



**Most Rev Barry James Hickey DD OAM STL BA MSocWK
Emeritus Archbishop of Perth**

I, Most Rev Barry James Hickey, submit that the attempt in The Bill to change the practices of a religious faith is inappropriate, dangerous and unnecessary.

1. INAPPROPRIATE

I view the attempt to change by legislation a basic element of any faith to be extremely inappropriate, especially if that faith is supported and valued by large numbers of people. Civil authorities should confine themselves to civil matters. The Bill under discussion presumes a mandate over religious content that it does not have. Religious practices are not to be changed by civil law.

2. DANGEROUS

To claim power over the content of any faith, can lead easily to abuse of that power. History, and even recent history, shows how easy it is for civil authorities to move from control to persecution, even to violent persecution if the claims of religion freedom and the limits of civil authority are not clear. To my mind, elements of religious practice like confession should not appear in parliamentary bills. It sets a dangerous precedent.

3. UNNECESSARY

The state has the power to require disclosure of sensitive matters, including the knowledge of or grave suspicion of the sexual abuse of children. To achieve this in the matter of religious groups, it only requires that ministers of religion be included among those who already have an obligation to disclose such information. It does not need to specify confession at all, and should not for the reasons I have given.

The Bill itself may not be necessary at this point in history. The Catholic Archdiocese of Perth in Western Australia has cooperated fully with the recommendations of the Royal Commission. The Clergy are fully committed to the protection of children, as are all parishes of the Archdiocese. The proposed legislation should be abandoned as the Bishops and Clergy can be trusted to accept their role in these matters, without an attack on their role as confessors.

Sincerely,

**Most Rev Barry James Hickey DD OAM STL BA MSocWK
Emeritus Archbishop of Perth**