

January 21, 2005

Exhibit No. 3
Date 1-21-05
Bill No. SB 202

Testimony in opposition to SB 202

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

My name is Eric Schiedermayer. I represent the Montana Catholic Conference, the voice for Montana's two Roman Catholic bishops in the state legislature, who in turn are the spiritual leaders of some 140,000 Montanans. I rise in opposition to this bill.

On the surface, the intent of this bill is laudable. The Catholic Church stands firmly opposed to ANY malicious intimidation or harassment of ANY person. Human dignity and human rights are God-given – intrinsic to every human person regardless of circumstances. They are not earned nor are they legislated. The Catholic Church affirms these rights, seeking human respect, economic and personal security, and social equality for all people. The Gospel values which we uphold reject adamantly any efforts to terrify, intimidate or threaten any person.

Proponents for this bill this morning have told some stories of horribly unjust discrimination – stories filled with pain, bigotry and hate; stories of people so afraid of someone who is different than themselves that they violate the fundamental human dignity of that other person. These are powerful stories. They tug at the heart; they cry out for change, justice and healing. While I stand in opposition to this bill, I certainly do not stand in opposition to the people who have told these stories. I stand in strong support of healing our culture of all hate and bigotry.

But the problems depicted in these stories cannot be solved by passing a law. The disease they describe is a disease of the heart. It is a spiritual disease. Change will come when hearts are changed, when children grow up in a home and a community steeped in respect and honor for every person. The answer to this problem lies not in the government, but in the family. And therein lies my opposition to this bill.

Legislation often brings with it unknown or unintended effects, and this is one of those cases.

In his state-of-the-state address the other night, Governor Schweitzer said that during his tour of every county in the state the people told him quite clearly that their top concern was the health of the family. While this definitely is strongly influenced by the economic difficulties that Governor Schweitzer seeks to remedy, there are other, deeper issues of concern as well. Pundits were shocked by national election exit polls in November wherein voters rated "values" as their top concern. We realize down in our guts that our culture, our communities, our families are losing their spiritual footing. We are losing our sense of purpose. We are losing sight of what it means to be human.

The problem with this bill, and all those which place the words "sexual orientation" in a list of protected classes of people, is that it obscures an objective moral truth of what it means to be human. Scripture tells us, "God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them." It is in our sexuality, and precisely in the complementarity of male and female, wherein we most closely resemble the divine image. It is in the life-giving union between a man and a woman wherein a family is born. All of the pressures in our society to accept and legitimize sexual activity outside of marriage – and this includes premarital and extramarital sex, not just homosexual activity – are ultimately harmful to us.

We are often tempted to define our own truth, rather than accepting a Truth which defines us. This seems to be especially true in the area of our sexuality.

Just yesterday, Pope John Paul II said, "Society currently needs more than ever healthy families who are capable of defending the common good. If we strengthen the sacred institution of marriage and the family in keeping with the divine plan, love and solidarity between people will grow." That love and solidarity is the solution to the problems described here today.

In conclusion, the sanctity of marriage and family, and the freedom of parents to rear their children in a healthy and moral climate are critical to a well ordered society. All of these are under assault today. It is incumbent upon us to strengthen and support them, not to undermine them, even unintentionally in the cause of non-discrimination.

Respectfully submitted,



Eric Schiedermayer
Executive Director, Montana Catholic Conference