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# Archbishop Makarios of Australia: “I do not distinguish the faithful between vaccinated and non-vaccinated”



“The doors of our churches will be open for all”

With an important encyclical addressed to the God-loving Bishops, the gracious clergy and the monastic communities of the Holy Archdiocese of Australia, His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia addresses, in an informative and responsible way, the issues related to the coronavirus pandemic and its incalculable consequences, drawing attention to the appropriate ways of managing these.

Among other things, he notes that vaccination against Covid-19, and all vaccinations, is primarily a medical and scientific issue, noting that the Church listens to the experts and adding that, “we urge our people to be vaccinated, without compelling anyone, respecting the freedom of every person.”

Moreover, on the possibility of banning the entry of unvaccinated faithful into places of worship in Australia, His Eminence Archbishop Makarios emphasises that,

“personally, I will never agree with a measure that divides the faithful between vaccinated and non-vaccinated. The doors of our churches” he stresses, “will be open for all. I do not accept that there will be people who wish to come to Church and we will not allow them.”

Making it clear, however, that difficult and significant issues must be solved through understanding, dialogue and by presenting alternative proposals, he announces that he is already in talks with the authorities and certain religious heads of our country and a team of doctors has been tasked with preparing a scientific and well-documented plan, with specific directions, so that the entry of those not vaccinated can be allowed into our churches. This plan will be submitted by the Archdiocese of Australia to the respective States along with the claim regarding the human right of every person to be able to attend church.

The Encyclical follows:

**MAKARIOS**

by God’s mercy, Archbishop of the Most Holy Archdiocese of Australia, Primate and Exarch of All Oceania, to the God-loving Bishops, the gracious clergy, the monastic brotherhoods of the Orthodox Church in Australia, grace and peace from Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Most honourable Brother Fellow Bishops and my beloved children,

Two years are almost approaching from December 2019, namely, when the spread of the pandemic commenced from the city of Wuhan in China to the entire world. This new unfortunate situation caused global unrest, led millions of our fellow human beings to death and imposed incalculable consequences and changes to the economic, social, political, existential, mental, and even ecclesial aspects of the everyday life of people. The closure of Churches and the prohibition of public worship, the way that Holy Communion is given, and other related matters constituted on the whole causes of coercion and deception, intense dialogue, but also conflict between the Church and state and legal systems.

In this context, we often find that key issues, such as the pandemic, are discussed by unqualified persons, namely those who lack the theological competency and scientific knowledge. Indeed, the assertions of these people, notwithstanding the fact that they are superficial and denunciatory, are propounded long before the responsible ecclesial voice of the official Church, clearly intent on underestimating and undervaluing it. For example, the dangerous assertion, that within the Church no illnesses can be transmitted, is often propagated, a viewpoint that was heard in

sermons of hierarchs and other official clergy (thankfully few), with the unfounded theological argument that within the Church all things are sanctified: the dust on which we walk upon the ground, the marble, the stones, the wood, the colours etc, and, as such, all these are changed into carriers of Divine Grace, thereby protecting us from pandemics and other such maladies. Certainly, such viewpoints can be identified more with idolatry, and these were condemned by the 7th Ecumenical Council. Beyond this, however, persons who support and promote such unorthodox theories shape the viewpoint and stance of the people of God, giving rise to a lack of trust towards the local Shepherds, and even towards the official voice of the Church.

This new coronavirus brought to the surface, amongst other things, a smouldering “subjective disease”, that of the multiplicity of language within the Church, something which refers to that old “virus” of Babel. A cursory study on the internet will persuade you of this personal assertion of mine. Moreover, a study of the personal social media networking of our clergy or of the sermons that are heard by certain priests of ours in the Churches will persuade you of this multiplicity of languages, which truly causes confusion, disappoints and primarily does not help our people. With these things in mind, I focus your attention on the following:

As clergy you are obliged not to forget your distinctive attribute as a priest. In relation to posts on social media from our clergy, I will soon return to this matter with a new encyclical, because correspondence often comes to my desk from parishioners in relation to certain clergy with photographed material and texts, which do not express a priestly ethos and ecclesial mindset. However, in relation to the coronavirus and the pandemic, be mindful that whatever you publish, people do consider it as the voice of a clergyman and, more broadly, as the voice of the Church which he represents. Do not forget, therefore, that your distinctive attribute as a clergyman does not allow you to function as an individual. As you know, even when a clergyman departs from the active governance of the Church, he is not defrocked, does not cease celebrating the holy Sacraments, does not cease to take part in the clergy meetings of the local Church. Therefore, in every situation you need to function and acts as members of the body which is called the Church. Not as individual members, not as autonomous ecclesial entities and voices, not as if you had no head, no bishop or no Shepherd, but as members of the Priestly Family of the Holy Archdiocese of Australia. If someone does not wish to be in this family, he has the right to leave; however, he does not have the right to follow his own way, and indeed one which is anti-ecclesial and unorthodox.
In relation to vaccination and all vaccinations, this is primarily a medical and scientific issue. It is more holy and more spiritual for us, the clergy, who do not

have the requisite knowledge, to ask and to listen. When we have concerns and hesitancies for certain public or critical issues, we communicate with our Shepherd and to him we submit our thoughts. Following this, the Shepherd has the responsibility to convey the concerns of the clergy and the laity of his Eparchy to the Synod, and the Synod, in its turn, will decide, to the extent that the Orthodox Church expresses herself synodically. When, for certain issues, even medical, there are ethical and spiritual dilemmas, then we underline and delineate these; and following this, we submit our thoughts with ecclesial decency to those who are responsible for making changes or finding solutions. For example, together with the Catholic and Anglican Archbishops of Sydney, we sent a letter of protest to the Prime Minister of our country, Mr Scott Morrison, in relation to the provision of certain vaccines, whose production is based on cell linings of aborted embryos. This, however, does not mean that all vaccines are ethically unacceptable. Specifically for the coronavirus pandemic, there are approximately 30 vaccines in circulation. Some of these are not produced with the cell linings of dead embryos. Consequently, there is no spiritual, ecclesial or canonical issue for a person to be vaccinated with one of these vaccines. The international scientific community tells us that vaccination is the only solution to confront the pandemic. We therefore listen to the specialists. We urge our people to be vaccinated, without compelling anyone, respecting the freedom of every person. The spirit, however, of the Church is not anti-scientific, anti-medical or anti-vaccination in relation to vaccinations which do not come from embryos. You have already vaccinated your children from a very young age, precisely because the spirit of the Church is not anti-vaccination, not in opposition to science.

We face huge difficulties these days, because already in the State of Victoria, it was announced that entry into our Churches will not be allowed to those faithful members of the Church who have not been vaccinated. In relation to the remaining States, there have not been similar announcements, beyond what is being said in general media outlets. Certainly, it is an inalienable right of every person to worship God in Church, a right which is even more applicable for us Orthodox Christians, who believe in the Holy Gospel, which emphatically stresses freedom and equality. Personally, I will never agree with a measure which divides the faithful between vaccinated and non-vaccinated. The doors of our Churches will be open for all. I do not accept that there will be people who wish to come to Church and we will not allow them. On this most sensitive issue, I have already begun, since, ten days ago, talks with our leaders and certain religious heads of our country. Furthermore, there is a team of doctors, who is currently preparing a scientific and well-documented plan, with specific directions, so that the entry of those not vaccinated can be allowed in our Churches. As the Archdiocese of

Australia, we will submit this plan to the respective States and we will seek their understanding, or rather we will claim the human right of every person to be able to attend Church. However, my experience up to this point, has taught me that we are able to solve difficult and significant issues with understanding, dialogue and by presenting alternative proposals. Writing letters of protest without having first spoken with the relevant Ministers, or to make threats and create noise, without first having submitted proposals with an alternative solution, leads to division and naturally to undesirable results. For this reason, once again, I urge you, do not be quick to judge, to make public statements, to censure and to take a position, at least on basic matters, without asking your leader, which is the Holy Archdiocese of Australia and your incumbent Archbishop. I remind you that, if to this day, beyond the manifold difficulties, we have managed to handle the matter of Holy Communion with calm and serenity, this is not due to the alleged heroism and bully-tactics of certain clergy, who thought that with posts on their personal pages on the internet they could become confessors. Rather, it has been due to dialogue and loving relations, which I try to uphold with our leaders, a relationship which builds up trust between the Church and State.

With these thoughts and appeals, I greet you all, my beloved priests “with a holy kiss” and I hope that you cultivate on a daily basis from within you God-pleasing ministry “a spirit of wisdom, a spirit of understanding”, so that you may all work united together with the body of our Holy Archdiocese, for the glory of Christ and the salvation of the people.

In Sydney, the 19th of September 2021

Your Archbishop

† Makarios of Australia

Primate of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia

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