

**SUBMISSION TO THE  
AUSTRALIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION**

**INQUIRY INTO THE  
FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

**Dr David Swanton  
February 2009**

( [www.ethicalrights.com](http://www.ethicalrights.com) )

**Contents**

Introduction	2
Freedom of Religion and Belief	2
The Religious Spectrum	2
Why are People Religious?	3
The Imposition of Religious Views and Discrimination	4
A Hypothetical Religion	6
Religion and the Inquiry	7
1. Evaluation of 1998 HREOC Report on Article 18: Freedom of Religion and Belief	8
2. Religion and the State – the Constitution, Roles and Responsibilities	11
3. Religion and the State – practice and expression	19
4. Security issues in the aftermath of September 11	21
5. The interface of religious, political and cultural aspirations	24
6. Technology and its implications	28
7. Religion, Cultural Expression and Human Rights	30
8. Additional Areas of Concern or Interest	33

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. This paper has been prepared as a submission to the Inquiry into the Freedom of Religion and Belief in the 21st Century by the Australian Human Rights Commission (the Commission). I note that the Discussion Paper produced by the Commission lists the objectives for the Freedom of Religion and Belief in the 21st Century project. My submission helps the Commission meet these objectives by providing arguments that are much too infrequently expressed.

2. I am a scientist and ethicist who approaches issues with objectivity and a rational mind and who makes decisions on significant issues based on evidence. Consequently, I do not believe in any gods or deities and am not religious. Probably about 30% of Australians are not religious.

3. I approach the issue of freedom of religion and belief from the perspective of an Australian male who contends that an individual's rights are paramount. Consequently, I support the right of all to believe what they will, as long as they do not discriminate against others or impose, unethically and hypocritically, their views on others through physical, emotional or legislative means, or otherwise oppress or deny other people their rights or freedom of choice. My analysis in this submission has been developed in support of this philosophy.

4. This submission is concerned with the rights of individuals to have choice in their religion and belief. Some of the submission's more significant points are the following.

- People are religious primarily through religious indoctrination, and because of its subjective cultural basis, they should not be permitted to force their views on others, even by stealth.
- No religions or belief systems should be imposed on people, including children. Religions should never be able to discriminate against groups of people, whether they be women, homosexuals, non-believers or others, whether overtly or stealthily, because equivalently, religious people would not like to be discriminated against.
- The fundamental rights of people must be maintained. Religions should have no more rights than any other groups of Australians.
- Religions have a long history of violence and turmoil, and being divisive through discrimination. They should not be permitted to provide government services.
- Religion's substantial problems need to be addressed; otherwise, freedom of choice in religion and belief will be affected, as will the likelihood that Australia can move towards a tolerant, inclusive, multicultural, secular and more egalitarian future.

5. I would be happy to expand on my paper if required.

## **FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF**

6. I need to make some relevant observations about religion to set the framework for my response to the issues before the Inquiry.

### **THE RELIGIOUS SPECTRUM**

7. Australia's diverse and multicultural society fills the religious spectrum. Some Australians do not believe in any gods and do not follow religions, some are religious but do not worship gods, and some follow one god or many gods.

8. Many people seem to be comfortably settled into their position on the religious spectrum, never challenging their own beliefs. These people might be very religious, they might be ambivalent, and they might not care about religion. They might include the many ‘good’ people known to Australians, including relatives, friends, work colleagues or people doing good deeds for the community.

9. Freedom of religion and belief requires that people have choice in religion and belief and that their religion should not adversely affect the rights of others. If religions do affect others’ rights or hinder freedom of religion and belief, then people need to be aware of this, otherwise freedoms continue to be denied. All people, regardless of whether they are ‘good’ people, or how religious they might be, need to be aware of the consequences of following their religions and beliefs. Most people would understand that it is unacceptable for people to infringe on other people’s rights and to have it continue, because people would not like it done to them. Consequently, it is important for people to reconsider their religion and beliefs and where they position themselves on the religious spectrum.

10. This submission makes some strong points to provide considered views for the Inquiry and to alert and challenge people to think critically about some fundamental religion and belief issues. This submission makes the case, for example, and is then emphatic, that discrimination is wrong. That conclusion alone has significant implications for freedom of religion and belief and our society.

### **WHY ARE PEOPLE RELIGIOUS?**

11. Religion, by its nature, is a faith, a belief system, and many people believe in religions regardless of what evidence there is to the contrary. Most world religions are based on religious texts written many hundreds or thousands of years ago by people with ancient, superstitious, and primitive customs and ethical systems. They had essentially no scientific knowledge, their understanding of the world was poor, and they created gods to explain what they could not.

12. Unsurprisingly, religious texts such as the Bible are scientifically flawed, and the god theories of religions are inconsistent with available evidence. Despite what religious leaders may suggest is revealed in their allegedly infallible and perfect religious texts, there is no credible evidence, and certainly not in the scientific literature, for gods, devils, fairies, angels, ghosts, that the universe was created, heaven, hell, a resurrection, a virgin birth, souls (something that survives death), miracles (events that are contrary to scientific understanding), or that prayers work. In the 21st century, it is delusional, by definition, to have a religious belief in imaginary gods that have characteristics or perform deeds *contrary to scientific and credible evidence*.

13. Beliefs in imaginary beings and things are propagated mainly through indoctrination. My standard indoctrination test is the following: consider what religion people would follow if they were raised in a country of a different religion by parents who fervently followed that other religion? As an example, a Christian should consider being raised by Muslim parents in an Islamic country, and Muslims should speculate about being raised by Christians in a Christian country. Buddhists, Jews, Hindus and other religious groups should ask similar questions.

14. Would they still follow the same religion? If their answer is no, then they should question why they follow the religion that they do, because clearly their religion is a function of their indoctrination. They have admitted that if they were indoctrinated in a different religion in a different culture, they would change their religion.

15. If their answer is yes, then perhaps they should try to objectively explain the geographical distribution of religions around the world. If a Catholic said they would be a Catholic regardless of whether they were raised by Muslim parents in a Muslim community, it should be asked why they are so special, because the overwhelming majority of children raised by Muslim parents in Muslim communities become Muslims. Children growing up in a Muslim community do not suddenly have a revelation of ‘Yes, Catholicism is for me’.

16. Many people might think that, as adults, they are making a choice about which religion is right, but this does not explain why the correlation between the religion of indoctrination and an adult’s final religion is so high. The geographic distribution of world religions and cultures is best described by this indoctrination theory because the correlation between religion and geography (culture) is very high.

17. Religious people, once indoctrinated, usually rely on religious leaders to tell them what to do, how to behave, what’s right and wrong, and what to believe in, rather than thinking for themselves. Their gods often proclaim that killing is wrong and then (hypocritically) murder people (including children). These gods are often sexist, racist, and homophobic; a reflection of the primitive society, for this is how the religion gave comfort to the primitive peoples that created the gods. In the 21st century, it is disappointing that people still consider that these gods, guilty of discrimination and atrocious acts, are worthy or worship.

## **THE IMPOSITION OF RELIGIOUS VIEWS AND DISCRIMINATION**

18. People who have been indoctrinated in a religion cannot argue from reason that it is right, because if they had been raised elsewhere they would follow a different religion. They are not philosophically wedded to any one religion. It is therefore particularly important that they not impose their religious views on others by physical, emotional, legislative or other means.

19. Why is this so? Should people be allowed to impose their religions on others? For many religions, Christianity included, doing so would be hypocritical. Christians would not wish Islamic or Jewish, or even non-religious (atheistic and agnostic) beliefs, habits or customs to be forced on them. It is hypocritical and unethical for Christians to do unto others what they would not want others to do unto them.

20. This statement can be made more general, more universal. The same weight should be given to the views, values or interests of others as one gives to one’s own interests. This is the most fundamental ethical principle. It follows that the values of any one individual should not be forced on others. This principle guarantees in theory that all people have equal dignity and rights, as reflected in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

21. The Inquiry’s objectives relate to the rights of an individual to have the freedom to express and adopt their own religions and belief systems. As a human right, people should be able to believe what they will, to the extent that it does not interfere with other people’s human rights. Consequently, organised religion should not be imposed on others, should not discriminate and should not oppress others.

22. Furthermore, for there to be freedom of religion and belief, there must be freedom of choice in religion and belief. There cannot be freedom if there is no choice. No religions and no one religion can be favoured.

23. A denial of choice is a denial of freedom, whether it be in religion or politics. Freedom of choice in belief is rarely the situation in Australia for children, where even in government schools, religion, usually Christianity, is being imposed on others by stealth and by childhood indoctrination before people's analytical skills are fully developed.

24. In addition, nobody would like to be discriminated against based on sex, religion, sexual preference, colour, race, language etc, and therefore religions should not discriminate against others. Religious organisations teach discrimination (their religious texts and church practices discriminate against women, homosexuals and non-believers) but often complain when its victims voice vehement objections. Discrimination is wrong because it denies people rights and unfairly affects their interests. Discrimination is abhorrent and should not be tolerated in religion or any aspect of society.

25. While it is important to respect the right of all to believe what they wish, honouring any gods that commit foul deeds should be discouraged and deplored, lest it affect how people behave in society. For example, on a Sunday, indoctrinated religious people can say with total conviction, 'God killed people in the Bible because he is good and just, God punishes those who do not believe in him, sex before marriage is wrong, contraception is wrong, God believes men are better than women and so women cannot assume positions of leadership in the Church, and as homosexuals are worthy of punishment they cannot join the priesthood'. On the next day, perhaps in their public service job, they might advocate the opposite view: that all murder is wrong, people have freedom of belief, condoms should be used, and that women and homosexuals should be afforded the same rights as others. The perception, and most probably the reality, is that religious indoctrination lays the foundation for a person's true beliefs—discriminatory beliefs that are clearly unacceptable in a secular, modern, multicultural and progressive Australia.

26. Would Australians have confidence that public servants with these religious views would treat unmarried bisexual pregnant women as equals of other candidates at interview? Would we have confidence that religious Prime Ministers or politicians can divorce themselves from their indoctrination and make informed and objective decisions about the role of, for example, women in the workforce or gay marriages, or make an objective decision about whether they should legislate for voluntary euthanasia or embryonic stem cell research, if perchance it conflicts with their belief systems? Even if they could demonstrate that they could treat people equitably and make public policy decisions based on evidence, their analytical skills have been severely compromised and the perception is that they do not do so.

27. Religious belief should be permitted and freedom to debate all issues must be strongly encouraged. People must be able to speak for or against religion, as they do on politics, sport, and ethical issues, freely and without retribution. However, the imposition of religious beliefs or values on others, including restricting choice in religion, should be forbidden. Similarly, discrimination under the guise of religious belief should not be tolerated.

28. There is danger in religious belief systems adversely affecting how people reason and how our society can grow and evolve. Organised religion can have deleterious effects on society. If organised religions preach scientific, ethical or other wrongs, either overtly or stealthily, and discriminate against others then these wrongs will eventually be propagated. Women, homosexuals, non-believers (including atheists and agnostics) and others who are not favoured by gods or priests are discriminated against and oppressed, often by stealth. Women and homosexuals are disadvantaged because they are denigrated and denied rights by religions.

29. The world has a long history of religion-fuelled hostility, which is a logical consequence of thousands of years of religious discrimination, denial of rights, intolerance of other religions, and religions imposing their beliefs on others. Only when people can believe freely in what they will, religious discrimination ceases and religions no longer oppress or impose their religious values on others, can Australia and the world move confidently on a track towards a tolerant, less divisive and more egalitarian future.

### **A HYPOTHETICAL RELIGION**

30. A case has been made that religion and belief should only be permitted when there is freedom of choice, and when they do not discriminate, are not imposed on others or otherwise deny people equality, dignity or other fundamental rights.

31. Please consider the following scenario. What if a new religion were to be established tomorrow in Australia, and an inspired person drafts a religious text that reflects the perfect views of their new and perfect God (and every good religion must have a god or two if it is to be competitive). The newly drafted religious text includes the following verses attributable to the new God.

- An Aboriginal person should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit an Aboriginal person to teach or to have authority over a non-Aboriginal person; the Aboriginal person must be silent.
- Any Aboriginal person who is arrogant enough to reject the verdict of the priest who represents your God must die.
- An Aboriginal person who works on God's holy day will be put to death.
- If a person has sex with an Aboriginal person, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death, their blood will be on their own hands.

32. The above verses are racist, abhorrent and disgusting. Such a religious text would be treated with the contempt that any racially discriminatory text deserves. The proponents of the new religion would say that God moves in mysterious ways or that the text is not meant to be taken literally. Neither explanation conceals the underlying racism.

33. The astute observer would realise that these verses have been extracted from the Christian Bible and reworked to substitute the phrase 'Aboriginal person' in biblical verses that condemn women, non-believers, a person who works contrary to God's laws, and homosexuals<sup>1</sup>. The racism in the newly drafted religious text is more than matched by the racism, sexism, religism<sup>2</sup>, homophobia, and particular nastiness that fill the Christian Bible. However, people do not seem to comprehend that the Bible represents the uneducated and far from enlightened views of primitive people, and serious belief in such discriminatory values is unworthy of civilised society, and a modern, secular and progressive Australia.

34. Freedom of belief is important. However, if belief systems deny other people their rights and are channelled through organised religion that involves discrimination and the imposition of primitive ethical values on others, then these belief systems are unacceptable. Religion that discriminates and imposes itself on other people should be considered similarly to a newly

---

<sup>1</sup> 1 Timothy 2:11-12, Deuteronomy 17:12, Exodus 35:2 and Leviticus 20:13 have been reworked to substitute the phrase 'Aboriginal person'. Numerous other biblical verses are disgusting because of their primitive ethical commentary, discrimination against women, homosexuals and non-believers, and advocacy of slavery and sacrifice. In addition, many verses are scientifically 'wrong'.

<sup>2</sup> This word is taken to mean discrimination against people of different religions, belief or non-belief systems.

drafted religion that discriminates against Aboriginal people: unworthy of a following and worthy of contempt.

## **RELIGION AND THE INQUIRY**

35. I have sampled many of the submissions made to the Inquiry, and noted that many of them are from people with religious backgrounds, many of whom ask for freedom of religious beliefs and, paradoxically, that the Christian religion be favoured. This is hypocritical and unethical.

36. Much of the Inquiry's Discussion Paper makes the premise that Australians, as a whole, have religious belief systems. This is not the case. The 2006 census showed that 18.7% of Australians had no religion (a trend that has been increasing), the same percentage as that of Anglicans in Australia. Further, it is reasonable to assume that the 11.2% of people who did not address the census question are more likely to be of no religion. That is up to about 30% of Australians have no or little desire for religion, and based on trends from previous Census results, this figure will increase in the future.

37. The paper also lumps atheists together. Atheists, broadly, are people who happen not to believe in a god or gods because there is no evidence that any gods exist<sup>3</sup>. The historian Stephen Henry Roberts summarised the atheists' position eloquently, 'I contend that we are both atheists. I just believe in one fewer god than you do. When you understand why you dismiss all the other possible gods, you will understand why I dismiss yours.'

38. People with religious beliefs should have the same rights, and no more, as others in society, including people who are not religious or who otherwise choose to believe in things only when there is credible evidence. No person or religious organisation should deny other people their rights, discriminate unfairly, oppress or denigrate others, or impose their religious views on others.

---

<sup>3</sup> The term atheist (meaning not a theist) describes what people are not, believers in gods, and atheists have a range of views on other issues. It would be more positive to categorise people by something that they are. We do not classify those who do not believe in imaginary flying pink elephants as 'aimaginaryflyingpinkelephants', we call them normal and sensible. Similarly, those who do not believe in imaginary gods should be classified as normal and sensible, and perhaps those who do believe in imaginary gods should be classified as 'asensible'.

## 1. EVALUATION OF 1998 HREOC REPORT ON ARTICLE 18: FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF

The responses to the issues that follow draw on the arguments above.

### 1.1 What are areas of concern regarding the freedom to practice and express faith and beliefs, within your faith community and other such communities?

39. This question assumes those answering it have a faith or religious belief. As noted in the previous sections, this is a false assumption, and probably does not apply to 30% of Australians. It is important to recognise that there is appreciable discrimination against people who do not believe in religion in Australia. This is the fault of religious organisations.

40. Why do religious schools generally refuse to recruit qualified science teachers who do not share the religious values of the school? Why do hospitals run by certain religious orders not permit women to undergo certain sterilization operations, when it may be more efficient to do so when the woman is, for example, having a Caesarean operation? Why are religious organisations permitted to run schools, hospitals, aged-care facilities and other institutions, be in receipt of public money, yet limit their services to those consistent with their own belief systems, not the belief systems of the people using their services? Why are non-charitable elements of religious organisations permitted to run businesses without paying tax? This uneven playing field is unjust, and disadvantages more efficient businesses and Australians in general.

41. In addition, if any religious organisation is in receipt of public funding, such as for schools or hospitals, it should be illegal to discriminate against any member of the Australian public. Publicly funded institutions should not show religism (discrimination based on religion). Taxpayers should not be funding discriminatory organisations.

42. In all of the cases above, non-religious people are disadvantaged. The fact that the non-charitable elements of religions do not pay tax means that other Australians, including low-income earners, pay more tax because religions do not. This inequitable distribution of taxpayer funds is discrimination against non-religious people.

43. I understand that commercial bus companies have not allowed atheists to advertise on buses, something that would not be denied religious organisations. This discrimination is unacceptable and must be eradicated.

44. Consistent with the beliefs of 70-80% of Australians, people should be able to choose if they want the option of voluntary euthanasia. Simply stated, people who are terminally ill, should be able to choose how to end their lives. However, organised religion, and religious parliamentarians, continue to deny Australians this basic individual right—they are effectively imposing their religious beliefs on other Australians. This is an unacceptable imposition of politicians' religious beliefs (mainly Christian) on other people.

45. If people do not want voluntary euthanasia, they do not have to have it—it is *voluntary*. Australians must ask how many Christians, whose ethical standards allow them to worship the mass-murdering biblical God (including of children), can demand that others must not die with dignity but instead suffer with indignity. Organised religions and politicians must not deny the choice of voluntary euthanasia to people just because they oppose it for themselves, for to do so is unethical, oppressive, and an arrogant imposition of one religion on other people.

46. Australian governments have often stressed the importance in a democratic system of respect for individual conscience, with political rhetoric of the form ‘The Government regards the protection of individual rights as fundamental and inalienable’. However, this does not seem to extend to people who have different beliefs about how individuals should live and die.

47. Can there be freedom of religion and belief if people are discriminated against because of their beliefs? It is hypocritical that Christianity and Islam do not want to be discriminated against, but they discriminate based on race, sex, sexual orientation, and religion, and want the freedom to continue to do so. Freedom of religious belief can only be acceptable when it does not result in discrimination or the imposition of belief systems on others.

### **1.2 Have new issues emerged since this report was published in 1998 relating to expression of faith?**

48. Ethical issues such as voluntary euthanasia, abortion, embryonic stem cell research, and the role of women and homosexuals in the churches have come much more to the fore since 1998. Religious organisations are taking a more hard line stance against all of these issues. Unfortunately, Christians, Muslims and Jews seem to have the same level of respect for each other that they have had throughout history, and their antagonism towards one another continues. These religions, because of their early childhood indoctrination and peculiar rituals, are held with great conviction by their proponents. The Christian Muslim divide seems to widen when terrorism is discussed. Religion, responsible for many of history’s great wars, continues to be a divisive element, and this needs to be addressed.

### **1.3 Is there adequate protection against discrimination based on religion or belief, and protection of ability to discriminate in particular contexts?**

49. No. Religions practice religism; they discriminate against people of other religions and of no religion. Mainstream religions believe that those who do not obey their gods should be punished, so discriminatory behaviour is preached at the pulpit. Religions often receive public funding to provide services to Australians and discriminate when providing these services. Any organisation that discriminates should be ineligible for government funding. Australian governments cannot condone or endorse religious organisations that discriminate. Government funding for discriminating organisations is unacceptable.

50. Discrimination in particular contexts, with respect to religion and beliefs, must not be tolerated or permitted. Discrimination denies people rights, contrary to Article 1 of the UDHR. Nobody wants to be discriminated against, and unless some people are more equal than others, it is therefore unethical to discriminate against others. If religions were permitted to discriminate, then it would be equally permissible for other religions or people to discriminate against religions, or homosexuals, or Aboriginal people. This is abhorrent, and a step towards a divisive society.

### **1.4 How are federal and state and territory governments managing incitement to religious hatred, and the question of control and responsibility?**

51. Unfortunately most federal, state and territory governments are dominated by predominantly Christian politicians. They have been indoctrinated to believe that their Christian religion is right. They might recognise but not act quickly to recognise hatred against other religions, but hatred against Christianity seems to be quickly noticed.

52. Governments are not attacking the core problems. There is discrimination, there is an imposition of one religion on others, and intolerance is prevalent. Education, a better understanding of other people, and a commitment to equal rights for all, are required urgently. Australia should be a secular state and it cannot have divisive underlying religious tones.

**1.5 How well have the recommendations of Article 18: Freedom of Religion and Belief been implemented by the various state and federal governments?**

53. The freedom of religion and belief should include the freedom to not believe and to act on one's beliefs as long as they do not directly affect others. Sex before marriage, consensual homosexuality, abortion and voluntary euthanasia would thus be allowed.

54. Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and of the UDHR refer to the right to freedom of thought and religion. These rights would be more commendable if they also referred to the right to non-belief. The rights refer to the right for people to manifest their religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching. If any worship, observance, practice and teaching of one religion results in discrimination or the imposition of one's belief system on others, then this is unacceptable, because it places greater emphasis on the interests of one person over another. In this respect, the ICCPR and UDHR are flawed. If discrimination is acceptable in one instance, then how can it ever be ridiculed for what it is?

55. The ICCPR and UDHR effectively state that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, and that these rights derive from the inherent dignity of the human person. People who would choose to have voluntary euthanasia are concerned about their dignity and quality of life, rather than the extension of their life if this involves unnecessary pain, suffering and indignity. Christian religious teaching, manifested through the votes of Christian parliamentarians, effectively violates the ICCPR and UDHR because governments deny those who are terminally ill the right to choose their most dignified option in dying. Clearly, people who are 'born free and equal in dignity and rights' should have the right to choose voluntary euthanasia and determine how they live and die.

56. Christian, Islamic and other religious teaching that discriminates against women, homosexuals, non-believers, or people not of their religion, effectively violates Article 1 of the UDHR. Religions deny women and homosexuals equality and rights, there are no female role models in the leadership groups of many churches, and women and homosexuals are precluded from the right to lead a religion.

## **2. RELIGION AND THE STATE – THE CONSTITUTION, ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

Section 116 of the Commonwealth of Australian Constitution Act states that:

*The Commonwealth shall not make any law for establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the Commonwealth.*

### **The Constitution**

#### **2.1 Is this section of the Constitution an adequate protection of freedom of religion and belief?**

57. The Australian Constitution has problems. Section 116 seems to be a perfunctory effort to stipulate that there should be a separation of church and state in Australia and that Australia should be a secular society. These are noble objectives, but the Constitution does not achieve them.

58. Section 116 is a denial of legislative power to the Commonwealth, but it does not ensure separation of church and state and does not offer any protection for those who do not believe in supernatural/imaginary gods. If religions are exempt under the Income Tax Act, then this legislation favours religions over other groups, including over those who do not have a religion. This undermines the perception of a separation of church and state. The separation of church and state must be enshrined in the Constitution if there is to be freedom of belief.

59. Section 116 does not prohibit religious schools that receive public funding from discriminating against well-qualified science teachers who have no religion. The Constitution does not, but must, protect individuals against discrimination by private organisations, including organised religion.

60. Aside from s.116, there are religious problems in the Constitution that must be addressed. When any one religion is favoured, the freedom of religion or belief is compromised.

61. The Constitution's preamble requires a more secular approach because it effectively discriminates against non-Christians. Although the preamble has no legal force, it contains a reference to the Christian God. There is no *perception* that Australians will treat other belief systems and non-believers/atheists with the same rights as Christians, given that the Christian God has such prevalence in the Constitution, albeit in the preamble. It is subservient, irrelevant and demeaning that the preamble says we are humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God. It is undignified to humbly rely on anything if, as a nation, we are to forge our own identity and determine our destiny with pride. The words 'Almighty God' may have some meaning for Christians and religious people, but it is gobbledegook to those who are not. Some may argue that the reference to God should reflect the historical nature of Australia's early white Christian-based society, but this constitutes a denial of Aboriginal belief systems and of the multicultural and desirably secular nature of modern Australia. The Christian belief in God does not deserve a place in a legal, and political, document. While many people choose to follow the Christian religion, it is wrong and divisive to include such religious perspectives in a Constitution belonging to all Australians.

62. If Christians do not think that reference to Almighty God in the preamble is discriminatory, what would they think if a reference to Almighty Allah, Thor or Zeus were substituted, or even added to the preamble? Imagine the outcry. Their attitude would be that there should be freedom of religion, but only if it is Christianity. This attitude is unethical.

63. Simply stated, the Constitution is no more a place for a religious statement than the Bible is for noting our humble reliance on our Prime Minister. The Constitution should aim to be inclusive of all Australians, rather than divisive. A divisive Constitution undermines religious freedom.

## **2.2 How should the Australian Government protect freedom of religion and belief?**

64. There are many options for the Australian Government.

- A stronger Constitution must allow freedom from religion or the right to not have religious beliefs.
- The right to not have religious beliefs needs to be reflected in all jurisdictional frameworks.
- There should be a full and complete separation of church and state in Australia.
- There should be no religious references in the Constitution, the Parliament, or material relating to any public institution.
- Australia should be a secular state, a non-divisive state, where no religions and no one religion is favoured.
- Religions should not be favoured any more than other organisations of people with similar interests.
- The non-charitable elements of religions must pay tax, and must be accountable in a democratic way, as, for example, companies are to their shareholders.
- Religions must be accountable for any government funding they receive.
- It is dangerous to vest power in religious leaders who are not elected and not accountable.
- It should be unacceptable for individuals and private and public organisations to discriminate and impose religious views on others.
- Religions should not be exempt from discrimination laws. Do Australians really believe that Christian politicians at Church can believe the terrible things written in the Bible about women, homosexuals, and non-Christians (including non-believers), and then treat others as equals and be tolerant of others the next day? Unless groups such as religious organisations are forbidden to discriminate, discrimination will flourish in society.
- Australia needs politicians with greater moral fortitude to stand up to organised religion.

## **2.3 When considering the separation of religion and state, are there any issues that presently concern you?**

65. Religions are unfairly advantaged in Australian society. Why should people with like belief systems and interests have any more rights in government or public institutions than people who have the same sporting interests, such as members of a tennis club.

66. Australia's Head of State is the Queen of Australia, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. She is also Supreme Governor of the Church of England, a position that is very relevant to the church, although it is mostly symbolic. The problem that there is not a full separation of church and state begins here. Australia's Head of State should have nothing to do with religion. The perception is

all wrong. When Australia becomes a republic or before, there must also be a separation of church and state in Australia.

67. Section 116 of the Constitution does not require that there be a separation of church and state or that non-believers have the same rights as believers. This must be rectified. If it is not, religions will continue to be favoured, discrimination ensues, and Australians will suffer the consequences. A secular Australia means that there can be freedom of religion and belief because the government should never have authority over individual values. Liberty of individual conscience, the freedom of religion and belief, cannot occur if religions or any one religion is favoured by the state, as is the current situation in Australia.

68. The prayer at the beginning of each sitting day in Parliament is just as antiquated and discriminatory as the Constitutional preamble. Parliament is not a church, and should not be imposing religious values on parliamentarians. Australians would vehemently oppose the use of daily prayers in schools, universities and hospitals, yet there are daily prayers in Parliament.

69. The perception of a separation of church and state seems a spurious concept when daily prayers occur. It is unethical to impose Christian prayers on others when Christians would vehemently reject other religions' prayers. Can people imagine the outcry from well-known Christian parliamentarians if a prayer to Allah was substituted for the Christian prayer, even if it occurred on a pro rata basis according to religious numbers? Christian leaders (in religion and politics) would not want to be hypocritically doing unto others what they would not permit others to do unto them.

70. The National Schools Chaplaincy Program is an attempt by the government to indoctrinate children in religion. Chaplains are expected to provide general religious and personal advice, comfort and support to all students and staff, regardless of their religious denomination, and irrespective of their religious beliefs. This is not compulsory, but the government is spending public funds to promote religion by stealth in the school system. This is unacceptable. Through denial of religious choice and the presence of mainly pro-Christian chaplains, the government hoped to promote Christianity in schools. It is unlikely that the government would have funded the chaplaincy program if the only chaplains available were non-Christian.

71. Australian religions are exempt from Income Tax, Capital Gains Tax and possibly other taxes. Religions can invest their money tax-free and cross-subsidise any of their 'business' activities. Colloquially, Australians would call this a lurk, and they do not come any bigger. If estimates that churches' annual turnover of \$20 billion per year are in the right ballpark, Australia could be forgoing well over a billion dollars per year in taxation revenue. Governments and politicians must question why religions are permitted to bank billions from their tax breaks; billions that governments could be using for the benefit of all Australians.

72. The Roman Catholic Church is the wealthiest non-profit organisation in Australia and one of its largest organisations, with approximately 180 000 employees. Yet it runs schools, hospitals, aged-care facilities, employment services and many other businesses without paying tax that other Australians would pay. Non-religious Australians find it difficult to establish schools, hospitals etc when their religious competitors do not pay tax. Religions are effectively cheating ordinary Australians. If some of that taxation revenue forgone were instead spent on Australia's poor and needy, on education and health, on medical and scientific research, on energy efficiency, and on fire prevention, Australia would be much better for it.

73. Nobody really knows what religions do with their money (perhaps propping up the rich parent religions overseas), as they are not accountable. The tax-exempt situation for religions is clearly discriminatory and unacceptable. It is quite extraordinary that this religious discrimination has existed for so long. Religions must not be exempt from any taxation and they must be accountable. This is fundamental.

74. Both major parties support daily Christian prayers in Parliament. Religions are tax-exempt and lack transparency. This is religious discrimination at the highest level. There can never be freedom of religion or belief if the Constitution and daily prayers send a pro-Christian message and the taxation system has a religious bias.

#### **2.4 Do religious or faith-based groups have undue influence over government and/or does the government have undue influence over religious or faith based groups?**

75. Yes. Religious or faith-based groups have undue influence over government. Australian governments in all jurisdictions have been reticent to introduce social change. The rights of homosexuals to marry, the rights of terminally ill people who seek voluntary euthanasia, the rights of women seeking abortion, researchers wishing to use embryonic stem cells are some contemporary issues that have been opposed for religious reasons. Claims to the contrary are not credible, given the religious people who vote against these issues. These issues have majority support in the community and do not directly affect other people. However, the number of religious politicians seems disproportionate compared to numbers in the community.

76. The Australian Christian Lobby (ACL) states ‘that there are large numbers of Christian politicians at all levels of Government who value your prayers and support’. The ACL claims that it lobbies ‘to affect Christian principles in Government and legislation’. The ACL is at least honest in its unethical and brazen attempt to impose one religion on other people. Religious organisations, and groups such as the ACL, should be given no greater access to politicians than other lobby groups.

77. Politicians should forbid religions to discriminate against particular groups of people, including women. However, with few exceptions, politicians are reluctant or lack the moral fortitude to stand up to the organised religions.

78. Barack Obama, as a Senator, correctly recognised that governments must not legislate based on politicians’ religious beliefs. Governments require a universal principle, one amenable to reason, to legislate. He said ‘Democracy demands that the religiously motivated translate their concerns into universal, rather than religion-specific, values. It requires that their proposals be subject to argument, and amenable to reason. I may be opposed to abortion for religious reasons, but if I seek to pass a law banning the practice, I cannot simply point to the teachings of my church or evoke God’s will. I have to explain why abortion violates some principle that is accessible to people of all faiths, including those with no faith at all.’<sup>4</sup>

79. With few exceptions, Australian politicians do not have the same ability to separate their religious beliefs from their political responsibilities. They need to understand that their religion is not amenable to reason, and must not be forced on others. Politicians need to ask religious leaders to justify why their religions should be tax-exempt (creating a burden for other taxpayers) or be heard on social issues, when religions deny scientific evidence, discriminate

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.secularism.org.uk/newsline.html?df=20081031>, quoted from 31 Oct. 2008, accessed 19 Feb. 2009.

against others, have a history of violent conflict, and impose themselves on others, effectively denying other people freedom of choice in religion and belief.

80. Religions have opposed just about every law that would bring about a better human condition, whether it be equality for women, women's suffrage, contraception, the use of condoms to prevent transmission of sexual diseases, the abolition of slavery, decriminalising homosexuality, abortion or voluntary euthanasia. Religions have retarded knowledge advancement by denouncing every scientific advance that conflicts with them. The Christian politicians may argue that they are not influenced by religion, but they fool nobody. Just about everyone who opposes abortion is religious. The correlation is very high.

81. This underlying rationale for the Euthanasia Laws Act—the religious opposition to voluntary euthanasia by certain politicians—has again come to the fore through the Commonwealth Parliament's recently legislated ban on the electronic transmission of information about voluntary euthanasia, and the ban that has also been placed on the sale of *The Peaceful Pill Handbook* by Dr Philip Nitschke and Dr Fiona Stewart. Nonetheless, in the absence of supportive voluntary euthanasia legislation, Australians are downloading the information in this book, and attending meetings, to make informed end-of-life decisions.

82. Religions, via Christian politicians, have enacted legislation to ensure that people who believe that voluntary euthanasia is a viable option cannot have it, or even information about it. This is a gross imposition of conservative and Christian religious views on other Australians, and a reprehensible act. Good government policy should not be about banning information that predominately elderly Australians would use to make informed decisions about how they should live, and end, their own lives, because this forces other people's religious values on them.

83. Another argument relates to s.116 of the Australian Constitution. Section 116 states that the Commonwealth shall not make laws 'for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion'. The clergy and most other opponents of the Bill oppose euthanasia because of their reliance on Christian ethical values. Clearly, those who support euthanasia rely on different ethical values, such as might be compatible with a 'religion' based on the primacy of the quality of life, rather than, for example, a Christian 'existence for its own sake'. If a religion were established that permits voluntary euthanasia, then it would seem to the layperson that the free practice of this religion, a religion concerned with individual liberty that does not directly affect others, would be prevented by a law that would be inconsistent with s.116.

84. Some world religions support voluntary euthanasia (so long as there are precautions to prevent abuse). Australian members of these religions are not permitted to practice their beliefs because of a Christian belief that all killing is wrong. Christians, who do not want voluntary euthanasia, might want to die with pain, suffering and indignity, but they should never be able to deny that choice for other Australians. That would be arrogant.

## **2.5 Would a legislated national Charter of Rights add to these freedoms of religion and belief?**

85. If a Charter of Rights is developed, then the right to not believe must also be protected. There must be equivalence in rights between belief and non-belief, including in religion. The right for individuals, of sound mind and body, to determine and choose how they should live, and in cases of terminal illness, how and when they should die must be protected. Individual liberty must not be constrained. People must be permitted to have freedom of belief (that would

include religion), but not if this is imposed on or discriminates against other people. There must also be complete freedom to debate religion and all other issues.

### **Roles and responsibilities**

#### **2.6 a) What are the roles, rights and responsibilities of religious, spiritual and civil society (including secular) organisations in implementing the commitment to freedom of religion and belief?**

86. Religions must not be imposed on others by physical, emotional or legislative means. This means, for example, at schools that receive public funding, no religions and no one religion should be foisted on students. Students should preferably be taught philosophy (and science), or at least be given the option of studying and comparing religions. Teachers should be employed without regard to their religious values or beliefs.

87. Religious leaders should be able to freely debate issues. Their argument that ‘my ethical views are right because it is my God’s fiat’ is neither objective nor compelling to people not of their religion. An objective observer would conclude that their values are those of people who wrote an ancient and primitive religious text, not representative of their church membership, and are discriminatory.

88. It seems that perhaps about 8% of Australians regularly attend church on any given weekend; many others might call themselves religious but might do so for cultural or family reasons. Many religious leaders’ views on issues like abortion, voluntary euthanasia and sex before marriage are at odds with what the majority of religious people believe. Do the majority of teenagers from religious schools really decide to wait for marriage before their first sexual experience, and forgo all contraception when they do have sex? Young people seem to give their religion short shrift on matters of sex, contraception, euthanasia, and the rights of women, amongst other issues. Religions should not make people feel guilty or punish them for thinking and acting for themselves.

#### **b) How should this be managed?**

89. The indoctrination of children should not be permitted in schools or education systems. Females in particular should not be permitted to be indoctrinated in Christianity or Islam, as they continue to be subjugated by these religions. Politicians must protect Australian females. Schools that teach that one religion is best, when clearly this is a matter of personal opinion, are creating a divisive society, and this should not be permitted.

90. Some people see children as only an extension of their parents, and justify childhood religious indoctrination as ‘right’ if that is what the child’s parents want. If Australians instead viewed children as also prospective independent, free-thinking adults, then denying religious choice to people in their younger formative years is disgraceful.

91. Surely, if religions were so confident in their own merits, there should be no need to indoctrinate children, as adults from near and far should flock to them to ‘see the light’. Religions and parents cannot justify denying children freedom of choice in religion and belief. Governments must act to ensure there is freedom of choice in religion and belief in all schools.

92. Philosophy would be useful in this regard, as would studies of comparative religion. What happens at a home is up to parents. Perhaps, if parents have the capacity to appreciate that

freedom of choice in religion and belief is a positive in the development of their children, childhood indoctrination of false and biased stories in the home will disappear.

## **2.7 How can these organisations model a cooperative approach in responding to issues of freedom of religion and belief?**

93. Religious leaders and people need to be educated to learn about religious freedom and the ethical merit of freedom of choice in developing belief systems. However, if education teaches that women are the equal of men and consequently should be able to hold leadership positions in their church, this is contrary to religious leaders' firmly entrenched belief systems, so it is unlikely that they will not accept it. As the Australian Human Rights Commission has established this Inquiry, it could perhaps take a lead in making people more aware of views that, for example, have been propounded in this submission.

## **2.8 How well established and comprehensive is the commitment to interfaith understanding and inclusion in Australia at present and where should it go from here?**

94. The Qur'an teaches that members of other religions should be fought 'until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah altogether and everywhere'. The Bible similarly teaches that those not of the Christian religion should be put to death, or at least destroyed. Most churches preach to their members that people not of their religion are sinners, who will have everlasting punishment in hell—not really a basis on which churches can have sensible interfaith dialogue. Many religious people deny the literal interpretations of their religious texts, but fundamentalists do not. Perplexingly, it seems impossible to obtain perfectly clear interpretations of the alleged perfect religious texts.

95. It would seem that Christians and Muslims, but also Jews, have the same level of respect and interfaith understanding for each other that they have had throughout history. While the religions are ostensibly making efforts to be conciliatory, it is probable that under the surface, their antagonism towards one another continues. It is to be hoped that the religions can work cooperatively with each other to make the world a better place.

96. It would be wonderfully uplifting if the leaders of the different major religions could join hand in hand and call for a better world. They could announce the cessation of all discrimination and religious hostilities, freedom and equal rights for all, that religions would now pay tax like other organisations, that divisive religious practices would be eliminated, that no religion's gods or beliefs are better than any other gods or beliefs, and renouncing all references in their religious texts that undermine equality and advocate punishment for people who are not of their religions. That would be a start. Otherwise, religions indulge in a childish, fruitless and divisive game of 'join up, our religion is better than your religion'. Australian politicians can unite on certain issues, and a proclamation to this effect by religious leaders would surely be beneficial.

## **2.9 How should we understand the changing role and face of religion, nationally and internationally?**

97. Religion is but one facet of society. The world is facing many pressing issues, relating to climate change, environmental protection, education, poverty and disease (especially in the third world), the nature of technological change, as well as financial, economic, population and political pressures. A lack of certainty and the rapidity of social change may drive people away from or to religion; the latter is a concern when religious terrorism is a major concern for many countries. Census data would suggest that religious numbers are decreasing as a proportion of the

population. As we understand our world more, and the injustice in it, people realise that there are no imaginary gods and no miracle solutions. People must work together to solve the world's problems, but intolerance and discrimination, arising from a denial of individual rights, all but undermine the final outcome.

### **3. RELIGION AND THE STATE – PRACTICE AND EXPRESSION**

#### **3.1 What are some consequences of the emergence of faith-based services as major government service delivery agencies?**

98. Faith-based agencies should not deliver government services. Faith-based agencies follow religious texts that discriminate against others, including women, homosexuals, non-believers and people not of their religion. They impose their religious views on others, overtly or stealthily. Religious schools discriminate against teachers who do not have the same religious values. No organisations that discriminate should be eligible for government funding.

99. Religion is a divisive issue, and that alone should prevent faith-based agencies providing government services. Religions can gain greater exposure by providing government services. However, religious groups should not provide government services because people should not be subjected to the customs of other religions, whether it be chats about God or Allah or religious symbols on hospital walls. Discrimination is wrong and should not be permitted.

100. Australians requiring medical treatment can be referred by their specialist for treatment in private hospitals, many of which are run by religious organisations. Non-Catholics should not need to attend a hospital that aims to ‘strengthen and develop Catholic health at regional and national levels’. Whatever this means (and what about the health of non-Catholics), it is discriminatory for something as fundamental as health care for Australians.

101. It seems that faith-based agencies do not pay tax and have an unfair advantage in a business environment. If this is the case, organisations that are intrinsically more efficient will be unable to compete. If religions were to pay tax, not discriminate and not force their views on others (this is unlikely, as many religions see the imposition of their beliefs on others as their reason for being), then Australia would go some way to ensuring all Australian groups are treated equally.

#### **3.2 How should government accommodate the needs of faith groups in addressing issues such as religion and education, faith schools, the building of places of worship, religious holy days, religious symbols and religious dress practices?**

102. A secular state is a non-divisive state unconcerned with religion; it favours no religions and no one religion. In a secular state, religious activity is not special and should not be treated differently to other activities. Australia should be secular. A secular Australia would be inclusive of all Australians, rather than divisive.

103. In the workplace, people are not encouraged to wear religious dress or symbols any more than people are encouraged to wear their tennis uniform, which is not at all. Religious dress should be for church and tennis uniforms for the tennis club. But if in the workplace some people were to wear religious dress, then other people could wear religious symbols, other people could put religious symbols or naked pictures above their desk at work, other people could sing religious songs at lunch time, other people could prefix every sentence with ‘because God loves you’, and a divisive contest of religious one-upmanship results. Throughout history, such contests have invariably resulted in violent conflict. Contests of religious one-upmanship should be stopped before they start. All are unacceptable.

104. Religion is divisive and different people have different views. We do not advertise our sporting preferences, political allegiances or sexual preferences when we are in the workplace, because this is inappropriate. In the workplace, and in our public institutions, we are there to work, and not to harass others with our personal views, whether they be that South Sydney or Brisbane Lions rule, that homosexuality is for everyone, or that Christianity or Islam is superior. People can do what they like in their own personal leisure time, outside of work, outside of school, outside of government-funded institutions, outside of Parliament, but to do so in work hours is imposing one's personal views on others, and this can be offensive. It also provides a means of discrimination. Ironically, religious people, who often have such firmly entrenched views, might actually be most offended by other people's religious symbols and dress.

105. Should Australians support people wearing uniforms or symbols from the past that cause great offence? Is other religious attire, for example crosses or burkas, any less offensive? The principle should be the same for all offensive attire, and unless we prohibit religious symbols and dress, a divisive society is the likely result.

106. There should be no support for religious places of worship, or for religious holy days, religious symbols or dress practices any more than there is for tennis clubs to build a tennis clubhouse or for their members to have a holiday on the day of the Australian Open final. To do so is to favour religious groups over others, and doing so discriminates against those that are not religious. Discrimination is wrong.

107. How would Australian Christians react if a week of holidays were announced in honour of other non-Christian religions? If Christians felt disappointed or angry because another religion was being imposed on them, then that is probably what people of other religions think about the Easter and Christmas holidays. In this respect, Christians should not attach more weight to their own interests than the interests of others. Changing the name of Christmas Day to something like 'Family and Friends Day (FAF Day)', 'Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Day', 'Environment Day', 'Intellectual Freedom Day', or 'Make the World a Better Place Day' could be better alternatives.

### **3.3 Is current legislation on burial practice and autopsy practice adequate? Are any other of your religious practices inhibited by law, procedural practice or policy (i.e. education or health)?**

108. About 70-80% of Australians believe that voluntary euthanasia should be a valid option for those who want it. Voluntary euthanasia, as a belief that does not directly affect others, is currently forbidden by law.

109. Organ donation is an important issue because many Australians cannot obtain donor organs. An organ donation system on death that by default requires participation by everybody, and which requires people to opt-out if they do not want to participate for religious or other personal reasons, would allow more Australians to lead healthier and more productive lives.

110. With respect to burial practice and autopsy practice, religious organisations should not be afforded rights other than those given to other Australians.

#### **4. SECURITY ISSUES IN THE AFTERMATH OF SEPTEMBER 11**

**4.1 a) Have the changes in federal and state laws affected any religious groups, and if so how?**

**b) How should this be addressed?**

111. As this matter is for religious groups to address, I have no particular comments on this issue.

#### **4.2 How should the Government balance physical security and civil liberties?**

112. Civil liberties and the rights of individuals must always be respected. Physical security should be managed within this framework. Perhaps a properly drafted Charter of Rights could help, but it would need to include the elements noted above, namely that people must be permitted to have the freedom of belief and of non-belief, and not be allowed to discriminate or impose their religious values on others.

#### **4.3 Consider and comment on the relationship between law and religious or faith based communities, and issues such as legal literacy, civil liberties, dissemination of law to new immigrant communities, and the role and conduct of judiciary, courts and police.**

113. I have no particular comments on this matter.

#### **4.4 a) Is there religious radicalism and political extremism in Australia?**

114. Yes.

**b) If so, what are the risks to Australia?**

115. Some Australians:

- believe that the earth was created in six days
- believe in intelligent design
- believe that those who do not agree with their religious beliefs are evil and should be destroyed
- condemn abortion, voluntary euthanasia, and homosexuality as evil
- discriminate against women
- force women to cover their bodies in dress
- advocate female and male circumcision (if done without individual consent and for non-medical reasons)
- oppose research with embryonic stem cells that may lead to a better human condition
- oppose contraception and the use of condoms.

116. These beliefs are irrational, evil and unworthy of humane, objective people. Our education system has failed those who can so readily be deceived or who are unable to recognise discrimination that causes hardship and misery in our society.

117. Religious freedom cannot occur if religious beliefs are imposed on others, through physical, emotional or legislative means. In addition, true religious freedom cannot occur unless

there is freedom of choice in religious beliefs, and this implies that the childhood indoctrination of one religion, sanctioned by state-funded religious schools, must not occur.

118. Religious radicalism between competing religions leads, as it has led over thousands of years, to religion-fuelled conflict. A secular Australia, where no religions and no one religion is favoured, where discrimination is prohibited, and where education and tolerance of others with different belief systems is fostered, is a first step in establishing a more unified and less divisive Australia.

#### **4.5 Can you provide any examples of social exclusion in regard to religion? How and why do issues of social exclusion develop?**

119. Religions are divisive by their nature. They teach that their church is the only valid church, not just that each of them is better than the other religions. In 2007, the Pope effectively told Christians that if a church isn't Roman Catholic then it's not a proper church<sup>5</sup>. The response was that unity would only be possible if the papacy renounces its errors and pretension. This is typical of the views of all religions: only their religion is the 'real deal'. Such intolerance cannot lead to harmony.

120. The Christian churches preach that people who do not subscribe to Christian beliefs are sinners and can go to hell (punishment for all eternity is ridiculous for any crime), regardless of how good a person they might be. This is not a reason why people of one religion would want to associate with someone from another religion. It is difficult to believe that homosexuals and women, particularly Muslim women, but also Christian women, can continue to be members of churches that discriminate against them.

121. Australian women have not, and would not, stand for such discrimination against them in the workforce. Australian women and homosexuals should not tolerate any discrimination against them in a church. That they do so shows the extent to which childhood indoctrination has a hold over and controls how people think and behave.

122. Non-religious people, or atheists, are generally unable to win jobs in religious schools (unless they conform to religious norms), homosexuals are discriminated against, atheists are unable to place banners opposing existence of gods on buses, and terminally ill people are denied the option of voluntary euthanasia. All are examples of unacceptable exclusion.

123. Religious groups impose themselves on others by trying to 'spread the word', but do not offer balanced appraisals of their religion. Religious leaders are biased towards their religion, and the more proponents they have, the more power, money and credibility flows their way. Religious leaders promote views contrary to evidence in teaching belief in imaginary beings. Why do they do this? They have been indoctrinated and they are deluded. Religion has a geographic and cultural basis because only people within certain cultures could possibly believe in the religious views taught by their elders. Christians and Muslims would think it silly to believe in Thor and Zeus, yet to objective outsiders, their beliefs are just as silly. When religious people understand why they do not believe in other religions, they will understand why other people do not believe in their religion.

124. Religious people have not learnt, or do not have the necessary analytical skills, to consider how their religion may appear to someone outside their religion. A more effective education

---

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article2056515.ece>, accessed 22 Feb. 2009.

system would not produce as many people who would believe in imaginary beings and adopt ethical systems that advocate punishment for all eternity. People must be given choice in their education, encouraged to question and critically evaluate what they learn, rather than accepting what they are told on face value. Religious people are individuals, and should be encouraged to form their own views on issues, rather than meekly accepting the values of their religious leaders.

## 5. THE INTERFACE OF RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL AND CULTURAL ASPIRATIONS

### 5.1 a) How would you describe the interface between religion and politics and cultural aspirations in contemporary Australia?

125. Religion has an influence on Australian culture, policies and society that is greatly disproportionate to the number of its adherents, and to its value as an ethical system, given that one of its crimes is advocacy of discrimination.

### b) What issues does this include?

126. About 70-80% of Australians support voluntary euthanasia. People in the final stages of a terminal illness should have the right to choose assistance in dying, if that is their informed will. It is an individual's life, and only each individual knows what is right for themselves. To deny this is to impose one's will on other individuals, and this is what religions do. Religions have denied, through legislation supported by Christian politicians, information relating to voluntary euthanasia to be transmitted *electronically*. Religions are trying to stifle organisations whose members have different beliefs to the organised religions. The Australian Government is attempting to block the use of websites, such as that for Dr Philip Nitschke's organisation, Exit International. The Australian Government has banned Dr Nitschke's and Dr Fiona Stewart's book, *The Peaceful Pill Handbook*. Yet Australians are accessing this book online because it provides advice on matters that are important to Australians.

127. Many Australians want information on end of life options, but the religious zealots in the Australian Government have effectively sabotaged the rights of elderly individuals to access this information through the imposition of their personal religious views on ordinary Australians.

128. Religion adversely affects attitudes towards women and homosexuals, whether embryonic stem cells can be used in research (they are not persons, they are but cells without a brain), the rights of ordinary Australians to compete against religious organisations in the provision of government services and to not be discriminated against in their ordinary lives.

129. In 2008, governments supported the Pope's visit to Australia for World Youth Day. Subsequently, Australia appointed a diplomat to head a post in the Vatican. Although the Pope has only recently and obliquely apologised for all the wrongs done by his church over thousands of years to other peoples, he still does not support the use of condoms in third world countries, contraception or abortion, he heads an organisation that discriminates against women, homosexuals, non-believers and other races, preaches beliefs in imaginary gods as a truth, and that people who commit some sins will be punished for eternity. That is not a very forgiving attitude.

130. The Pope presides over a church that was indifferent to the plight of Jews during the Holocaust and which has a terrible history of war, violence and sexual predation from its leaders. Yet the Australian Government refuses to make plain that these policy stances are unacceptable, and that the Pope's discriminatory views about non-Catholic, female or homosexual Australians are unacceptable. People should not be allowed to preach discrimination under the guise of religion.

## **5.2 How should government manage tensions that develop between aspirations?**

131. Governments can manage tensions through constitutional change, political reform and strong rational, non-partisan political leadership. A regulatory regime is required to eliminate the tax-exempt status for the non-charitable elements of religious organisations and prohibit discrimination at all levels of all organisations. Education is required, and while governments can initiate this, religious organisations will need to realise that they cannot accept their religious texts as truths, and that discrimination is wrong.

## **5.3 How do you perceive gender in faith communities?**

132. The female gender is greatly disadvantaged and discriminated against in Christianity and Islam. Mainstream religions oppress females. This is unacceptable. Religious people would not like others to discriminate against them, so it is hypocritical for them to do to others what they would not like done to them. They should not judge, lest they be judged.

## **5.4 Do you believe there is equality of gender in faith communities?**

133. No. Women are third-order citizens in Islam, and second-order citizens in Christianity, and both situations are unacceptable. It will take some time for women to reach equality in living standards and equality of pay and rights, but only if explicit and implicit religious discrimination ceases. How can women have parity in everyday life, when religious people consider women unworthy of religious leadership? Every church or religious service reinforces the fact that women are unworthy of religious leadership. This discriminatory baggage is then carried into general society. It is not surprising that women do not reach positions of status at the same rate as men.

134. Politicians must have the moral fortitude to ensure that Australian females are not subjugated by discriminatory religions such as Christianity and Islam. Have politicians ever wondered why they can tolerate a situation that so discriminates against Australians? An irate politician should act on the exclamation of 'how dare these religions treat Australian women, homosexuals and non-believers with such contempt'. That is over half of the Australian population. Discrimination is wrong.

## **5.5 What do you think should be the relationship between the right to gender equality and the right to religious freedom in Australia?**

135. Gender equality must take precedence over religious freedom. The former is ethical and does not cause discrimination; the latter is unethical if it results in discrimination. Australia cannot afford to have people hiding behind a religious cloak of intolerance and irrationality to justify discrimination against women, or any other groups of people. If religious freedom took precedence, then any religion that discriminates against people based on race, colour, sexuality, creed, religion, disability, political, sporting or other affiliation would be acceptable. Discrimination could be rife. A new religion that discriminated against Aboriginal, black or disabled people in the same way Christianity and Islam discriminate against women would be abhorrent and unacceptable. People should have the freedom to choose their own religion, but they do not have the right to discriminate, impose it on others or act on it so that it adversely affects others.

136. If religious freedom were paramount, then extreme religious groups could establish themselves in Australia, as their discrimination would be no less severe in principle than

Christian and Muslim discrimination against women and homosexuals, though the extent of the discriminations has varied through the ages and with different belief systems. Discrimination is discrimination, and unacceptable to those who contend that all humans should have equal rights.

137. Religious organisations' discrimination and history of killing through crusades, inquisitions and religious wars has not deterred as many people as it should from the clutches of the mainstream religions. The power of childhood indoctrination is strong—this is why religions do it—and unless freedom of choice is provided in childhood, the wrongs, discrimination and divisiveness of religion will continue in society. Discrimination and fear of other religions leads to anger, anger leads to hate, hate leads to violent conflict, and unfortunately this sequence has repeated itself for thousands of years.

138. Article 1 of the UDHR states that 'all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.' Religions must cease discrimination and treat all people equally to be consistent with this Article.

### **5.6 Citizenship and Australian values have emerged as central issues, how do you balance integration and cultural preservation?**

139. The rights of the individual must have precedence, as I have argued previously. A stable and humane culture will follow from tolerance of others, and without the discrimination and the subjective commentary on others inherent in mainstream religions. Many politicians talk of the rights of the individual, but its use is often rhetorical, as politicians do little to enforce the principle. Many politicians probably fail to see the conflict, but it is clear: religious people would not like to be discriminated against solely because they are religious and so religious people should not discriminate against others.

### **5.7 What are reasonable expectations to have of citizens' civic responsibility, rights, participation and knowledge?**

140. People should understand that their own views about how they behave and what they believe are personal and should not be imposed on others in society. They should be aware of their rights, and that discrimination against others, and intolerance of others, is unacceptable.

### **5.8 Is there a role for religious voices, alongside others in the policy debates of the nation?**

141. Religions discriminate against women, homosexuals and non-believers, amongst others. Discrimination and vilification should not be permitted. Religious and non-religious people must always be able to debate religious and other issues freely and respectfully. However, religious leaders' arguments that:

- creationism is right (contrary to scientific evidence)
- imaginary gods exist, souls exist, miracles occur or prayers work (contrary to scientific evidence)
- men are superior to women (contrary to evidence)
- homosexuals do not have the right to head their religion (denying them basic rights)
- voluntary euthanasia is wrong because it is against God's law (while their religious texts tell that their God kills people, including children)

- all people should be treated equally (when their religious texts tell that those not of their religion should be punished for all eternity)
- their religion is 'right' (while their religious texts speak of murder, slavery, sacrifice, atrocious crimes against non-believers, and other disgusting acts)
- freedom of religion is right (while their religious texts advocate discrimination against people of other religions)
- their religious values are 'right' (while conveniently overlooking the fact that most of their members subjectively follow their religion because of their childhood indoctrination, and if they were to have been raised by people of another religion and culture, they would have followed that other religion)

are ridiculous and lack credibility.

142. It is unlikely that a religion, a system of faith and worship, often involving an imaginary god, should have credible things to say on, for example, economic and scientific issues such as climate change.

143. The Bible revels in telling of God's wrath in killing. Most Australians have heard the stories. The Christian religion has killed in crusades, inquisitions and religious wars. Despite all their killing, some Christian religions then attempt to oppose abortion and voluntary euthanasia because cells or people die. Hypocrisy does not sit well with rational beings.

144. Objective people can rightly ask on what basis can religions:

- call for equal rights, when they discriminate against women, homosexuals and non-believers
- oppose the use of condoms, which would prevent transmission of sexual disease, particularly in third-world countries
- seek scientific evidence supporting their convictions, when they conveniently ignore substantial scientific evidence undermining their religion
- call for the right of freedom of religion, when they deny others the rights to their own lives, and try to impose their own religious values on others.

These religious positions are possibly why more people are moving away from religion. However, the bonds formed through childhood indoctrination are strong, and some concerted effort will be required to break them and free minds to think without bias.

145. If there were a religion that does not discriminate, does not impose its views on others, does not have a history of violence and confrontation, does not have subjective belief systems (involving imaginary gods), is not scientifically flawed, treats all with respect and equality, advocates a better life for all, and perhaps provides guidance (without demanding unquestioning uncritical obedience) as to how people should and society should be structured so that the world can be a better place, then its ambit would go beyond the narrow and divisive themes of most current religions. People might welcome its objective and well considered views in debate.

## **6. TECHNOLOGY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS**

### **6.1 How have the new technologies affected the practice and dissemination of religious and faith communities?**

146. Religions can use electronic technologies to propagate their beliefs. It seems that religious organisations still obtain favoured treatment on early morning TV, more so than other groups in society. However, those who believe voluntary euthanasia is a good option are forbidden to use electronic means to distribute information.

147. Religions can propagate their views more widely using global technologies such as the internet. Others can propagate alternative views, but mainstream religions are well funded and run by zealots. There is a danger that the indoctrination of children, discrimination and the imposition of religious values on others could worsen before it improves.

### **6.2 Has new technology had an impact on your religion and/or your religious practice?**

148. As a person who does not believe in imaginary beings, I have no comment on this matter

### **6.3 What issues are posed by new religion and spiritualities using new technologies?**

149. There are websites that propagate untruths about science and religion, seek money for ‘truths’ about imaginary beings, advocate discrimination or that gods can kill or do inappropriate things. Freedom of speech is important, but well-funded religions can propagate untruths and discriminatory values faster than less well-funded organisations.

### **6.4 Is your freedom to express your religion or beliefs hindered or helped by current media policies and practices, considering reporting, professional knowledge, ownership, and right of reply?**

150. Many media organisations have religion reporters, meaning Christian religion reporters, but do not employ reporters who can provide an alternative view free of religious dogma. Reporters do not challenge a religious leader on why they deny women the right to lead their church. Why do religious leaders discriminate? Commercial media organisations need to make a profit. Politicians need votes. The 8% of people who are regular churchgoers vote as one on critical issues, and the media and politicians have determined that they do not want to alienate those Australians who overtly or covertly have a policy of discrimination against women, homosexuals, non-believers and others.

### **6.5 What impact do the media have on the free practice of religion in Australia and the balanced portrayal of religious beliefs and practice?**

151. Unfortunately, but expectedly, the media has a large impact, because reporters often do not ask the hard questions. Can you imagine the outcry if a leading TV reporter on a commercial television station were to question the Pope, or even a Cardinal, on how he (it must be ‘he’) can:

- justify a ban on the use of condoms in third world countries
- oppose a reasonable abortion at the expense of the right of the woman to determine what is right for her own life
- ask terminally ill people to repeatedly vomit their own faeces when in the final stages of colon cancer rather than permitting the option of voluntary euthanasia

- deny the use of cells for research
- justify the existence of a god or soul when there is no scientific evidence
- advocate that others, not of his religion, should have everlasting punishment in hell
- discriminate against women, homosexuals, and other races
- justify imposing his religious views on others through political force
- worship God, who according to the Bible, kills children
- justify why his and other religions should receive favourable tax status over other Australian organisations.

152. Some reporters might consider such questions as impolitic, but the questions need answers. People and the media need to consider issues in greater depth, and ask the hard questions, if our society is to become more tolerant and less divisive. Australians donate lots of money to religions, and Australians need to know where it goes.

#### **6.6 Are there religious or moral implications in the development of new technologies such as the internet and or mobile phones, especially in regard to religious vilification and hatred?**

153. Religious vilification, hatred, discrimination, and the imposition of religious views on others should not be tolerated any more that in other areas of society. New technologies could mean that religious hatred etc might be propagated more quickly.

## **7. RELIGION, CULTURAL EXPRESSION AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

### **7.1 Is there satisfactory freedom of cultural expression and practice within the normative social and legal framework?**

154. I have no particular comments on this matter.

### **7.2 Do service providers in your state or territory support the right to cultural security, safety and competence?**

155. I have no particular comments on this matter.

### **7.3 How can the cultural aspirations and human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders be met?**

156. The cultural aspirations and human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders should be met in the same way as for other Australians. All should have equal rights. Nobody should be permitted to discriminate or to impose their cultural views on other Australians (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders included) if that is not the desire of those individuals.

### **7.4 What are the issues impacting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities at present, and proposed solutions?**

157. It is desirable that problems affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are quickly addressed so that the quality of life in these communities rises to be at least equivalent to that of other Australians. For Australians, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, this means leaving behind primitive beliefs, including in ethical systems that discriminate, that are divisive (if you do not belong to this belief system you will be punished) or intolerant of others, and that are imposed on others. Australians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities can acknowledge that their old belief systems were at one stage the basis for their cultures, but adopting ethical values that promote equality and respect for all and value the lives of all Australians is important. Change must occur if we are to move on from the past.

158. The issues that have plagued Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and the issues that affect other Australians, could be addressed in some part by education and by adopting more responsible, tolerant and ethical values, that will make all Australians, and humans, live better lives.

### **7.5 Are there any issues in regard to participation in the faith community for people with disabilities?**

159. In some religions, disabled and ill people are given hope of cures for their disability or illness. This is misleading and fraudulent, and takes advantage of disabled and ill people. There is no scientific evidence that religion can provide cures for disabled people. Gods cannot miraculously and spontaneously regrow limbs on amputees, and despite how many people turn purple busting their guts in prayer, it will not happen. Prayer does not work. Childhood indoctrination has however managed to mask this delusion for some religious people.

160. Discrimination against disabled people is as wrong as against people based on their sex, sexual preference, race, colour or other irrelevant characteristics. It should not be tolerated.

## **7.6 How is diverse sexuality perceived within faith communities?**

161. Diverse sexuality is discriminated against by many religions. Most religions seem to endorse married heterosexuality, but little else. Homosexuality is, according to the Bible, worthy of the punishment of death. It is disgusting that these views are propagated in the Christian religion, and that children can read of these views in the Bible. There is a view that Islam's views on diverse sexuality are more severe.

## **7.7 How can faith communities be inclusive of people of diverse sexualities?**

162. Religious communities must appreciate that their religious texts do not reflect the words of a god, but were written by primitive and ancient peoples trying to make sense of the world. The ethical systems in these texts are just as primitive, and religious people must acknowledge that people of diverse sexuality should have the same rights as other people. Only when religious leaders stop propagating ancient rituals and customs can faith communities become more tolerant of groups condemned in their religious texts.

## **7.8 Should religious organisations (including religious schools, hospitals and other service delivery agencies) exclude people from employment because of their sexuality or their sex and gender identity?**

163. No. Religious organisations discriminate against people based on sex, sexuality, gender identity, race, religion or lack thereof, and other irrelevant characteristics, and this is unacceptable. We would think it abhorrent that a new religion could be established that discriminated against Aboriginal persons or black people, but this is no less vulgar than how Christianity and Islam discriminate against people based on their sexuality or sex and gender identity. Discrimination is wrong.

## **7.9 Do you consider environmental concern to be an influence shaping spiritualities and value systems?**

164. No. It is again interesting, but expected, that some religious leaders have recently denied scientific evidence linking climate change to human activity. In doing so, religious leaders hinder the betterment of the world, based on their primitive, subjective and entrenched viewpoints. It is also interesting that the concepts of population growth and a sustainable planet are naturally conflicting, but the Catholic Church seemingly wants unfettered population growth. This would seem irresponsible at best.

## **7.10 a) Are there religious groups, practices and beliefs that you think are of concern to Australians?**

165. There are many issues of concern, including

- that all religions believe that their religion and its ethical values alone, are 'right', and that they must be imposed on all other people
- religions discriminate, are intolerant of others, and do not treat all people equally
- the distrust that religions have for each other that often results in violent conflict
- religious opposition to matters that would advance the human condition, voluntary euthanasia, abortion, embryonic stem cell research, and the use of contraceptives
- the teaching of religious texts as having some factual basis when in many respects they are contrary to scientific understanding

- the religious contentions that the world was created, imaginary gods exist, souls exist, miracles occur, and prayers work, contrary to scientific evidence
- the use of parliamentary prayers
- the religious bias towards Christianity in the preamble of the Australian Constitution and that s.116 does not provide for a separation of church and state or protect non-believers
- the tax-exempt status given to religions
- the use of discriminatory and tax-exempt religious organisations to provide government and business services for Australians
- the gender, sexual and racial discrimination that is rife in religion
- the disgusting religious attitude towards non-believers
- the use of divisive and offensive religious symbols and dress
- the use of violence, terrorism and war to defend religious beliefs
- politicians and the media consulting with religious organisation on issues unrelated to religious teaching and despite these organisations having a history of discrimination and violence.

**b) Should these be subjected to legislative control, and should they be eligible for government grants and assistance?**

166. Legislative and regulatory controls should be used to ensure that only organisations that do not discriminate, do not violate an individual's rights by seeking to impose religious values on them, and that can otherwise compete fairly with other Australian businesses (that is they should not be tax-exempt) should be eligible for government grants and assistance. Religions do not meet these criteria, and therefore should be ineligible for government grants and assistance. Religions should not be favoured any more than other organisations, and certainly, religious organisations should not be exempt from legislation that applies to other Australians.

## **8. ADDITIONAL AREAS OF CONCERN OR INTEREST**

### **8.1 What additional issues do you think are relevant to and affect freedom of religion and belief in Australia?**

167. Relevant issues have been addressed in response to previous questions.

### **8.2 Do you have additional thoughts or comments?**

168. The key points of this submission can be summarised as follows.

169. Religions are belief systems usually based around stories in primitive and ancient religious texts. Religions have a terrible history and reputation of discrimination, violence, and oppression; in addition, they are scientifically flawed and reflect the ethical standards of primitive peoples. Nevertheless, they continue to survive mainly through childhood indoctrination.

170. Australians should have freedom of religion and belief, and they can believe what they will, but under no circumstances should they be permitted to discriminate other people, including women, homosexuals or non-believers, or impose their values on others, as these deny fundamental rights protected under the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Discrimination is abhorrent, and if it remains a feature in religions, it will continue to have a divisive effect in Australian culture.

171. Australians should be encouraged to think critically about issues, and question their beliefs, so they can freely determine how they should live their lives. Not only should religions not be imposed on Australians by physical, emotional or legislative means, Australians must have choice in determining their beliefs, and under no circumstances should religions or any one religion be tax-exempt or otherwise favoured. Australia must be a secular state with a separation of church and state if there is to be true freedom of religion or belief.

172. The arguments in this submission stand on their own if they are considered with an open mind, objectively and devoid of cultural or religious bias. The consequence of this is that the Inquiry should recommend that substantial changes be made to how religious organisations function so that religions are not favoured in Australian society, and that all Australians are afforded the same rights. If these changes occur, there is great promise that Australia can grow to be a more prosperous, egalitarian, tolerant and inclusive society worthy of the title of ‘civilised’, and lead the world in the acknowledgement and protection of human rights.