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Pray Away the Gay? No Way!

Part I

By Kristine Danowski

All of us have heard of Rev. Ted Haggard, a married, vociferously anti-gay, evangelical pastor dismissed from his Colorado megachurch in a gay-sex scandal. Haggard announced that he has undergone three weeks of intense therapy and is now “completely heterosexual.” Yeah, right.

This article describes a practice that has thus far escaped the attention of both professional and amateur skeptics groups. The practice is quackery and fraud at best and life endangerment at worst. The practice is a “cure” for lesbians and gay men, and two kinds exist.

“Reparative therapy,” “conversion therapy,” or “sexual reorientation therapy” purports to change a person’s sexual orientation from homosexual to heterosexual. Reparative therapy masquerades as a form of legitimate, secular mental health practice, but its practitioners are overwhelmingly conservative to fundamentalist Christian with a few Catholics and Orthodox Jews thrown in for diversity. “Transformational ministry,” on the other hand, is overtly religious and claims to use fundamentalist or conservative Christian dogma to change a lesbian or gay person into a straight person. Whatever their moniker, reparative practitioners resemble faith healers, fortune tellers, and creationists far more than genuine mental health providers.

Homosexuality was removed as a mental illness from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders in 1973. No legitimate professional organization considers homosexuality to be a mental illness. The American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Sociological Association, the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors, & Therapists, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, the American Counseling Association, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science, to name a very few, have all issued position statements affirming the diversity of human sexual

EVENTS CALENDAR

April Program

Saturday 21 April 2007,
at 2 p.m.

Center for Nonprofit
Management, 2900 Live Oak
Street in Dallas

Biotechnology for Dummies

NTS president John Brandt will give a talk on biotechnology. This field has revealed much about the mechanism of life in the past three decades. What was superstitiously supposed about life’s processes is now being explained by science as perfectly natural.

NTS Social Dinner

Saturday 28 April 2007,
at 7 p.m.

Good Eats
6950 Greenville Avenue, Dallas

Let us know if you are coming.
We need to reserve a table.

Check the NTS Hotline for more
information at 214-335-9248.

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experience and firmly opposing reparative therapy. Amnesty International even denounces reparative therapy as “torture” and “inhumane treatment.” So why, then, is there a “cure” for a nonexistent illness? Because a tiny minority of people firmly believes that being gay or lesbian is a “sin.” Being a gay man or lesbian is just wrong. No lesbian or gay man could possibly be happy, self-confident, and secure in her/his sexuality. Whether they admit it or not, all lesbians and gay men are automatically miserable because they know their same-gender orientation is abnormal and they really should be straight.

No scientific evidence exists for the four main ideas underlying reparative therapy. This pseudopsychology was first revealed in 1983 in the book *Homosexuality: The New Christian Ethic* by Dr. Elizabeth Moberly. Moberly herself is a never-married Christian fundamentalist (note the “Christian” in her book’s title) who claims to be heterosexual. She has never conducted any studies to support her ideas, and neither has anyone else in the “ex-gay” world. Yet they and their variations form the foundation for all “cures” for the disease of homosexuality.

Moberly’s first idea is that lesbians and gay men have *defensive detachment* from the other gender. For example, if you are a lesbian, you have had an unhappy childhood in which you and your father were constantly at odds. You don’t like your father, and you extend this dislike to all men. Thus you feel sexually oriented to women. *Gender rejection* is the refusal to accept both your biological gender and its socially accepted gender-specific behavior. For example, a lesbian might be a “tomboy,” or a gay man might be a “sissy.” These individuals want to be the other gender so they assume the characteristics of that gender, including sexual attraction to their own gender. In other words, the lesbian really wants to be a man, part of being a man is sexual attraction to women, hence she displays masculine behavior such as playing sports and preferring women. *Same-sex ambivalence* claims that inside every gay person is a straight person struggling to get out. Gay men and lesbians are truly heterosexual and require assistance to discover their inner straight person. Because lesbians and gay men don’t really want to be gay, same-gender relationships are doomed to failure. Lastly, lesbians and gay men inordinately sexualize *same-sex friendships* because improper childhood socialization means they can’t get along with their same-gender peers.

Readers may immediately see some logical problems with these ideas. The assumption that every gay man and lesbian had an unhappy childhood is clearly false. We all know at least one lesbian or gay man who had a happy childhood and loving parents. Reparative practitioners insist that *something* must have gone wrong in childhood to cause an individual to be lesbian or gay. That something could be anything from a minor incident such as a failed exam or as major as sexual abuse. If a trivial childhood occurrence can make someone gay, why aren’t we all gay? Reparative practitioners also insist that rigid gender stereotypes are appropriate and healthy. Boys should not play with dolls or experiment with makeup; girls should not play hockey or like science. Simply because society sanctions some kinds of behaviors doesn’t make them mandatory and correct; simply because some children defy them doesn’t make these kids abnormal. Reparative practitioners deny that a gay person can be happy, but we all know at least one happy,

well-adjusted gay person. Many gay and lesbian relationships last decades. We all have same-gender friendships; are we all gay? Of course not.

Reparative therapy consists of a menagerie of pseudopsychology and unproven and discredited modalities. The “B-SADD paradigm” is very common. First, practitioners use *bizarre techniques* such as aversion therapy with electric shocks or rubber bands. The client wears a rubber band around her/his wrist, and whenever s/he feels a same-gender attraction, s/he snaps the band to snap her/himself back to the reality that this attraction is wrong. Next the practitioner *seduces* the client to the joys of heterosexuality. The practitioner extols the happiness of socially- and biblically-sanctioned heterosexual marriage, children, and the American dream. When this doesn’t work, the practitioner uses *aversion* to the horrors of homosexuality. The practitioner tells the client that homosexuality causes AIDS, other sexually-transmitted diseases, and pedophilia, increases the risk of suicide and substance abuse, and degrades humanity. The practitioner also *disassociates* the client from her/his past, including gay friends, supportive straights, and anywhere the client might “act out.” Thus the practitioner effectively isolates the client from anything and anyone who truly affirms her/his sexuality. Finally, the practitioner *distracts* the client from her/his loneliness. Anything from praying, dieting, and exercising to “enjoying the small things” can be a distraction as many as 50 to 500 times a day.

Other bizarre techniques include exorcism/spirit warfare (“the devil made you gay”), prayer and fasting (“pray away the gay”), regression therapy (“what really made you gay?”), intrauterine/fetal trauma resolution (similar to CO₂ engrams), non-sexual touch/massage (to desexualize those same-sex friendships), recovery of repressed memories (“seriously, why are you gay?”), masculinizing men/feminizing women (to conform to gender stereotypes, playing football with men/putting makeup on women), and newagey “bioenergetics” or “inner child” stuff. Like fortune tellers, reparative practitioners guess until they get it. They will find a reason why the client is gay. Most alarmingly, if the client does not change from gay to straight, the practitioner *blames the client* for not trying hard enough. All the time the practitioner constantly reinforces the belief that being gay is “evil” and “sinful.”

What kind of person goes to “ex-gay” therapy? Studies have shown four types of victims. The first are adolescents coerced by ignorant, homophobic parents; these are a minority of victims. If a teenager comes out as lesbian or gay, or does not conform to gender stereotypes, parents may send the teenager to an anti-gay boot camp or practitioner. The parents may threaten to withhold college tuition or throw the kid out of the house if the teen does not go. Second, gays who were raised in fundamentalist religious homes and learned that being gay is evil are the majority of victims. They have no positive gay role

models, so they internalize all the negativity. Third, extremely self-loathing, extremely religious gay men who refuse to accept their sexuality and manifest it in unhealthy ways are a sizeable minority of victims. These men may have multiple partners, engage in unsafe sex, and blame their sexual orientation for all their problems. Fourth, self-destructive, self-loathing gays who have serious mental illness and/or substance abuse are a minority of victims, but nearly all “ex-gay” leaders and spokespeople. Being gay, having a mental illness, and/or a substance abuse disorder are entirely separate issues. These gays do not get the mental health care they truly need for their clinical depression, bipolar disorder, crystal meth habit, etc., but they sure get plenty of “ex-gay” pseudoscience and dogma. Gay men predominate as clients of reparative practitioners. These four types of people are the immediate victims of “ex-gay” quackery. We are all the long-term victims.

In the next article, we will examine some major proponents of “ex-gay” therapy and the science behind sexuality research. □

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Web news

by John Blanton

Discovery Institute at SMU

The hrrrr're back!

Back in March of 1992 Southern Methodist University hosted Phillip Johnson and a bevy of other new-age creationists at an affair called *Darwinism: Scientific Inference or Philosophical Preference*, much to the consternation of SMU's science departments. It appears we didn't get our fill.¹

The creationist Discovery Institute Center for Science and Culture (CSC) has connived a re-run of the flying circus. This month Discovery Institute will stage Darwin vs Intelligent Design at SMU, and once again the science departments are consterned. *The Dallas Morning News* reports:²

From the SMU biology department

The bio department still objects to having the conference on campus.

The News article reproduces a letter from the SMU Biology Department:

The Biology Department at SMU expresses its strong opposition to the conference sponsored by the Discovery Institute entitled "Darwin vs. Design @ SMU". In our opinion, the scheduling and hosting of such partisan events at SMU raises several issues. The Discovery Institute is a think tank that promotes pseudoscience. They seek to discredit evolutionary thought by evoking fundamentalist objections that are faith based and not based on science but they give a false impression of being scientifically proven. This approach of using a guise of pseudoscience to promote a religious belief system has been rejected by the United States Federal Court system on several occasions. In 1982, a Federal District Court in Arkansas concluded that creation science "is simply not science" because it depends upon "supernatural intervention" (*McLean v. Ark. Bd. of Educ.*, 529 F. Supp. 1255, 1258 (E.D. Ark. 1982) and more recently a Federal District Court in Pennsylvania concluded that the subject of the Discovery Institute's April 13-14 program ("Intelligent Design" or ID) is "not {science} and moreover that ID cannot uncouple itself from its creationist, and thus religious,

antecedents" (*Kitzmuller v Dover Area School District*, 2005). In the book "Science and Creationism: A View from the National Academy of Sciences" (published 1999) the National Academy of Sciences unequivocally states that "creationism has no place in any science curriculum at any level".

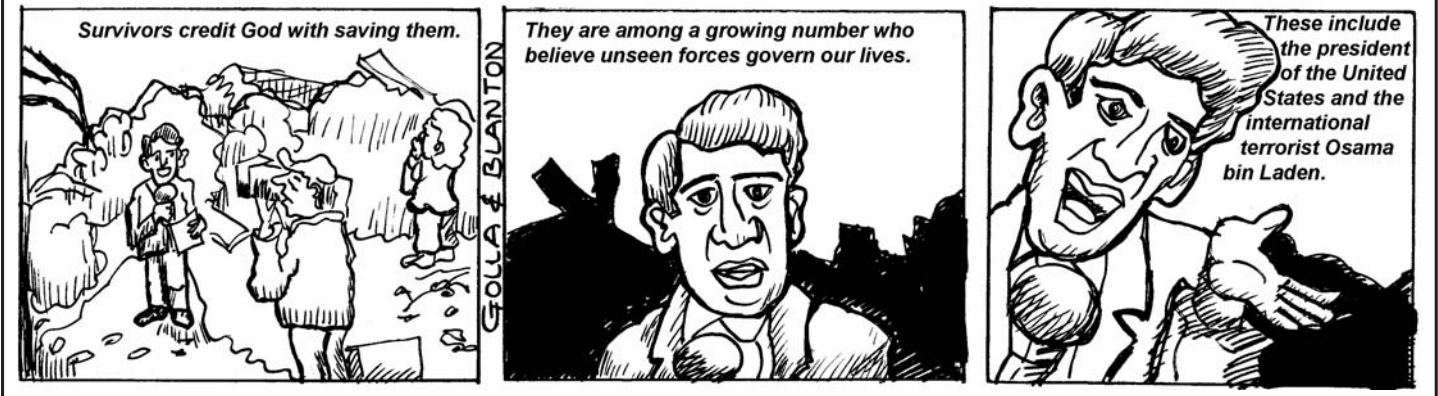
In recovering from the Dark Ages, Science developed a set of operational principles that permits the analysis of nature in an abstract and detached set of methodologies involving observations and reason in a complementary approach. Gathering data, interpretation of data with inductive and deductive reasoning, self-correcting reported observations and the repeatability of the results are fundamental to the scientific approach. It is the hypothesis-driven aspect of science that allows general principles to emerge from among the many that might be true by systematically testing alternative proposals. This fundamental principle serves as the foundation of science. Those who seek to propose hypotheses outside of this accepted scheme are practitioners of pseudoscience.

In the biological sciences the principles of evolutionary thought are fundamental to our discipline. Evolution is considered the only way to make sense of the living world. This is the major theme of our teaching and research. We offer a special course in our curriculum (Biology 3303 Evolution) and the summary states that this course is "A study of the principles of biological evolution. Includes natural selection, adaptation, molecular evolution, and the formation of new species, the fossil record, biogeography and principles of classification." It is a basic and fundamental course in our curriculum and the principles learned in the introductory courses and Evolution are expanded in every course we offer in the department.

For these reasons, the Biology Department strongly opposes hosting of the Discovery Institute's conference on Darwin vs Intelligent Design here at SMU. We are especially disturbed by the deception that pseudoscience perpetrates while masquerading as a legitimate endeavor. The Discovery Institute's Center for the Reversal of Science in Culture has a clear social agenda, replete with a 5-year plan (<http://www.antievolution.org/features/wedge.html>). The 5-year plan is less concerned about evolution than it is about ending so called "scientific materialism". In essence the program is against scientific enquiry and its impact on society. Darwinian evolution is targeted primarily because it is considered a "weak point" in the "trunk of science". Failure to notify the public that the conference has an overarching social objective, well beyond the issue of evolution, is deceptive and has no place at an academic institution. Research in our Biology program is intended to have an impact on

Skeptic Ink

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society, but does not begin with a social agenda. Indeed science is neither conservative nor liberal, nor does it seek to support or refute a theistic world-view. Biology objects to the conference on Darwin vs Intelligent Design because it is intended to serve as a propaganda platform, directed by Phase II and III of the Discovery Institute's 5-year plan. These tactics are objectionable in any arena, and are the antithesis of scientific enquiry. The position of Biology is not contrary to rights of free speech. Rather we object to guests in our house who abuse the privilege so stridently. We choose to strongly oppose the Discovery Institute @SMU.

Biological Sciences

Southern Methodist University

The conference will be April 13-14 in McFarlin Auditorium at SMU in Dallas, TX.

References

- 1 <http://www.leaderu.com/orgs/fte/darwinism/index.html>
- 2 http://religion.beloblog.com/archives/2007/03/from_the_smu_biology_department.html

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