



Vatican City State, 15 February 2017

By email: senator.parry@aph.gov.au
The Hon. Stephen Parry
President of the Senate
Suite SG.40
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
AUSTRALIA

Dear Senator Parry,

The Senate's motion regarding me on 8 February 2017

It has been brought to my attention that the Senate passed a motion in relation to me on 8 February 2017, in the following terms:

27 LAW AND JUSTICE—CATHOLIC CHURCH—ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Senator Siewert, pursuant to notice of motion not objected to as a formal motion, moved general business notice of motion no. 185—That the Senate—

(a) acknowledges that 4 444 people made allegations of child sexual abuse by members of the Catholic Church, including the clergy, between January 1980 and February 2015;

(b) notes that allegations of criminal misconduct against Cardinal George Pell have been forwarded to the Victorian Office of Public Prosecutions by the Victorian Police; and

(c) calls on Cardinal George Pell to return to Australia to assist the Victorian Police and Office of Public Prosecutions with their investigations into these matters.

I am concerned that the Senate's motion appears to have been made on the basis of a significant misunderstanding of my willingness to assist the Victoria Police in their investigations of allegations made against me. The use of parliamentary privilege to attack me on this basis is both extraordinary and unjust.

The facts are that Victoria Police and the Office of Public Prosecutions have not requested my presence in Australia. I was willingly interviewed by the Victorian Police in Rome last year, and continue to cooperate with the Victorian Police in relation to their investigations.

Given that the investigation is ongoing, any calls from the Senate for my return to Australia can only be perceived as an interference on the part of the Senate in the due process of the Victoria Police investigation.

The inappropriateness of the Senate's motion was publicly noted by the President of the Australian Council for Civil Liberties, Mr Terry O'Gorman AO, and I draw the Senate's attention to his comments¹.

I also take this opportunity to reiterate that I appeared before the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse to give evidence in relation to three case studies. I appeared before the Royal Commission in person in March 2014, by video link in August 2014 and although I was unable to appear in person in February 2016 due to health concerns, I voluntarily gave evidence in Rome for 4 continuous days from 10pm at night (local time) until 3am the following morning. Any fair minded person would conclude that I have made every effort to be available to the Royal Commission and to Victoria Police to assist with their inquiries.

Further, in circumstances where the vast majority of the allegations highlighted in the Motion in fact relate to offences which occurred prior to my appointment as an Archbishop (and in a significant number of instances before I was even ordained a priest), it is unjust and seriously misleading to link all offences and allegations against Church personnel to me. No one individual is responsible for all Catholic entities in Australia and those Church leaders who failed to protect children should not be shielded from accountability for their actions by assigning blame to others who were not involved.

The Senate would be aware that over 20 years ago, I was the first Archbishop in Australia to take decisive action to combat the evils of Child Sexual Abuse by providing independent commissioners to hear from victims and make recommendations about the response. I am saddened by the incidents of abuse and have expressed my sorrow and apology to survivors on a number of occasions, both publicly and in private meetings with them.

Finally, Senators should be reminded I have been clear in my statements rejecting the allegations that have been made against me. I strongly believe that I should be permitted the same due process as any other Australian in an ongoing investigation, and that the Senate's interference in that regard is extraordinary. I call on the Senate to move to withdraw its call for me to return to Australia.

I ask that this letter be tabled in the Senate.

Yours sincerely in the Lord,

George Card. Pell
Prefect

¹ <http://www.robertsonogorman.com.au/blog/2017/february/09/terry-ogorman-comments-on-senate-calls-for-pell-to-return-to-australia/> accessed 15 February 2017

