

5 February 2024

## **SUBMISSION TO THE PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION**

Moore College thanks the Productivity Commission for the opportunity to provide a submission in response to their draft report on *Future Foundations for Giving*. Moore College is a Higher Education Institution (an Australian University College) that has among its objects to be “an establishment of Higher Education committed to advancing the knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith”, and “to promote the study of theology in the wider community in Australia and internationally”. For more than 160 years we have been training men and women for a variety of Christian leadership positions, both ordained and lay. This submission, therefore, comes from a perspective that is transparently Christian.

We take this opportunity to commend the Commission on its goals of reforming and simplifying the DGR system and increasing philanthropic giving. This submission deals specifically with the report’s proposal to exclude from the DGR system (1) the activities of primary, secondary, religious and other forms of informal education, except for activities where charities have an explicit equity objective; and (2) all activities associated with the promotion of religion (Table 6.1, page 187).

In summary, we believe the draft report’s proposal that “all activities for the purpose of advancing religion” be excluded from the DGR system (p. 179) appears to be ideologically driven rather than evidence-based and ignores significant historical considerations and also the complexity in the purpose and intent of such activities. Our constitutional commitment to freedom of religion ought to ensure that donations made to faith groups are not treated either favourably or unfavourably on the basis of a group’s religious commitments but on the basis of whether they add to the general community’s social capital and further public benefit. The draft report does not sufficiently weigh the historical evidence or the specifically Christian motivations that demonstrate the connection between the advance of religion and broader philanthropic generosity.

The *history of philanthropy* and charitable activity in the Western world is deeply intertwined with the influence of Christian faith. Christian individuals in Europe, America and, more recently, Australia have been among the most active in this space, and they have been explicit about their personal Christian faith as a motivating factor in their generosity and social action. In Australia, Christian individuals and churches set up schools, pre-schools, hospitals, hospices, aged care facilities and youth clubs as an expression of their faith and in order to serve the wider community, irrespective of race, gender or creed. In many instances, they were the first to do so, and the government entered into these spaces only later. The first charity established in New South Wales was the Benevolent Society, established by Rev. William Cowper in 1813 to assist with an early problem of homelessness. In 1816 a charity school was opened in a church vestry at Newcastle. It is today Newcastle East Public School.

The history of Australia since European settlement reveals a long-standing partnership in charitable work between public and private institutions. Governments continue to rely upon religious organisations for the provision of education, medical, welfare and community services since the needs in these areas far outstrip the ability of state and federal governments to provide without a very substantial rise in the tax burden on every citizen. Private schooling (both traditional and low-fee options), private colleges for higher education, private hospitals,



and private aged care facilities all supplement the work done in these areas by public institutions. Thomas Moore (1762–1840), Thomas Sutcliffe Mort (1816–1878), Eliza Hassall (1834–1917), and Vincent Fairfax (1909–1993), amongst others, are examples of Christian believers whose generosity stretched far into the wider community. The “social capital” generated by the activity of those whose primary motivations include “the promotion of religion” has been well documented. The failure to acknowledge this in the draft report is inexplicable.

A second consideration goes to the heart of *the motivation of Christians to give* or involve themselves in this way. Christian philanthropy and Christian charitable activities arise from core doctrines of the Christian faith. Of course this does not mean that others are incapable of philanthropy or charitable activity. However, in the case of Christian men, women and organisations, there is a direct and basic relation of such activity with their Christian faith. Christianity’s primary text, the New Testament, records Jesus Christ commanding his disciples to “love your neighbour as yourself” (Matthew 22:39) and his disciple James writes “religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world” (James 1:26). Faith and good works are inseparable in Christian teaching, just as love for God and love for one’s neighbour are inseparable. Conceptually, such behaviour is deeply anchored in the Judaeo-Christian commitment to the intrinsic value of each human life since each person is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–7). Surprisingly, none of this is considered in the section of the report entitled “Motivations for Giving” (page 117) though “Faith” is included in Figure 3.13 (page 119).

The most significant consequence of this is that “the promotion of religion” is most often not a stand-alone purpose of organisations covered under the DGR system. The promotion of religion and the provision of public benefit are deeply intertwined and are not at all easy to untangle. Christian organisations are involved in the provision of health care, aged care, education, and the pastoral care of those in schools and hospitals, the armed forces, the Police force and also to those in prisons, in order to further the welfare of all those concerned (and others associated with them) as well as to provide a witness to their faith in the God who loves all that he has made. The benefits provided are available to the general public (or “a sufficient section of the general public”) as defined by the *Charities Act 2013* (page 180) and are not restricted to co-religionists. There is a transparent connection between the promotion of the Christian faith and the philanthropic generosity of people who have been transformed by that faith commitment. We are not suggesting that this motivation is by any means the only driver for philanthropy, but its historic and present significance in Australia is far more profound than the draft report acknowledges. To suggest that these services might be supported but only not if they do not involve the promotion of religion is oddly ideological in this context.

None of this is to suggest that Christian engagement in charitable enterprises has been perfect. Alongside other groups (e.g. sporting associations and public enterprises such as schools, policing and even the medical profession), we know that religious groups have not done enough in the past to prevent abuse of the trust placed in them by some of their practitioners who have engaged in predatory behaviour. This is inexcusable and a great deal of work has been done in recent years to assist victims and to put in place measures to ensure this is far less likely in the future. Yet overwhelmingly the contribution of religious groups to the welfare of the general community has been positive.



We do not believe that any reform of the DGR system should aim at the exclusion of “the promotion of religion” as a criterion of eligibility. A fuller picture of the involvement of religious groups in these important areas of public life over a prolonged period and an acknowledgement of the entwined nature of religious faith and charitable activity justifies the retention of this criterion alongside others.

Thank you for your consideration of this submission.

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