

## **His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia issues statement on the change or suppression (conversion) practice prohibition bill 2020**



The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia affirms that its social ethos is founded in the teachings of Jesus Christ. Within the Gospel of our Lord, nothing is emphasised more than His abiding concern for the isolated, the disenfranchised, the marginalised, the neglected and the vulnerable.

Christ's condemnation of the privileged's indifference to the plight of the oppressed is uncompromising and unequivocal. At the same time, His compassion and love for "the least of these" is enduring and boundless.

Consequently, the teachings of Christ provide specific moral imperatives for the affording of justice to the wronged, protection for the powerless and mercy and

love for all.

The Orthodox Church calls upon all to be committed to a life of love in which no distinction is made and no discrimination practised against anyone, for “all are one” (Galatians 3:28).

Nonetheless, we express our grave disquiet at the proposed passage of the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practice Prohibition Bill 2020 by the Victorian Legislative Assembly.

While the Orthodox Church extends its loving embrace around all, in an effort to protect the vulnerable from coercion, the proposed Bill appears to extend too far towards the opposite extreme, specifically and without properly defining its parameters, criminalising prayer for one another, which is at the heart of Orthodox spirituality and the highest expression of Christ’s injunction to “love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:34).

Indeed, the ambiguous and vague manner in which Change of Suppression (Conversion) practices are defined in the bill, are of concern to us, since they could be taken to include pastoral care, counselling and spiritual advice provided within the Mystery of Confession, and providing for penalties not only for individuals but also corporate bodies.

Most significantly, the Bill, in criminalising practices “whether with or without a person’s consent” abrogates a fundamental right which is at the centre of the Church’s understanding of humanity, that of free will, which allows each person to choose for themselves, without coercion or compulsion, their own spiritual and moral direction, for as Saint John Chrysostom observed: “despite the weakness of human volition, the will can take the initiative toward God.”

The Orthodox Church unequivocally condemns any and all forms of coercion exercised towards individuals based upon their moral choices. At the same time, it feels compelled to affirm its mission to “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15) and to seek that it be permitted to preach the salvific Gospel of Christ free from that coercion, to all who choose to hear it.

We therefore prayerfully urge the esteemed members of the Victorian Legislative Assembly not to pass the proposed Bill in its present form, but having carefully considered its repercussions and broader social ramifications, to achieve via appropriate amendments, its laudable aim of protecting the vulnerable. I remain,

In Sydney, on the 8th day of December, 2020

Prayerfully yours,

† Archbishop MAKARIOS

Primate of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia

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