

# SUNDAY ARTICLE

ST DAVID'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ♦ 27 JANUARY 2019



## Australia Is Not a Secular Society

*Christopher Brohier*

“Australia is not a secular country – it is a free country.” Our new Prime Minister Scott Morrison said this in his maiden speech in Parliament on 14 February 2008.

This statement remains true and must guide our debate as we as a nation consider the implications for religious freedom in the light of same-sex marriage and the Ruddock review. It is vital, as where we start from will guide where we finish.

Australia is not a secular country.

“Secular” is a much-debated term. Its origins are Christian, referring to clergy that were not solely given to prayer and meditation but were also involved with their community. However, in common parlance it is now accepted as being a-religious [having no religion]. Hence, the Australian Secular Lobby.

*...relying on the blessing of Almighty God have agreed to unite in one indissoluble federal Commonwealth...*

However, it is manifest that Australia is not an a-religious nation. Our founding document begins with the words, “Whereas the people of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland and Tasmania humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God have agreed to unite in one indissoluble federal Commonwealth...” That is a profoundly Christian declaration.

The concept of representative democracy comes from the recognition of the value of each individual. That, again, is a Biblical concept flowing from the truth that mankind is made in the imago Dei – the image of God, as Genesis 1:26 says, “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”

The constitutional requirement of just terms for the appropriation of property is grounded in the Magna Carta, which was written

by a Christian to continue the existing tradition of bringing biblical concepts into the law of England. So, too, the constitutional right of trial by jury.

The Magna Carta begins with the words, “Know that before God for the health of our soul...to the honour of God...and the better ordering of our kingdom...” and the conclusion says, “Since we have granted all these things for God.”

Australia is not a secular nation. Australia is a free nation.

Fundamental to our freedom is the freedom to live out our faith, something which has some constitutional protection so far as Commonwealth law is concerned. Here, it is critical to understand what faith and religious identity is. It is not, as some assert, a mere belief. Christian doctrine says that being a Christian is the deepest identity one can have.

Let me explain.

The Bible says that every person apart from Christ is spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1-3). When a person puts his or her faith in Christ, a miracle occurs. God sends the Holy Spirit to live in that person's heart (Galatians 4:6) and to give new life: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new," (2 Corinthians 5:17, NKJV).

Jesus described this as being born again (John 3:7). The apostle Paul puts it this way in the book of Galatians, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me..." (Galatians 2:20). These are profound mysteries, but they speak of the reality of a life changed from inside out by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is not a mere belief; it is deepest identity.

That identity plays out and must be respected in law. As Chief Justice French said in a speech which touched on religion entering the public square, "Persons who advocate or oppose laws according to their religious beliefs have the same rights and freedoms as anyone else in our society

to put their point of view. It could not be otherwise." Those who assert that the separation of church and state means that people of faith cannot speak into public debate are wrong.

But the freedom is more than the freedom to speak. It is the freedom to live out our faith and not be compelled to live contrary to it. Here, the recent United Kingdom Supreme Court decision of Ashers Bakery is important. The bakery was asked by a same-sex attracted man to bake a cake

with the words, "Support Gay Marriage". On the basis of their Christian convictions, they declined. He had his cake baked by someone else but sued them alleging discrimination on the grounds of sexuality.

All the lower courts upheld his claim but the Supreme Court rejected it, correctly holding that there was no

discrimination on the grounds of sexuality but rather that Ashers could not be compelled to act contrary to their convictions. They would not have baked the cake whoever asked them to. This freedom must be worked out in Australian society.

"Australia is not a secular country – it is a free country." Let us never surrender this freedom and particularly the freedom to live for and proclaim the goodness of Jesus.

***It is the freedom to live out our faith and not be compelled to live contrary to it.***



*Christopher Brohier is a Christian barrister in South Australia who served as a lawyer for the Coalition for Marriage.*

Source: [https://www.acl.org.au/australia\\_is\\_not\\_a\\_secular\\_society#splash-signup](https://www.acl.org.au/australia_is_not_a_secular_society#splash-signup)

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