

CONVERSION THERAPY PMM

The following amendment has been tabled by Revd Dr Sean Doherty :

After the words 'That this Synod', delete all and insert:

“(a) note the statement of 16 January 2017 signed by The UK Council for Psychotherapy, The Royal College of General Practitioners and others concerning the practice of conversion therapy;

(b) affirm that all sexuality is equally affected by the Fall and that therefore therapies and pastoral practices which assume otherwise are not warranted;

(c) affirm that pastoral care, prayer ministry and professional counselling are legitimate means of supporting individuals who choose them freely, provided that they respect the proper dignity of human beings and do not involve coercion or manipulation or make unwarranted promises about the removal of unwanted feelings; and

(d) ask the House of Bishops to draw up guidelines for work in this area to discourage inappropriate pastoral practices, and to encourage good ones.

The case for this amendment is offered below

- **Amendment section (a) enables Synod to note rather than endorse the Jan 2017 statement.** This is better given :
 - The wideranging and poorly defined nature of “conversion therapy”
 - A lack of proper theological support
 - Lack of necessary expertise on Synod to make the very strong and sweeping judgments that “*the practice of conversion therapy has no place in the modern world, is unethical, harmful and not supported by evidence*”
 - The divisive nature of the statement in what is already a highly contested area
 - The statement’s assertion that both sexual orientation and one’s gender identity are “a fundamental aspect” of a person
- **The motion appeals to science but the scientific evidence presented in the supporting paper by the proposer is weak and selective.** It is found in para 13 which rightly notes the importance of the 2009 APA report and includes a quotation taken from its summary of the systematic review of the literature on efficacy and safety. However, the motion, the Jan 2017 statement and the supporting paper all fail to do its nuanced account justice. In particular
 - Given that, as the quote says, there is a “*limited amount of methodologically sound research*” the dogmatic statements made in the motion and the Jan 2017 statement are difficult to justify
 - To say there is “*no sound evidence that it works*” is not the same as saying there is “*sound evidence that it does not work*”
 - It is also important to be clear that efficacy and harm are distinct categories.
 - In fact the quote itself says simply it is “*unlikely*” for there to be change. More importantly, the words removed from the quote say that on the studies which provide “*best basis for predicting what the outcome of valid interventions would be. These studies show that enduring change to an individual’s sexual orientation is uncommon*”. “*Unlikely*” and “*uncommon*” both signal that change, though perhaps relatively rare, can happen for some people, to some degree, for some time (and for some may even prove “*enduring*”) as is supported by other studies, notably the work of Jones and Yarhouse
 - The motion describes conversion therapy as “harmful” but the APA quote in para 13 is immediately preceded in the report by this statement:

None of the recent research (1999–2007) meets methodological standards that permit conclusions regarding efficacy or safety. The few high-quality studies of SOCE conducted recently are qualitative (e.g., Beckstead & Morrow, 2004; Ponticelli, 1999; Wolkomir, 2001); although they aid in an understanding of the population that undergoes sexual orientation change, they do not provide the kind of information needed for definitive answers to questions of safety and efficacy.

- The supporting paper precedes the quote by claiming that, in relation to conversion therapy, there is "much evidence that it has potential to cause harm" (underline added) and the motion removes the language of "potential" and simply declares it is "harmful". The APA report says in the para after the quote "We found that there was some evidence to indicate that individuals experienced harm from SOCE" (underline added). Here again the evidence has been misrepresented.
 - The next section of the APA report therefore begins "*Although the recent SOCE research cannot provide conclusions regarding efficacy or safety...*" but the motion and the Jan 2017 statement state very strong and negative conclusions about both.
 - That following section also notes that "*Former participants in SOCE reported diverse evaluations of their experiences: Some individuals perceived that they had benefited from SOCE, while others perceived that they had been harmed*" but the motion and statement give no sign of recognising that some have benefited.
 - On the further supporting scientific evidence offered by the proposer from Professors Michael King and Robert Song see also the responses from Dr Martin Davie and from Glynn Harrison and Andrew Goddard. More widely see also Peter Ould's article.
- **The amendment in (b) offers a theological rationale and draws out its implications**
 - The current motion has no Christian or theological content
 - The supporting paper GS2-070A similarly gives very limited theological rationale
 - Amendment section (b) makes clear that, whatever we wish to say about God's purposes for human sexuality in creation, all of our experiences of our sexuality are "equally affected by the Fall"
 - It draws a clear theological judgment from this which is not dependent on scientific claims about efficacy or harm but Christian convictions: "*therapies and pastoral practices which assume otherwise are not warranted*"
 - This expresses much better the important concern underlying the motion ie that there are pastoral approaches and therapies which presume and treat certain people as worse sinners because of their sexuality
 - That theological judgment, without embracing the complex and contested category of "conversion therapy", makes clear that – on the basis of Christian belief - there are unwarranted therapies and pastoral practices and clearly these could include some forms of "conversion therapy".
- **The amendment in (c) offers a positive vision of the church's calling and wider good counselling practice which is lacking in the wholly negative original motion**
 - **The amendment in (c) also sets out clear safeguards which have a strong biblical and theological basis and seek to guard against abusive practices:**
 - The importance of pastoral care and prayer ministry
 - The need for all such ministry to be supportive and freely chosen
 - The need to respect human dignity
 - The unacceptability of any coercion or manipulation
 - The need for any promises to be warranted
- **The amendment in (d) recognises the need for further work, work which can be implemented through the Teaching Document and the Pastoral Advisory Group.**
 - This focus on the church's ministry is much more constructive than Synod endorsing and calling on the Archbishops' Council to become a co-signatory of a statement which has a number of weaknesses, is strongly opposed by many within the church and offers neither positive vision nor theological rationale.