


Conversion Therapy Bans: Aargh!

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We have only used the expression “Aargh!” once before in over 40 years of writing. That’s when we used the “Aargh!” expression in our article “Hidden in Plain Sight” to reveal our concerned response to the fact that most in the church do not see that the very act of problem-centered counseling engenders sinful conversations.[1] Once more we have a hidden-in-plain-sight phenomenon, this time related to the conversion therapy ban.

Aargh is a word that is “used as an expression of anguish, horror, rage, or other strong emotion,” but in this case not “with humorous intent.”[2] For us Aargh expresses our anguish, consternation, and horror. We are shocked that so many in the church, from pastors to pew sitters, have lost their spiritual bearings over the conversion therapy bans.

Since our last article on the conversion therapy ban in Canada, both the United Kingdom and France have enacted conversion therapy ban laws. Interestingly, the conversion therapy ban in the UK was “for gay or bisexual people in England and Wales, but not for transgender people.”[3] However, “France has a new law that bans so-called conversion therapies and authorizes jail time and fines for practitioners who use the scientifically discredited practice to attempt to change the sexual orientation or gender identity of LGBTQ people.”[4]

Each time another country or another US state implements laws to ban conversion therapy, the religious community reacts against the ban. In our three prior articles on the Canadian Conversion Therapy Ban Bill C-4, we reported the following two responses from Dr. John MacArthur and Dr. Albert Mohler.

Dr. John MacArthur issued “A Call for Pastors to Stand United on Biblical Morality.” MacArthur refers to an email he received from Pastor James Coates and says:

James’s recent email gave me insight into the Canadian government’s decision to pass Bill C-4, which “directly comes against parents and counsellors who would seek to offer biblical counsel with respect to sexual immorality and gender.” James indicates that it **could be** used to “criminalize evangelism” (emphasis added).[5]

Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr., president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, recently posted a *Briefing* on conversion therapy bans, titled “Direct Threat to Religious Liberty.”[6] Mohler eloquently and eruditely explains the dire possibility of these bans, especially in Canada and the United Kingdom (UK).

One more report from the BBC says:

What are religious groups saying about a ban? Some religious groups oppose any ban on conversion therapy and argue that it would infringe on traditional religious teachings, such as the belief that all sex outside a heterosexual marriage is sinful. The Evangelical Alliance, which says it represents 3,500 churches, said a ban could jeopardize religious freedoms, such as supportive prayer.[7]

As we have shown in a previous article, MacArthur, Mohler, and the Evangelical Alliance are all in error with respect to the effect of the conversion therapy bans.[8] It is not true that Bill C-4 “directly comes against parents and counselors who would seek to offer biblical counsel with respect to sexual immorality and gender” (MacArthur), or that such bans are a “Direct Threat to Religious Liberty” (Mohler), or that this “could jeopardize religious freedoms, such as supportive prayer” (Evangelical Alliance). MacArthur’s bravado approach of encouraging 5,000 pastors to preach a sermon on biblical sexual morality shortly after the passage of Bill C-4, Mohler’s hyperventilating about a “Direct Threat to Religious Liberty,” and the Evangelical Alliance are all pandering false information about conversion therapy bans and unnecessarily enflaming the fears of many Christians about what might be, when these bans are very unlikely to impinge on biblical preaching or teaching. While one should be **concerned** about **any laws** that might affect personal and religious freedoms, there is no reason to raise the level of concern to **FEAR**.

In our state, California, Assemblyman Evan Low introduced Assembly Bill 2943, which was to ban **paid** conversion therapy. Before its final approval religious groups attacked the bill calling it a threat to the practice of their faith. The bill was clearly about **paid** conversion therapy. Low was surprised and we were shocked that a conversion therapy ban bill that was **aimed at paid therapists** would have such a reaction from the religious community.

The bill was strongly supported by Democrats and some Republicans. Because of the religious opposition, Assemblyman Low shelved the bill in hopes of getting support from the religious community that opposed the bill. Low wants to have conversations with those in the religious community to see if some consensus can be reached before resubmitting the bill.

Wikipedia reports:

A total of 20 states, as well as the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and 100 municipalities ... have banned the practice of conversion therapy on minor clients. Penalties range from fines to imprisonment.[9]

Almost six months have passed since Canada’s Bill C-4 passed. Additionally, conversion therapy bans have been enacted by various states in the U.S. during the last 10-plus years. Yet, in spite of the plethora of sermon messages that have been given on Romans 1 and other passages about the sin of homosexuality, **no one has ever been fined or imprisoned in the U.S., Canada, or France as a result of preaching or teaching about homosexuality.**

After more than 10 years of conversion therapy bans in America and the new laws in Canada and the UK, the *First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America* still applies as quoted here:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion; or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.[10]

Also, the “Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees the following fundamental freedoms: **(a)** freedom of conscience and religion; **(b)** freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication; **(c)** freedom of peaceful assembly; and **(d)** freedom of association.”[11]

In addition, “The right to **freedom of religion in the United Kingdom** is provided for in all three constituent legal systems, by devolved, national, European, and international law and treaty.”[12] The *First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America*, “Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms,” and the freedom of religion in the United Kingdom are the final authorities on the freedoms of religion, conscience, and speech.

It is unlikely that there is a current threat to the religious communities in the US, Canada, or the UK. To date no conversion therapy ban in the United States would prohibit biblical teaching or evangelism. In an “Abstract” of a law volume titled *The Legal Status of Conversion Therapy*, the law states: “The bans do not apply at all to private individuals or ‘members of the clergy...providing religious counseling to congregants.’”[13] It is not yet known in Canada how Bill C-4 will be implemented and especially how “practice, treatment, or service” will be applied or **to whom it may be directed**. Although the psychotherapists will be restricted, it is doubtful that the bill will prevent churches and Christians’ efforts. It has now been six months since Bill C-4 was passed and there have been no reports of it affecting any pastors or others who teach, preach, or personally minister God’s Word.

To find out about this we wrote to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, David Lametti, expressing our concerns about how Bill C-4 would apply “to private individuals or to members of the clergy who provide religious counseling to congregants.” The beginning of his response states:

Many people turn to their faith when they are experiencing personal challenges. As a Catholic, I believe that religious leaders need to be able to talk with and provide guidance to their congregants about their faith. People need to be able to explore who they are, including the religious aspects of their identity.”[14]

A Reuter’s article about the proposed conversion therapy ban law quotes the Minister for Women and Equalities in the UK, who has said: “People’s personal freedoms are key to the health and functioning of a democratic society, such as freedom of choice, freedom of speech and belief, and are central to my proposals.”[15]

As we said in a prior article, we hold Focus on the Family (FOTF), Dr. James Dobson, Jim Daly (the current head of FOTF), the American Family Association (AFA), and the Family Research Council (FRC) responsible for much of the current trust in psychotherapists, the current love for conversion therapy on the part of pastors, and the current desire of Christian leaders to attempt to protect “choice” for psychotherapy clients, so that pastors can send congregants to psychotherapy. FOTF, AFA, and FRC spent large amounts of money and received national coverage promoting a Freudian-based conversion therapy—the very kind of therapy that should be avoided by all believers. The FOTF, AFA, and FRC support for and promotion of Freudian-based psychotherapy has wreaked havoc in the lives of those who came for help. FOTC needs to stop referring individuals who ask for counseling to state-licensed psychotherapists, **rather than Christian ministers**.

Pastors and Christian organizations that trust in the psychological wisdom of mere humans over the Word of God for transformational change are crying out against any and all bans of conversion therapy. Moreover, they are afraid that the bans will prevent preaching and teaching God’s Word regarding what the Bible says about sexuality and transformed lives. **That hasn’t in the entire US, and it is doubtful to happen in Canada and the UK!**

Conversion Therapy versus Gospel Change

We have said for some time that we support the conversion therapy bans because they are literally aimed at therapy, i.e., psychotherapy, not at Christian ministry. The definition of *therapy* is “the treatment of mental or psychological disorders by psychological means.”[16] The word *therapy* is in every ban and, by definition, applies to psychological means of conversion. The ban has nothing to do with any religion or any private person—only professional psychotherapists. Much of the confusion comes through the word *conversion*, which means “(1) the process of changing or causing something to change from one form to another.... (2) the fact of changing one’s religion or action of persuading someone else to change theirs.”[17] Thus conversion therapy is a psychological means of changing a person’s sexual behavior. In contrast, Christian conversion refers to a person being born again by means of the Holy Spirit in response to the Gospel. The change only comes by the work of the Holy Spirit. The fact of the matter is that **Christians do not convert anyone. It is a divine work of God by His Holy Spirit.**

While we are opposed to psychotherapy and would be happy if all psychotherapy were banned, we specifically welcome the conversion therapy bans laws, because the Bible has the temporal and eternal answer for the sins of homosexuality. Pastors and ministry leaders who have referred Christians out to conversion therapy should repent from having done so. Psychotherapy has been shown to be both unsuccessful and detrimental for those individuals who consider changing their sexual orientation or their gender identity. Preaching and teaching the Gospel, on the other hand, changes lives from the inside out, not by fixing them, but by replacing the old nature with a New Life in Christ! It is through Christ living and working in a believer that sins are forgiven and overcome according to His way and His timetable—**NOT** through the detrimental means of conversion therapy.

Although psychotherapeutic systems of conversion therapy differ from psychoanalytic to torturous types of behavioristic treatments, none have anything to salve the soul of those with burdened consciences. For too long pastors and so-called Christian ministries have been referring fellow believers out to a worldly system that can only alter and strengthen the old, sinful Adamic nature, which is in enmity against God (Rom 8:7). In other words, even so-called Christian psychotherapists are using a system that panders to what the Bible refers to as the flesh or carnal nature, in contrast to the new man in Christ, of whom Paul says: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor 5:17).

As we mentioned in a previous article, there are many testimonies of conversions from homosexual sinfulness to salvation in Christ by former gays and lesbians who have died to self and who give witness to the biblical faith that condemns their former lifestyle. One excellent example of a former lesbian is Rosario Butterfield. In the article titled "Love Your Neighbor Enough to Speak Truth," Butterfield says: "To be clear, I was not converted out of homosexuality. I was converted out of unbelief." [18]

Summary

We have been opposed to conversion therapy from the very beginning. We repeatedly warned Christians about this evil worldly psychological therapeutic system. That is why we are in favor of the conversion therapy **bans**. The church should have rejected this wicked form of psychotherapy long ago. And it is a black mark against Christendom that it took the worldly powers of government to begin getting rid of this plague. If these bans ever do serve to limit preaching and teaching about sexual sin from the Bible, it is because of those Christian leaders, pastors, and organizations that joined hands with psychotherapists who practiced conversion therapy by referring those in need to those horrendous conversion therapy wolves who were devouring the sheep.

Therefore, we are in favor of conversion therapy **bans** and pray that they will not be misused to fine and/or imprison Christians for preaching and/or teaching from the Bible about the sins of homosexuality. Every conscientious Christian should be concerned about laws that would affect evangelism. However, so far there is no need to **fear** the conversion therapy ban laws! There is no need to suppose what might be when there are few reasons to be concerned and many reasons to support conversion therapy ban laws, especially like the California bill that specifically uses the word "paid" and is aimed at psychotherapists. MacArthur, Mohler, the Evangelical Alliance, and others who have generated false information about the possible effects of the conversion therapy ban laws need to repent because of the false information they have been propagating widely. Christians need to avoid all such individuals and organizations who oppose conversion therapy bans under fallacious "facts" that border on fear-mongering, particularly those that have been sending needy souls to licensed psychological practitioners of conversion therapy.

On the other hand, if the tide turns and Christians are facing fines and/or imprisonment, true believers are committed to obeying God rather than the laws of the government as they continue to proclaim the truths of the Bible.

[1] Martin and Deidre Bobgan, "Hidden in Plain Sight Aargh! PsychoHeresy Awareness Ministries, <https://psychoheresy.com/christian-psychology/hidden-in-plain-sight-aargh/>.

[2] "Aargh," <https://www.oxforddictionaries.com>.

[3] "Report: UK to Ban Conversion Therapy for Gays, but Not for Trans People," *Voice of America*, 3/31/2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/report-uk-to-ban-conversion-therapy-for-gays-but-not-for-trans-people-/6510654.html>.

[4] "So-Called Conversion Therapy Made Illegal in France, and Penalties Include Jail Tie for Practitioners," *CBS News*, 1/26/2022, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/france-bans-conversion-therapy-lgbtq-rights-gay-gender-identity/>.

[5] John MacArthur, "A Stand on Religious Morality," <https://www.gracechurch.org/news/posts/2307>.

[6] Albert Mohler, "Direct Threat to Religious Liberty: Legislative Bans on Conversion Therapy on Both Sides of the Atlantic as Canada Passes Most Comprehensive Conversion Therapy Laws in the World and Britain Seeks to Follow Suit," *The Briefing*, <https://albertmohler.com/2022/01/03/briefing-1-3-22>.

[7] "What Is Conversion Therapy and When Will It Be Banned?", *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-56496423>.

[8] Martin and Deidre Bobgan, "Conversion Therapy Ban Reactions," PsychoHeresy Awareness Ministries, <https://psychoheresy.com/christian-psychology/conversion-therapy-ban-reactions/>.

[9] "List of U. S. Jurisdictions Banning Conversion Therapy," *Wikipedia*, 6/26/2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_U.S._jurisdictions_banning_conversion_therapy.

[10] *Constitution of the United States of America*, <https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/amendment-1/>.

[11] "Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms," <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/const/page-12.html#:~:text=Guarantee%20of%20Rights%20and%20Freedoms&text=1%20The%20Canadian%20Charter%20of,a%20free%20and%20democratic%20society>.

[12] "Freedom of religion in the United Kingdom," *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_of_religion_in_the_United_Kingdom.

[13] John J. Lapin, "The Legal Status of Conversion Therapy," Georgetown University Law Center, <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/gender-journal/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2021/08/Legal-Status-of-Conversion-Therapy.pdf>

[14] David Lametti, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, official statement sent to us by email.

[15] Hugo Greenhalgh, "Britain's proposed ban on LGBT+ conversion therapy too soft, say critics," *Reuters: The Daily Docket*, 10/29/2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-lgbt-rights/britains-proposed-ban-on-lgbt-conversion-therapy-too-soft-say-critics-idUSKBN2HJ1ML>.

[16] "Therapy," *Google Dictionary* (Definitions from *Oxford Languages*), 6/29/2022.

[17] "Conversion," *Google Dictionary* (Definitions from *Oxford Languages*), 6/29/2022.

[18] Rosaria Butterfield, "Love Your Neighbor Enough to Speak Truth: A Response to Jen Hatmaker," *The Gospel Coalition*, October 31, 2016, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/love-your-neighbor-enough-to-speak-truth>.