



*We proclaim a crucified Christ*

1Cor1.23

5 December 2020

*All Clergy,  
Archdiocese of Melbourne*

Dear Bishops, Fathers and Deacons,

My prayerful greetings to you in this Season of Advent, and on this joyful day of ordinations to the priesthood. Please keep Jude, Simeon, James and Jude Thaddeus in your prayers.

You may have seen a bill, quietly tabled by the State Government last week, called the **Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020**.

<https://content.legislation.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/bills/591143bi1.pdf>

<https://content.legislation.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/bills/591143exi1.pdf>

With scant consultation over the past twelve months, and little discussion in recent weeks, the bill was tabled without religious communities having the opportunity to see exactly what was being proposed, and to be frank, it raises serious concerns and questions.

The basic problem is not the announced intention, which appears to be about preventing harmful and coercive practices that would damage human dignity. This I would support. The problem however, is the content of the bill itself and its explanatory memorandum (links above), which looks like a dramatic over-reach of the state into the contexts of prayer, conversion, pastoral conversation, spiritual accompaniment, family life and the freedom of individuals to change and to seek advice and direction of their own choosing to make their own decisions.

Since the bill was made public I have given some time to reading and understanding it, and have sought a range of advice. While more consideration will need to be given to it, I have to be clear with you that I oppose this bill as it currently stands. It is expected that the bill will be

debated and brought to pass in the lower house as early as next week, and brought back to the upper house early next year.

Can you please make your own people aware of the bill and its possible implications, and encourage them to phone their local Member of Parliament to express their view. Because the bill has not been widely publicised, many parents and families, clergy and people of faith are currently unaware of the contents of this proposed legislation, which might have a chilling effect on the ability of Victorian people of faith to express a view, share their faith, or talk about biblical teaching without fear of state interference.

In fact, the ultimate outcome of this bill may not actually be to protect anyone who is vulnerable, but to silence people of faith from expressing their view.

If outstanding questions can be answered comprehensively, and time given to public debate and discussion, it is possible such concerns could be resolved, but in the meanwhile I will give some public attention to this issue, alongside other faith leaders. Attached to this letter is a set of unresolved questions legislators in Victoria ought to be able to answer. You may wish to use these as discussion points with your people, and as points they might raise in their conversations with local Members.

I am pleased for you to circulate this letter and pray we can find a fair and equitable approach to this issue, strangely appearing just weeks before the celebration of Christmas.

Yours fraternally in Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter A. Comensoli'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a small cross symbol at the beginning.

**Most Rev Peter A Comensoli**  
Archbishop of Melbourne