**Stop abusing people and life-giving Faith in the name of religion**

 ‘It is time that leading politicians and religious leaders stopped abusing religion to hurt people and cling to power’, said the Revd Dr Josephine Inkpin, a transgender Anglican priest and Minister of Pitt Street Uniting Church in Sydney, speaking ahead of this Saturday’s protest at Sydney Town Hall against the One Nation ‘religious freedom’ and ‘parental choice in education’ Bills in NSW Parliament.

 ‘As I, and so many people of faith embody,’ she said, ‘there is no necessary conflict between being part of the LGBTQ+ community and being a person of faith. The attempts to drive a wedge between people undermines our nation’s shared commitments to human rights and a ‘fair go’ for all. Jesus was quite clear – ‘love your neighbour as yourself’ is at the heart of divine law and compassion. Shockingly however, the cross, a symbol of love for all, is turned upside down by some to become a sword to damage others.’

 As chair of Equal Voices, a national LGBTQ+ Christian network, Dr Josephine Inkpin celebrates the increasing emergence of sexually and gender diverse people of faith, and the growth of affirming churches and other religious groups. ‘The transformation of life-denying religion may be one of the last and hardest frontiers of LGBTQ+ liberation,’ she says, ‘but it is ultimately irresistible, for it is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It offers freedom and healing for all, including for those desperately trying to deny the compassion at the heart of all the great religions.’

Dr Inkpin encourages the positive engagement taking place in many quarters, including in the Metropolitan Community Church, the Society of Friends, the Uniting Church and sections of the Anglican, Catholic, and other Churches. ‘It has been encouraging’, she says, ‘to have the support of both the Moderator of the Uniting Synod of NSW/ACT and the national Anglican Public Affairs committee in opposing the One Nation ‘religious freedom’ Bill. LGBTQ+ people of faith call on others to join them in standing up for us and for all whose rights and lives are threatened by such misplaced reactions. Sexually and gender diverse people have so much to enrich religion, as in all other areas of life.’

 With her fellow LGBTQ+ people of faith, Dr Inkpin draws particular attention to the threats to transgender people, in the Education Bill proposed by NSW One Nation. ‘We so badly need attention to transgender needs’, she says, ‘in education as in so many other areas of life. Yet this moves entirely in the wrong direction. May we together as a society therefore use it as a rallying call to change direction, turn the cross the right way up, and fully affirm the gifts of all.’

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