

# Cardinal warns against secular reading of religious rights

PERTH, Australia – Cardinal George Pell of Sydney has warned that an Australian bill of rights could sharpen anti-Catholic sentiment and ostracize Christian communities who wish to uphold traditional values.

Western Australia Attorney General Jim McGinty is currently promoting the idea for one such bill; he said in May that a bill of rights should be enshrined in Western Australia state law. McGinty said many people are unaware that the basic human rights they take for granted are not protected by law.

Although not directly responding to McGinty's proposal, Cardinal Pell said that the "secularist reading of religious freedom places Christians (at least) in the position of a barely tolerated minority – even when they are the majority – whose rights must always yield to the secular agenda."

"Although, I don't think other religious minorities will be treated the same way," the cardinal said Oct. 30 in an address to The Sydney Institute, a current affairs think tank, on "Prospects for Peace and Rumors of War: Religion and Democracy in the Years Ahead."

"Democracy does not need to be secular," the cardinal said.

The event marked the launch of the cardinal's book, "God and Caesar: Selected Essays on Religion, Politics and Society," published by The Catholic University of America Press and Connor Court, an Australian publisher.

The cardinal predicted a "large battle" over human rights and anti-discrimination legislation in light of the British government refusal to grant Catholic Church agencies in that country an exemption from sexual orientation regulations, despite this meaning the country would lose one of its most successful adoption services.

Cardinal Pell said Australia still has the concept of exemptions to anti-discrimination laws to allow church agencies to do their work in a manner consistent with their

beliefs. However, he noted that the concept came under attack when Catholic bishops petitioned Scotland's government for such an exemption for church agencies.

He quoted English philosopher Anthony Grayling, who said: "We are trying to keep a pluralistic society, and elements of the Christian church and other religions are trying to destroy it."

"At the heart of this attack on the concept of exemptions for faith-based agencies lies a false analogy drawn between discrimination against homosexuals and racial discrimination, and this is already beginning to appear in Australia," Cardinal Pell said.

He said the race analogy has been very effective in casting the churches as persecutors.

"So, in the United Kingdom, and also in Massachusetts where a similar issue arose in 2006, warnings that the Catholic Church would be forced to close its adoption services if exemptions were not granted were described as blackmail," Cardinal Pell said.

The prelate said the case "shows what can happen when bills of rights are interpreted from the premises of a minority secularist mindset, especially when it is sharpened, as in Europe, by fear of homegrown Islam."

Christian persecution in the name of human rights was highlighted last year when Australian federal Health Minister Tony Abbott, a practicing Catholic and former seminarian, came under attack when he proposed to increase spending on new counseling services.

When it was revealed that two Christian anti-abortion groups would play an integral role in Abbott's plan, the Australian Greens and Democrats and the Women's Electoral Lobby called for him to be stripped of his portfolio.