

‘Safe Schools’ in Australia: Protection of Diversity or Suppression of the Natural? **(Nikolaos G. Koios, Content Coach of Pemptousia)**

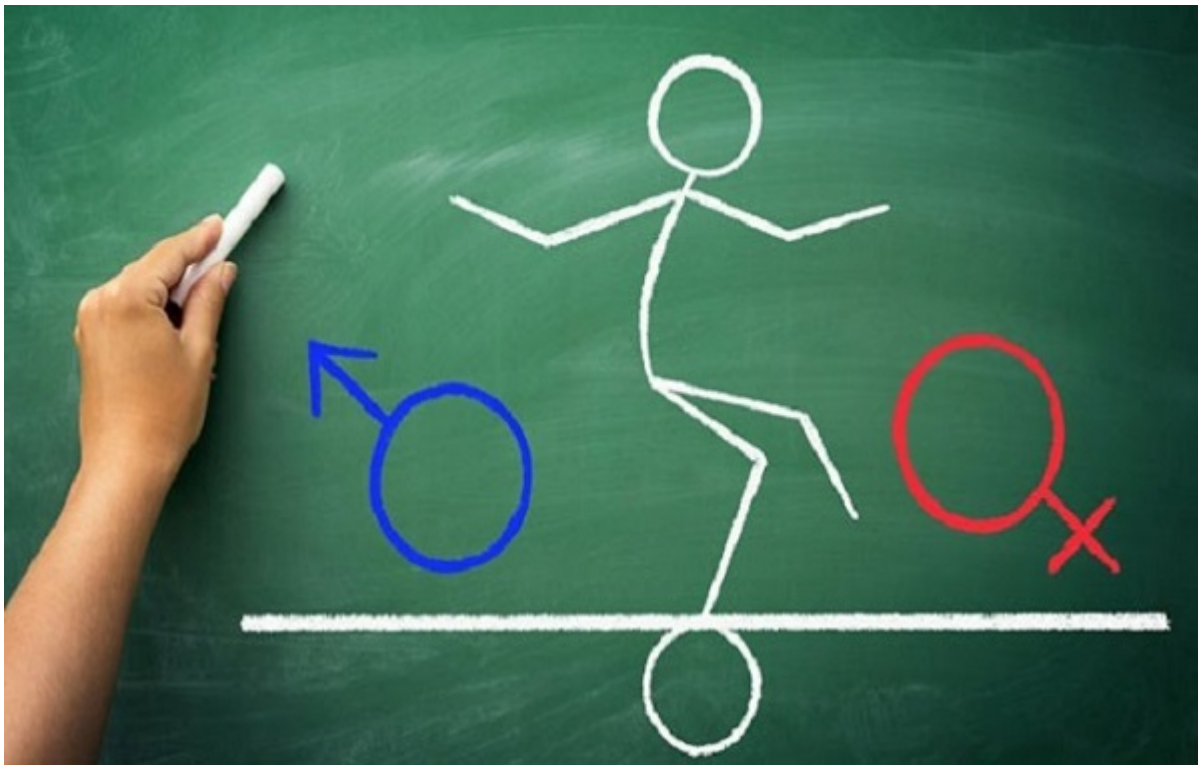
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A few months ago, public debate [in Greece] was dominated by the issue of the relations between the two sexes and sexuality. This was sparked by a week of discussions on gender identities, organized by the Ministry of Education. A variety of views were expressed, positive and negative, regarding both the content of the initiative and the way in which it was constituted. The position of the Church and theology was repeatedly under discussion. And, on this level, opinions were expressed which illumined various facets of this question, which is so important for human nature, human morals and human societies.

In Australia, which is a long way from Greece, yet is also quite close because of its flourishing Greek and Orthodox community, there are ongoing developments as regards the handling of sex education by the

teaching community and these are creating similar, though, it seems, more contentious, reflections than those which emerged in the week of discussions in Greece.

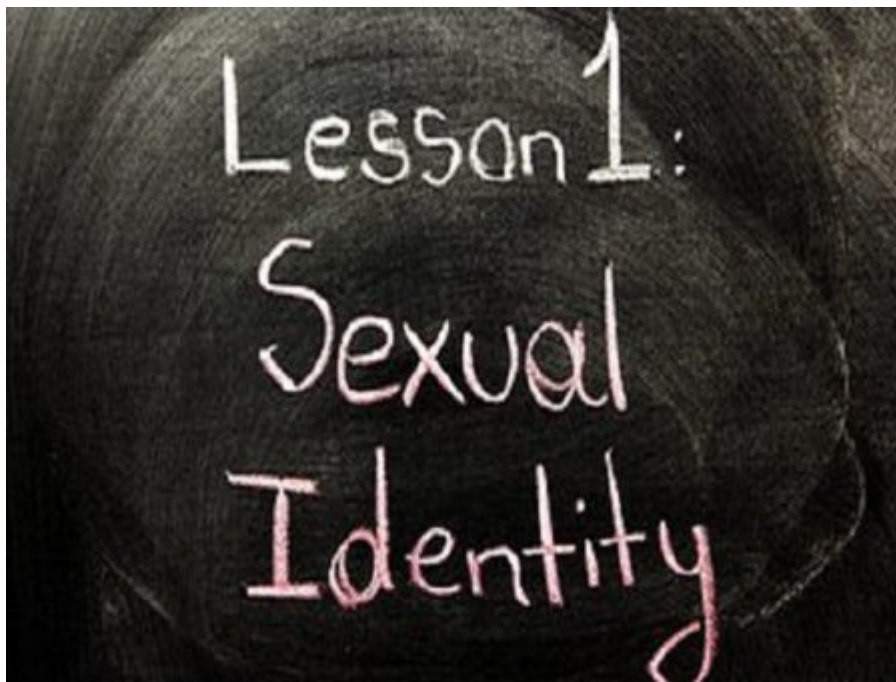


Safe Schools Coalition Australia (SSCA) [1]

A radical new programme has recently been implemented and is being introduced into schools as an anti-bullying programme called Safe Schools Coalition Australia (SSCA) [2]

SSCA is a national coalition of organizations and schools which promotes awareness on matters of homosexuality and bisexuality. SSP (Safe School Programme) was put together by Roz Ward and others from the 'Safe Schools' in the state of Victoria.

The SSP programme[3] has been organized within the context of student safety. The aim is to persuade the government, the media and the public that homophobic bullying is common and can be overcome only by the validation, promotion and normalization of homosexual relations, while at the same time giving it a high priority on the school agenda.



Πηγή: <http://youreteachingourchildrenwhat.org/>

The SCCA offers a number of sources to teachers, pupils and the wider public with information regarding attraction to the same sex and matters of bisexuality. Great emphasis is placed on the use of circumstantial studies of attraction to the same sex and bisexuality among young adults and to the depiction of their experiences in positive terms. Australian parents, however, have alleged that the material produced by the SSCA encourages extreme sexual activity and minimizes the risks related to it.

Many of the sources on the SSCA site are linked to the Minus 18 site, to which pupils are directed for further information[4]. The Minus 18 site (<https://minus18.org.au/>) contains sexual content which is unsuitable for children of school age. The web pages of SSCA and Minus 18 are disseminating their messages through the material of the web source 'All Of Us', which they created precisely for this purpose.

This site is aimed specifically at pupils mostly aged 13-14 and has been approved by the Australian government[5]. It contains a collection of short videos which include interviews about the experiences of young lesbians, homosexual males, bisexuals, transsexuals and intersexuals. Pupils watch the video and then take part in a classroom activity or discussion about the interviews, supported with supplementary material[6].

Of particular concern is the fact that the teaching material encourages pupils to become, or at least to consider becoming, sexually active, as is indicated by the

following comment: *'Ask pupils to imagine themselves in the role of a young person aged sixteen or older going out with someone they really like'*. We should point out that in this exercise, the teacher is supposed to ask half the class to pretend that they are going out with someone of the same sex and the other half with the opposite sex.

One principle which is being promoted is that sex is not only male and female but that there is also 'non-binary'.

Those who disagree with this perspective are called 'heteronormative' and the claim is made that heteronormality leads to the bullying of LGBTQI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersexual) people and that, therefore, the reduction of heteronormality in schools is a good thing[7].



Source: <http://youreteachingourchildrenwhat.org/>

The SSCA has received funding[8] from the federal government so that it can develop an anti-bullying programme, especially for children who are attracted to the same sex and to bisexuality. This is one of the most important funded anti-bullying programmes in Australia, despite the fact that the instances of bullying of such children are less than 1% of the total.

Yet it would appear that this programme is more than just a simple campaign against bullying. This is demonstrated by the close relationship between the SSCA and Minus 18 sites. The material presented is sexual and promotes views on sex which are of doubtful validity, both to the scientific community and to the public at large. The programme has been shown to be divisive, since it calls into question

and attempts to marginalize traditional concepts concerning sex. Moreover, the programme openly encourages pupils and teachers to take part in events and marches, actions which are hardly consistent with the role of a school.

A very clear, but also worrying, picture is provided by the testimony of parents/guardians of pupils in safe schools. In broad terms, these can be summarized as follows:

1. Pupils who disagree with the view that sexual relationships other than those between a male and female are normal and should be officially legitimized and institutionalized have faced disapproval, verbal attacks and isolation. Even in cases where they have said clearly that they have no feelings of fear or hostility towards those who are included in the LGBTQI agenda, they have been called homophobes, because they stated flatly that they did not accept all these instances as a normal and natural expression of sexuality[9].
2. Meeting days are organized, as well as events about sexual information and the exchange of views such as the so-called 'Wear It Purple' day, without reference to the school community or, in particular, to parents and guardians.
3. Many schools have entered the 'Safe Schools' programme without the knowledge and agreement of the school community, a fact which has often been concealed for a considerable period of time.
4. Under the ideological cover of a campaign against bullying, what is in fact happening is a new form of bullying which imposes silence on those who have a different view of the spirit of SSCA and Minus 18. Those who have a different view, who see sexuality, the sanctity of the human body and the relationship between the sexes from a traditional standpoint are usually called 'stupid and backward'. And this despite the fact that they are in the majority.
5. Of particular concern is the fact that the LGBTQI community enjoys special treatment, at a time when many schools have significant minorities who are the object of bullying. The question is, why should the LGBTQI community have a programme against bullying behaviour directed solely to their own needs?
6. Educational activities and collective behaviours are being adopted (wearing the distinctive colour on Purple Day, forming lines depending on the view which each person has) where it becomes easy to aim at and marginalize those who disagree with the spirit of SSCA and Minus 18.
7. In many cases, it is assumed that pupils younger than 16 are sexually active and they are given access to material which is not suitable for their age group and is contrary to the values and principles of their family.



Source: <http://youreteachingourchildrenwhat.org/>

The plebiscite on same sex marriage in Australia

Concern over the goings-on in the 'Safe Schools' has been reinforced by the forthcoming plebiscite on same sex marriage organized by the Australian Government. According to the official Government site, this has been the subject of long-term discussions[10] and will begin with forms being sent by post to voters on 12 September 2017[11].

Commenting on the decision of the Government to proceed with a plebiscite, *Lyle Shelton, Managing Director of the Australian Christian Lobby, wrote in the Daily Telegraph [Australia] that the discussion regarding same sex marriage and LGBTQI rights is emotional and is taking place under the umbrella of protection against bullying. It is clear, however, that the issue is not bullying, but the promotion of a new agenda regarding sexuality and the relationship between the sexes. Thus far, governments have confirmed the equality of all citizens, but on the question of marriage they have recognized that the difference between the sexes, the need for male and female, is inherent and inalienable.. Diversity does not necessarily imply discrimination. There is, however a real fact. Marriage, as the union between a man and a woman and as the basic institution for the creation of a family, is the fundamental constituent of society in its present form. Any alteration will bring about incalculable repercussions on social life[12].*



Source: <http://youreteachingourchildrenwhat.org/>

Reactions to 'Safe Schools'

Against the coalition for 'Safe Schools', are citizens of Australia with spiritual, religious and moral principles which allow them to recognize that the value of the relationship between a man and a woman is under attack, as is completion through the sacrament of marriage and the institution of the family. For this reason, a web site has been created which calls upon all those who disagree with this maneuvering to sign an electronic petition to withdraw State funding for the Safe Schools Coalition Australia (see: <http://youreteachingourchildrenwhat.org/2017/08/petition-to-stop-safe-schools/>)

The content of the agenda of the SCCA and Minus 18 and the policies they promote are on the same wave-length as the ideology highlighted by the week of 'gender identities' organized by the Greek educational system. This is a much better organized and far-reaching programme. But it still provokes the same associations and pricks the spiritual reflexes of those people who have a Church conscience and who are struggling spiritually on the basis of the Gospel teaching. In other words, of those who view the relationship of the two sexes from the point of view of a union between equals and of marriage. In these troubled and uncertain times, Christians and those who view marriage as a life-long commitment expect the counsel of the Church as both a sign-post and support.

In an interview related to 'gender identities', His Eminence Metropolitan Nikolaos of

Mesogaia and Lavreotiki, Chairman of the Bioethics Committee of the Church of Greece, said: 'The issue of sex in human nature and the relationship between the two sexes is felt keenly by the Church, which considers it very much part of its purview... It would be wrong for the Church to ignore it and keep silent about it. After ascetic restraint, the relationship between a man and a woman is the most important spiritual event in which the human body is involved'[13].

There is a widespread misconception that the Church considers sexuality as a 'taboo'. Sex for the Church is a holy sacrament and is directly linked to the profound mystery of the human persona. We are called to become perfect through the characteristics given to us by nature and through our birth. Together with the DNA of our parents and ancestors, we also inherit our sex, which is either masculine or feminine. Our sex is a profound element of our nature, which is linked to our personality, perhaps more than all our other characteristics.



Source: <http://youreteachingourchildrenwhat.org/>

Through the Biblical narrative of Genesis, the preaching of the Gospels and Epistles and the whole of its Literature and Tradition, the Church has seen the two sexes as distinct and complementary elements of human nature. This is demonstrated by anatomy and physiology, as well as by psychology and social practices[14]. The relationship between the two sexes- not only when it ends in sexual union, but

every healthy contact and social connection- is of a sacred nature. As Elder Aimilianos, former Abbot of the Holy Monastery of Simonos Petras on the Holy Mountain, says, the personality of a man needs features which only a woman can give him, and vice versa[15]. Every deviation from the interaction between a man and a woman within the bounds of respect, love and sexual union within marriage is, for the Church, a departure from the path of perfection.

It is not only the extreme sexual behaviours such as those which the SSCA is attempting to protect through its agenda on behalf of the LGBTQI with its educational activities, which is a sin. There is also sin in heterosexuality, when this is expressed without accountability, without responsibility, without respect for the uniqueness of the person and when the opposite sex is regarded merely as a vessel of selfish pleasure[16]. The distinct feature of homosexual activity, however, is that it contravenes the laws of nature[17].

The Church does not fear sin. It can forgive it, by embracing sinners and offering them boundless space for forgiveness and repentance. Where it baulks is at the legitimization of sin and its elevation to normality. When transgression becomes the law and sickness is considered health, then transgressors are de facto prevented from finding their way, as are the sick from recovering their health.

In his interview, Metropolitan Nikolaos of Mesogaia refers to the parallel instance of the Greek education system, with its week of gender identities, and states: '*Whereas those in government want a religious knowledge lesson which provides information rather than instruction, they, the same people, provide their own instruction as regards their agenda for gender identities. They offer an ideology and way of thinking about the relationship between people and their sex which, instead of liberating, enslaves them*'[18].

George Mantzaridis, professor of Christian Ethics has said that: '*The Church doesn't impose on people its view of the human person or its moral teaching. Each person is autonomous... But at the same time it must not disparage basic principles of natural law by claiming the right to legitimize and establish a natural perversion or deviant moral behaviour as an institution of society*'[19].

Naturally, this view does not legitimize any hostile or disdainful behaviour towards those who have a different opinion or preference. For the Church, each person, however sinful, is an image of God and its purpose is to bring all the sinners on the earth today and in history to the Kingdom of Heaven, in a spirit of freedom, love and repentance. This does not mean, however, that it will applaud, or not condemn, activities such as those of the SSCA and Minus 18, where, through

clandestine operations and the abuse of the educational system and of the rigorous process of learning in schools, normality is censured and perversion is the new norm.

[1]. <http://youreteachingourchildrenwhat.org/safe-schools-coalition/>

[2] <http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org.au/>

[3] Safe School Programme

[4] Because of adverse reactions, these sources are no longer posted on the federal site of the SSCA, though they remain on the site for 'Safe Schools' in the state of Victoria. See

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/Pages/safe-schools-coalition.aspx?Redirect=1>

[5] <https://www.education.gov.au/safe-schools-coalition-australia>

[6] See <https://www.studentwellbeinghub.edu.au/docs/default-source/all-of-us-online-version-may-2016-v3-pdf/a8c146fe405c47b9989542b9040a5b90.pdf?sfvrsn=0>

[7] *ibid.*

[8] Following an investigation into the programme, federal funding was withdrawn in July 2017. The government of the state of Victoria, however, did not merely pledge to continue the funding of the programme, but also required that it be taught in all state schools in 2018. It should be noted that Melbourne, the capital of Victoria, is the centre of the largest Greek Orthodox population in Australia

[9] <http://youreteachingourchildrenwhat.org/testimonials/>

[10]

http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library

. The text of the government web site makes a distinction between the terms 'referendum' and 'plebiscite' regarding the forthcoming vote. A 'referendum' refers exclusively to matters pertaining to the Constitution of the country and the result is binding. A 'plebiscite', which is what is being offered in this case, is not binding but is more advisory in nature and is essentially an official measurement of public opinion.

[11] http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2017/08/22/paperless-option-confirmed-same-sex-marriage-postal-plebiscite?cx_navSource=related-side-cx#cxrecs_s

[12] <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/rendezview/this-is-not-about-bigotry-or-homophobia-this-is-about-fact/news-story/e9d2d13b9d89f3c84e59c23533d43837>

[13] See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5D89ah37Yeo>

[14] *ibid.*

[15] Archimandrite Aimilianos Simonopetritis, *Λόγοι Ασκητικοί: Ερμηνεία στον Αββά Ησαΐα*, Athens 2005, pp. 286-7.

[16] *I Cor.* 6, 9-10

[17] *Rom.* 1, 27-8

[18] See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5D89ah37Yeo>

[19] George Mantzaridis, *Χριστιανική Ηθική II*, Holy and Great Monastery of Vatopaidi, The Holy Mountain 2015, p. 394.

The article was written with information from the following sources:

1. <http://youreteachingourchildrenwhat.org/safe-schools-coalition/>
2. <http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org.au/>
3. <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/Pages/safe-schools-coalition.aspx?Redirect=1>
4. <https://www.education.gov.au/safe-schools-coalition-australia>
5. <https://www.studentwellbeinghub.edu.au/docs/default-source/all-of-us-online-version-may-2016-v3-pdf/a8c146fe405c47b9989542b9040a5b90.pdf?sfvrsn=0>
6. <http://youreteachingourchildrenwhat.org/testimonials/>
7. http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_L

8. http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2017/08/22/paperless-option-confirmed-same-sex-marriage-postal-plebiscite?cx_navSource=related-side-cx#cxrecs_s
9. <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/rendezview/this-is-not-about-bigotry-or-homophobia-this-is-about-fact/news-story/e9d2d13b9d89f3c84e59c23533d43837>
10. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5D89ah37Yeo>
11. Archimandrite Aimilianos Simonopetritis, *Λόγοι Ασκητικοί: Ερμηνεία στον Αββά Ησαΐα*, Athens 2005.
12. George Mantzaridis, *Χριστιανική Ηθική II*, Holy and Great Monastery of Vatopaidi, The Holy Mountain 2015.