CONFÉRENCE DES ÉVÊQUES CATHOLIQUES DU CANADA
CANADIAN CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

4 December 2025

The Right Honourable Mark Carney, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
Ottawa, ON
mark.carney@parl.gc.ca

Re: Proposed Restrictions on Religious Freedom – Bill C-9

Dear Prime Minister Carney,

On behalf of the Permanent Council of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB), we write to you today to express deep concern regarding recent reports that your government, in co-operation with the Bloc Québécois, plans to remove the long-standing religious exemption in Section 319(3)(b) of the *Criminal Code* as part of Bill C-9 amendments.[1]

We recognize and unequivocally affirm the importance of condemning hatred, protecting vulnerable people and communities, and fostering a society in which every Canadian can live free from discrimination, intimidation, and violence. The Church has consistently supported appropriate measures to confront extremism and the promotion of hatred. We also understand the serious challenges that have emerged in recent years, including the increase in antisemitism and other forms of hateful speech and behaviours, many of which have targeted the Christian community. These actions leave a deep wound on the fabric of our country.

At the same time, the proposed elimination of the "good faith" religious-text defence raises significant concerns. This narrowly framed exemption has served for many years as an essential safeguard to ensure that Canadians are not criminally prosecuted for their sincere, truth-seeking expression of beliefs made without animus and grounded in long-standing religious traditions. Courts have made clear that only the most extreme forms of speech fall within the scope of hate-propaganda offences.

However, the removal of this provision risks creating uncertainty for faith communities, clergy, educators, and others who may fear that the expression of traditional moral or doctrinal teachings could be misinterpreted as hate speech and could subject the speaker to proceedings that threaten imprisonment of up to two years. As legal experts have noted, the public's understanding of hate-speech and its legal implications are often far broader than what the *Criminal Code* actually captures. Eliminating a clear statutory safeguard will likely therefore have a chilling effect on religious expression, even if prosecutions remain unlikely in practice.

[1] *CriminalCode*,RSC 1985, c C-46, s 319(3)(b): "No person shall be convicted of an offence under subsection (2) […] (b) if, in good faith, the person expressed or attempted to establish by an argument an opinion on a religious subject or an opinion based on a belief in a religious text".

We are also mindful that the existing defence has been supported not only by Christian organizations, but also by civil liberties advocates who view it as an important component of Canada's constitutional commitment to freedom of religion, freedom of expression, and pluralism. Respect for these freedoms is not only a constitutional requirement but a foundational element of our national identity. The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* declares Canada to be "a free and democratic society".

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Government of Canada:

- To ensure Bill C-9 does not remove the religious-text defence from the *Criminal Code*.

Or alternatively:

- To provide clear assurance through a public statement – including in any legislative record or parliamentary debate – that good-faith religious expression, teaching, and preaching will not be subject to criminal prosecution under the hate-propaganda provisions; and
- To commit to broad consultation with religious leaders, legal experts, and civil-liberties organizations before any amendments are made to Bill C-9 that would affect religious freedom.

We believe it is possible to achieve the shared objective of promoting a society free from genuine hatred while also upholding the constitutional rights of millions of Canadians who draw moral and spiritual guidance from their faith traditions.

We share these concerns in a spirit of dialogue and mutual respect, and we remain committed to working constructively with the government to ensure that legislation aimed at reducing hate does not inadvertently undermine the freedoms that sustain a healthy, diverse, and democratic Canada.

Sincerely,

+ Pierre Goudreault

The Most Rev. Pierre Goudreault
Bishop of Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pocatière and
President of the Canadian Conference
of Catholic Bishops

cc.- Hon. Sean Fraser, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada (mcu@justice.gc.ca / sean.fraser@parl.gc.ca
- Patricia Lattanzio, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice (Patricia.Lattanzio@parl.gc.ca)
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