

Submission to Senate Enquiry re Discrimination 11/12/2012

I would caution against declaring all discrimination as bad.

Certainly discrimination is bad if some groups are actively demonised or disadvantaged, but the opposite is also true – majority views and values can be greatly disadvantaged because a particular minority group or individual makes a complaint that their values and views don't prevail.

For example, despite a large body of scientific evidence on the value and safety of immunisation, and the disadvantage and danger to the community generally but especially to young children, of having unimmunised individuals in our midst, there are some individuals and groups that actively campaign against immunisation.

The questions arise – am I, as a General Medical Practitioner, discriminating against them if I oppose their propaganda? Am I discriminating against them if I decline to give them a certificate excusing them from having their children immunised so they can still get the Government bonus? I certainly am!

If parents want to make lifestyle decisions for themselves, that is their choice and prerogative. But they have to be prepared to accept the “cost” of such choices. On the other hand, the Law does not allow them the freedom to abuse their children, and that includes denying their children proper medical care. I believe that includes denying them the protection of immunisation.

We have to make discriminatory choices in every day life – what type and quantity of food to eat, for example. So, not all discrimination is bad.

Once we get into the realm of discrimination allegedly causing “offence” or “insult”, I believe our freedom of speech becomes at risk, because offence can be caused not just by actual words used, but also by such vague things as facial expression, emphasis, hand movements, etc. The message received by the alleged offended person may be completely different from the message that was intended by the alleged offender. It is so easy for misunderstandings to occur even between people of the same cultural background, let alone those from different backgrounds or with a different worldview.

Then if we start discussing religious differences, the whole thing becomes significantly messier! For example, Christian philosophy and education have encouraged (with some notable and tragic exceptions) open discussion and argument about science, Biblical authority, and various other theological issues. Christians have been subjected to severe criticism (some justified), ridicule, parody and distortion. Generally, Christians have been fair game for the secular media. However, the slightest perceived insult against the Prophet, or the slightest implication that the Koran may have some teaching that is questionable, is greeted with world-wide riots causing destruction and death in many cases.

The sad history of trying to deal with such situations is that the loud minority often prevail over the moderate majority, and therefore to try to pass anti-discrimination laws in a way that is logical and fair to all becomes impossible, and often ends up causing more anger and harm than intended.

Maybe if the Commission were able to get laws through that would forbid Federal and State Politicians from insulting and abusing each other under the guise of Parliamentary Privilege, there would be a lot less of us citizens who are offended by their childish antics!