

Dear Committee Members,

Inquiry into the Disclosure regimes for charities and not-for-profit organisations

I would like to confine my submission to whether or not charitable purposes should include the advancement of religion and inter alia, the advancement of prayers and proselytisation. As you would be aware, the Charitable Uses Act of 1601 (referred to as the Statute of Elizabeth) included the advancement of religion, but The Enlightenment occurred subsequently and for the past 200 years there has been either a constitutional separation of church and state or a widely held belief in the principle of separation of church and state in all liberal secular western democracies, including Australia.

Thomas Jefferson wrote on January 1, 1802 that there should be a wall of separation between church and state. He argued passionately for the freedom of religion, or of none. I submit that such a wall of separation should work both ways; that in return for the state not meddling in the affairs of the church, the church should not meddle in the affairs of the state. In other words, liberal secular democracy must allow for both freedom of religion and freedom from religion, in equal measures.

I submit that religious instruction and practice, prayers and proselytisation should be paid for by the faithful and not be subsidised by the state or non-believers. Therefore, I submit that religions should not be afforded preferential tax treatment. Past practices have distorted the level playing field for competitor businesses because religions have strayed further and further into the secular world of business.

The state granted various religions parcels of land for the erection of places of worship but many have been subsequently sold for commercial purposes, at enormous profit, which has benefited religions instead of the state whose grant is no longer being used for its intended purpose. This transfer of wealth from the state to the church has enriched and empowered a small group of people who are in charge of their religious orders and churches. It has enabled them to amass far more wealth and power than they ever contemplated - so much for the vows of poverty and humility.

The vast wealth which has been transferred from the state to the church has occurred at the same time as the faithful have strayed away from the regular practice of their religion or have even become agnostics or atheists. The wealth of the churches is now being used in the pursuit of power over the lives of the citizens of the state.

Thomas Jefferson would now be turning in his grave. The church has no democratic right to dictate to the people of the state or to the representatives of the people, but there are many examples of them attempting to do just that.

I conclude by asking you to exclude the advancement of religion and the offering of prayers by contemplative orders from the list of charitable purposes.

Yours sincerely,
John Goldbaum