

Rabbi Jeremy Lawrence responds to Elizabeth Farrelly

Elizabeth Farrelly's Op-Ed (SMH, [Keeping quiet allows intolerance to thrive](#), 1 Sep) makes a stunning segue from the Jewish Bar Mitzvah (which she attended as an invited guest) to her main focus, the conclusions drawn in and from Maryam Nazawie's lecture on Islam and Sharia law.

There is no segue from one to the other. In a free society, religious groups ought to be able to conduct their services and ritual in their places of worship according to their traditions so long as they do not impose their values on anyone who does not wish to participate and they do not violate the law.

No one is compelled to attend a service with separate seating. For many who choose to, this provides them with the comfort and inspiration that is central to their spiritual lives. Within Orthodox Judaism there is increasing religious education and participation for women. Some hold their own prayer services others have structured more egalitarian worship. For those who have chosen to re-script the ritual and admit mixed seating there are a plethora of non-Orthodox alternatives.

Many prominent contributors to Australian as well as English, American and other free western societies are devout individuals, who ascribe their interest in bettering the world to religious teaching and participation.

Within Jewish Jurisprudence, there is a powerful teaching that "The Law of the Land is the Law". *Matters of religious status* such as Is this food kosher? When does the Sabbath come in? Is this person Jewish or eligible to marry under Jewish law? Are subject to expert Rabbinic authority. However, there is no question that *matters of state* are under the law of the land. No rabbi could sanction criminal behaviour, rape, abuse, breach of contract; nor suggest that a civil marriage may not be terminated by a civil divorce. The State's legislation is paramount.

For those who choose to incorporate religious living and ritual in their lives, rabbis facilitate the necessary ceremonies, including, as may be necessary, religious marriage and divorce. Both are handled within the law. The acknowledged basic rights for individuals to manifest their religion and culture are among a basket of others which are the hallmark of the free and democratic living we cherish. Our ability to live our lives respected by others and to enjoy diversity with freedom and without compulsion are amongst our democracy's greatest qualities. Within the Jewish tradition we prize the state's democratic institutions and revere its independent judiciary.

It is easy to pick on verses or teachings of all ancient religious texts and ridicule them as contrary to our societal norms today; to dismiss the contemporary adherents as part of an anachronistic culture, even barbaric. To do so falls prey to the misapprehension that fanatical adherence to religion is necessarily authentic. It is to misunderstand the evolution of thought and practice that has religious ethicists collaborating with the medical and scientific communities in establishing codes for genetic research, organ donation, fertility treatments. It is to dismiss the valuable contribution that the religious adherents as well as dissidents bring to our society. Moreover, it is to disown the parent culture that established "You shall have just weights and measures." "There shall be one standard applied to you and the stranger in your midst," "You shall extend your hand to the needy," and "You should love your neighbour as yourself."

These pillars of our law derive from teachings of our faith. The Bar Mitzvah Elizabeth Farrelly attended was the celebration of a boy embracing those teachings; that Jewish law engenders respect for the individual and the democratic society of which we are proud members.

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