



GOSPEL, CHURCH & NATION

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF VICTORIA

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CONTENTS

1. Keeping censorship out of prayer and counselling
2. Two Christian scholars on antisemitism in Australia
3. Abortion's seldom-acknowledged impact on women
4. March for the Babies, Melbourne, Saturday, October 10, 2026

1. Keeping censorship out of prayer and counselling

Victoria's draconian "conversion therapy" ban of 2021 made headlines overseas ([here](#) and [here](#)) when the new law criminalised not only supportive counselling, but even praying for, an individual who seeks to overcome unwanted feelings of same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria.

Under the state's controversial *Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2021*, anyone who offers counselling or prayer aimed at changing or suppressing an individual's gender identity or sexual orientation may be jailed for up to two years or incur a maximum fine of nearly \$10,000.

A recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling on conversion therapy bans, however, has made an important distinction — which Victoria's law does not — between "harmful conduct, such as aversive physical interventions", and a citizen's right of free thought and speech.

As a result, a major part of a law banning so-called "conversion therapy", adopted by the state of Colorado in 2019, has been declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court.

On March 31, 2026, at the conclusion of the *Kaley Chiles v. Salazar [Colorado Govt]* [case](#), the court ruled, by a majority of 8–1, that a state government may outlaw only harmful and coercive conduct, but [may not censor](#) "which viewpoints counsellors are allowed to express and which viewpoints families and children are allowed to hear in the counselling office".

Such censorship, the court has declared, is unconstitutional as it is in clear breach of the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment's protection of free speech.

Justice Neil Gorsuch, writing for the majority of judges on the Supreme Court, observed that the plaintiff, **Kaley Chiles**, a licensed professional counsellor and Christian practising in Colorado Springs, "seeks to engage only in speech" (*Kaley Chiles v. Salazar*, p. 12). He concluded, "The First Amendment stands as a shield against any effort to enforce orthodoxy in thought or speech in this country." (p. 23).

After the Supreme Court's decision, Ms Chiles [urged Christians](#) to educate their children about biological sex.

"We would start at age 2 or 3, not with what sex is, but that you are a sex, that you are a boy or you are a girl, you are made in the image of God, who doesn't make mistakes," she explained. She called on Christians to be "more proactive", rather than reactive to the widespread promotion of transgender ideology.

"If we don't sex educate our children, then it's very clear that someone else will," she warned.

2. Two Christian scholars on antisemitism in Australia

After the Bondi Beach terrorist attack of December 14, 2025, Australian Anglican theologian **Rev. Dr Michael Bird**, [expressed](#) concern that both Australian Federal Police Commissioner Krissy Barrett and senior ABC commentator Laura Tingle flatly denied that the Bondi pogrom had anything to do with the Islamic religion.

Dr Bird, who teaches at Melbourne's Ridley College, suggested that many politicians, journalists and even senior law-enforcement personnel "live in a world so shaped by secularity that they cannot imagine how 'religion' can be enmeshed within politics".

He added that "the progressive left has abandoned the principle of equality before the law in favour of a moral hierarchy of identities", whereby people's identities are ranked according to degrees of their supposed victimhood — and not according to "evidence, law or evaluating behaviour".

Writing before Labor passed its anti-hate-speech legislation in early 2026, he warned that such laws "will never be applied against Muslims or anti-Semitic progressives, because government and law enforcement will never challenge the hierarchy of identities".

Another Australian Anglican theologian, **Rev. Dr Mark Durie**, who is a widely-published international authority on Islam, recently made a [detailed submission](#) to the Australian Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion, in which he considered three questions:

1. Are there antisemitic passages in the canonical scriptures of Islam (the Quran, the hadiths and the siras), and what do they say about Jews?
2. Are these passages considered by Muslims to apply to Jews today, or were they only directed at the Jews whom Muhammad encountered during his lifetime?
3. Is Islamic antisemitism in Australia a recent development or does it have a longer history?

In his conclusion he observed that:

"... all the canonical texts of Islam contain antisemitic passages. Furthermore, these passages are considered by many Muslims, including influential ones such as Grand Imams and members of parliament, to apply to Jews today: they are drivers of antisemitism among Muslims. Furthermore, the expressions of antisemitism that have become more widely acknowledged in Australian media in recent years are not a recent development.

“It is important to stress that these findings do **not** imply that all Muslims read the canonical sources of Islam in an antisemitic light. My point is simply that some do, including highly respected and influential Muslim thought leaders.”

Dr Durie, as well as being an Anglican minister, is a senior research fellow at the Melbourne School of Theology and a [writing fellow](#) at the Middle East Forum in the U.S. He is the author of several works on Islam, including, most recently, a 34-page report, [UK Grooming Gangs and Islam](#), for Christian Concern, a leading evangelical advocacy group in the United Kingdom.

3. Abortion's seldom-acknowledged impact on women

Many well-intentioned and pastorally-minded Christians fear that speaking or preaching against the killing of the unborn, or publicising a pro-life event, such as Melbourne's annual March for the Babies (see details below), risks alienating many congregation members, women in particular.

How, then, can Christians sensitively broach a politically contentious issue such as abortion, while balancing grace and truth?

Two important aspects of abortion, which are seldom acknowledged by the mainstream media and academia, are of the highest importance and relevance to women. First, feminism's founders were all anti-abortion. Secondly, women who have an abortion risk suffering long-term adverse consequences to their health and mental well-being.

Contemporary feminists often insist that free access to abortion is essential for advancing the status and empowerment of women. But it is noteworthy that leading figures of the original feminist movement, such as **Mary Wollstonecraft** (1759–1797), **Elizabeth Cady Stanton** (1815–1902), **Susan B. Anthony** (1820–1906) and **Alice S. Paul** (1885–1977), were strongly pro-life.

Serrin Foster, president of Feminists for Life of America, has [written](#): “Without known exception, the early American feminists condemned abortion in the strongest possible terms.” She notes the irony that the U.S. anti-abortion laws of the latter half of the 19th century were the direct results of the advocacy work of the early feminists.

Legalised abortion not only destroys innocent human life on a vast scale, but also causes women who have undergone abortions to suffer long-term psychological wounds.

In 2000, Australian women's advocate and self-styled Christian feminist **Melinda Tankard Reist** lifted the curtain on this tragic yet hidden dimension of abortion, with her [pioneering book](#), *Giving Sorrow Words: Women's Stories of Grief After Abortion*. In it she recorded personal accounts of 18 women and drew on the experiences of more than 200 others. All thought they could quickly get over their abortions and resume their normal lives, but their lives were never the same again. Almost without exception, they suffered deep grief for their lost child — a grief that often lasts for years.

Reist's book also exposed the coercion women experience from boyfriends, husbands, parents and society in general. It also reveals the inadequacy of much current counselling for women.

Even some “pro-choice” advocates have been prepared to acknowledge, in peer-reviewed medical journals, that women suffer post-abortion grief and depression (e.g., [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)).

4. March for the Babies, Melbourne, Saturday, October 10, 2026

Melbourne’s March for the Babies is held each year in loving memory of the babies lost through abortion in Victoria. It is a family-friendly event with a peaceful police presence.

This year’s march marks the 18th anniversary of the adoption, by Victoria’s parliament, of the *Abortion Law Reform Act 2008*, one of the cruellest and most extreme models of abortion legislation to be found anywhere in the Western world. Its provisions have resulted in the following adverse outcomes in Victoria:

1. Abortion is legal, effectively for any reason, right up to birth.
2. Babies who survive abortion and are born alive are left to die (by legal omission).
3. Sex-selective abortion is legal.
4. No help is offered to a woman with an unplanned pregnancy, such as independent counselling or financial assistance, to encourage her to consider options for her unborn child other than termination.
5. A doctor with a conscientious objection to abortion is compelled by Victorian law to refer a woman seeking a termination to another doctor who is willing and able to organise one for her.

All PCV pastors are strongly urged to promote this year’s March for the Babies among their congregations.

When: Saturday, October 10, 2026, at 1:00 pm.

Where: Meeting at Treasury Gardens, corner of Spring Street and Wellington Parade, Melbourne.

Further details: MarchForTheBabies.com, Facebook.com/MarchForTheBabies.

A PDF copy of this Gospel, Church & Nation Update is available online at:
gcn.pcv.org.au/2026/09/01/update.pdf

Rev. Dr Thomas Witherow (1824–1890) a Northern Irish Presbyterian minister and historian



“It seems to me that if a preacher only prophesies smooth things, preaches only what he considers palatable to his audience, spares errors that are abroad in the community working much evil, and purposely keeps back any portion of the truth for being pronounced sectarian and uncharitable, he ceases to be the minister of God and becomes the servant of man.”
— **Thomas Witherow (1834–1892)**, *The Apostolic Church: Which Is It?* [1856] (4th edition, 1869).