

Gospel Conversion Therapy

By David Robertson

Queensland has just become the first state in Australia to ban Gay Conversion Therapy. Because of Covid 19 restrictions they beat the Victorian government to it, which in keeping with its somewhat more authoritarian character, has proposed something far more draconian and troubling. It's interesting to me as an outsider to observe how different states in Australia behave – it seems as though there is some kind of race to the progressive bottom – with Victoria and the ACT usually leading the way – but this time Queensland 'won'.

Why should we care? What does it matter? Should we be for GCT anyway? I wrote this article for the Christian Today website - <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/should.gay.conversion.therapy.be.banned/135372.htm> which explains why, although I am not for GCT, I think it is dangerous to ban it. It's a puzzle to me how our society determines that some therapies for change are good but others are bad. If someone wants therapy to change their gender they will be encouraged and helped. If they want therapy to change their sexuality, then whoever helps them could go to jail. Go figure! Our society encourages something which is contradicted by basic biological science, and at the same time discourages dealing with an identity change which was not even recognised as such until the late 19th Century.

From a Christian perspective I doubt very much if therapy is the best way to deal with sin – although it may help deal with the consequences. What concerns me more is the way that 'conversion' is viewed. If it is a sin against the holy state to seek to change someone's nature, where does that leave Christian conversion – which by its definition seeks a radical change of nature? The early church we are told was not ashamed of speaking about conversion, and indeed rejoiced in it.

"The church sent them on their way, and as they travelled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad." (Acts 15:3).

There is an aversion to this in much of modern secular society. It does not mind if we are 'religious' and go to church. It is okay if we belong to a knitting club, or a line dancing society. The one thing that we must not do – the one thing that we must never suggest – is that we would like people to be converted. Even in some Christian circles we have bought in to this. We 'respect' Islam but we don't want Muslims to be converted. We should not be looking for our family, friends, work colleagues to be 'converted'. Who do we think we are? My fear is that much of modern society desires to inoculate people against the Gospel – to therapise us out of the Good News. I often thought that religious education in my school in Scotland (and often the kind of religious services we would get on the BBC) were kind of like the flu jab – it gave you a wee bit of religion, in order to prevent you getting the real thing!

Sometimes I am asked the accusatory question: "Are you trying to convert me?" The answer is simple. "No, because I can't. It is only God who converts. But I want you to be converted. I want you to have new life. I want you to know Christ. That is what I pray for you." Given that people without Christ are lost and on their way to hell – why would we not long for them to be converted? How cruel and heartless do we have to be to believe that and not care? Given that we know the joy, peace, love and eternal life that Christ brings, why would we not long for those we love to have those phenomenal gifts? Paul, for example, had such a longing for his own people, the Jews, to be converted, that

it caused him ‘great sorrow and unceasing anguish’ (Romans 9:2). His passion to see people converted was such that he could write, “I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.”

A few years ago I heard my former colleague, Sinclair Ferguson, state at a meeting of the Crieff Conference; “churches in Scotland have ceased to grow with conversion growth, because they no longer expect conversion growth”. The truth of that statement hit me like a hammer. I have been a pastor in two Presbyterian congregations – a small rural and a small inner city. In both the expectation amongst the leadership was that the church would grow by Christians coming to it. The problem with that is simply that in Scotland there were fewer and fewer Christians to transfer – and even if a new Christian family came to our area, they were very unlikely to come to us – because we were so small we did not have all the programmes they expected. We knew that if we did not grow, we would die. And the only way to grow was through conversion growth. The Lord was gracious and granted our desire.

Can I suggest that the situation is the same here in Australia. Our crying need is for new converts. We don’t need new church plants that are in effect just church repotting. We need

new churches that result in new Christians (which is often what happens and the main reason why church planting is so important). We don’t need church revitalisation projects which seek to grow by attracting Christians from other biblical churches. We need churches to be revitalised by new believers! How many of our churches have seen any conversion growth in the past five years? If not, then we need to ask why not, and cry out to the Lord. May he give us the same burden that Paul (and Christ) had for the lost. Or perhaps we too have been therapised out of our Gospel passion?

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