

To: The Australian Government Productivity Commission

Re: The "Future Foundations for Giving" Report

February 2024

Dear Commission,

Please find following my submission to the Inquiry into the above Report.

I make this submission as a private citizen with an interest in civics, religion, and ethics.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this Inquiry.

Yours faithfully,

David A W Miller.

SUBMISSION

Inquiry into “Future Foundations for Giving” Report

Introduction

While this Report contains some worthwhile initiatives for simplifying and streamlining the administration of the charities sector, the Report raises some concerns as it seems to be biased against faith-based charities.

Issues

The background paragraphs in the introductory Terms of Reference section of the Report state that the Productivity Commission would like to see philanthropic giving double by 2030. This seems at odds with removing the tax-deductible status of faith-based charities and school building funds, as well as possibly removing their autonomy and burdening them with extra paperwork.

I don't think that the status of “basic religious charity” and its associated privileges and exemptions, should be abolished (recommendation 7.1). The report says that the Productivity Commission does not see anything special about “the practice of religion through the DGR system” but that there should be “community-wide benefits”.

However, this does not make complete sense. Because of their size, most charities cannot be focused on an overall benefit to society, but are necessarily focused on some specific area of need, or have some specific interest or area of expertise. All these specific needs being addressed adds up to meeting overall needs.

The Report seems to be asking “What is special about Christianity, that it should be given specific consideration?”. This ignores the fact that religious altruism is the motivation for much charitable work.

So, what is special about Christianity? To quote English author, scholar, historian, presenter and commentator, Tom Holland, on what Christianity gave the world, he lists, “lifelong marriage, concepts of sexuality that protected women and children, the modern scientific method, the idea that humans bear the image of God, the equality of all people, the universality of ethics, the abolition of slavery, expanded care for the poor, the establishment of democracy, mass education, the original hospital system, and having one set of laws for all people”.

In other words, Christianity has made Western society what it is (in the best senses). And as the West has started to move away from its Judeo-Christian foundation, benefits such as freedom of speech and conscience, the sanctity of human life, women's rights, and the principle of all people being equal, have started to disappear.

Holland has written a whole book documenting how Christianity made Western civilization. The book is called “Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World”.

Another author, named Vishal Mangalwadi has also written a book on how the Bible has shaped the Western world. His work is titled “The Book that Made Your World”.

To quote the late Chuck Colson, former political advisor to President Nixon, and later prisoner advocate, author, and speaker, "It never ceases to amaze me how modern western secularists are doing all in their power to purge Christianity from public life. They are sawing off the branch they're sitting on".

This applies to school building funds as well as charities. If they are to lose their tax-deductible status and there are less donations for such purposes, then who will fund the work? Well, probably the government...

In essence, I gather that the proposals concerning faith-based charities and schools can be summed up as a recommendation that religious charities and schools should be stripped of their Deductible Giving Recipient status and their autonomy.

Conclusion

Although some of the proposals in the Report make sense, it would also appear that the Future Foundations for Giving Report is another incremental step in the now monotonous attacks on Christian faith and rights that are occurring in various aspects of government administration. Former Prime Minister John Howard calls this process "the de-authorisation of the Judeo-Christian influence on society". This can only have bad results.

Some of the recommendations in this report are practical, but please leave the legal status of faith-based charities and schools alone. They have this status for a reason.

Thank you.