



The Government intends to ban 'conversion therapy'. A new law covering both sexual orientation and gender identity is being drafted, overseen by Equalities Minister Roderic O'Gorman TD.<sup>1</sup>

But such a law could restrict the ordinary work of churches – prayer, pastoral care and preaching. It could also criminalise Christian parents seeking to bring up their children in the faith. In fact, any Christian activity which upholds the Bible's teaching on sexual ethics could be at risk.

A similar law in Victoria, Australia, has

made "not affirming someone's gender identity" illegal. It even criminalises parents who refuse to allow their child to take experimental puberty blockers.<sup>2</sup>

'Conversion therapy' is a deliberately broad term chosen by LGBT activists. There may be quack therapists and others who exploit people and use abusive practices. But verbal and physical abuse are already against the law, so this is not the activists' true motivation.

They want a criminal law reaching into churches and families which they can use to force people to endorse LGBT ideology.

## Ban will trigger false accusations against Christians

A Bill to ban 'conversion therapy' was first proposed in 2018.

It defined 'conversion therapy' as: "any practice or treatment by any person that seeks to change, suppress and, or eliminate a person's sexual orientation, gender identity and, or gender expression".<sup>3</sup>

Activists often wrongly accuse Christians of such behaviour when we encourage professing believers to live in accordance with

scripture on matters of sex and gender.

Christians oppose any forced or coercive attempts to change someone's identity. But we must be free to teach that coming to

Christ always means changing how we live, including committing to faithful marriage or celibacy.

The Government did not support the 2018 Bill, saying it was

"concerned, based on legal advice, that the Bill is not clear enough in its language".<sup>4</sup> Mr O'Gorman says that he hopes the wording this time will be "constitutional".<sup>5</sup>

But he continues to suggest the dangerous language of 'suppression' will be included.<sup>6</sup> Research carried out to inform the Bill was deeply flawed, even suggesting that personal prayer could be counted as 'conversion therapy'.<sup>7</sup>



## RESEARCH FAILS TO MAKE ANY CASE FOR A NEW LAW

The Government commissioned Trinity College Dublin to conduct research into 'conversion therapy practices in Ireland', with assistance from campaign group LGBT Ireland.<sup>8</sup>

**“not statistically representative”**

The resulting report was deeply flawed. It utterly failed to assess the

prevalence of abuse in Ireland, instead focusing on studies from abroad and interviewing only five people who said they were 'victims' in Ireland.

The study admits that “the sample sizes for both the survey and interviews are small... The survey used a non-probability sample and is therefore not statistically representative of



the wider LGBTI+ community. Similarly, the findings from the interviews are not generalisable...”<sup>9</sup>

Particularly worrying is an assertion that 'conversion therapy' can include

“heterosexism and cissexism which can occur in everyday interactions”.<sup>10</sup>

In other words, anything said in casual conversation disagreeing with LGBT ideology is conversion therapy.

## ACTIVISTS' EXTREME DEMANDS

LGBT activists have called for bans on 'conversion therapy' with no exceptions. They say any such laws must cover religious practices, including the ordinary work of churches.

But since genuine abuse is already illegal, it is clear such a law will restrict everyday practices that cause no harm.

Tiernan Mason, part of the Anti Conversion Therapy Coalition, described to the Irish Daily Mail the 'conversion therapy' he thinks takes place in Ireland:

“A lot of it is just talking to a religious leader, such as a priest or a pastor. It's people who come out to their parents who then tell them they need to seek spiritual

guidance and support.”

He wants a new law to cover “anyone from a school principal trying to persuade a student to go back in the closet, to religious leaders telling people they shouldn't be gay”.<sup>11</sup> Christians might not describe their beliefs in these terms, but it is easy to imagine the far-reaching consequences of such a broad law for parents, teachers and church leaders.



## CRITICISM OF CONVERSION THERAPY PLANS

Free speech groups and feminists fear that the new law could prevent important conversations with children struggling with their gender. An 'affirmation-only' approach will increase the one-way pressure to transition.

Gender critical group Genspect describes the potential of a broad ban in stark terms:

**“It has been a highly effective sleight of hand, sneaking enforcement of a new ideology into law... The audacity is breathtaking.”<sup>12</sup>**

# CI working to protect churches

## TOP LAWYER: PROPOSALS COULD CRIMINALISE ORDINARY WORK OF CHURCHES

In 2021, we commissioned written legal advice from leading human rights lawyer Jason Coppel KC.<sup>13</sup>



Jason Coppel KC

Coppel explains that prayer, pastoral care, preaching and parenting could all fall foul of the kind of conversion therapy ban being sought by activists.

Saying to someone they can't be baptised, take communion, lead a service or run the youth group because

of behaviour at odds with the Bible would also be caught, says Coppel.

In his criticism of proposals, he focused on the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). As such, many of his findings apply directly to Ireland.

He explained that the ban activists want would cut across no fewer than four Convention rights.

He points out, for example, that Christian beliefs about sexual ethics and gender are covered by the Convention because: "The Courts have consistently regarded such beliefs as protected

by Article 9 ECHR and worthy of respect as such". Therefore "these beliefs must be treated by the State with neutrality and impartiality".<sup>14</sup>

Coppel continues: "... one of the fundamental facets of freedom of religion or belief is the right of a religion to determine its own beliefs and practices, the legitimacy of which should not be questioned by the state".<sup>15</sup>

A law of the kind activists want would also breach the Convention's guaranteed right to a private and family life, freedom of expression, and freedom of association.

Such a law could therefore put the Government in breach of its own human rights obligations.



## 'LET US PRAY' CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED

The Let Us Pray campaign was launched by the Institute in September 2021.

It aims to protect the ordinary work of churches and innocent parents from being caught by a conversion therapy ban.

It has the latest news on Ireland's plans for

a ban and how Christians could be at risk.

Sign up at [letusprayireland.com](https://letusprayireland.com) to be the first to hear about campaign developments and for help engaging with the legislative process. It's vital that Christians make their concerns known to lawmakers.



let us pray

Join the campaign at: [letusprayireland.com](https://letusprayireland.com)



# Will Ireland 're-educate' church leaders?

## 'NOT AFFIRMING GENDER IDENTITY' OUTLAWED



The Australian State of Victoria's ban on 'conversion therapy' is often held up by activists as the model to be followed.<sup>16</sup> But this legislation, which came into force in February 2022, expressly criminalises prayer if it is deemed not to support a person's sexual orientation or gender identity.<sup>17</sup> The penalty can be up to ten years in prison and a maximum fine of over €100,000.<sup>18</sup>

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) has started 're-educating' church ministers in how to comply with the law.

Murray Campbell, a pastor based in Melbourne, attended

one of the events. He said, "we were informed that no person's sexuality or gender identity is broken or sinful, and to suggest so contravenes the intent of the new laws".<sup>19</sup>

The VEOHRC, responsible for enforcing parts of the new ban, has released guidance on what is now outlawed. It says conversion therapy includes: "not affirming someone's gender identity", and parents "refusing to support" their children receiving puberty blockers. It says it would

be illegal for church leaders to tell someone they will be 'excommunicated' if they continue a same-sex relationship. The guidance says encouraging someone to practise celibacy is also unlawful conversion therapy.<sup>20</sup>

According to press reports, parents of gender-confused children in Victoria are living in fear of being prosecuted for trying to protect their children from irreversible medical interventions.<sup>21</sup>



## VIEWS ON SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR BANNED



In December 2021, Canada passed into law a Bill banning conversion

therapy in just nine days. Motions in the Canadian House of Commons and Senate allowed the Bill to pass at speed without any scrutiny by MPs or Senators.<sup>22</sup>

Like Victoria, the Bill's definition of conversion therapy is very broad. It

includes any practice designed to "reduce non-heterosexual attraction or sexual behaviour".<sup>23</sup>

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada says the wording of the law could "ban sincere expressions of religious beliefs and teachings in sermons, courses of religious study and consensual pastoral counselling".<sup>24</sup>

References at [the.ci/ctroi-ref](https://the.ci/ctroi-ref)

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