

Is the Bible Next? State Law Demands Church Change Its Doctrine

A newly passed law in Washington state is sending shockwaves through religious communities across America. Democratic state Sen. Noel Frame, a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, has spearheaded Senate Bill 5375, a law that removes the clergy-penitent privilege for Catholic confessions and mandates that clergy report suspected child abuse, even if the knowledge comes from the confessional booth.

“I do not believe that any institution or person should be above the law when it comes to protecting children,” Frame told NPR. She further argued that “Canon law has changed many times and it can change again.”

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The law, signed earlier this month by Democratic Gov. Bob Ferguson, goes into effect in late July. It requires clergy to report suspected child abuse to law enforcement or the Department of Children, Youth and Families within 48 hours—no exceptions for confessional privacy.

The Archdiocese of Seattle responded with firm resistance. Archbishop Paul Etienne said, “Priests cannot comply with this law if the information is obtained during the Sacrament of Reconciliation.” He emphasized that canon law makes the seal of confession “inviolable,” and any priest who violates it risks excommunication.

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The Washington State Catholic Conference noted, “We supported

the inclusion of clergy as mandatory reporters but sought an amendment to preserve the seal of confession," a provision still recognized in the majority of states.

But the fight is far from over. On May 8, the Department of Justice under the Trump administration opened a civil rights investigation into the law. Assistant Attorney General Harmeet K. Dhillon stated the law "forces priests to choose between their faith and the law," calling it a clear violation of constitutional protections. The DOJ contends the law unfairly targets clergy while maintaining privileged communication for lawyers and physicians.

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Why This Precedent Is Dangerous

There is no room for debate about the evil of child abuse, it is vile and must be rooted out with unwavering resolve. But as dangerous as abuse is, it is equally dangerous for the government to dictate the doctrines and practices of religious institutions. This law does exactly that.

Mandating that the Catholic Church alter centuries-old doctrine for the sake of state compliance is not just a slippery slope—it's the foundation for a landslide.

Once the government assumes power over how faiths operate under the guise of protection, that same power can be extended to silence what it finds disagreeable.

Today it's the confessional. Tomorrow, it's the Bible. Then the name of Jesus.

This isn't about politics. It's about precedent. It doesn't matter if a law is authored by a Democrat or a Republican, when the state tells a church how to function, freedom of

religion is compromised.

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Governments often appeal to noble causes, such as protecting children, to seize new authority. And while justice must be served for victims, entrusting the state with spiritual oversight invites tyranny.

If this law stands, it sets a chilling example for the nation: that the Constitution's protections can be bypassed with enough moral outrage. But religious liberty does not exist only for the parts that are popular. It exists to protect what the culture would otherwise crush.

This is what the road to criminalizing the Bible looks like.

James Lasher *is staff writer for Charisma Media.*