



# Banning conversion therapy or banning the Gospel?



Jesus told the woman caught in adultery to 'go and sin no more'. But saying the same thing to a practising homosexual could mean breaking a planned new conversion therapy law.

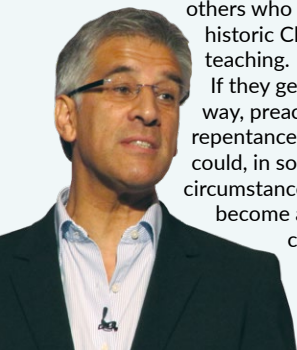
The Government wants to ban practices that seek to change someone's sexual orientation or gender identity. 'Conversion therapy' is a wide umbrella term chosen by LGBT campaigners. It covers abusive practices by quack medical practitioners and charlatan preachers which are largely illegal already.

But the campaigners want to go much further: they want to stop people criticising their lifestyle or theology. A conversion therapy ban could hand them a veto on the preaching and practice of churches.

## ACTIVISTS TARGET BIBLE-TEACHING CHURCHES

Leading supporters of the ban see it as a way to attack biblical teaching that sex is for marriage. Liberal clergy want the criminal law to settle their theological disputes with evangelicals and others who hold to historic Christian teaching.

If they get their way, preaching repentance could, in some circumstances, become a crime.



Revd Steve Chalke (left) says a ban must cover pastoral care of those with same-sex attraction.<sup>1</sup> He says informal prayer and sermons that do not affirm LGBT identities are damaging and require Government intervention, alleging these are 'safeguarding' issues.<sup>2</sup> Chalke claims that failing to embrace pro-LGBT theology will lead to "a crop of high-profile prosecutions" against churches.<sup>3</sup>

C of E Synod member Jayne Ozanne (below) sat on the Government's LGBT Advisory Panel until March 2021. She too claims church prayer ministry is

conversion therapy and attacks churches for teaching that homosexual behaviour is "sinful".<sup>4</sup> She wants conversion therapy to be made a criminal offence.<sup>5</sup>

Advocates of a ban say evangelical churches damage mental health. Former worship leader Vicky Beeching claims the church harmed her mental health, blaming "years of being taught that same-sex relationships are 'sinful'".<sup>6</sup> She claims to have been through "various forms of conversion therapy", including being encouraged to read Christian books.<sup>7</sup>

*"We urge you to ensure that the UK will not tolerate those who practise conversion therapy in any form, **whether consensual or not**, and that those who practise it will be **prosecuted**. This will have the impact of causing **religious leaders** to think twice, as they will be loath to risk having a **criminal record** that would stop them following their vocation."*<sup>8</sup>

*Ozanne Foundation letter to the Prime Minister, 8 September 2020*



# “ The activists in their own words

## Jayne Ozanne

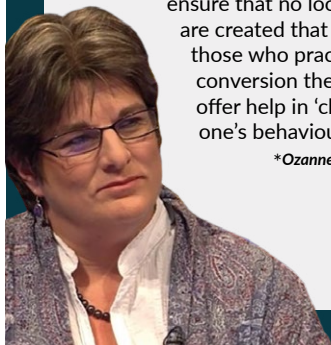
“ People offering conversion therapy are rarely licensed mental health professionals. Many are in fact religious officials – such as church leaders or prayer ministry members ”<sup>9</sup>

“ [Conversion therapy] covers a wide array of approaches designed to change a person's sexual behaviour or gender identity. These can include talking therapies, prayer... ”<sup>10</sup>

“ It's not just medical professions it's actually, sadly, a lot of well-meaning but ill-informed individuals and we have to find a way of making that criminal and I'm glad to say that I know the Government is very determined to do that. ”<sup>11</sup>

“ This is not a matter of freedom of speech... this harmful practice is unfortunately promoted and practised primarily by religious leaders... the ban must... ensure that no loopholes are created that allow those who practise conversion therapy to offer help in 'changing one's behaviour'. ”<sup>12\*</sup>

*\*Ozanne Foundation*

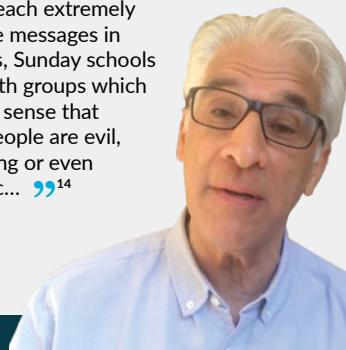


## Steve Chalke

“ [A ban] must include all coercive practices disguised as the 'pastoral care' of those with so called 'same-sex attraction' ”<sup>13</sup>

“ [The Government] is in danger of missing the heart of the issue... most churches do not run... structured education sessions that can be easily identified as 'conversion therapy'... Instead, many churches typically engage in...

- **Informal prayer** – Most people who share their sexuality with a church leader... are most likely to be 'offered' the chance to be prayed for...
- **Treating 'same sex attraction' as an illness or affliction...** to be told... 'you struggle with same-sex attraction in the same way that other people struggle with lying, drinking, lust or gambling' sends a message that generates an unquantifiable amount of psychological damage.
- **Barriers to participation** – It is common for evangelical churches to refuse leadership positions to LGBT people or to remove them from leadership if they 'come out'...
- **Negative teaching** – ...they teach extremely negative messages in sermons, Sunday schools and youth groups which create a sense that LGBT people are evil, disgusting or even demonic... ”<sup>14</sup>



# “ Defining conversion therapy

## **i** KEY POINTS:

- Very few countries have laws against ‘conversion therapy’.
- The bans that do exist, such as in Germany and parts of Australia, are usually focused on medical treatments or situations where there is lack of consent.<sup>15</sup>
- The law proposed in Canada is worryingly broad, but even that would still allow adults to take part in consensual counselling.<sup>16</sup>
- UK campaigners are pushing for the most extreme ban possible, which would cut across the ordinary work of churches and could even catch Christian parents.

## CHRISTIAN ACTIVITIES THAT COULD BE CAUGHT

The scenarios below show how damaging a ban could be for ordinary church life

### **Evangelism:**

A Christian shares her faith with a friend at work. The colleague is interested but reacts angrily when she learns that all people must repent of sin, including sexual sins. She is in a same-sex relationship. She tracks down her colleague’s church online and reports her and the church. She claims they told her she would ‘go to hell for being gay’ in an attempt to change her.



### **Church membership:**

A church removes a man from membership for being persistently unfaithful to his wife. He is told he will be restored to membership only if he repents. Since the unfaithfulness involves homosexual activity, the man accuses the church of trying to repress his sexual orientation.



### **Parenting:**

A teenager tells her school teacher that her Christian parents are trying to ‘stop her being gay’. She says they pleaded with her not to pursue same-sex relationships and urged her to ‘repent and trust in Jesus’. The teacher reports the parents for subjecting the girl to conversion therapy.



### **Baptism and confirmation:**

An Anglican church requires candidates for adult baptism or confirmation to attend classes. These cover ‘Christian living’, including sexual ethics. A candidate strongly objects to hearing that homosexual relationships are wrong. He is told he cannot be baptised unless he accepts the Bible’s teaching. He reports the church to the authorities for trying to change his sexual orientation.



### Canada, Proposed Bill:

**“ conversion therapy means a practice, treatment or service **designed** to change a person's sexual orientation to heterosexual or gender identity to cisgender, or to **repress or reduce non-heterosexual attraction or sexual behaviour.** ”<sup>17</sup>**

(This applies to activity carried out on an adult without proper consent or on any child, and carries a maximum five-year prison sentence.)

### UK campaigners' proposals, July 2020:

**“ Any form of counselling or persuading someone to change their sexual orientation or behaviour so as to conform with a heteronormative lifestyle, or their gender identity **should be illegal**, no matter the reason, religious or otherwise – whatever the person's age. ”<sup>18</sup>**

#### Preaching and teaching:

A lesbian activist visits church on a day when the minister – who knows her personally – is preaching on sexual ethics. He teaches that sex is a gift reserved for marriage between a man and woman, and says singleness is an honourable calling. She reports this as an attempt to change or repress her sexual orientation.

#### Pastoral counselling:

A teenage girl tells her church youth leader she feels attracted to other girls. The leader sensitively encourages her to read the Bible, pray, and avoid fantasising about wrong relationships. The girl does not pursue her faith. Years later she accuses the leader of trying to repress her sexual orientation.

#### Communion:

A Grace Baptist church protects people from taking communion in an “unworthy manner” (1 Cor. 11:27-28) by only serving it to believers who are not involved in “known sin not repented of”. An openly gay visitor from a liberal church learns he cannot take communion. He says the refusal is an attempt to change his sexual behaviour and reports the church.

#### Private prayer:

A church member wrestling with same-sex attraction asks both the pastor and a church friend to pray with him. Years later he joins a 'gay affirming' church. He decides the prayer support was really conversion therapy. He reports the pastor and his former friend to the authorities.



## GOVERNMENT PLEDGES A BAN

PM Boris Johnson says conversion therapy is “abhorrent” and has pledged to ban it.<sup>19</sup> Government ministers in Scotland and Northern Ireland support a ban.<sup>20</sup> The Government Equalities Office declares “these activities are wrong, and we are not willing to let them continue... we will fully consider all legislative and non-legislative options to prohibit promoting, offering or conducting conversion therapy.”<sup>21</sup>

## WHAT IF IT ALSO APPLIES TO TRANS?

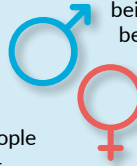
Activists want any conversion therapy ban to include ‘gender identity’. This could be used by trans activists to shut down debate.

Confusingly, it would affect those trying to discourage people from changing gender – since activists claim they are merely ‘accepting who they really are’. A parent who complains their child has been damaged by gender ideology at school could be accused of ‘suppressing’

their ‘true gender identity’.

If a feminist tells a gender confused girl to embrace being female, she could be punished. And the rapidly growing ‘detransitioner’ movement of ex-trans people could find itself on the wrong side of the law.

Controversial doctor Helen Webberly claims it is conversion therapy to tell a child “You will grow out of it” or “If you have a vagina you are a girl”.<sup>22</sup>



## SUSPECT RESEARCH CANNOT BE RELIED ON

Activists rely heavily on two pieces of research to make the case for a ban.

The UK Government’s ‘National LGBT Survey’ recruited people attending ‘Pride’ celebrations in 2017. It admits: “The sample was self-selected, and there is no guarantee that it was representative”.<sup>23</sup>

Of respondents, two per cent claim to have undergone conversion therapy.<sup>24</sup> But the report states “we did not provide a definition of conversion therapy in the survey”.<sup>25</sup> Respondents’ claims were not verified. And the survey did not ask when or where the experiences took place. They could be from previous decades or from overseas, rather than

reflecting what is happening in the UK today.

The Ozanne Foundation ‘Faith & Sexuality’ survey claims to “provide strong evidence of the harm that attempts to change sexual orientation are reported to inflict”.<sup>26</sup> But no clear definition of conversion therapy was given to participants, who were self-selecting respondents to an online form promoted by gay rights groups. Of the 458 who claimed they had experience of attempting to change their sexual orientation, 282 said it included “private prayer” or “prayer with close friends”.<sup>27</sup>

The survey’s claims about ‘inflicting harm’ are not supported by the data.



## ATTACKING CHRISTIAN CONVERSION

It is concerning that activists have picked the word 'conversion' to describe what they want to ban. The Bible uses the word "conversion" to describe becoming a follower of Jesus Christ (e.g. Acts 15:3). Central to conversion is faith in Christ and repentance from sin.

Gospel preaching often includes challenging specific sins, like Paul did in Acts 17 where he called on pagans to forsake idolatry. 1 Corinthians 6 lists a range of sins formerly practised by members of the church at Corinth – including

homosexual activity. It concludes: "And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (v11). So the offer of the gospel is for all people, whatever their sins.

Theological liberals want to use the law to coerce churches to accept their view that Christianity does not involve repentance from sexual sin. They want to force LGBT theology on the Church.



## CHRISTIAN BELIEFS PROTECTED IN LAW

Although activists object to the Bible's teaching on sex, the "orthodox Christian belief that the practice of homosexuality is sinful" has been deemed worthy of recognition and respect by the UK courts. In one of the leading cases, brought by The Christian Institute, it was held that the manifestation of this belief in teaching, practice and observance is protected by human rights law.<sup>28</sup>



## CANADIAN BILL 'AMBIGUOUS AND DANGEROUS'



Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

The Canadian Government has brought forward a Bill which threatens five years in prison for anyone causing a child to undergo conversion therapy or coercing an adult into doing so.<sup>29</sup>

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops called the Bill "ambiguous", warning

of "a real danger that Christian and other religious and ethical teaching with respect to human sexuality would be interpreted as criminal acts". They said it could outlaw "private conversations between parents and their children on matters of human sexuality".<sup>30</sup>

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada expressed concern that the legislation could "penalize and silence public speech and religious instruction on matters of sexuality and gender".<sup>31</sup>



*References available at [christian.org.uk/ConversionTherapy-ref](http://christian.org.uk/ConversionTherapy-ref)*



CHRISTIANINSTITUTE



@CHRISTIANORGUK



CHRISTIANORGUK



CHRISTIANORGUK