

Submission to Religious Educational Institutions and Anti-Discrimination Laws

The period allowed for this review is very short and has only recently come to my attention. Therefore this is a very hurried response touching primarily on the basis for religious (Christian) views and the need for them to be upheld by teaching institutions.

It seems to me that the general public, and the members of the Law Reform Commission, have no real understanding of what true religious commitment means. And it is irrelevant whether, as I recently read, 74 per cent of Australians oppose the right of religious schools to discriminate against students and staff on the basis of their sexuality, gender identity or relationship status.

As a Christian, I am to love my neighbour as myself, but that does not mean I let them do what they like if doing so will harm them or their soul. But more importantly, I am to love God with all my heart and soul, mind and strength. Jesus said, “He who has my commands, and keeps them, he it is who loves me”. So I have no real choice about what I can or cannot do in the majority of areas of life, particularly sexuality.

In regard to sexuality, the Biblical teaching is quite clear. Sex outside marriage is proscribed. Marriage is for life between a man and a woman. While some who call themselves “Christian” would argue both these points, committed Christians (people of real faith) will almost always support them.

Homosexuality has always been proscribed by Christianity (and Islam). It is only recently that our society has decided it is acceptable. Similarly, gender fluidity has only recently been seen as an acceptable lifestyle choice, but again, it does not fit with the Bible’s prescriptions for sex and marriage.

Therefore Christian institutions must be able to support this basic position, not only by what they teach, but also by the lifestyles of their teachers. All of you would be aware of how children emulate respected teachers – and if that teacher is living outside the Biblical bounds, students will be inclined to think that such behaviour is acceptable for them too. This is probably why Jesus said in relation to the religious teachers of his day “do whatever they tell you, and observe it. But don’t do what they do, because they don’t practice what they preach”.

Further, there are people out there whose only desire is to attack these fundamental teachings of Christianity, and who will actually infiltrate Christian institutions with a view to so doing. This seems not to be the case with Muslim, Hindu or other religious institutions.

Thus requiring commitment to the Christian “ethos” of an educational institution should be permitted for both students and teaching staff. This is not to say that students who may later identify as some other gender or become pregnant should be expelled, but that those (students or parents) who join the institution agree that they will support the school’s ethos. This is even more important for teachers. I can’t hold teaching or even many support positions in my church unless my lifestyle is consistent with my faith profession – why should teachers in religious institutions be any less constrained? Your paper says the proposed legislation would “require all staff to respect the educational institution’s religious ethos”, yet you propose to prohibit institutions from making employees sign such statements.

Finally, the propositions at B and C go so far as providing that LGBTQ+ staff, who have had to be employed under these proposals, may “provide objective information about alternative

viewpoints [on sexuality] if they wish". This would hardly be in keeping with the ethos of the institution. Given the Christian commitment to one man one woman marriage, there can be no "objective information about alternative viewpoints", and there is no doubt that the provision of any such alternative viewpoint would be tantamount to trying to convert students to such other viewpoint (i.e. a secular religion). In your paper such conversion is given as grounds to terminate a teacher at a kindergarten who tries to convert staff or students to another religion (clause 66).