

Swedish Gay-Rights Bill Threatens Religious Freedom

Pentecostal church leaders in Sweden are rallying against a proposed law that could make it illegal to publicly express the biblical position against homosexual behavior.

A government legal expert told journalists late last year that passage of the bill might criminalize the “reading of certain Bible verses in public.” When senior pastor Jack-Tommy Ardenfors of the Pentecostal Smyrna Church in Göteborg, Sweden, heard about it, he said he would “keep preaching the scriptural truths” and “sue himself” in protest if the so-called smear bill is passed.

Defamatory statements about homosexuals are prosecutable in Sweden under existing laws. The new bill defines homosexuals as a group in need of special legal protection against discrimination—alongside, for example, Jews, Gypsies and women.

The specific target of the new bill are Swedish-Nazi smear campaigns against homosexuals, but the broader effect of the proposed legislation could open the door to criminalizing the religious views of Christians, Jews and Muslims. Minister of Justice Thomas Bodstrom said in March that he would “never personally endorse a law that forbids quoting the Bible.”

Ardenfors told Charisma that the bill “probably won’t get the vote in parliament,” but he emphasized not taking the proposed law for granted. “Ten years ago the gay lobby was

insignificant. Today it is very influential,” he said.

Non-Christian organizations representing publishers, journalists and lawyers say the new law would undermine freedom of speech. Meanwhile, Sweden’s three largest denominations—Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Congregationalist, as well as “Christian gay” pressure groups—favor the bill.

The campaign for gay rights gained momentum in Sweden in 1998, when the Lutheran archbishop of Sweden hosted an exhibition in the National Cathedral in Uppsala that portrayed Jesus as gay. In 1999, statements made against homosexuality at a Youth With a Mission event in Malmö, Sweden, caused the city to ban contributions to government school or social projects from any church that sponsored the YWAM event.

A separate bill proposing the right for homosexual partners to adopt children is also gaining support in Sweden.