

A BAN ON THE BIBLE?

Public reading and expounding Bible passages on marriage, divorce and homosexuality could become a crime in South Australia.



The **Equal Opportunity (Miscellaneous) Amendment Bill** was quietly introduced by SA Attorney-General Michael Atkinson on 26 October 2006. **Clause 61 of the Bill would prohibit “victimisation” (ie vilification)** - any “public act which incites hatred, serious contempt or severe ridicule against a person or group” on the ground of their marital status or sexuality (among other grounds). There is **no exemption** for acts performed for a religious purpose - but actors, artists and comedians would have an “artistic purpose” exemption.

In NSW and Queensland, which have similar laws against homosexual vilification, Christians have been subjected to complaints and stressful conciliation procedures for:

- writing a letter to the editor outlining the risks (eg HIV) of homosexual behaviour;
- making public statements supporting traditional man-woman marriage;
- at a community group meeting, moving a motion against the promotion of the homosexual lifestyle;
- warning Catholics about a homosexual activist involved in school seminars on sexuality.

Under the SA bill, complainants would be assisted by the Equal Opportunity Commission, but defendants must pay for their own costs and legal advice for attending conciliation sessions - with fines of up to \$2500 for non-compliance. Defendants would not be compensated if complaints against them are dismissed.

In September 2006, UK police arrested a man for offering leaflets discussing Bible passages on homosexuality. The Church of England Bishop of Chester was subjected to an hour of police questioning in 2003 over his remark to a journalist that he would encourage homosexuals to consider the possibility of re-orientation. In 2004 the Cambridge University Christian Union was investigated by police for a lecture by the Anglican Dean of Sydney on the Bible and homosexuality. In February 2006 a Scottish MP reported the Catholic Archbishop of Glasgow to police for a sermon affirming man-woman marriage.

OTHER PROBLEMS with the Bill include:

The Bill would restrict the ability of SA Christian schools to maintain a biblical ethos. Such schools would be able to hire staff according to biblical principles - but if they choose not to employ practising homosexual people they would have to publicise this policy to employees, potential employees and students and report it to the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity who would also publish it (clause 17). The bill would prohibit Christian schools from discriminating against practising homosexual students. Schools would not be allowed to prevent such students promoting their lifestyle in various ways and would have to have an anti-victimisation (ie anti-vilification) policy. Christian schools could be prohibited from expounding Bible passages which condemn homosexual behaviour.

The Bill would allow the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity - who is selected because of his/her commitment to anti-discrimination - to investigate any matter, even if there is no complaint (clause 67).

PHONE YOUR STATE MP

(see White Pages p 33 for names and phone numbers);

PREMIER MIKE RANN

(email: premier@saugov.sa.gov.au; fax: 8463 3168; phone: 8463 3166);

OPPOSITION LEADER IAIN EVANS

(email: davenport@parliament.sa.gov.au; fax: 8370 2626; phone: 8278 5844).

Include your name and address. In your own words, politely say to them:

‘ The Equal Opportunity (Miscellaneous) Amendment Bill would undermine the freedom of religion and freedom of speech of all South Australians. Please reject it! ’

For more information, contact Ros Phillips, Festival of Light Australia, 4th Floor, 68 Grenfell St Adelaide 5000, phone 1300 365 965, email: rhp@fol.org.au.