

CRL's Push for State Control of Religion

What Every Religious Leader Needs to Know

Key Threat: State Regulation Disguised as “Peer Review”

The CRL Rights Commission is reviving its failed attempt to legislate State control over religion. Despite this being rejected by Parliament after hearings before the COGTA PC, it is again proposing a “Peer Review” strategy. The plan? Use high-profile abuse cases to justify creating State-appointed, State-funded Peer Review Committees that will determine who may lead, preach, and register religious organisations.

“You want to open up a church... you apply first. We test you... and grant a licence.” – CRL Chair, Feb 2025

Why You Should Be Deeply Concerned

1. It is UNCONSTITUTIONAL

- Violates Section 15: freedom of religion and conscience.
- Violates Section 18: freedom of association (including the right not to join a state-approved body).
- Violates Section 31: right of religious communities to self-govern.
- Forces religious leaders into state-controlled “Umbrella” structures.

2. It is UNNECESSARY

- South Africa already has robust laws (Criminal Law, SORMA, Children’s Act etc.) that cover all criminal abuses.
- The issue is not the absence of law—it is poor enforcement of the law.
- Religious freedom has never been a defence to excuse criminal behaviour.

3. It is UNWORKABLE

- Who decides who qualifies as a “religious practitioner” or can register a religious organisation?
- Which doctrine will be “official”? Who sets the standard?
- How will licensing be enforced? What if you disagree with the Peer Review Committee?

4. It is UNAFFORDABLE

- Estimated cost to taxpayers: R750 million start-up + R250 million annually.
- CRL’s current annual budget is one-fifth of what this scheme would require.
- Who do you think will pay the license fees for “approved” religious organisations and religious practitioners?

The Real Danger

The CRL announced on April 22 that “it has established a Section 22 Committee ... to undertake all the preparatory work towards the establishment of the peer review council.”

Among other things, its mandate is to:

- Develop strategies to **deal with and curb *spiritual transgressions***.
- Conduct extensive research to **assess the scale and impact of abuse of people’s beliefs** and harmful religious practices in eroding the religious rights of Christian believers, especially where monitoring is slack or absent.
- Make recommendations for **a legal and/or legislated framework** to promote peer review mechanisms in the religious sector.

The CRL is seeking evidence that the religious sector is out of control, which will be used to convince Parliament to pass legislation to implement a system of State regulation. If this succeeds, it will fundamentally alter the relationship between the State and the religious sector.

No religious leader or organisation will remain free from government oversight.

What Should Be Done Instead?

Religious communities should consider:

- Strengthening voluntary fraternals and networks for greater accountability.
- Adopting the existing Religious Freedom Charter and Codes of Conduct.
- Implementing financial accountability best practices.
- Enforcing background checks for child protection.
- Encouraging learning and training in theology and practical church management
- Recommending the CRL use its existing powers to help educate and assist.
- Supporting FOR SA’s defence of religious freedom

Final Word

The CRL says, “It’s not business as usual.” But the solution is not State control of religion. History has shown that when the State regulates religion, persecution and oppression follow. If this legislation passes, your right to preach freely, serve freely, and worship freely is at stake.

“In whatever ‘self-regulatory’ terms this is couched, these regulatory bodies will be state-appointed, state-funded and state-controlled.” – Bishop Zipho Siwa

→ Stand for your freedom. Speak now. Before it is too late.