



We proclaim a crucified Christ

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10 November 2021

To: *Members of the Victorian Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council*

Concerns about the diminishing of religious freedom and the accumulation of power

Dear Honourable Member,

My prayerful greetings to you. I write to express grave misgivings I share with other faith leaders, in relation to the *Equal Opportunity (Religious Exceptions) Amendment Bill 2021*.

The proposed legislation diminishes the ability of faith organisations to confidently manage employment matters according to their faith and conscience.

As a point of principle, this is a serious over-reach of the Government into the rightful freedoms of faith-based organisations in Victoria. Organisations of care charity, including religious and church agencies, have a right to practice their faith without new administration burdens and pressures.

In my own context, Catholic organisations are inclusive and welcoming places, not despite but *because* they are Catholic. Across all sectors in Catholic organisational contexts, I am particularly concerned that the introduction of an 'inherent requirement' test is a serious intrusion into the expression of faith, and an unnecessary instrument of power. It will lead to vexatious claims being adjudicated by a Commissioner or the Courts, neither of which have competency to define religious matters for believers.

The Government has been unable to identify a single problem in Catholic schools with which this legislation is meant to address, and many in my community are therefore concluding that the Government means to diminish the rights of large religious communities and concurrently target religious minorities. I hope this is not the case.

To people of faith, this is looking increasingly like a willingness to hurt the rightful expression of religious faith coupled with an extravagant adoption of political power over our lives. Please see attached my statement to the media of 2 October.

With great respect to our public representatives, I urge a mature re-think on both of the above proposals, and for a fairer and democratic approach to be taken.

With every grace and blessing, I remain,

Yours sincerely in Christ Jesus,

Most Rev Peter A Comensoli
Archbishop of Melbourne