

The Preamble to the Australian Constitution contains the words, "Humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God". As Australian citizens we continue to declare that we too put our trust in Almighty God.

For centuries, to speak of Western civilisation was to speak of Christian civilisation. The two were in many ways synonymous. The values that we have cherished and sought to strengthen are in large measure founded on the Judeo-Christian belief system. The many freedoms, advantages, opportunities, values and liberties which characterise the West owe much to the growth of Christianity with its inherent belief in the dignity of the human person as created in the image of God and the code of behaviour that flows from this belief.

The Canberra Declaration follows on from the 2009 Manhattan Declaration and the 2010 Westminster Declaration. It declares that when Christian values are respected and allowed freedom of expression, not just confined to so-called sacred spaces but in the public arena as well, society is richer and healthier.

We wish to emphasise three areas that demand particular attention in our contemporary Australian society, namely religious freedom, marriage and the family, and the sanctity of human life. Were we to undermine any one of these values, the social fabric of our nation would be seriously weakened, to our personal and collective detriment.

### **Religious Freedom**

Religious freedom includes freedom of conscience and freedom of speech. The importance of these freedoms is shown in countries where they are threatened or absent. Police states and totalitarian nations inevitably begin with the curtailment of basic liberties, including religious freedom and the right to speak one's mind and conscience. This includes the right to change one's religious beliefs.

We affirm the basic necessity of freedom of conscience, having the liberty to speak publicly about one's faith and beliefs, and having the right to practise the religion of one's choice. If these freedoms are removed – even in the name of supposed benefits – the



## **The Canberra Declaration**

### **A Call to Christian Conscience**

Released 23 July 2010

The Canberra Declaration is the work of many individuals, clergy and Christian ministries, representing a wide variety of denominations. Over 20 Christian leaders and clergy were involved. Other individuals are invited to sign the Declaration at [www.canberradeclaration.org.au](http://www.canberradeclaration.org.au)

prized values of democracy and liberty are seriously undermined.

In Australia today these freedoms are being restricted by laws which, although appearing positive on first reading, have the potential to lead to unintended and unacceptable consequences. These laws include anti-discrimination legislation, hate crime laws and legislation on religious and sexual vilification – each of which may be interpreted in a way that effectively works as a barrier to religious freedom and freedom of speech.

Thus the signers of this declaration affirm the fundamental right of Australians to religious freedom and freedom of speech, and we oppose legislation which denies such freedoms. We likewise oppose laws subjugating our nation to foreign powers and instrumentalities which restrict these freedoms.

### **Marriage and Family**

Another vital package of values and social benefits is the long-standing institution of the natural family resulting from marriage between a man and a woman – as affirmed by the definition of marriage in the Marriage Act: "...the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life".

No other social institution has done so much good for people and for nations, yet marriage is being undermined, to the detriment of children, individuals, and society itself.

Lifelong marriage between a man and a woman guarantees children their

biological birthright to a mother and a father and has a proven track record of providing them with protection, education, welfare, support and nurture. No other arrangement has improved upon the benefits of marriage.

In the face of competing alternatives and moves to redefine marriage, we affirm the importance and social utility of marriage between a man and a woman and the families formed thereby.

### **Human Life**

The third important set of values revolves around the sanctity of human life which is being undermined in much of the Western world, through abortion, euthanasia, and some of the new reproductive technologies.

We believe that all human life, being made in the image of God, has intrinsic and equal value from conception to life's natural end.

The very heart of a humane and civilised society is based on the way it treats its most vulnerable and innocent members including the unborn and the disabled. We therefore insist on the right of all persons, including those who are vulnerable or dependent, to protection from conception to natural death. We will support, protect, and be advocates for such people, since to do anything less is to weaken our humanity and despise our personhood.

We will not comply with any directive that compels us to participate in or facilitate abortion, embryo-destructive research, assisted suicide, euthanasia, or any other act that involves the intentional taking of innocent human life.

### **Conclusion**

Religious freedom, marriage and family, and the sacredness of human life have provided the foundations enabling Western democratic societies to flourish. We erode these foundations at our peril.

The faith which is at the heart of many of the values and strengths underpinning the Australian nation now compels us to speak up in their defence.

**For the future of this nation, and for our children's future, we call upon all like-minded citizens to support and sign this declaration.**