



# Church attacks Calvary 'secrecy'

By Ewa Kretowicz

The Catholic Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn has accused the ACT Government of hiding the proposed buy-out of Calvary Hospital behind a veil of closed doors and secret deals.

In the same week as Catholic Archbishop of Sydney Cardinal George Pell criticised the \$77 million contract, Archbishop Mark Coleridge said Canberrans were unhappy with the secrecy surrounding the agreement.

"I also shared that sense of things going on behind closed doors, secret deals being done and also the sense of inevitability that was being generated, or the illusion of inevitability that there was no point of putting up any resistance or asking questions," he said.

Their views have put them into conflict with ACT Health Minister Katy Gallagher who accused the two senior clergymen of putting pressure on the sisters of the Little Company of Mary to halt the sale.

"The archbishop and the cardinal have chosen their time to come out and lobby and I think, from where I sit, that is to place maximum pressure on the nuns as they contemplate this," Ms Gallagher said.

Archbishop Coleridge strongly denied the charge.

"I am not pushing the sectarian line, I am seriously concerned for the good of the ACT community and I honestly believe after grappling with this takeover for 12 months, this takeover would not be in the best interest of patient care in the ACT," he said.

His comments yesterday solidified growing Church opposition to the deal – opposition which could ultimately scuttle the project.

*The Canberra Times* revealed the ACT Government plan to buy Calvary Hospital from the Little Company of Mary Health in April.

Under the deal, the Little Company of Mary would buy Canberra's hospice, Clare Holland House, for \$9 million.

But the proposal can only go ahead with the Vatican's approval and Archbishop Coleridge is expected to express his opinion on the sale in a formal declaration to the Holy See.

"Over this process it has been amazingly hard to get all the facts and grasp all the issues," he said.

He said his opinion to the Vatican would be based on a statement on the Archdiocese website.

In the statement, Archbishop Coleridge says there is no evidence to suggest government bureaucracies run better hospitals than private providers. "What I fail to understand is why the need for change should mean a totalitarian approach to provision which would exclude in principle any provider other than the ACT Government."

But Ms Gallagher said the only way the ACT Government could invest the \$200 million of capital works needed at Calvary Hospital without plunging the capital further into deficit was to own it.

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**Canberra Times**  
Saturday 31/10/2009  
Page: 1  
Section: General News  
Region: Canberra Circulation: 58,978  
Type: Capital City Daily  
Size: 291.97 sq.cms.  
Published: MTWTFS-

Brief: CALVARY  
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“I’ve sought additional advice on this again on that point specifically. Our budget is audited and they have to conform to the standards. It’s an accounting problem, it’s not an asset of ours and this proposal puts it on the table should the people of the ACT own this asset.”

She said his comments about the process distracted from the issue. “I do think it’s unhelpful to run this as a Christian and non-Christian discussion. I think it’s a divisive strategy and this is about pulling everything together in terms of what is best for our community’s health-care system, regardless of what your religion is.”

The Greens and the Liberals are yet to decide how they will vote on the appropriation Bill if the Vatican approves the deal.

Community consultation is continuing, with submissions to ACT Health by November 12.



**RESISTANCE:**  
Archbishop Mark Coleridge says a takeover would erode patient care in the ACT.