



School Teacher Sent to Prison For Refusing to Use Preferred Pronouns of Transgender Student

Description

IRELAND: An schoolteacher who refused to use gender-neutral pronouns for a transgender student because of his Christian faith has been sent to prison for contempt of court.

Enoch Burke was arrested yesterday morning for breaching a court order not to teach at his Westmeath school in Ireland.

Mr Burke told the judge: *'Transgenderism is against my Christian belief. It is contrary to the scriptures, contrary to the ethos of the Church of Ireland and of my school.'*

After Judge Michael Quinn made his ruling, Mr Burke said: *'It is insanity that I will be led from this courtroom to a place of incarceration, but I will not give up my Christian beliefs.'*

MailOnline [report](#): Counsel for Wilson's Hospital School's board of management said it was with a *'heavy heart'* that it sought Mr Burke's committal to prison, but she said her client had been left with no choice as Mr Burke continued to attend the school, despite the court order which it had obtained last week.

The dispute began over his refusal to address a transitioning student as *'they'* rather than *'he'*, as requested by the student and their parents in May, and agreed to by the Church of Ireland school.

This escalated to his suspension on the day before the start of the autumn term, pending the outcome of a disciplinary process.

He had refused to remain away from the school on paid leave for that suspension, the court heard, and would sit in an empty classroom, declaring that he was there to work.

Mr Burke told Judge Quinn: *'I am a teacher and I don't want to go to prison. I want to be in my classroom today, that's where I was this morning when I was arrested.'*

He said he loved his students, to whom he teaches German, history and politics, as well as debating.

'I love my school, with its motto Res Non Verba, actions not words, but I am here today because I said I would not call a boy a girl.'

He added: *'Transgenderism is against my Christian belief. It is contrary to the scriptures, contrary to the ethos of the Church of Ireland and of my school.'*

Referring to his suspension, Mr Burke said: *'It is extraordinary and reprehensible that someone's religious beliefs on this matter could ever be taken as grounds for an allegation of misconduct.'*

'My religious beliefs are not misconduct. They are not gross misconduct. They never will be. They are dear to me. I will never deny them and never betray them, and I will never bow to an order that would require me to do so. It is just not possible for me to do that.'

He described his suspension as *'unreasonable, unjust and unfair'*. He added: *'There has been a dumbing down of the seriousness of suspension. It is a serious step.'*

'It has tarnished my good character and my good name, particularly in the profession of a teacher, where one is so close to a large number of members of the local community. It leaves a stain on what has been, for me, an unblemished teaching record.'

Mr Burke said he had a wonderful relationship with his pupils, who knew him as a man of *'professed morals and convictions'*.

He asked how he could return to school and bow to something he believed to be *'manifestly wrong'*, which he also described as a *'violation of my conscience'*. Mr Burke told the court that he believed that *'around this country, teachers are being forced to participate... they are being forced to use the pronoun "they" instead of either "he" or "she".'*

Rosemary Mallon BL, for the board of management, told Judge Michael Quinn that her client had no choice but to ask the court to send Burke to prison for breach of a court order.

'It is a coercive order we are seeking, not a punitive order. We are simply seeking to have Mr Burke comply with the order.'

'...Mr Burke is knowingly in breach of this order, he is therefore in contempt and he has made it clear that if he is not committed to prison he will attend at the school [today], and the concerns of the school regarding the ongoing disruption to the students remain,' she added.

She noted that Mr Burke could make his arguments at court tomorrow, when the injunction obtained last week is due to be reviewed, and at the school's disciplinary hearing this month.

by Baxter Dmitry

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