

"It's Time to Say Sorry"

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Originally published in SMH, 8 NOVEMBER 2017

As the votes are counted in the Postal Survey on Same Sex Marriage, it's time to reflect a little on the experience of the last few months.

As a deeply committed older Christian, I've been dismayed by the contributions of Australian churches to the acrimonious and damaging debate which has been imposed upon us, and particularly by those who have joined the Coalition for Marriage.

I've been dismayed, first, because Australian churches have been callous and un-Christ-like in their support for an extended public campaign, which they surely knew was certain to cause widespread distress and suffering to some of Australia's most vulnerable citizens.

I've been dismayed, second, by the essentially dishonest, fear-driven and fear-creating nature of the campaign churches have signed up to, and put big money towards.

The Coalition for Marriage campaign is pervasively dishonest. It is dishonest in not being up-front about the foundational reason conservative Christians are implacably opposed to marriage equality, and that is their belief that any and all sexual relationships outside of heterosexual marriage are immoral and defective.

The campaign is dishonest in trying to scare people into thinking that society will unravel if marriage is extended to include LGBTI+ Australians. Scare-mongering, by its very nature, is dishonest, because it plays to people's fears, and doesn't require evidence. It is often best without evidence, except for cherry-picked and easily discredited examples from overseas, which, even when proved accurate, mostly amount to fundamentalist Christians resisting scientific and societal consensus, doggedly insisting on their right to discriminate and exclude.

The Coalition for Marriage's NO campaign has been dishonest in arguing that children will become the innocent victims of a YES outcome. The strategy is dishonest because all available evidence suggests that children brought up by same-sex couples do equally well as those brought up by opposite sex couples, with ideological talk about the need for gender complementarity failing the test of peer-reviewed scientific research. The children do well and they are sure to do even better when their parents are given the societal honour and recognition of marriage.

I am dismayed, third, because those churches who have joined the Coalition for Marriage appear oblivious to how morally compromised they have become. They are morally compromised for claiming that they alone speak for God. Church history is littered with examples of similar bogus claims, about the age and shape of the earth, about slavery, interracial marriage and women's rights.

Christian churches are morally compromised when they interpret the Bible in such a way as to cause preventable suffering to those *Jesus* described as his *'little ones'* – the weak, the defenceless; the marginalised. They are already compromised for almost 2,000 years of abusive interpretation, described by one of America's leading Christian ethicists as *'teachings of contempt'* directed at those who are sexuality and gender diverse.

Is there some light in this dark account? There is. Even amongst those who voted NO in the postal survey, there has been widespread disappointment with how the NO campaign has been waged, and with the out-of-touch leadership of their churches. An *Australian Christians for Marriage Equality* campaign has been waged, not quite so loudly or well-funded, but with wonderful support. A new grass-roots movement called *Equal Voices* has drawn Christians from around the nation to encourage straight allies to support their even braver LGBTI+ fellow Christians, one of whom, a young daughter of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney, penned these words of defiance:

"We are not the monsters you make us out to be, however much you may shout it from street corners. We aren't deviant or degenerate. We aren't child abusers. We don't need to be healed or brutally driven into an image of cisgender heterosexuality. What we need is for you to listen to our voices and see us for who we are. We are every sexuality, romantic orientation and gender under the sun. We have intersex variations. And, above all of this, we are human."

The best thing to have emerged from this awful process is that Christians have come to realize, how urgent is our need to say sorry, and to embark on what will be a long and painful process of reconciliation. To that

end, all Christians are invited to add their names to a National Apology to LGBTI+ fellow Australians.
<https://equalvoices.org.au/apologise/> **This includes a commitment to reconciliation.**