should be State owned and controlled and not exempt from the laws against discrimination.

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