Religious Discrimination Bill – Exposure Draft

Your Submission

I write to oppose this proposed bill on the grounds that religious institutions in Australia are already among the most powerful, privileged and protected groups in our society. As a Christian Minister of Religion who has worked for almost twenty years in the Anglican Church of Australia and Canada and now, in my role as Senior Pastor of Metropolitan Community Church, Sydney, a GLBTQI inclusive religious denomination, I find the proposed bill troubling on a number of fronts;

Unlike previous Anti Discrimination Bills, this Bill, if passed would give organised religion free license to continue a culture of openly discriminating against gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and intersex persons. It is not fair or just for religion to continue to wield that amount of privilege and power given the indisputable tragic effects that protecting such attitudes have led to in the past, and continue to this day. Effects like; fostering internalised self hatred and shame for children who are GLBTQI, gay teen suicide and attempted suicide, instilling a belief in our youth that God hates who they are, the threat of job loss and financial ruin that GLBTQI teacher’s face in religious schools by the very institutions they serve so faithfully.

As a gay married man who is also a Minister of Religion, I have personally felt the full effects of the inflated religious freedoms that have long existed in this country. Religious freedoms that have led me to endure the psychological tortures of conversion therapy, exorcisms, workplace bullying and intimidation, internalised self hatred and shame, and feelings of constantly being scorned. Infact, religious freedoms are so well protected in this country that because of my sexuality and deep desire to serve God and the church, I had to leave Australia, my country of birth in 2003 and fly to Vancouver, Canada in order to find a church that would employ me. Think about that for a minute, my personal freedoms suffered so much as a direct result of religious freedoms here that I had to pack up and leave my homeland! - not just my job, in order to find a safe work environment in a country where religious freedoms weren’t upheld as this unalienable right to discriminate against those who just happen to be different.
When conservative Christians speak about their religious freedoms being under threat, please consider the very real threats GLBTQI people face every day in this country. Threats to their personal freedoms. Imagine walking out of a restaurant and having someone come up and threaten you verbally, physically, emotionally. This happened last year to my husband and I on account of us being gay. Imagine being chased by a car load of young people and being followed home after work and having to endure the terror of not knowing if you’d even make it home on account of being gay. That happened to my husband this year. Imagine walking by Town Hall in Sydney and having someone call you “faggot”. That happened to us this year as well. Imagine sitting at a pub having a meal and a well dressed couple sitting next to you condemns your husband for being a gay minister, citing the Bible as their defence. This happened to my husband this year too. A couple of months ago, a respectful young gay couple were quietly sitting together on public transit at the end of the day holding hands, they were told by someone who worked for the transit system they had to stop holding hands as it made others uncomfortable. Imagine saying that to a straight couple? So much homophobia in our society today is due to the unchecked freedoms religious institutions have enjoyed and they have come at a real cost to GLBTQI people. There are countless stories GLBTQI people can tell of how religious freedoms have impinged upon their personal freedoms time and time again. The effects of these confrontations can range from completely ruining a night, to completely destroying a life and they can come at anytime.

Whether these discriminatory attacks against GLBTQI people occur through a car load of young people hunting us down for fun or through a celebrated football star’s twitter slur, GLBTQI people live with discrimination every day, much of it fuelled by religious freedom. In my view, it is not religious institutions that need more protection, it is the outcasts of our society today that religion so often discriminates against that need the protection. Jesus spent most of his time hanging out with the very people that appeared to threaten religious freedom, the very ones who were condemned as ‘sinners’ - so its clear to me Jesus himself would be rallying against protecting religious freedoms in Australia because he saw the hypocrisy that religion exhibits from time to time and called it out for what it was.

This is why I oppose the draft Bill, because it protects religious freedom at the very real cost of an individual’s freedom. The cost is far too high in my opinion.

Thank you for your consideration of my submission.

Sincerely,
The Reverend Dale Yardy