

..... keeping separate **Church & State**

The Australian Constitution prohibits the Commonwealth from making any law for establishing religion, imposing religious observance or using religion as a test for office. However this has not guaranteed a secular state and boundaries between church and state have become increasingly blurred.

The Howard Government shaped its response to refugees in terms of Australian values which it said were Christian. Exclusively religious chaplains were funded in government schools and all states give as of rights to religious instruction in school hours. Schools are prohibited from providing meaningful activity for those who opt out.

MPs, including prime ministers, have openly declared their religious allegiances and parliaments around the country still pray before each sitting that their deliberations are overseen by God for '*...the advancement of Thy glory*'.

Organised religion is exempt from taxes for their commercial businesses. Earnings for the 10 biggest religious groups were estimated at \$23.3b in 2005, costing taxpayers untold sums in lost revenue that might otherwise be spent on services.

The Democrats strongly defend the right of freedom of religion and value the good work done in its name, however, freedom from religion must also be respected and true democracy demands that government authority and the authority of the supernatural must be kept separate. The influence of religion in civic affairs also needs to be better balanced given the public's diminishing engagement with religion and our now very diverse mix of religious practices.

Our Plan

- Constitutional reform to **enshrine separation of church and state**
- Tax system reform to remove exemptions** for church organisations for profits made from purely commercial operations.
- Replacing **prayers in Federal Parliament** with period of reflection on the importance of ethical practice
- Reforming the National Schools **Chaplains** Program to:
 - extend its availability to all schools
 - allow schools to determine the nature of student welfare they wish to provide such as youth workers, nurses, social workers or psychologists
 - require participants to have appropriate qualifications
- Obliging church organizations providing publicly funded services such as hospitals and employment placement to **not discriminate on religious grounds** in the services they deliver or the people they serve and employ.
- Abolishing **grants for proselytising** such as the \$8m for Catholic World Youth Day
- Adherence to the fundamental principle in schools that **children should not be inculcated in religion** before they are mature enough to make judgements on particular belief systems.
- Confining religious instruction or education in government schools to **after school hours**, changing parent permission to opt in rather than opt out and encouraging **ethics** education in schools
- The principle that **government should be policy neutral** when it comes to religion – between different religions and with those of no religion.