



*The North Texas*

# Skeptic

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## Pray Away the Gay? No Way!

### Part II

By Kristine Danowski

In Part I, we examined the pseudopsychology underlying “ex-gay” therapy. Now we will see who promotes reparative therapy and why. As we will see, Ted Haggard is not the only one with “moral indiscretions.”

The first of many, Love In Action (LIA) was founded in 1973 in San Francisco by Rev. Kent Philpott and John Evans. Initially Philpott was seeking a way to promote Christianity to gay men when, he says, he met numerous gay men like Evans who were unhappy with their sexual orientation. Philpott decided to try to make these gay men straight using Christianity. LIA launched nationally with the publication of Philpott’s book, *The Third Sex?*, that was subsequently withdrawn from circulation after a libel suit. Apparently, Philpott claimed some clients successfully changed from gay to straight when they actually did not. Evans left LIA and publicly denounced it in 1980. Philpott was removed in 1980 after “moral indiscretions.” LIA has chapters nationwide. Alarming, LIA targets adolescents and their homophobic parents.

Undercover in the organization, gay activists have attacked LIA’s methods. LIA has full-time residential programs for both adults and teens. Each resident has his own “man monitor” or “penis patrol” to prevent masturbation and sexual contact between residents. Imagine the sexual tension in the residence from all the intense repressed sexuality. Adults have limited contact with the outside world while teens have none. LIA’s teen program is called “boot camp” because that’s what it is. As mentioned in Part I, teens are frequently coerced into participating. LIA’s programs are a cash cow. The adult program costs at least \$1200 a month plus a \$2000 “initiation fee.” Adults are expected to work full-time and turn over all their earnings to LIA to pay for their “treatment.” While the teen program can last a few weeks to a few months, the adult program lasts 2-7 years. LIA is fundamentalist Christian.

## EVENTS CALENDAR

### May Program

Saturday, 19 May 2007 at 2 p.m.

Center for Nonprofit  
Management  
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas

#### Biotechnology for Dummies

Erling Beck will give a talk on Morgellon’s Disease: A New Illness or Delusional Parasitosis.

He will explain the symptoms of Morgellon’s disease and its similitude with delusional parasitosis (a mental illness). The presentation will showcase the little scientific literature available. Also, what is the role of the Internet and the media: Raising awareness or propagating hysteria?

### NTS Social Dinner

Saturday, 26 May 2007 at 7 p.m.  
Good Eats, 6950 Greenville  
Avenue, Dallas

Let us know if you are coming.  
We need to reserve a table.  
214-335-9248

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The largest and most influential “ex-gay” ministry is Exodus International. Founded in 1976, Exodus is an umbrella group with approximately 11,000 autonomous affiliates to whom it refers clients. Exodus has had some trouble over the years. Both “ex-gay” male founders renounced Exodus and its methods in 1980 and married each other in 1982. The “ex-gay” director of its British division denounced its methods in 1991. Nevertheless, Exodus is still profitable. It holds national “ex-gay” conferences for clients and practitioners. Exodus reaffirms fundamentalists’ anti-gay dogma to both pastors and parents. Recently, Exodus has focused on a more political agenda. Far-right politicians frequently are keynote speakers at their conferences. Some Exodus proponents want to eliminate the terms “ex-gay” and “former homosexual” in favor of “post-gay.”

Until Ted Haggard, the most infamous example of an “ex-gay” leader with “moral indiscretions” was John Paulk. Paulk was a member of Exodus’ board of directors. He was a self-proclaimed success story, a gay man who changed to a straight man. He married an “ex-lesbian,” and both were prominent speakers on the religious right circuit. However, in 2001, Paulk was photographed cruising in a Washington, D.C., gay bar. His career as an “ex-gay” success story thus ended ignominiously. Exodus removed Paulk from its board, and similar to Ted Haggard, Paulk checked himself into intensive counseling. He says he “still struggles” with his “homosexual urges.”

Other well-known groups and individuals endorse reparative therapy. The American Family Association (Donald Wildmon), Christian Coalition (Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson), Coral Ridge Ministries (D. James Kennedy), “Doctor Laura” Schlessinger, Courage/Courage Trust (Vatican-endorsed), Evergreen (Mormon-endorsed), Focus on the Family/Love Won Out (James Dobson), Jews Offering New Alternatives to Homosexuality, Operation Rescue (and most anti-choice organizations), Parents and Friends of Ex-Gays (P-FOX), Promise Keepers, and Traditional Values Coalition (Lou Sheldon) are just a few. Note that all of these groups are religiously and/or right-wing politically motivated. Some of these names should sound familiar. Many of them endorse creationism/intelligent design, and all vehemently oppose equal rights for women, lesbians, and gay men.

Several individual practitioners have been instrumental to the “ex-gay” movement. Especially troubling is that some of them have legitimate professional degrees and training. Charles Socarides, M.D., is one of the original psychiatrists who furiously opposed removing homosexuality as a mental illness. In the 1960s he conducted flawed “studies” that reinforced homophobic stereotypes. All of these studies were subsequently discredited as flawed and biased. Socarides is now considered on the fringes of the psychiatric profession because of his extreme anti-gay views.

Named “the most dangerous anti-gay zealot in the US today” for his damage through the 1980s-1990s, Paul Cameron is a fundamentalist Christian who uses science to justify his religious beliefs. Cameron got a B.S. from the University of Kentucky at Louisville and in 1966 he got his Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Colorado at Boulder. He was an associate professor of human development at the University of

Nebraska until he was fired in 1980. After that he jumped on the anti-gay, anti-AIDS bandwagon because he wanted to make a name for himself. Chances are that if any readers have heard any homophobic statistics, Cameron was the source. He generated volumes of phony statistics on the alleged dangers of homosexuality. He conducted seriously flawed “studies” to repackage old stereotypes and disguise them as science. Like those of Socarides, all of Cameron’s “studies” have been discredited. Cameron’s career as a legitimate psychologist effectively ended when he was expelled from both the American Psychological Association and the American Sociological Association for misrepresenting his research. Even worse, both professional associations passed resolutions formally dissociating themselves from him. He was cited for fraud and misrepresentation in a 1985 lawsuit. Nevertheless, the religious right and reparative practitioners still regard Cameron as an authority on sexuality.

Another anti-gay psychologist is Joseph Nicolosi. Nicolosi got a Ph.D. in psychology from the California School of Psychology in 1977. He poses as a secular psychologist but is actually a devout Catholic. He founded the Thomas Aquinas Psychological Clinic in 1980 to provide Catholic-centered therapy. Nicolosi’s original clients were gay priests referred by the Catholic church. However, the Catholic church has since severed ties with him because of his arrogance and discredited methods.

Nicolosi, Socarides, and others founded the National Association for Research and Therapy for Homosexuality (NARTH) in 1992. NARTH organized previously fringe reparative practitioners and now attempts to give them some respectability. It masquerades as a secular, scientific, professional group, but it adheres to previously discredited theories and methods as well as attempts to discredit legitimate science. Like Exodus International, NARTH recently has adopted a more political agenda. Reparative therapists are a very, very small minority. NARTH has ~1,000 members; compare that to the American Psychological Association with over 150,000 members.

The “ex-gay” movement invented its own mental disorder: Same-Sex Attraction Disorder – SSAD. Legitimate professional associations like those listed in Part I consider this bogus. According to Dr. Richard Fitzgibbons, a member of NARTH’s “Scientific” Advisory Committee, “The three most important risk factors for the development of SSAD in men are weak masculine identity, mistrust of women, and narcissism” and “The major conflicts that lead to SSAD in women are, in my opinion, a mistrust of men’s love, a weak feminine identity, or intense loneliness.”

Richard Cohen used these claims as the foundation of his 2001 book *Coming Out Straight* from vanity publisher Oakhill Press. Two years later Cohen was permanently expelled from

the American Counseling Association for six violations of its ethics code that bars members from actions which “seek to meet their personal needs at the expense of clients, those that exploit the trust and dependency of clients, and for soliciting testimonials or promoting products in a deceptive manner.” In 1979 Cohen got a B.A. in theater from Boston University. He was originally Jewish, then at BU he converted to fundamentalist Christianity, then to the Unification Church (Moonies.) Cohen claims to be an “ex-gay;” he married a woman. He was a member of a religious sex cult from which he derived his “methods.” Cohen has had a number of “moral indiscretions.”

What makes NARTH, Exodus, and LIA unprofessional is that they have no uniform guidelines, professional standards, or practitioner qualifications. Anyone can advertise as a reparative therapist. Many people leading groups have no formal education or mental health training, not even in pastoral counseling. Moreover, these groups do not specify candidates for “treatment,” any definitions of “treatment,” or any specific, uniform definition of “success.” Some groups claim success as a complete conversion to heterosexuality; others a cessation of “homosexual activity,” or celibacy. Still others claim success is “achieving a relationship with Jesus Christ.” Legitimate mental health treatment should delineate appropriate candidates and a consensus definition of successful treatment outcomes.

As readers might expect, NARTH, Exodus, and LIA do not officially keep statistics on success. Of course, without a consistent definition of success any numbers these groups claim are meaningless. Individually they claim a 40%-90% success rate. Some practitioners go further: a person can change from gay to straight “easily and effortlessly” using subliminal or self-hypnosis tapes. LIA claims that a gay person needs 12-24 months “to become straight.” Joseph Nicolosi claims that a gay person needs “6.7 years to become straight.” So which is it?

What makes NARTH, Exodus, and LIA quacks is that they outright fabricate and wildly exaggerate their claims. “What’s a little lie if it gets people into heaven?” they ask. As we have seen above, they regularly contradict themselves on basic details, like success rates. They conduct fraudulent and biased “studies.” And just like creationists and Holocaust deniers, they quote real scientists out of context. Legitimate researchers need to issue press releases to deny “ex-gay” proponents’ allegations. This happened recently when, in Time magazine, James Dobson deliberately misrepresented both Dr. Carol Gilligan and Dr. Robert Spitzer as being anti-gay when the opposite is true. Gilligan and Spitzer both issued press releases decrying Dobson’s tactics, and Dobson was forced to issue a “clarification.” This is par for the course in the “ex-gay” world.

Anti-gay groups like NARTH have an obvious interest in suppressing any science that shows a biological or genetic component to sexual orientation. If, for example, a “gay gene”

is identified, groups like NARTH will be out of business for good and they know it. In addition to discrediting legitimate sexuality research,

NARTH uses tired stereotypes (“gay agenda,” “left-wing conspiracy,” etc.) to discredit the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association stance against reparative therapy.

In 1998, the American Psychiatric Association issued its position paper “Therapies Focused on Attempts to Change Sexual Orientation (Reparative or Conversion Therapies)” and augmented it in 2000. The Association reaffirmed that homosexuality is a normal variant of human sexuality, not a mental illness. It reaffirmed its opposition to attempting to change a person’s sexual orientation: “gay men and lesbians who have accepted their sexual orientation positively are better adjusted than those who have not done so.” Furthermore, the Association stated, reparative therapy is not supported by science, rather by religious and political forces opposed to full civil rights for lesbians and gay men. Reparative therapy can be harmful or coercive: “first do no harm.” Proponents of reparative therapy also exaggerate their claims while minimizing risks. Finally, reparative therapy not only ignores the social stigma facing lesbians and gay men, it actively stigmatizes them.

Sexual orientation is a complex interplay among biological, cultural, and environmental factors. Over 500 other animal and insect species exhibit homosexuality, including same-sex couples raising their young. Since 1990 scientific studies have identified some physical differences between gay and straight humans. A genetic component appears to be a component of sexual orientation; however, it is not the only component. Much more research is needed to elucidate the causes of heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual orientations.

Considering what we know about “ex-gay” proponents, we should question them critically. If homosexuality is not an illness, why does it need a “cure?” If there are “ex-gays,” are there “ex-straight?” If no religious prohibition against homosexuality existed, would the “ex-gay” phenomenon exist? Why do ex-gay proponents sound so much like faith healers? If people’s sexual orientation conflicts with their religion, why don’t they simply change their religion? If the “ex-gay” leaders don’t claim they’re “cured,” what does that mean for their followers? Why are nearly all reparative therapists devout Christians who believe being gay is a “sin?”

Why do the claims of ex-gay proponents vary so much? Why do their “conversion rates” vary so much? Why don’t all proponents adopt the program claiming the 90% success rate? Are the other programs substandard? Are the “success stories” really what they claim to be? Why do even the “ex-gay” leaders say they still “struggle?” Aren’t they cured using their own

methods? Are they “cured” over the long term? Why are there no long-term follow up studies on reparative practitioners’ self-proclaimed success stories?

If same-sex ambivalence dooms gay and lesbian relationships to failure, how do “ex-gay” proponents explain the 50% divorce rate among heterosexual couples? If platonic same-sex friendships “cure” homosexuality, why aren’t people “cured” all the time since these friendships are so common?

How long can reparative therapists ignore and misrepresent legitimate science in their own financial and political interests? Ask the creationists!

Finally, why is reparative therapy still legal if it is so harmful? The American Psychological Association does not want to interfere with therapists’ “right to practice.” People have the right to choose their own treatment, even if that treatment is bad.

Pioneering sexuality researcher Jack Drescher, M.D., states quite clearly:

“[Reparative therapists] are like creation scientists [sic]. What science offers to confirm what they believe they will take. What science offers that disconfirms what they believe is to be discarded and rejected. So sometimes it looks like you are having a scientific conversation, but you really are not because it’s two different dialogues going on at the same time. One is about science; one is about belief and faith.”

No scientific evidence supports the claims of either reparative therapy or transformational ministry. No ethical mental health professional practices or refers people for reparative therapy. Scientific evidence to date indicates that sexual orientation cannot be changed. Proponents of the “ex-gay” myths use pseudoscience to support religious bigotry and to oppose equal rights for lesbians and gay men. Skeptics and anti-quackery proponents should investigate the “ex-gay” phenomenon and further expose it for what it is – a disgrace.



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## Web News

by John Blanton

*The World Wide Web is a wonderful source of information and news. Some of it is true, and some of it is not.*

### Dutchman's Noah's ark opens doors

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2007-04-29.htm#ark>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/6604879.stm>

It's even bigger than the real thing. Which isn't saying much.

**A half-sized replica of the biblical Noah's Ark has been built by a Dutch man, complete with model animals.**

Dutch creationist Johan Huibers built the ark as testament to his literal belief in the Bible.

The ark, in the town of Schagen, is 150 cubits long - half the length of Noah's - and three storeys high. A cubit was about 45cm (18in) long.

Hubers got started in May 2005 out of concern that the Netherlands might be flooded. I wonder where he got that idea.

### Rumors of cell phone deaths greatly exaggerated

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2007-04-29.htm#cell>

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-0704260009apr26,1,6246569.story>

And aren't we all glad.

**Tales of a virus that kills with one call became the talk of Pakistan, the Tribune's Kim Barker writes**

KARACHI, Pakistan — The rumor spread quickly, from the small town of Sialkot to the nation, from cell phone to cell phone, friend to friend. The text messages warned of a virus if people answered phone calls from certain numbers.

The virus would not hurt the phone. Instead, in a scene out of a horror movie, it would kill the recipient. Immediately.

My first thought was the trick phone the Israelis once gave to a terrorists on their short list. But, no. This isn't the old exploding cell phone story.

Recipients are warned to ignore calls from 0A9-888888 with a dancing snake screen display.

In mid-April, these messages swamped Pakistani cell phone users, causing many to turn off their phones...

Could this be a way to make the freeways safer?

## MIOS meeting

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2007-04-29.htm#mios>

This isn't from the Web. We get a monthly e-mail meeting notice from the Metroplex Institute of Origin Science. I've been attending these meetings since 1989 and have usually found them entertaining. If young Earth creationism is your bag, then MIOS is your gig. They meet the first Tuesday, but not in January. Take note, meetings are now at a new location.

### Metroplex Institute of Origin Science

Hear Dr. Don R. Patton Present Revisiting The Dead Sea Scrolls

Dr. Patton is the staff Geologist for the Qumran Plateau excavation in Israel, the site that produced the Dead Sea Scrolls some 2,000 years ago. These scrolls, perhaps the most significant archeological discovery of all time, have changed the way we view the Bible.

Many have been led to believe that the original text of the Bible has deteriorated over years of copying and recopying. The Dead Sea Scrolls provide a test of that hypothesis, allowing us to compare modern versions with recently discovered manuscripts written over 2,000 years ago.

Dr. Patton will take you to the scene of the original caves where the scrolls were discovered with one of the Bedouins who made the discovery. This is a fascinating story with eternal implications.

New Location

Dr. Pepper Starcenter  
12700 N. Stemmons Fwy  
Farmers Branch, TX

Tuesday, May 1st, 7:30 PM

## ID claims don't hold up

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2007-04-29.htm#ID>

<http://media.www.smudailycampus.com/media/storage/paper949/news/2007/04/26/Opinion/Id.Claims.Dont.Hold.Up-2881926.shtml>

SMU hosted Intelligent Design in April, and the SMU Daily Campus had a grand time of it. Here's an op-ed piece by a couple of real scientists:

By: Dr. John Wise and Dr. Pia Vogel, Contributing Writers

ID is the idea that the origin of living things requires the intervention of an outside intelligence.

Jonathon Wells, a Discovery Institute fellow, Philipp Johnson and other ID and creationism proponents have asserted that there is no evidence of transitional intermediates between species in the fossil record and have inferred from this that a creator must have intervened. Their assertion is blatantly and unequivocally false. It's rock for goodness' sake. It's hard to ignore tons of rock with whale-like tetrapods, tetrapod-like whales, reptile-like birds, bird-like reptiles, fish with arm bones, and the many other transitional forms found in them over and over again without losing credibility.

Then Wise and Vogel cruelly cite an example:

Our favorites are the fish-to-amphibian-tetrapod transitions. These were particularly embarrassing for Philipp Johnson, who used the absence of the then-not-yet-discovered intermediates between fish and amphibians as evidence that no such intermediates ever existed. This led him to write that a creator was responsible. Unfortunately for Philipp Johnson, several such intermediates have since been found. The absence of evidence, it should be pointed out, is never evidence for anything. Dinosaurs with feathers. Birds with teeth. Fish with fingers. This real scientific evidence is tangible. It is as hard as stone. One cannot credibly deny its existence. ID fails on this claim.

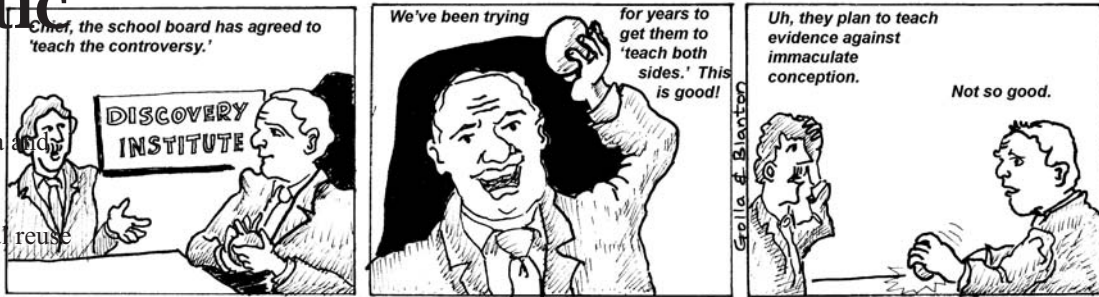
We know Johnson as the godfather of Intelligent Design, and we met him when ID first came to SMU in 1992 and autographed a copy of his book Darwin on Trial for us.

Neither is Michael Behe's argument of "irreducible complexity" spared.

... The repeated failures of the claimed "irreducible complexity of biochemical systems" have been

## Skeptic Ink

by Prasad Golla and John Blanton.  
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published in the peer-reviewed scientific literature again and again, but we'd be happy to reiterate.

And they do.

Listen to what Dr. Behe wrote in 1996 about the complexity of the mammalian immune system: "As scientists, we yearn to understand how this magnificent mechanism came to be, but the complexity of the system dooms all Darwinian explanations to frustration. Sisyphus himself would pity us." So what did ID's premiere scientist recommend? He suggested that this subject is beyond human comprehension; we should not even bother to try to understand it. Real scientists didn't give up on this important science. Between 1996 and 2005, each element of the "transposon hypothesis" of immune system evolution was scientifically confirmed.

Now, aren't you sorry you missed the show?



### Future Meeting Dates

May 19, 2007	September 8, 2007
June 16, 2007	October 13, 2007
July 14, 2007	November 10, 2007
August 11, 2007	December 8, 2007

## Amazon links

The NTS has a "associates" relationship with on-line marketer Amazon.com. We put product links on our Web site, and we get a commission whenever somebody clicks on the links and makes a purchase.

Amazon recently introduced "context links." We put a short segment of Java code on our Web pages, and when the page is loaded the Java code executes and adds Amazon product links to the page you are viewing.

The links relate certain words or phrases on the Web page to Amazon products. For example the phrase "Richard Dawkins" might link to a book by Richard Dawkins. Sometimes Amazon gets it right, but sometimes what gets linked sets me to scratching my head.

You won't see any of the links on any page unless you or someone else has previously loaded the page, because the Java doesn't run until somebody loads the page, and it takes a while for Amazon's servers to cook up the response and add the links to their database. I have found it usually takes five minutes or more after somebody first loads a page before you will see any of the links. I have set a limit of ten links per page, and I elected to link only to books, music, and videos. That's mostly what would reasonably link to our Web content, anyhow.

Log on, read the Web news or the newsletter. Click on the links and buy from Amazon. You will be pleased to see that references to late NTS member L. Sprague de Camp links to some of his famous books.

John Blanton

Skeptical Web Master

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**FIRST CLASS**

Address Correction Requested

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Yes, I agree with your purposes in exploring paranormal and pseudoscientific claims from a responsible and scientific point of view, and while I do not endorse the a priori rejection of paranormal phenomena and pseudoscientific claims, I believe that such claims must be subjected to the fair and systematic testing which rational enquiry demands.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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