

My TLRI Response

My name is Steve Nicholson and I am the Associate Minister of The Branch Christian Church in Launceston, Tas. I was ordained a minister of the gospel in the Presbyterian Church of Queensland in April 1982. I have served churches in Queensland and Tasmania since that time, apart from a sabbatical year in 2015. I have served at The Branch Christian Church, a member of the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches of Australia (FIEC <https://www.fiec.org.au/>), since February 2016.

I have a number of concerns about the TLRI “Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Conversion Practices”, Issues Paper No. 31 (Nov. 2020) which I have read through.

1. No explicit statements about the teaching of the Bible are condemned in this paper but by implication its teaching would almost certainly fall foul of the paper.

- In my ordination vows I have sworn to “*uphold the Bible, as originally given, as the God-breathed and infallible word of God. This precious, lifegiving word is sufficient for our knowledge of God and the supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.*” There is nothing unusual about this vow, it is standard fare in Reformed, Presbyterian, and Independent Evangelical churches (such as The Branch where I serve).
- The TLRI paper is explicit about what it categorises as “unacceptable conversion practices” but vague about how it proposes they should be determined and by whom. For instance, on pages 18-19 we read:
 - i. **False publications.** *Encouraging, pressuring or forcing subjects to read or view materials which make pseudo-scientific and false claims about LGBTQA+ people, the ‘causes’ of LGBTQA+ identity, or otherwise pathologise LGBTQA+ sexual orientation and gender identity.*
 - ii. **One-to-one practices.** *Programmatic ‘counselling’ or ‘pastoral care’ of LGBTQA+ people, including faith-based support, spiritual guidance, or other religious development, that attempt to change or suppress sexual orientation or gender identity.*
 - iii. **Group practices.** *Encouraging, pressuring or forcing subjects to attend prayer groups or scripture study groups that attempt to change or suppress sexual orientation or gender identity. Viewing or listening to sermons, lectures or talks about LGBTQA+ people that are premised upon assertions that LGBTQA+ people are broken, sinful, immoral, pathological, or in need of fixing.*
 - iv. **Intensive practices.** *Organised retreats, camps, online ‘courses’ and ‘conferences’ where intensive or systematic individual and/or group SOGI conversion practices are delivered and engaged in. Some of these activities involve intrastate, interstate or overseas travel to such events.*
- Under this proposal, will the Bible be regarded as a “false publication”? Indeed, who will decide what is “false”? What criteria will be used to decide what is “false”? Will Christian pastors, parents, teachers, doctors and other health care professionals be dragged before the courts? It would appear so! Could a speaker at a church youth group or camp who warns against homosexual behaviour from the Bible or discourages gender transitioning be charged under the proposed changes? It would appear so! Would a church pastor counselling a young teenager against trying to change their gender brought to him by a concerned parent be found guilty under this proposal? It would appear so!

2. Should young teenagers be discouraged from making life-changing decisions about their gender when they so often change their preferences on a range of other matters?

- Our laws do not permit those under 17 to hold a drivers license, or those under 18 to vote, because they are recognised as not sufficiently capable of shouldering the responsibilities and consequences involved. Yet, this paper advocates they should be allowed to choose to change their gender over the wishes of their parents and not be discouraged from doing so.

- The recent UK High Court Tavistock ruling recognised the culpability of such a course of action when it upheld Quincy Bell's case that at 16 she was not sufficiently aware of the irreversible life-altering implications of her desire to become a male. Now aged 23, she has reidentified as female but struggles to accept the consequences of her youthful decision. She may not ever be able to bear children (and having undergone a double mastectomy will certainly never breastfeed). This is heartbreaking by anyone's standards.
- By age 20, Quincy realized *"the vision I had as a teenager of becoming male was strictly a fantasy and that it was not possible. My biological make-up was still female and it showed, no matter how much testosterone was in my system or how much I would go to the gym. ... I felt like a fraud and I began to feel more lost, isolated and confused than I did when I was pre-transition."* <https://dailycaller.com/2020/12/01/transgender-children-puberty-blockers-united-kingdom-high-court/>
- How many more young people may be subjected to this kind of torturous regret if they are given inordinate encouragement to try and "transition" when it is not a healthy course of action?
- I see no evidence that this potential eventuality is even contemplated by this paper.
- So-called "conversion therapy" has two sides to it, but only one side of the issue is catered for in this unnuanced proposal, and it does so stridently and militantly.

3. What is the scientific backing for this proposal?

- Numerous reputable scientific studies have failed to find a "gay" gene. See <https://www.abc.net.au/news/science/2019-08-30/no-single-gay-gene-study-finds-science/11461114>. Yet, unquestioned scientific support is claimed for all things LGBTQA+ while any kind of supposed "conversion therapy" is dismissed as unquestioningly harmful.
- The AMA and the APA's categorisation in recent years of so called "conversion therapy" are cited as apparently sufficient scientific basis for the conclusions of the report. But as the following article in the Sydney Morning Herald makes clear, gender reassignment surgery often proves not to be the desired panacea. See <https://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/the-inbetweeners-20150730-ginojq.html>. This potential factor is not addressed in the paper.
- This paper advocates unequivocally for the prosecution of those who try to dissuade a child from their intention to gender transition. It seems the young "autonomous self" must be respected and protected by legislation at all costs, no matter how foolish time may prove many a young "autonomous self's" decision to be! The predicate seems to be that any discouragement of sexual inclinations is bad, and all autonomous sexual desires must be allowed to be explored. There is no room in this report given to the potential harm that may stem from youthful inquisitiveness or unfettered exploration of awakening sexual desires.
- This TLRI paper is not obviously based on reliable science. At best, it is biased by omitting to acknowledge the inconvenient truth of de-transitioning and the legitimate desire of parents and others to intervene and avert the potential regret of irreversible consequences. Instead, it wants to enforce by legislation the sovereignty of recognised "medical experts" over the wishes of parents and guardians and especially over the opinions and wishes of religious leaders. At worst, it is culpably inadequate in explaining the "science" on which it purports to be based, and militantly hostile toward those who think otherwise. In the mind of the authors of this paper there can be no "worthy" reasons to think otherwise, so "perpetrators" must be prevented or punished at all costs.

4. The one-sided nature of this proposal astounds me.

- Page 21 of the report admits that the TLRI is *"presently unaware of data about the nature and prevalence of SOGI conversion practices in Tasmania. No scientific study has been published on the prevalence of SOGI conversion practices in Tasmania or Australia."* In place of scientific studies, the paper offers "an estimate of prevalence" based on studies from the

UK because of supposed “similar demographic conditions with respect to religious observance and LGBTQA+ people.” From this it surmises that “up to 10% of Australians may be exposed to some form of SOGI conversion practices.” So, a surmised 2.5 million Aussies may have been exposed to this unwanted practice! That is an outrageously unjustified claim! With no clear scientific evidence, the paper sets out industriously to address a perceived injustice it thinks is occurring to millions in our community and recommends criminalising the perpetrators! At the very least, this must be retracted, and the necessary research completed before anything like this is ever presented to the government. This kind of half-baked approach instils no confidence that the report can be trusted. By its own admission, the report jumps to conclusions about what may be happening in Australia based solely on reports from overseas. One certainly hopes the overseas countries cited did perform due diligence in their research rather than simply do what this premature report does!

- The expert panel includes the name of one minister of religion, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] To pass the pub test, shouldn't an expert panel solicit the perspectives of a range of Christian denominations?
- De-transitioning conferences are being organised and run in the UK and the USA by those living with the often-irreversible consequences of their SOGI desires, but we hear nothing in this paper about the potential for great harm and deep regret at one's own behest. Or is this an inconvenient truth? <https://quilllette.com/2020/01/02/the-ranks-of-gender-detransitioners-are-growing-we-need-to-understand-why/> Will this be taken into account in the “scientific research” that still needs to be undertaken by the TLRI? After all, the report is quick to discredit the findings of another report due to perceived procedural irregularity.
- What measures does this paper advocate against potential harm caused by the LGBTQI+ community who may advocate for one of their peers to “gender transition” but that person may later find they cannot fulfill their “transition” dream to the extent they'd been promised or hoped for and becomes suicidal over it? The Quillette link (above) makes clear that much unhappiness and many suicides do occur after (rather than before) transitioning. Yet, I find nothing in this paper addresses the obvious potential for that kind of harm.
- Will we see a new kind of “stolen generation” forced to live with the potentially irreversible consequences of their youthful desire to change genders because they were unhelpfully encouraged to do so by the very people they trusted? I find nothing in this paper about the obvious potential for such harm.
- Little or no attention is given to the duty of care for the future wellbeing of a young person beyond that of never interfering with what they may wish to decide about their gender.
- Is it only those who subscribe to LGBTQA+ ideology, or those at least sympathetic to their cause, who can be trusted with the welfare of a young person experiencing the perplexing confusion of gender dysphoria?

Conclusion

The section beginning on page 6: “*The emphasis on ideology to distinguish from theology may also be useful and important for a general description of conversion practices. However, there are limitations to its applicability to statute, especially criminal codes/statutes*” gives little confidence that what the paper is seeking to address will counterbalance the needs of the LGBTQA+ community with the needs of those wishing to exercise their religion without fear of recrimination in our State.

Respectfully,

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