

Letter published in the Church Times - 11th February 2011 Ex-Gay Therapy

Dear Sir

I was disturbed to see that the letters published last week on Ex Gay therapy appear to have completely missed the point.

While they concentrated on the effectiveness or not of such therapies, the real issue lurks in the background - the issue of why people come to the conclusion that their feelings are 'unwanted' in the first place.

Groups such as NARTH (National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality) campaign for the right of homosexuals to receive treatment for their 'unwanted feelings'.

But people come to them, not because they simply want to change, but because they have been told over and over again that their same-sex feelings are wrong, sinful, even dirty and depraved. Christians in particular, come because they have been told that to please God, they have to somehow put them aside, be 're-orientated' or 'healed'. Some are even told that they need deliverance from a demon.

Ex-Gay groups and people who offer "Christian Therapies" do not merely respond to those who come to them - they promote the message which brings people to them in the first place. On NARTH's website amid all the claimed scientific evidence there are articles which make this explicit, like one by DA Abbott comparing homosexual feelings to Paul's "[thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me.](#)" He goes on to say "We, like Paul, have "weaknesses of the flesh. We experience immoral, illegal, unethical and unhealthy inclinations" and concludes that homosexual feelings should be regarded as such.

The same message was, apparently expressed during Mrs Pilkington's sessions which hit the headlines recently. During those sessions it is reported that she reinforced the view that homosexuality is "a mental illness, an addiction" and "an anti-religious phenomenon".

Thus practitioners of reparative therapies do not operate in a vacuum. They are more akin to the cowboy builder who knocks on your front door to tell you that your roof needs repairing, and then offers to repair it.

There can be no objection to individual homosexuals who have decided for themselves, that their faith means that they must be celibate, or pray for some change in their lives. I am happy to respect those who find that they have been able to find peace in marriage, despite earlier homosexual feelings - that is their choice and their right.

But what happens much more frequently, is that homosexuals are told that their feelings are wrong by the same vested interests who then offer to 'heal them'. Such a process of 'sexual revulsion' on the one hand and conditional 'love and acceptance' on the other, often causes great harm to those who are drawn in.

Yours

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Sir, — I do not know why anyone should wish to change his or her God-given sexual orientation, except as a result of the unfair and unjust pressures laid on lesbian and gay people by society and, I fear, by elements in the Church which have refused to grow up and understand that such orientations are entirely natural.

The passages in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament which condemn homosexuality are either ambiguous or have a purely anthropological interest. Jesus did not condemn, and nor should we. We could not do better than follow the gracious response to the issue by the Episcopal Church in the United States, bless all loving relationships, and move on to the serious issues that beset our world once and for all.

It is really very sad when people are moved to be disgusted with themselves, and, as clergy, we must do everything we can to help people to accept themselves as they are and rejoice at the way God has made them. So-called "Christian" counsellors who try to make gay people straight find uncomfortable echoes in the Nazi past with its concentration camps, and the appalling present-day experience in Africa of "corrective rape" of lesbian girls. I am sure that such counsellors are still a very long way from that, but they do help to build up an atmosphere of fear and resentment which I, for one, find extremely disturbing.

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