

**Religious diversity, legislation, and Christian privilege****Ms. Ujala**

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**Abstract**

Everyday interactions and formal legal systems work together to keep religious diversity in Victoria, Australia under control. In the following essay, we'll look into this link in greater detail. Formal legal structures and everyday contacts play a key role in facilitating the peaceful resolution of religious differences. There is a distinction to be made. How people of different backgrounds, in terms of power and fame, practice their religion today varies. In addition to communities learning through experience of these processes. Another way of putting it is that the social In part, people's interactions with one another and the community are shaped by how Australian culture views its diverse religious groups. Legal frameworks, such as anti-discrimination laws, play a role in encouraging diversity alongside interpersonal contacts with others in daily life. That which transmits information. People's emotional reactions to legal matters are also influenced by the interactions they have on a daily basis. buildings, structures, and the like. Everyday encounters are affected by regulations that make it illegal to discriminate or slander another person. the effect that judicial rulings have on people's actions is called the "shadow of the law," and it's a real thing. Educating people about the expected rules of conduct in a certain circumstance. use-appropriate or use-inappropriate; yes, or no.

**Key words:** religion, sociology of religion, sociology of law, religion, law, multiculturalism.

**Introduction:**

There are three related topics covered in this article. Primarily through in-depth interviews with key players, it gives a case study of religious diversity reconciliation in Victoria, Australia. The study specifically examines the results of Victoria's anti-vilification and anti-discrimination legislation, drawing the conclusion that these laws help facilitate healthy debate over religious differences. Finally, we discuss the role that legislation plays in fostering civil and courteous daily interactions among adherents of various religions and those who do not practice any religion, and we argue that while legislation plays an important role, it is insufficient to promote such interactions. Fokas (2019) argues that the outcomes of actual cases, as well as the "shadow" that these cases cast, are affected by anti-discrimination and anti-vilification laws pertaining to religion. The second phrase refers to the laws' symbolic value as an example of how to handle

religious pluralism and a guarantee of protection. Governments all throughout the world have established these rules. We argue that the "shadow" or symbolic aspect of the law is what has an impact on the day-to-day handling of religious plurality.

Demands for further research into how the law affects people's daily activities are also discussed (Babie, 2015; Fokas, 2019). These questions are answered here. The greater Melbourne area and the Australian state of Victoria are the primary foci of this study. Victoria, a state in Australia, has a very diversified population, both in terms of ethnicity and religion. In order to accommodate its diverse population, Victoria has enacted a convoluted system of laws. Victoria is the only Australian state to have both an anti-discrimination statute (the Equal Opportunity Act of 1995/2010) and a law against racial and religious prejudice (the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act of 2001). While there are anti-discrimination laws in place at the federal and territorial levels of Australia (Gelber, 2011), the Victorian Racial and Religious Tolerance Act of 2001 stands out for its comprehensive set of rights and remedies. In 2001, the law was passed in Victoria, Australia. With Babie's (2015) call for a sociological perspective in mind, we look at how this law has affected the lives of people of different faiths. In particular, we look at how this law has altered official procedures.

Few in-depth discussions of the Equal Opportunity Act can be found in the appropriate literature. Many people in Victoria have strong feelings about the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act (RRT Act) that was recently passed in the state (Brennan, 2011; Ezzy, 2013; Gelber), and there is much disagreement over its effectiveness. Some people think the RRT Act is counterproductive because of the costs it requires of its members, while others agree with them (Brennan, 2011). There are many who believe the positives much outweigh the problems (Gelber, 2011), most notably members of religious minorities who have profited from cases launched under the law. Mohr and Hosen (2011: 11) argue that the RRT Act's usefulness depends on the individual's familiarity with the interplay between the law and society. The law can be considered as an instrument for developing positive communal connections, a medium of communication, or a floor upon which to build a functional government. These three explanations all make sense. The case can be seen in a variety of ways, including as a chance to practice working together with a diverse group of people, as a waste of resources under a problematic and needless law, or as a necessary but insufficient way to eradicate prejudice. However, Frank Brennan (2011: 86) argues that there are no advantages to using the RRT Act.

For Brennan (2011:86), "there is no reason to believe that this type of litigation promotes greater religious tolerance and understanding." More on the connection between this and the Catch the Fire Ministries case is forthcoming. Brennan worries about the financial

burden the pastors of Catch the Fire Ministries have faced, but it seems he is unaware of the bias and demonization that led to the lawsuit being filed by the Muslim complainants. Specifically, Brennan concerns the pastors' spending in the case of Catch the Fire Ministries. Brennan (2011: 78) makes the surprising claim that religious faith is essential for upholding human rights. This shows that non-religious people and religious people who aren't Christians respect these groups' moral worldviews and ethical activities less than religious people who aren't Christians.

The legislation does provide some protection against religious vilification, but it is "far from comprehensive," as Kath Gelber (2011: 95) notes, while also underlining the ways in which Christians are helped by specific aspects of the law. Gelber concludes thus because the law offers some safeguards against religious slurs. Follow this link to read Gelber's (2011: 106) critique of the Catch the Fire Ministries case, in which he explains why the "love the sinner, hate the sin" approach was flawed there. No matter how sympathetic you are, it is never okay to speak ill of another person. The vocabulary of white nationalists is reworked to sound more "humane and decent." The way they achieve this is by having their language become more "civil and respectable," or mainstream. This, she says, is like their goal, which they've established for themselves. These adjustments on the surface don't erase the fact that these crimes are motivated by hatred.

These analyses of the RRT Act's pros and cons raise some important questions, but they do not investigate the connection between the effects of anti-discrimination and anti-vilification laws based on religion and the relative historical privilege and status of the relevant religious groups. That is to say, they don't look into the possible nexus between the two. One facet of the phenomenon known as Christian privilege is Christians' easy access to vast sums of public money and other resources. Christian groups dominate Australia's faith-based organizations providing social services, healthcare, education, and elder care, as reported by Bouma (2012), which receives billions of dollars in annual government funding. This is illustrative of the way in which Christians and Christians' ideas are assumed while trying to understand other religions. Despite the strong rhetorical commitment to religious variety and freedom, Beaman (2013: 145) notes that "a universal Christianity expressive of shared values is the primary basis from which religion is imagined institutionally and against which the citizen self-assesses." Christian privilege manifests itself regularly in the form of discriminatory actions and is ingrained in laws and institutions that enjoy disproportionate advantages.

Christian privilege is institutionalized, as pointed out by Elizabeth Hurd (2015) and Saba Mahmood (2015), who both use the United States as an example. Hurd (2015: loc. 103) argues that the current political debates regarding the right to religious freedom amount

to "a politics defined by religious difference, [that] privileges forms of religion favored by those who write laws, control resources, and govern societies and marginalizes other modes of belief, being, and belonging." Similarly, Mahmood (2015) contends that Christian supremacy in modern states has been bolstered in part because of legal guarantees for religious freedom. Many Protestant religious groups, as pointed out by Luke Beck (2018), have attempted to influence the law in areas of "morality" where they are not in danger of losing their own rights to freely exercise their faith. According to the Australian social and political history, this is especially so for Australia (p. 951).

#### Methods:

We started by conducting interviews with people engaged in cases brought before the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) to learn more about what we considered "critical cases" relevant to the function of Victorian legislation in the negotiation of religious difference. Critical case sampling, as defined by Rice and Ezzy (1999), identifies instances in which the issues or methods under study are most likely to be visible. This is done so that we can provide answers to the questions asked in the research. They were either the subject of legal or police action, were deeply involved in interfaith negotiations or other forms of religiously motivated litigation, or had extensive local connections, knowledge of customs, and experience with community-based initiatives. All of the responders met at least two of the requirements. We used these standards to choose twelve religious delegates from the Melbourne metropolitan area. The replies also show that Melbourne is home to a wide variety of religious communities. This is especially true when looking at the numbers of people who identify with minority faiths and the number of people who were born in countries other than Australia and speak English as a second language. To keep the focus on the regular lives of religious people, we refrained from speaking with prominent media figures. But we were able to talk to people who had personal experience with religion. Publicly available information was used to reach out to them, and the cascade technique was put into play to enlist their help. The conversations took place between May and October of this year (2019). The inquiry could not begin unless it was given the go light by the Human Research Ethics Network at the University of Tasmania.

Many disputes are settled by mediation, yet these settlements rarely make headlines or become official precedents. This makes it more difficult for people who have been before the VCAT to get hired. One of the Act's advantages is that it promotes the use of mediation as an alternative to going to court to resolve conflicts, which will be described in greater depth below.

Despite this, a large number of the cases that the VCAT hears remain a mystery.

Our sample consists of people who have testified before the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT), people who have assisted or been involved with those who have testified before the VCAT, and people who, for other reasons, have unique insights into the intersection of law and the everyday negotiation of religious differences.

Participants included a Catholic priest, an Asian-born Catholic, an immigrant Sikh, an immigrant Muslim who is a community leader, two Protestant pastors, a Pentecostal pastor, two members of a stigmatized new religious movement, a Pagan, and the manager of a Christian organization that existed before the establishment of VCAT. All of the interviews were transcribed using Trint, and a theme analysis was conducted using NVivo. To protect the participants' privacy, we may redact information such as the setting, the participants' religions, and the organizations to which they belonged at the time of the conversation.

As the interviews progress, we make a point of differentiating between two major subgroups by referring to them as "Christian" and "minority religions." Since these three denominations make up the majority of Australia's Christian population, the word "Christian" is used to describe them all. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), Sikhs, Muslims, Pagans, and followers of new religious organizations are all considered "minority religions." The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a minority religion that is also part of the Christian tradition. Despite this, the Latter-day Saints we met with had the most in common with those of the minority church, thus they were included.

The decision to label the LDS faith as a Christian religion is based only on factual evidence and should not be interpreted as a theological or cultural assessment. This viewpoint better reflects the historical context in which the events described occurred. The ethnic diversity within the interviewee's religious community; the interviewee's religion and the practices of resolving religious differences with members of other religions; and, if applicable, a detailed explanation of the specific VCAT cases in which they had been involved. The impact on the relevant religious group or organization was a common theme in VCAT cases, rather than the specifics of the case.

#### Findings:

Various religious groups in Victoria, Australia have received rulings that are widely and consistently dissimilar from one another thanks to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) and the state's anti-discrimination and anti-vilification acts. This is most

clear in the participants' proposed solutions to the previously mentioned religious disagreements. Most Christians in our survey think problems can be spoken about and addressed amicably through dialogue, but there are some noticeable outliers. There are many who think discrimination and libel laws are unnecessary or should only be enforced in special cases.

Members of religious minorities, on the other hand, think that casual conversations aren't enough to combat the systemic discrimination they encounter. They see the judicial process as an essential component of the effort to alter the deeply rooted nature of the prejudice and slander they experience.

The Catholic priest elaborated on these two points. According to him, the Islamic Council of Victoria asked the Catholics for help in the Catch the Fire Ministries case because "we get along well together... we'd met them before." The Islamic Council of Victoria requested the gathering as a result of this. The need for law and interpersonal connections, he continued, was self-evident. However, I think the most important things are talking to people and building these various networks. Conversations and other forms of getting to know one another are just the beginning of the process that leads to mutual appreciation and understanding. Laws are necessary but not sufficient to address social issues. Legislation is necessary to shield the populace from defamation, glass ceilings, and other forms of discrimination. But by itself, it is not enough.

The Catholic priest in this scenario thinks that making eye contact and talking about everyday things is usually enough to keep peace between people of different faiths.

Discrimination and slander are at epidemic proportions, making legal protections a need. Among Christians, the Catholic priest gave the most upbeat opinion of the legislation.

However, the law is seen by many people of minority religions as "an instrument for promoting good community relations" and "a framework for supporting social change in daily activities" (Mohr and Hosen, 2011: 11). Because the law, in their view, is "an instrument for promoting good community relations" (Mohr and Hosen, 2011: 11), this is the case. The Sikh participant reflected on his experiences in Australia and the Indian subcontinent and concluded, "I believe that laws are extremely important at this time." Sometimes, the absence of a law prevents something from being approved. Although [the legislation and daily contacts] are crucial, the Sikh participant admitted that it will take some time for the community to adopt them. The Indian caste system is a good example of this. That's why it was crucial to have the Equal Rights Amendment added to the Constitution in 1950. However, if they had left it unrestricted, persons from lower social classes would never have been able to find work.

Respectful daily conduct and adherence to the law can take on quite diverse connotations for people of different cultural backgrounds. Members of minority groups have a heightened understanding of the ubiquitous and deeply embedded character of many forms of prejudice as a result of their personal experiences with vilification, harassment, and discrimination. They have a stronger belief in the power of legislation to curb bigotry and slander and to promote a more humane approach to resolving differences in society. This is because the law prohibits extreme cases of prejudice and defamation. Christians, who enjoy special privileges as a result of their faith, tend to minimize the significance of the law while highlighting the significance of maintaining regular interactions. In general, with a few notable exceptions, they are oblivious to the privileges they receive and the challenges encountered by followers of religions that are in the minority. According to Christians, modern social connections are already fairly equal and don't need to be altered much.

#### Discrimination:

Many people who identify with minority religions, and Muslims in particular, say they have been the target of prejudice at some point in their lives. A Muslim who took part in the debate recounted multiple incidents in which Muslims had been the target of bigotry and harassment. He was troubled by the bad representation of Muslims in Australian media and by the fact that drivers honked at his wife because she wore a niqab. A halal market and a place of worship were also demolished. His wife wears a veil. He made the connection between police treatment of local Muslims and the vandalism of a halal market, saying, "We contacted the police when this happened; they are aware of the situation; and we installed a camera." After the vandalism at the halal market, authorities were contacted and a security camera was set up. In most cases, submitting to the authorities is a good idea. Sure. You are right, they do go to a [Islamic] school. Multiple Fridays in the weeks following the February 2nd tragedy in Christchurch found me in the company of law enforcement. These are the places where people gather to worship on Fridays. Right now, all they're doing is watching. Finding out that this is a widespread problem offered some relief. That is, the protection of people who identify as Muslims.

A Catholic priest and members of the Latter-day Saints (LDS) have voiced their dismay about the bad sentiments of Muslims. According to one Sikh participant, "oftentimes, you hear about an incident where someone got off the train and was pushed; that could also be considered criminal behavior, like not just focusing on the Sikh people, but also someone who feels a bit different or is new to the country and can be pushed easily."

Though minorities in Australia may still face private prejudice, they are afforded some protection from public discrimination (including protection from employment discrimination), as several participants pointed out. According to the Muslim participant, discrimination of any kind is completely unacceptable from a governmental or legal perspective. However, such bias may manifest itself on a smaller, individual level.

The Pagan who made the statement referred to anti-vilification legislation as "a civilized method redressing... victimization" of Pagans. There was a demand for a "day of prayer" in the Melbourne suburb of Casey in response to the danger posed by "Satanic cults." In particular, he brought up Olivia Watts, a defeated council candidate who was later raped (see Ezzy, 2013). Rather than practicing Satanism, Olivia Watts was a Wiccan. In light of these facts, the self-identified Pagan proposed using the idea of "religious tolerance" to counter the prejudice and misunderstanding that surrounds Pagan beliefs and activities.

One recurring theme in these accounts is the emphasis on the importance of protecting religious minorities from acts of discrimination, harassment, and violence. They are treated differently from the rest of Australian society due to discrimination and harassment. At an ecumenical event, a halal restaurant is defaced, a Muslim kiosk is shut down, a Sikh is assaulted, and a Pagan is forced off a train. These are just a handful of possibilities. Neither they nor anybody else in their group intends to force their religion on anyone else. They are fighting for the freedom to participate equally in society without harassment or discrimination based on their religious views and for the ability to practice their religion as they see fit.

They believe that the stigma they face will lessen and their freedom to live as they choose will increase if these needs are formally recognized by the law. This demonstrates the value of anti-discrimination and anti-vilification laws in giving members of religious minorities a framework for understanding the impact of prejudice and bigotry on their daily lives.

A key factor in allowing members of minority groups to keep their identities is "accepting difference," as one participant who identified as Sikh put it. He thinks it's important that Australia has laws in place to safeguard human rights. I've opted to stay in Australia because I feel everyone is treated fairly here, both by the general public and the law. It's not impossible to have more independence.

Then, he went on to talk about the case of *Arora v. Melton Christian College*, in which a Sikh family claimed their child was discriminated against because he was not allowed to attend school wearing a patka, the traditional head covering for Sikh men. Participants from various religious minority tended to agree that the law facilitates access to benefits

to which all citizens are entitled. More places of higher learning, such colleges and universities, are open to the general public. However, equal opportunity must be a prerequisite for admitting people from different groups. (Sikh) Religious minorities place great symbolic value on legislation that protect their members from harassment and hostility because of their faith. They make them feel as though the discrimination and slander they do face are not shared by the majority of people. Vandalism against a mosque or other house of worship is seen as immoral and contrary to societal norms. Discriminatory policies and procedures in the classroom can also be questioned and altered. Legislation alone isn't enough to stop discrimination and slander, but it is a vital part of the answer since it offers a framework for the process of cultural transformation. Members of religious minorities, and particularly Muslims, are overrepresented among those who report having experienced discrimination first-hand. The Muslim contributor talked about how his wife (who wears a niqab) had been honked at by passing motorists, how a halal shop and a place of worship had been vandalized, and how he was worried about the negative portrayal of Muslims in Australian media. In view of the Muslim participant's worries about Islamophobia in Australian media, we provided these instances. He made the following remarks about the relationship between the police and the Muslim community in his district: There was a camera set up and police were notified [after the vandalism at the halal restaurant]. The police will always take the side of the victim. Yes. I noticed that law enforcement officers were present at the Islamic school both on the Friday of the Christchurch massacre and the Fridays that followed. On Fridays, you can find them in the mosques and churches. They're just monitoring things for the time being. It's comforting to know that others care about them as much as I do. I'm speaking to the necessity of protecting the Muslim community.

Both the Catholic priest and the Latter-day Saints shared the concerns about Muslims being portrayed negatively. The Sikh also described the following acts of violence and abuse directed at Sikhs:

It's not uncommon to hear of an incident in which someone was pushed as they got off the train; this could be considered criminal behavior, and it's not limited to the Sikh community.

Minorities in Australia may be protected from overt forms of discrimination (such job discrimination) by the country's legal system, but some residents have reported experiencing discrimination on a more personal level. The Muslim participant claimed that "from a legal or administrative standpoint, no one can discriminate against anyone." However, micro-level discrimination can also exist in personal relationships.

The anti-vilification act was hailed as "a civilized method of redressing... victimization" by the Pagan representative. He spoke about an attack on a rejected council candidate, Olivia Watts, after one of Melbourne's municipal councillors called for a "day of prayer" against the menace of "Satanic cults" (see Ezzy, 2013). The event was attended by Pagans. To be clear, Olivia Watts was not a Satanist but a Wiccan. The Pagan participant considered how the concept of "religious tolerance" might be applied to the fight against the prejudice and misunderstandings that Pagans face.

One of the most notable things about these accounts is the emphasis placed on preventing acts of violence, harassment, and discrimination against members of religious minorities. They are treated differently from the rest of Australian society due to discrimination and harassment. At an ecumenical event, a halal restaurant is defaced, a Muslim kiosk is shut down, a Sikh is assaulted, and a Pagan is forced off a train. These are just a handful of possibilities. They have no intention of forcing their beliefs and rituals on anyone. They want to be able to fully engage in society without facing any kind of prejudice or hostility because of their religion, in addition to the freedom to do so.

They consider the law to be a formal expression of these norms, the adoption of which they hope will lessen prejudice in everyday life. This demonstrates the value of anti-discrimination and anti-vilification laws in giving members of religious minorities a framework for understanding the impact of prejudice and bigotry on their daily lives.

The Sikh participant emphasizes "accepting difference" as a key component that enables people of minority cultures to keep their identities. The fact that I can count on being treated the same as everyone else is a major factor in my decision to stay in Australia, thanks to both the community and the judicial system. He has great respect for Australia's statutory obligation to protect and promote human rights. It's possible to have more leeway.

He then went on to analyze the case of *Arora v. Melton Christian College*, in which a Sikh family claimed their kid was discriminated against because he was not allowed to wear a patka to school. In this case, the judge sided with the family. Participants from religious minorities often characterized legislation as a means to ensure equal access to opportunities and services: if the school is not accepting practising Sikh[s], then this is a major issue for the community. It would be discriminatory if [the school] merely allowed it to be a Christian school and did not welcome students from other faiths. And people can look for and find colleges or universities that are a good fit for them. However, if they intend to admit people from other groups, they must do so without bias. To members of religious minorities, regulations that shield them from harassment and slander because

of their faith are of great symbolic importance. They make them feel as though the discrimination and slander they do face are not shared by the majority of people. The vandalizing of a mosque or other house of worship is seen as a serious crime that does not reflect cultural values. Discriminatory policies and procedures in the classroom can also be questioned and altered. While legislation is not the sole tool needed to combat bigotry and slander, it does lay a solid groundwork for the essential societal shift.

*Christians:*

However, the worries of individuals who identify as Christian are notably distinct from those of participants who identify as other religions. They are characterized by a decline in the perceived influence of Christianity in public life. For the first time in a very extended period of time, Christians are gradually being pushed to the margins of society. On the other hand, in the past, Christians enjoyed more respect and tolerance from the general population. In addition, I think that Christians are facing a growing sense of marginalization in contemporary society, which makes them more open to rejection and criticism for their moral ideas. The reason for this is because Christians believe that the world is becoming increasingly hostile toward their moral beliefs. (Some traditionalists would have you believe that,<sup>2</sup>

I get the sensation that people are frightened to be truthful about their ideas owing to political correctness or whatever term you like to use. This is despite the fact that the Bible makes it abundantly clear that people should be truthful about their ideas. [In consideration of] everything else that has taken place up to this point. However, I do not shy away from the realities of Christianity because I think many people fear being labeled if they speak the words of the Bible. For this reason, I do not shy away from the facts of Christianity. As a result of this, I do not try to hide or gloss over the Christian realities. (Catechutal) catapult As opposed to a desire for equal treatment, these issues are important because they focus on the necessity for both non-Christians and Christians to hear the voices and views of Christians, rather than the desire for equal treatment. They also seem to have an incredible lack of awareness of the potential for injury and violence that can be communicated through these points of view. Their remarks and concerns on the right to freely express oneself and practice one's religion are evidence of this point.

*Minority religions:*

Despite the fact that the nature of the "resistance" experienced by members of minority religions varied widely, many recalled experiencing it at some point in their lives.

Participants of faiths other than Christianity expressed worry that they would be discriminated against if they openly practiced their religion. The ongoing discussion in Australia about new mosque construction is a good example of this. The Muslim participant questioned why there couldn't be a mosque given the presence of two different kinds of churches, a pagoda, and other structures. The Muslim community of Bendigo, a rural city in Australia, has brought their case to the highest court or equivalent. They plan to build a mosque. Catholic and Anglican churches are the most common, but there are at least two more major Christian denominations. The Hindu religion has its own temples. Although Sikh places of worship do exist, the media is more interested in covering stories involving Muslims, whether they be attempts at political statement making or acts of offensive behavior. A non-Muslim's sins are buried deep within the soil.

The Latter-day Saint said that an ecumenical Iftar feast was seen as a security danger for no good reason, and that this was a public celebration linked with Islam:

Again, the Iftar meal is a special time for people to come together as a community. When someone said, "Oh, you'd better have the police there for security," officers were dispatched. Thankfully, they took that step. There is no need to increase security because there have been zero incidents.

It's probable that people of religious minorities feel similarly uncomfortable about openly expressing their faith. The Sikh assumed that some fellow Sikhs in Australia didn't wear turbans or didn't shorten their hair for fear of prejudice.

But he also talked about how Sikh immigrants are making sure their kids keep up their traditions (like wearing a patka) so that they don't die out. The Pagan, like the other participant, was worried about practicing his religion in his own garden because of the risk of persecution. In conclusion, members of the new religious organization's congregation were hesitant to be openly identified as such, according to individuals who participated in the movement.

#### *Accepting difference:*

The necessity of accepting one another's diversity and respecting one another's religious beliefs was stressed by all attendees. However, there was a wide range of interpretations, experiences, and assessments of these general concepts among the participants. The ability to accept and celebrate differences has proven crucial for members of religious minorities to thrive in a multicultural society. The Muslim healthcare worker made allusions to the Hippocratic Oath when explaining his approach to patients. He believes

it is his moral duty and professional responsibility to accord each patient with courteous service. This includes patients who are LGBT+ or seeking abortions, whose situations he finds very challenging or uncomfortable.

Some people feel more "protected" against bigotry and prejudice when they engage in formal connections between members of various religions. A local member of the LDS church participates in the interfaith event. The necessity of accepting one another's diversity and respecting one another's religious beliefs was stressed by all attendees. However, there was a wide range of interpretations, experiences, and assessments of these general concepts among the participants. The ability to accept and celebrate differences has proven crucial for members of religious minorities to thrive in a multicultural society. The Muslim healthcare worker made allusions to the Hippocratic Oath when explaining his approach to patients. He believes it is his moral duty and professional responsibility to accord each patient with courteous service. This includes patients who are LGBT+ or seeking abortions, whose situations he finds very challenging or uncomfortable.

Some people feel more "protected" against bigotry and prejudice when they engage in formal connections between members of various religions. A local member of the LDS church participates in the interfaith event.

### **Discussion:**

The focus of this research is the procedure followed by the VCAT when a case containing a religious dispute has been filed. The vast majority of Christians who took part in our study remained mute when we asked them to reflect on their privilege and influence. One of the numerous advantages of Christianity is that its adherents rarely face discrimination, harassment, or defamation, at least in terms of the types of cases brought before the VCAT. Australia's cultural malaise may be traced back to the country's refusal to discuss Christian privilege openly. In her review of inquiries and reports conducted by the Australian government on the topic of religious freedom, Elenie Poulos (2019: 10) notes that the 1984 NSW Anti-Discrimination Board Inquiry was the first to highlight "how majority or mainstream religious groups are spared the discrimination suffered by minority religious groups." Poulos states that this study "illustrated how majority or mainstream religious groups are exempt from discrimination suffered by minority religious groups."

All following reports fail to notice the discrepancy. The results of our inquiry provide support for this claim.

We found that Christians in our study regularly experienced feelings of being "on the outside." Poulos (2019: 13) also notices this trend and argues that it's because of a growing chasm between Christians' claims to the truth and the needs of a pluralistic society's respect for its members. Because of cultural and legal discrepancies brought on by the granting of increased legal rights to women and LGBTIQ individuals, the majority of religious organizations in Australia are witnessing a deterioration in their traditional beliefs and moral standards. This is a natural result of laws that make it safer for women to participate in public life. Since the Christian majority, as constituted by Christian institutions of power, has had the truth claims of its beliefs challenged in court, it has found itself in the position of the persecuted minority in the problematization of equal rights. This is the case because influential Christian institutions often acknowledge them to be such. The Greek numeral for 2019 is 13.

To Poulos's list, we would add, "legal protections afforded to members of religious minorities." Some Christians must face the dehumanizing and discriminatory nature of their beliefs and behaviors because of legislative constraints on what can be stated about Muslims and whether Christian institutions are permitted to discriminate against members of religious minorities. It's important to remember that fundamentalist Christians aren't to blame for society's prejudice and demonization of individuals who practice religions that aren't the mainstream.

Maddox (2005) claims that the stigmatization of members of minority groups is widely practiced in Australian culture and politics.

Conservative Christian speakers maintain their constitutionally allowed right to discriminate in a variety of public circumstances by portraying themselves as "outsiders" and supporting religious freedom. According to Elenie Poulos (2019: 10), the first step toward the "right to discriminate" was taken with the release of a research on religious freedom in 2011. As of the year 2011, one's "right" to discriminate in the name of religion was included in the definition of religious freedom. Previous definitions of religious freedom focused on the absence of persecution for one's faith. Before this shift, religious freedom meant the absence of any type of persecution based on a person's faith. When the word "religious freedom" is employed, it obscures, conceals, or minimizes the reality that the right to discriminate is pursued in public contexts, such as in enterprises that receive government support to provide services to the broader public. When the term "religious freedom" is used, this is exactly what is meant. Christians are not impeded from openly practicing their faith in any of these organizations. Their ability to discriminate is being questioned in the context of their work as public service providers in social welfare, healthcare, education, and other public settings.

There may be a correlation between the challenges faced by conservative Christians in Australia and the fact that many of them work in the social services industry. Christian communities in Australia expanded their efforts to care for the sick, poor, and old in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Maddox, 2014). As a direct result, faith-based organizations are now liable for anywhere between one-third and one-half of these services (Richardson-Self et al., 2020). Certain conservative Christians are dissatisfied that, despite being requested to volunteer and assist with these programs, they are prohibited from engaging in discriminatory activities that are consistent with their moral and religious convictions. They consider this to be contrary to their moral and religious beliefs. In contrast, laws prohibiting the denigration and discrimination of women, Muslims, LGBT+ individuals, and other religious minorities have been enacted for legitimate reasons. These regulations have been enacted in numerous nations across the globe.

According to Zucca (2018), those who are subjected to discriminatory behavior incur severe consequences as a result.

It is difficult to believe that Australia is a nation that values and welcomes religious diversity due to the country's profoundly rooted Islamophobia. The majority of these tensions and concerns revolve around diverse religious structures, articles of clothing, and symbols. As the Muslim participant mentioned earlier, these concerns are reflected in opposition to the construction of a mosque and the decision to take legal action against it by filing a complaint under the Planning Act. Participants cited the Arora case as an example of this practice in its various manifestations, one of which is the prohibition on donning religious garb, such as turbans or niqabs, in public spaces, the workplace, or educational institutions. In the *Catch the Fire Ministries* case, the question of whether the Christian right to religious freedom permits the expression of anti-Islamic sentiments was at issue.

All of these forms of discrimination – whether it is the freedom to discriminate or the freedom not to be discriminated against – have historical privilege and stigma embedded within them, which affects how individuals interact with the law and go about their daily lives.

This collection of short stories illuminates the consequences of living in the "shadow of the law" (Fokas, 2019). According to Effie Fokas (2019: 4), the majority of a court's influence is exerted through the transmission and reception of information, as opposed to the imposition of concrete policy changes through issued judgments. Despite the fact that the plaintiffs will be directly impacted by the VCAT's decisions, there will also be a large number of "general effects" (Galanter, 1983: 117). According to Fokas (2019: 71), "the

communication of information by or about the Court's action, and the effects of the response to that information" are the subjects of these general effects. The case against Catch the Fire Ministries has multiple repercussions, one of which is that it functions as a deterrent against engaging in certain activities, such as making statements that could be interpreted as anti-Islamic. In a broader sense, Fokas and Galanter highlight the ways in which judicial decisions influence normative expectations regarding what constitutes acceptable and objectionable behavior. These effects are more directly related to how pertinent communities receive and interpret information regarding individual court or tribunal rulings than to the actual consequences of such decisions. Thus, the "shadow of the law" serves to illustrate the intricate relationship between the law and ordinary life.

The focus of this research is the procedure followed by the VCAT when a case containing a religious dispute has been filed. The vast majority of Christians who took part in our study remained mute when we asked them to reflect on their privilege and influence. One of the numerous advantages of Christianity is that its adherents rarely face discrimination, harassment, or defamation, at least in terms of the types of cases brought before the VCAT. Australia's cultural malaise may be traced back to the country's refusal to discuss Christian privilege openly. In her review of inquiries and reports conducted by the Australian government on the topic of religious freedom, Elenie Poulos (2019: 10) notes that the 1984 NSW Anti-Discrimination Board Inquiry was the first to highlight "how majority or mainstream religious groups are spared the discrimination suffered by minority religious groups." Poulos states that this study "illustrated how majority or mainstream religious groups are exempt from discrimination suffered by minority religious groups."

All following reports fail to notice the discrepancy. The results of our inquiry provide support for this claim.

We found that Christians in our study regularly experienced feelings of being "on the outside." Poulos (2019: 13) also notices this trend and argues that it's because of a growing chasm between Christians' claims to the truth and the needs of a pluralistic society's respect for its members. Because of cultural and legal discrepancies brought on by the granting of increased legal rights to women and LGBTIQ individuals, the majority of religious organizations in Australia are witnessing a deterioration in their traditional beliefs and moral standards. This is a natural result of laws that make it safer for women to participate in public life. Since the Christian majority, as constituted by Christian institutions of power, has had the truth claims of its beliefs challenged in court, it has found itself in the position of the persecuted minority in the problematization of equal

rights. This is the case because influential Christian institutions often acknowledge them to be such. The Greek numeral for 2019 is 13.

To Poulos's list, we would add, "legal protections afforded to members of religious minorities." Some Christians must face the dehumanizing and discriminatory nature of their beliefs and behaviors because of legislative constraints on what can be stated about Muslims and whether Christian institutions are permitted to discriminate against members of religious minorities. It's important to remember that fundamentalist Christians aren't to blame for society's prejudice and demonization of individuals who practice religions that aren't the mainstream.

Maddox (2005) claims that the stigmatization of members of minority groups is widely practiced in Australian culture and politics.

Conservative Christian speakers maintain their constitutionally allowed right to discriminate in a variety of public circumstances by portraying themselves as "outsiders" and supporting religious freedom. According to Elenie Poulos (2019: 10), the first step toward the "right to discriminate" was taken with the release of a research on religious freedom in 2011. As of the year 2011, one's "right" to discriminate in the name of religion was included in the definition of religious freedom. Previous definitions of religious freedom focused on the absence of persecution for one's faith. Before this shift, religious freedom meant the absence of any type of persecution based on a person's faith. When the word "religious freedom" is employed, it obscures, conceals, or minimizes the reality that the right to discriminate is pursued in public contexts, such as in enterprises that receive government support to provide services to the broader public. When the term "religious freedom" is used, this is exactly what is meant. Christians are not impeded from openly practicing their faith in any of these organizations. Their ability to discriminate is being questioned in the context of their work as public service providers in social welfare, healthcare, education, and other public settings.

There may be a correlation between the challenges faced by conservative Christians in Australia and the fact that many of them work in the social services industry. Christian communities in Australia expanded their efforts to care for the sick, poor, and old in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Maddox, 2014). Since then, religious groups have picked up the tab for anything from a third to half of these services (Richardson-Self et al., 2020). While volunteers and help are needed for these initiatives, some conservative Christians are unhappy about being barred from participating in any discriminating acts that are in line with their moral and religious beliefs. They hold that this goes against their principles and values. On the other hand, there are good reasons why we have laws that make it

illegal to insult and discriminate against women, Muslims, LGBT+ people, and members of other religious minority. Many countries throughout the world have passed laws similar to these.

Discrimination has dire repercussions for individuals who experience it, says Zucca (2018).

Australia's ingrained Islamophobia makes it hard to believe that it is a country that supports and welcomes religious diversity. Most of these issues and worries stem from people's different approaches to religious architecture, attire, and symbolism. According to the Muslim participant, these worries are reflected in the decision to file a complaint under the Planning Act to stop the construction of a mosque. Participants used the Arora case to illustrate this phenomenon in its many guises, including the restriction on wearing religious clothing like turbans and niqabs in public places, the workplace, and schools. The Catch the Fire Ministries case revolved around the topic of whether or not Christians have the right to religious freedom that includes the ability to advocate anti-Islamic views.

Individuals' interactions with the law and their ability to go about their daily lives are influenced by the historical privilege and stigma associated with both the right to discriminate and the right not to be discriminated against.

Living in the "shadow of the law" (Fokas, 2019) is a reality that is explored in this collection of short stories. Effie Fokas (2019: 4) argues that a court's primary means of impact is the dissemination of knowledge rather than the implementation of new policies through rulings. Although the plaintiffs will feel the "direct effects" (Galanter, 1983: 117) of the VCAT's rulings, there will be many "general effects" as well. According to Fokas (2019: 71), "the communication of information by or about the Court's action, and the effects of the response to that information" are the subjects of these broad effects. Among the many effects of the case against Catch the Fire Ministries is the fact that it serves as a deterrence against specific actions, such as making words that could be perceived as anti-Islamic. More generally, Fokas and Galanter draw attention to how judicial decisions shape social norms for what is and is not considered acceptable behavior. More so than the actual results of specific court or tribunal judgements, these repercussions are tied to how those communities receive and interpret that information. As such, the concept of the "shadow of the law" can be used to demonstrate how deeply the law permeates daily life.

