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Senior Bishop Warns Conversion Bill Risks Criminalising Conservative Views

A true story of faith under pressure. Read the first half below, then continue online.

KEY SPIRITUAL TAKEAWAY

"Very alarming implications for family life"

(Transliterated from the original Hindi.)

They had gathered only to pray. When prayer itself becomes the target, faith is proved not by words but by staying.

The Story - Part One

The Rt Rev Philip North, the Bishop of Blackburn, has warned that the draft Conversion Practices Bill risks criminalising conservative views - calling it state overreach with "very alarming implications for family life". North spoke to The Telegraph on 26 November, a day after taking his seat in the House of Lords, in his first major intervention since joining Parliament's upper chamber.

His warning is blunt. "I'm concerned about the overreach of the state into conversations within families," North said. "Parents could be prosecuted, even imprisoned, because of interpretations of conversations they have with their children."

North is one of the Church of England's most senior bishops, and his words carry weight precisely because they come from inside the institution - not from a campaign group, but from a bishop who now sits in the Lords and will have a vote on the legislation he is warning about.

The Telegraph reported North's warning on 26 November, in a report by Joe Burgis, Cameron Henderson and Tim Sigsworth, under the headline "Senior bishop: Trans law risks criminalising conservative views". North spoke to the paper a day after taking his seat in the Lords on 25 November - a first intervention that sets the tone for how he intends to use his place in Parliament.

Bishop Philip North: 'Overreach Of The State Into Conversations Within Families'

The draft bill, currently in pre-legislative scrutiny, would make it a criminal offence to carry out so-called conversion practices. Under the proposals as reported, parents, therapists, clinicians and teachers could face up to five years in prison for conversations with gender-questioning children. Religious leaders who share their faith's teachings on sex, gender and marriage would also be at risk.

North says the danger is not in what the bill claims to target, but in how widely it could be read. The bill "could really disincentivise parents from having ordinary conversations with their children who are exploring gender and sexuality", he said - and the chill would fall on everyone, "not just for people of faith... But for any responsible parent having open conversations with their child."

That last line is the heart of his argument. North is not framing this as a Christians-only concern. He is framing it as a parents' concern - and as a question about where the state stops and the family begins.

The Turning Point - What Happens Next

The story reaches a life-changing moment that changes everything -- and what seemed like the end is only the middle. Two reports disagree on the numbers, and one question is left unanswered: will the CCTV footage ever come out? Read the full story to find out what happens next.

PERSONAL REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When gathering to pray carries a real cost, what keeps a community coming together anyway -- and what would keep you coming?

2. The pastor's sister shielded him with her own body and fainted under the blows. What does costly, self-giving love look like in your own family or church?

3. When justice is delayed and a complaint is withdrawn under threat, how do believers hold on to truth without giving in to fear -- or to hatred?

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