

CIT Comment on Living Out's Repudiation of Therapeutic Support for Goals of Clients Who Experience Unwanted Same-sex Attractions

31 March, 2016

In reference to a recent article by Sean Doherty in the name of Living Out¹, Core Issues Trust gratefully acknowledges their recognition that they are aware of no organisations in the UK promoting “Gay Cure” or “Conversion Therapy” (apparently defined as therapist coercion and fixed, predetermined goals). Such pejorative terms are caricatures designed to obscure the distinction between approaches that are religiously mediated (such as represented by Living Out) and those affirming professional psychotherapeutic support (represented by Core Issues Trust).

However, Core Issues Trust does not support the position, which is now embraced by increasing numbers of UK evangelicals, promoting a category of ‘gay self-acceptance’ rather than hope of change. This ‘conservative gay-affirming’ position² equates unwanted same-sex inclinations to ‘orientation’ regardless of whether or not these have been acted on. In a desire to support those who uphold orthodox Christian teaching but also experience, have acted on, or are tempted by same-sex erotic feelings, this position promotes the idea that help properly begins with acceptance of this *orientation* as an authentic part of an individual’s being. Such orientation, they claim, is both natural and neutral, without need of change and unresponsive to what they consider unnecessary therapeutic interventions. But does not such a position unwisely give credence to the concept of ‘orientation’ as a distinct *category*? This is especially so when it appears to be uncritically assimilated into orthodox Christian teaching. Such a position sanctifies an extra-biblical anthropology in which male and female appear to be additionally ‘gay’ or ‘straight’, by default or design. The Living Out statement illustrates this point clearly.

Confusion and conflation of Sexual Categories and Identities

Three extracts from the March 2016 Living Out article are indicative of an unbiblical anthropology:

1. “what we need isn’t more heterosexuality or less homosexuality, but the holiness found in Jesus Christ” [we consider this to be a false antithesis]
2. “Attempting to change someone’s sexual orientation assumes that being gay is somehow more problematic than being straight” [this denies the fundamental principle of client self-determination which underlies all authentic therapeutic

¹ <http://www.livingout.org/does-living-out-support-gay-cure-or-conversion-therapy-> <accessed 26/3/2106>

² We acknowledge a distinction between those who agree with the Bible’s teaching that homosexual practice or fantasy is wrong but see homosexual orientation as neutral and natural (conservative gay-affirming), and those who call themselves evangelical Christians but support the right of people with same sex attraction to have intimate sexual relationships with people of the same sex (gay affirming).

interventions and contradicts the complementary nature of the creation of male and female, in the image of God]

3. "If a person changes from lustful desire towards people of the same sex to lustful desire towards people of the opposite sex, that is in no sense an improvement" [this invocation of the Binary Model ('homosexual' and 'heterosexual') is a caricature – what if the client is a person whose (heterosexual) marriage, or aspiration to marriage, is being destroyed by homosexual feelings?]

Such a framework promotes a belief that "orientation" (which is not defined) is an authentic part of a person's being – just as authentic, they suggest, as "our God-given identity as female or male." The article conflates and confuses 'identity' (orientation) and biological category (male and female gendering).

Yet as Whiteway and Alexander (2015:29 cited by Living Out)³ point out "... what can be emphasised in these studies is that environmental influences are the largest contributing factor to same-sex attraction ...". The Living Out article has apparently obscured the vital distinction that, while our "orientation" is shaped postnatally in our upbringing, our God-given birth sex, or gender, is not.

Unintentional Missiological Gatekeeping

Although unapologetically a Christian initiative, Core Issues Trust serves the needs of the broader UK community who seek professionally mediated change, and specifically welcomes people of other and no faith, including those from the Jewish, Muslim and Hindu or secular communities. Homosexual feelings and temptations are not uniquely spiritual in origin, although acting upon them or embracing them as an orientation does have spiritual consequences. Imposing Christian holiness, as Living Out appears to do, as the only remediation for same-sex attractions or behaviours has the unintended effect of acting as a form of gatekeeping, denying any but Christians help for unwanted same-sex behaviours and feelings. The Trust promotes a multi-causal view of the origin of homosexual feelings, common to all people regardless of spiritual or ethnic background. Therapeutic support may well assist any unwanted part of same-sex inclinations rooted in developmental, traumatic or socialisation difficulties and is accessible to any individual on a voluntary basis, regardless of creed. We believe that professionally mediated therapeutic approaches may legitimately be offered to people of all religions and none; in addition, people of faith may find further help and support within their own belief system.

Confusion of Professional and Religious Therapeutic Approaches

It is often not recognised that there are two distinct streams of therapeutic approach to helping people, who wish to reduce unwanted same-sex attractions. Religious approaches often involve teaching or support groups and spiritual practices such as prayer and Bible reading. Professional therapists, on the other hand, often work on a purely secular basis, using modalities that are widely employed in other therapeutic contexts (such as, for example, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy). There appears to be no

³ <http://www.livingout.org/resources/understanding-the-causes-of-same-sex-attraction><accessed 30 March, 2016>https://www.scienceandchristianbelief.org/serve_pdf_free.php?filename=SCB+27-1+Whiteway+Alexander.pdf

reason why a person should not engage in both professional and religious initiatives simultaneously, as long as the boundaries of each are clear.

The Living Out article does not distinguish between these two approaches, indeed it confuses them. It cites an article⁴ that refers to a major study whose participants, it says, followed a programme of “reparative therapy”. In fact the study involved did not address “reparative therapy” at all but rather what its authors call “religiously mediated change”. The article does, however, report that this study “found no evidence that such attempts were harmful.” It is this fact that Core Issues Trust wishes to present in a society that has been persuaded that such programmes are comparable to electric shock treatment and other forms of aversion therapy promoted by the medical professions until quite recently.

Simply being unable to pinpoint developmental origins or trajectories in relation to sexuality is insufficient reason for believing that ‘homosexual’ feelings are equivalent in nature to ‘heterosexual’ desires. The Trust rejects this equivalence and reinforcement of the increasingly defunct binary (‘gay’/‘straight’) model. This is a political tool which has introduced the categorical notion of ‘homosexual’ and ‘heterosexual’ orientation into religious perspectives, and into the thinking of the UK mental health institutions. Human sexuality is multi-faceted and fluid⁵. Its expression and disposition sometimes change spontaneously but can also be modified and in some cases transformed, along a continuum of outcomes.

Core Issues Trust will continue to offer change-orientated therapies using standard modalities undertaken within an ethical framework. Such an approach affirms Therapy Assisted Sexual Fluidity (TASF)⁶, which term is preferable to the APA’s (2009) ‘Sexual Orientation Change Efforts’ (SOCEs), which similarly reifies the notion of ‘orientation’ and appears to postulate, in straw man fashion, the notion of categorical change without reference to a continuum of outcomes.

The Trust will continue to support other independent and self-regulating bodies similarly rejecting the conservative gay self-acceptance or affirming model. It will also contribute to the development of support structures honouring professional interventions, individual autonomy and client aspirations.

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Core Issues Trust is registered in Northern Ireland, number NI606015 accepted by HMRC as a charity for tax purposes number XT29880. Registered address: 102 Kinedale Park, Ballynahinch, BT248YS, Northern Ireland.

⁴ P Ould <http://www.livingout.org/can-your-sexuality-change><accessed 30 March 2016>

⁵ Such fluidity is not infinite, as those promoting ‘Transgender’ as yet another orientation, would have us believe.

⁶ Dr C. Rosik, March 18, 2016, personal communication.