

Honorable members of Parliament

My name is Rev. Grant Gunnink, I am an orthodox Christian minister serving a church in the Reformed tradition here in Calgary AB.

Let me start by saying something I believe we would all agree on. People who struggle with their sexual orientation and/or their gender identity are not problems to be solved or fixed but people who need to be loved and find the support and encouragement they need.

And I believe that we would all agree that giving people our love and support, especially for those of us who provide people with pastoral care as part of our professional calling.... That such love and support must be authentic love and honest support.

I believe that those who are struggling with orientation or gender identity are wrestling with these issues in such a way that deal specifically with matters of authenticity and honesty.

And finally, I think we would all agree that in our current pluralistic society, we have an obligation to foster authenticity and honesty in pursuit of the truth by making sure that ALL voices are invited to contribute and have a seat at the table.

So let's consider if the proposed changes to the Criminal Code addresses the matters that would we all agree on.

First – were ALL voices invited to contribute and have a seat at the table when this idea was first considered by the Fed gov't? I don't believe so.

There are hundreds of churches across our country, not to mention the Temples, Gurduwaras, Mosques and Synagogues of other religious groups. So, I would expect that an effort to include ALL voices in this legislation would result in far more materials being available to show the results of this consultation.

But that brings me to my next point. When we bring ALL voices to the table we also make space for dissenting voices and alternative perspectives, even if we do not agree with and find they are contrary to our own beliefs. Is that not what those who have been advocating for Sexual Minorities have been fighting for over the years.

And isn't ironic then that an amendment to the criminal code supposedly crafted in their interests, violates the principle by which they were able to speak up and have their voice finally heard??

So does this proposed law help those wrestling with sexual orientation and gender identity, especially in regards to the issues of authenticity and honesty, in a way that is authentic and honest?

No – it does not, because the goal of this legislation is to silence dissenting voices, exclude alternative perspectives through coercion and threat of financial penalty and/or jail time.

How can struggling people be loved and supported in honest and authentic ways by those in their religious communities and families if those people can not speak honestly and authentically from their own identities and convictions and beliefs, if the Fed Gov't seeks to silence them?

It's ironic that the Fed Gov't seeks to prevent coercion and repression of identity through coercive and manipulative legislation that represses honest and authentic love and support from churches and other religious communities.

In the same way that people who struggle with sexual orientation and gender identity are not problems to be solved or fixed, people who love and offer care and support out of their religious convictions are not impediments to progressive thinking who need to be legislated out of the way!

The definition of Conversion Therapy in Bill C-6 needs to be corrected to reflect the fact that the Canadian Constitution guarantees that people like myself and my colleagues and my congregation and our contributions have the religious right to offer honest and authentic love and care and support to people in these circumstances.

So this proposed legislation does not reflect what we can all agree on, and it needs to be significantly amended in order to correct this.

Now – as you consider what to do about this proposed legislation you are going to hear many more stories and testimonies about conversion therapy.

And as you listen - I would ask you to look for what these stories have in common.

The stories which end well, where people are at peace and living a healthy happy life, regardless of the direction they resolved their issues... these are the stories where honest and authentic love care and support was received.

The stories which are tragic and heart wrenching are those which feature coercion and threat and manipulation and where honesty and authenticity were suppressed.

So, I think we would also agree that coercion and threat and manipulation never bring about a good ending to anyone's story.

Honorable members of Parliament – I hope you realize that you are writing Canada's story on this issue.

I believe you want it to end well – so I appeal to what we can all agree upon, and respectfully ask that you amend the proposed legislation so that it allows for honest and authentic love care and support from traditional religious communities, and does not exclude it through coercion and threat.

Thankyou for your willingness to listen, and blessings upon your public service.

Rev Grant Gunnink