

# We're a robust democracy so suck it up, zealots

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Illustration: Tom Jellett.

It's hard to overstate the extent of the ridiculousness, overzealous subjectivity and downright hypocrisy on both sides of the Israel Folau matter.

The religious types and the hardcore opponents of Folau are two peas in the same pod, as bad as each other. Most Australians must be looking on in horror at the trumped-up zealotry on both sides. The sensible centre detests such posturing, it always has.

Rugby Australia can do what it wants — sack him, keep him, find a justification for either. The fans and the courts will make their judgment eventually.

Equally, Folau should be free to respond however he wants: challenge the decision, go quietly, whatever suits his fancy. Again, the fans and the

courts will sit in judgment, all in good time.

Teammates can express their thoughts — they have a dog in the fight. Fans too.

And sponsors can choose to remain as financial backers or pull their assistance based on how the organisations in the spotlight react to controversy within their ranks. Who can call themselves a capitalist and disagree with that notion?

But polemicists with an axe to grind are worthless additions to the debate. Unless they want to help fund his court case, in which case I say go for it. Put your money where your loud mouths are.

The conga line of hangers-on casting largely self-righteous black-and-white judgments on what is an incredibly grey matter is just laughable. Clowns, one and all.

The people who want religious bakers to be able to make their own choices whether to sell cake for gay weddings suddenly have a problem with the GoFundMe business doing the same thing when it comes to hosting Folau's fundraising appeal.

What utter hypocrites such religious types are.

Equally, the reverse applies: the LGBTI advocates who demand all bakers service gay weddings now applaud GoFundMe's refusal to host Folau's cause. What hypocrites, one and all.

If these zealots on both sides of the ledger didn't hate each other so much they would deserve one another's company forever, in eternal damnation if you will. To be sure, they look in a mirror and see one another.

The Folau case is a lightning rod for a broader debate.

I spent decades arguing for same-sex marriage because I loathed the bigotry gay couples faced, largely from religious types who hid behind

their faith, using it to justify discrimination.

People such as Folau who seemingly break the code of the Bible when covering themselves in tattoos (Leviticus 19:28), for example, yet selectively refer to other parts of the scriptures to justify their hate, embrace the definition of hypocrisy.

The good news is such uneducated zealots are on the wane in the West: even our Prime Minister, whose faith required him to walk out on the gay marriage vote in parliament, wasn't prepared to explain why he did so when on the campaign trail because he knew doing so put him out of step with most Australians.

The bad news is that many of the more zealous advocates for change (and I applaud their activism), unfortunately, also are blinded by their passions, showing signs of what can be referred to only as reverse bigotry or payback, heaping the hate back on to those who served it up for so long.

Part of me wants to agree with them; what goes around comes around is a very biblical way of thinking. Rather Old Testament, an eye for an eye. But such thinking isn't what modern democracies that embrace diversity and pluralism should be all about.

And that is my faith: not zealotry before a god I've never seen, nor certainty that there isn't one — an atheism that is as arrogant in its certainty that there is nothing as the religious are in their certainty there is a heaven and a hell.

I believe in democracy and all that it entails. That includes the right to be a bigot. Yes, George Brandis was right after all, even if he didn't need to blurt it out the way he did in the Senate.

But guess what? Going hand in glove with the right to be a bigot (yes, I'm talking to you, Israel) is the right of your employer not to employ such bigots. Particularly when bigotry (even if it's cloaked in religion) goes against the ethos of the organisation you work for, especially if you

pledge to uphold its values.

Even if Folau wins the legal battle against Rugby Australia, he'll never again pull on a Wallabies jumper. Amen to that.

Here is another contradiction the zealots on both sides can't seem to see. The same religious types who want religious schools to be able to refuse to hire gay teachers if they so choose also have a problem with Rugby Australia not wanting to employ someone who doesn't share its ethos. What's the difference?

Equally, if you think it's outrageous that a religious school can refuse to hire a gay teacher (because, like Folau, it believes being gay consigns you to hell), why applaud Rugby Australia refusing to honour Folau's contract because his values don't align with the organisation for which he worked?

For years the religious lorded their majoritarianism over the rest of us as though that was what democracy was all about. It's not, nor was it then, which is why I'm happy to defend the now minority religious groupings upholding their ancient rituals — because history is important. It's worth studying, it's worth observing, even if I won't practise it for the same reason I don't apply leeches to my body when I'm sick.

I live in a modern society. But if people want to believe Noah put two of every animal on a boat to ensure the survival of all species during a worldwide flood, I'll defend their right to hold such strident views. Which includes believing that gays will go to hell. Even if I think such views are - ritualised nonsense.

But spare me the pious wounded whingeing of the religious lobby, which is upset it is being victimised the way it was so willing and able to victimise others for so many centuries. Its inability to suffer in the face of adversity the way Christ did is unbecoming.

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