

The Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee

End Conversion Therapy/Practices Virtual Engagement Session in private with the Committee and Individuals with lived experiences

26 October 2021

Participant – D

Committee Member – Alexander Stewart

D started by declaring having been at both ends of Conversion Therapy experience.

D grew up in the 1950s and 1960s in a family environment in which sexuality was never discussed. He recalled going to church since the age of 8 and discovering his personal faith in his teens. 'At the time people got married and had children, and that was it.'

D got married and the couple was part of a Charismatic house church. The process of coming out was triggered by his wife: 'It was only in the early 1990s (well into my 40s) that my wife asked me if I was gay.'

D's wife got in touch with the True Freedom Trust in London, where for the first time D got to talk about his sexuality with other gay men but, unlike him, none of the other men were married. In hindsight, D identifies the group's aim as Reparative Therapy, i.e. with the ultimate goal of conversion. After 1 or 2 years, D was put into contact with JM from the Courage Trust (now Post-Courage), the first time he got the chance to talk to another married gay man.

From the mid-1990s, D became a founding member and a leading figure of the Discipleship Group but, along with JM and other leading members, began to realise it didn't work, that people didn't change.

D was still part of a Charismatic House Church, which he now considers to have been a very damaging experience. The leader of this church took it upon himself to counsel D, taking the position that 'if he got me sorted out, everything would be fine with the marriage'. No thought was paid to his wife's own issues. The church and D's wife 'colluded' with each other to get D 'sorted out'. D's mental health deteriorated, and he almost experience a nervous breakdown.

As part of the Charismatic House Church, D and his wife visited Romania in the early 1990s to establish a link with a church there after the fall of the communist dictatorship. Two or three years later D and his wife met with several leaders of the House Church when D was under the assumption they would talk about Romania, but when the other 4 or 5 members arrived it became apparent that they were there to talk about him: 'I withdrew into myself and felt so threatened. It was horrendous.'

D would later find out that the conversations had with the church leader had been shared with other leaders 'on a need to know basis'. This leader never admitted to disclosing such conversations, merely saying that he may have let something slip. This breach of trust was the catalyst for D leaving this Charismatic Church in 1994.

He then joined a Charismatic Anglican Church where he found a much more healing environment. Attention was paid to D's wife's issues and D described this as progress. Nevertheless, the marriage did not survive, and D believes it to be due to the hugely unrealistic expectations created in both him and his wife by the original Charismatic House Church. His sexual performance had been under the microscope all the time and this made physical intimacy impossible, leading to the end of the marriage in 1999.

D then moved to Oxford and looked to be part of a church there. He found a United Reformed Church that looked to be inclusive, a more liberal church, 'a healing place'. Several Anglican churches in the City were openly anti-gay. After 3 years, D suggested and supported the creation of an LGBT ministry for gay Christians, which he found inwardly cathartic.

Courage Trust, where D had led one of the groups, became a very different organisation, a very inclusive space.

True Freedom Trust were no longer trying to change people's orientation but advocating celibacy to gay Christians, thus denying the expression of their sexual orientation. D believes this stance to be as damaging as Conversion Therapy. He would be in favour of a complete ban of Conversion Therapy and of any form of coercive control on human flourishing, as sexual people and people of faith, and of encouraging the integration of sexuality and spirituality. This coercive control can be portrayed as part of a religious journey away from homosexuality, with churches claiming they are inclusive, whilst frown on any expression of same sex sexuality.

When asked about what could be put in place to support the experience of Christian gays, D suggested the creation of an LGBT chaplaincy, which he has not yet been able to make happen as it ideally required the wholehearted support of the local faith community.

D would really like to hear back from the progress of the bill and offered to contribute in whatever manner he can.