

'FREEDOM' TO DISCRIMINATE

After the nation voted 61pc to allow same-sex marriage recently, the real issue has emerged from the shadows as religious conservatives defend their "freedom" to discriminate in God's name. -- By Don Pagé, 16 Nov 2017

Right-wing ideologues have retreated bruised to Parliament to haggle over details beyond the simple Yes/No which they allowed Australian voters on same-sex marriage. The recent \$122million government "survey", which they forced as a stalling tactic, has confirmed the public approval well known from previous polling.

However, the issue became a battleground as a few political conservatives challenged the hesitant centrists in the Federal Liberal Government. A slim majority in Parliament made it a natural political football to kick around for a few months, regardless of equality or human rights for others (see links below).

The religious Right has tried to dress up prejudice as somehow a "religious freedom" – to discriminate against others.

The right of clerics to refuse to marry same-sex couples is now being elevated beyond an unwritten social bias to a kind of 11th Commandment.

HOW FAR WILL IT GO?

By trying to sanctify prejudice in God's name, MPs now need to decide how far to exempt this: for clerics only, for civil celebrants too, or can florists discriminate along with cake-makers and limo-drivers?

Once the door reopens to discrimination on one issue, then why not as well against race, political or other preferences? It only takes a new law to overturn a traditional freedom, as shown by former Prime Minister John Howard in redefining marriage as between a man and a woman exclusively in 2004, which started the fuss. He had the numbers in Parliament, his MPs voted regardless of conscience, and it has taken until now to review it.

There is no Bill of Rights to guarantee basic freedoms and to put them beyond political whim. People in Australia have only those rights not specifically denied by a law.

The reality is that freedom is just a vague tradition of rights for people, with only an implied obligation – to respect those same rights of others. None of that is guaranteed, especially when MPs can overrule on a whim or a technicality.

Perhaps a Bill of Rights is finally needed in Australia to stop abuses by powerful minorities or by an uncaring majority – or the tyranny of 51 percent.

Further reading, for and against:

<https://freedomforfaith.org.au/we-dont-have-to-speculate>

<https://theconversation.com/talk-of-same-sex-marriage-impinging-on-religious-freedom-is-misconceived-heres-why-82435>

<http://australianmarriage.org/same-sex-marriage-and-religious-freedom/>

Source: www.woronoravalley.com