

Bill C-6 – Submission to the Justice Committee Through My MP
Dr. Rob Godard
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Like many Canadians, I stand opposed to coercive and involuntary practices carried out under the banner of “conversion therapy”. I am grieved to hear harrowing stories of people who have suffered through practices of this kind, and I am thankful for the desire of parliamentarians to protect Canadians from such an experience.

My purpose in writing is to express heartfelt concern at the current framing of the Bill C-6, which I believe is drafted too broadly and without sufficient precision. I appreciate the verbal assurances that the Minister of Justice has given that good-faith conversations about sexuality with family members and religious leaders will not be affected by the Bill. However, I believe that these assurances need to be reflected within the wording of the Bill itself. I cannot see how religious liberty and freedom of speech can be maintained if the Bill is passed into law as it stands. Currently, its definition of conversion therapy is so broad that good-faith conversations with family members and faith leaders seem sure to fall foul of it. Added to that, it is difficult to have confidence that the public teaching of many pastors and other faith leaders on matters of sexuality would not be deemed illegal by the Bill.

As a Christian pastor, I am bound by conscience before God, by loyalty to the Christian Scriptures, and by contractual obligation under the faith statements of my church and denomination, to teach and preach that sexual intimacy is to be reserved for the context of marriage between a man and a woman. That represents historic Christian orthodoxy, as a core element of the Bible’s vision for human flourishing within the design of God. It is a position to which millions of Canadian Christians adhere. I do not by any means expect that all within our society will agree with it, but I do expect to retain the liberty to express and discuss it within a free and open society such as ours.

I could not in good conscience refrain from teaching what the Bible affirms, but I believe that under Bill C-6 I might have reason to anticipate prosecution under the Criminal Code for carrying out my duty as a Christian pastor. Do we really want to be a country that imprisons its faith leaders? Many countries have gone down this road before, and Canada would not wish to be numbered among them.

I do believe that an unamended Bill C-6 would represent a landmark erosion of religious liberty and freedom of speech in Canada. As a Canadian who loves this country and as a pastor who seeks to serve many needy people within the community, that prospect is thoroughly heart-rending for me. This would not be the Canada I know and love and wish to bequeath to my children.

Please take clear and urgent steps to amend this law to make it fit for its stated purpose and to maintain the freedom of religion and freedom of speech in Canada, as guaranteed by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

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