

'Beyond Egypt' Closes

Lessons from the rise and demise of an
LGBTQ conversion organisation

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Beyond Egypt's original logo

Abstract

Reflecting on the history and closure of yet another conversion "therapy" organisation has several benefits. It creates an opportunity to educate people about the beliefs, practices, and language of the LGBTQ conversion movement. It also enables people to see how the movement has evolved and recognise its existence today in a number of religious contexts. Non-faith individuals, media, and legislators will also benefit as they are given an in-depth look into the LGBTQ conversion world and understand why there is a rising movement to end the harm that has been accumulating for the last five decades.

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Introduction

Beyond Egypt (BE), a longstanding Australian "ex-gay", reparative/conversion "therapy" organisation, has ceased operating. BE joins a long list of similar organisations that have been shutting down for over a decade in Australia; the most significant being Australia's Living Waters in 2014, and in the US the year before, the high profile, umbrella organisation, Exodus. Legislation is being passed throughout the US, Australia, Canada, and other western countries to protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth from the harmful and often devastating practices of what has become known as "conversion therapy". As important as legislation is, it would be naïve to think that legislation alone will end the nightmare, because the psychological, emotional, and spiritual damage these organisations have caused, is **the result of deeply entrenched, outdated religious beliefs**.

Beyond Egypt's name is a euphemism for the Israelites being released from the bondage and slavery they'd experienced under the Egyptian Pharaoh, as told in the Old Testament. The same thinking was behind the name Exodus, the global umbrella organisation for these ministries. Similar ministries used New Testament Greek words to describe the same concept, such as Eleutheros (a freed slave) and Metanoia (a change of mind, repenting something one has done). The slavery and bondage these ministries intended to free people from was homosexuality and more recently, a transgender identity. Homosexuality had to be repented of before one could embrace a new identity in Christ, that is, heterosexuality, or hetero normativity.

Beyond Egypt—in the beginning.....

BE was founded in 2006, and was one of Australia's last "ex-gay"¹ groups to be formed. It was presented as a ministry to help those with "unwanted" same-sex attractions, and masturbation and pornography in those areas, as well as relational brokenness. In some ways, BE was like a Christian version of Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous (SLAA). SLAA is a 12-step program (like AA) for anyone who believes they have a problem with sex addiction, love addiction, romantic obsession, porn addiction, co-dependent relationships, or fantasy addiction.² Unlike BE, SLAA is not anti-LGBTQ. BE, in contrast, views same-sex orientation or gender identity as caused by wrong development or needing change or suppression. BE was also set up to equip the church to help people who struggled with their sexual orientation or gender identity.

By consistently mentioning the word "unwanted", BE was intending to let people know it was not out to evangelise the gay community or work with people who'd accepted they were LGBTQ. There was plenty of work to do with those who were "struggling" in the churches which taught "homosexuality is a sin", an abomination, and a disqualifier of eternal life. Occasionally a disgruntled full-on gay slipped through the cracks. Very much in the minority for BE, these were individuals who, because of a series of poor life choices, had turned to Christianity, believing that their troubles were caused by their sexuality.³ Tom is a good example. The Sydney Anglican publication, *Southern Cross*, told part of his story in a feature article that promoted ministries like BE, Liberty Christian Ministries, and US based *Setting Captives Free* and others.

¹ Even though Beyond Egypt would not class itself as an "ex-gay"/change is possible ministry, you'll see later on how these claims were false.

² "Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous," accessed 6 Jan 2021, <https://www.slaa.org.au/>.

³ A Venn-Brown, "Common Themes in 'Ex-gay' Stories (unwanted same-sex-attraction)," *Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International*, 24 Jul 2011, <https://www.abbi.org.au/2011/07/common-elements-in-ex-gay-stories/>.

TOM* HAD A GREAT HEAVINESS OVER HIS LIFE.

Once an active part of Sydney's gay scene, he had drifted away with drug use and now online pornography was a major part of his life.

"It didn't feel like I was going anywhere good," he says.

Yet he wasn't sure how to escape the desires that seemed entwined with his sexuality. So, he did an internet search and stumbled on a Christian website addressing habitual sin. Tom took up the 60-day Bible study course and discussed issues online with a mentor.

At the end of the course, Tom was encouraged to join a church, so he first joined the Christian group at his university, then a church one of the leaders attended.

For Tom, learning how to deal with his sexual desires was very difficult. "The hardest thing was working out how to live a sexually honouring life," he says.

He had to face the possibility that he would be single for the rest of his life, although he says he tried not to think about it too much.

When Tom started to investigate ways of moving away from the gay lifestyle, one of his overwhelming emotions was loneliness.

"Just before I went to church, I was very lonely," he recalls. He adds that the desire to belong was common among the people he got to know in the gay scene.

Tom, after about five years as a Christian, did become attracted to a certain woman and is now happily married. But there was a period where he needed to work through and accept that he might be called on to stay single.

Tom looks back on his experiences and reflects that God has a standard he wants us to uphold in our sexual behaviour - but he doesn't leave us to do it alone.

"I want to affirm that we're fallen people with brokenness in all sorts of areas," he says. "But God doesn't abandon us."⁴

**not his real name.*

The founder and leader of BE, Colin,⁵ grew up in the Hills district of western Sydney in a home where his mother was an active committed Christian and his father an atheist. According to friends, Colin's relationship was stronger with his mother than his father. Colin's teaching and testimonials always mention that his father didn't give him the acceptance, attention, affection, and affirmation he believes are essential for all young men to grow up "normal" heterosexuals. He "*resented him*". "*The last thing I wanted to be like was my dad*" Colin said.⁶ This distancing and inability to connect with his father, later became a foundational pillar of Colin's teaching on the causes of homosexuality or his "same-sex attractions" as he'd always call it.⁷

⁴ DAVID MCINTYRE, "Broken, bound, forgiven," *Southern Cross*, 3 April 2004.

⁵ Colin's surname has intentionally been left out of this article

⁶ Colin D, *Homosexuality and the Bible, Elephants in the room* (Jannali Anglican Church, 2014).

⁷ The theory of the distant father and strong mother as the cause of homosexuality was promoted and prevalent amongst mental health professionals of the 1950s and 1960s. Some made their careers as "experts" on it. In

Colin attended the all-male school, The Kings School.⁸ This had its challenges: as it often does for the less macho young man. He was bullied and teased. Not only was aggressive sport, like rugby, a problem, but the compulsory military cadets was also challenging. I relate, having been forced by my parents into school cadets when I entered high school. Some of my most terrifying experiences in my early high school years were on rifle ranges, weekend war games, and the end-of-year two-week camps at Singleton army base with cadet corps from all over the state. The other guys seem to revel in these experiences, reminding guys like Colin and myself, that we weren't making the grade or "normal" men. Maybe, Colin discovered, as I did, he could avoid many of the unpleasant aspects of military life by joining the cadet band.

Being a young gay man at any school has its challenges, but the culture and reputation of the all-male school would have intensified Colin's feelings of not being masculine enough. "*Socially awkward*" and "*emotionally needed*", were other labels he gave himself.⁹ Colin's saving grace was his intelligence, but that also came with a price, having gained the label "nerd".

At 15, Colin joined St Paul's Carlingford youth group. I imagine it must have been a relief to be in a mixed gender environment where heterosexual, male, competitive testosterone didn't permeate everything. His mother, warm and well-liked, worked part time at the church and Colin not only attended church and youth but also a mid-week Bible study. You can fit into evangelical churches like St Paul's comfortably for some time, singing the songs etc., but eventually one must have an encounter with Jesus Christ and accept Him as your personal Lord and Saviour (the born-again experience)¹⁰. You can only fake being a "real Christian" for a limited amount of time. As was often said, and I may have used it in my preaching "sitting in a church doesn't make you a Christian any more than sitting in a garage makes you a car". Colin's conversion experience would have further accentuated the imbalance of his relationships with his parents.

I imagine Colin's secret inner conflict was well and truly underway when he committed his life to Christ at 17 (1992). It was like that for me at the same age, starting my final year in high school in 1969. The previous year had been clouded with confusion, depression, a suicide attempt, and sessions with a psychiatrist; all about my emerging homosexuality. I'd given my life to God at a Christian youth camp during the summer holidays, believing God was the only answer to set me free from my secret homosexual thoughts, feelings, and experiences.¹¹

At 18, Colin looked at his first gay porn and became instantly addicted according to his testimony. Masturbation and his identity as a "masculine" male, troubled him constantly. We are told that he battled with masturbation and pornography for four years. Once again, it's not difficult to imagine the hell he was going through. In my own life, when the initial euphoria of my "born again" experience began to wear off, the conflicts with my desire to live a righteous, Christian life that was pleasing to God, and trying to rid myself of every homosexual thought, feeling and behaviour were tearing me apart. I kept the battles a secret.

1973 the American Psychiatric Association took homosexuality off its list of mental health conditions. Even though the theory was no longer taught or believed, Christian ministries have continued to use it as their basis for the cause (relational brokenness) healing of homosexuality (male to male non-sexual bonding).

⁸ <https://www.kings.edu.au/>

⁹ *My Christian Marriage is More Important Than My Same Sex Attraction, Open House Interviews* (HOPE 103.2, 2017).

¹⁰ "Born again" is a phrase, particularly in evangelicalism, that refers to "spiritual rebirth", contrasted with physical birth. The basis of this is found in John chapter 3 when Jesus had a conversation with a religious leader who was seeking the answer to eternal life.

¹¹ A Venn-Brown, *A Life of Unlearning: A Preacher's Struggle with His Homosexuality, Church and Faith* (2015). Chapter 4 Enter Christianity

Colin was the ideal candidate for the "ex-gay" message. He ticked all the important boxes: non-masculine male, distant father, and a secret sexual addiction that produced shame and guilt. One of the early influences on Colin was Sy Rogers¹², a "former homosexual and transsexual", now married with children, who'd regularly visited Australia and helped set up Exodus here. Like thousands of young men, Colin watched Rogers' videos and listened to the powerful testimony. Surely if God could do such a dramatic transformation in Sy's life then why not his? Colin also sought help from therapists and organisations aligned with his evangelical culture and beliefs. The "ex-gay" message was at its strongest in Australia and overseas at this time.

Colin, in his personal testimony and bio, was often billed as a young man who'd successfully overcome porn (although it is rarely mentioned that it was gay porn) and masturbation through his Christian beliefs and teaching. But a deeper look reveals this was not actually the case.

"Colin became a Christian at 17, looked at internet porn for the first time at 18, and became addicted a few days later. God rescued him from that after 4 years, and he is still loving the freedom, 13 years later," the bio read when Colin was to present at the prestigious evangelical Men's Katoomba Convention at the beginning of 2011.¹³

During the Marriage Equality debate in Australia in 2017, Colin was interviewed on Christian Radio HOPE 103.2. *"Am I still attracted to men? Yes, but it's a lot less than it used to be. **Do I still struggle with porn? Well, old habits die hard,**"* Colin told the listening audience.¹⁴ (emphasis mine)

In 2019, once again speaking at an evangelical men's convention about temptation, Colin was asked about masturbation. *"Can you masturbate without lust? Yes, **I was doing that for years as a tool to keep away from porn and it worked.** God said that was never the end goal for you that is just a temporary thing that I have allowed for a certain time and now the time, especially as I was about to get married a few months later I want you to stop. Stopping masturbation was one of the hardest things I've ever done. I didn't really understand what spiritual attack was until I stopped masturbating. I got slammed so bad, spiritually. It was awful,"*¹⁵ Colin responded. (emphasis mine)

In 2014 when Colin was giving a series of talks at Jannali Anglican church, in the southern suburbs of Sydney he confessed to his audience *"**Three weeks ago was the first time I looked at porn in a year. I had new computers. I need software on my computer, so I don't look at porn.**"* There was a window period of a day when the software wasn't loaded, and Colin gave into the temptation. Colin explained that a week later, he plucked up the courage to tell his wife, who he is always accountable to along with others.¹⁶

Kudos to Colin for his openness and honesty in an environment that can be very black and white and judgemental, but from my observations something very weird is going on here.

In Colin's teaching he reminds his audience that giving into sexual temptation, a person is saying no to God and yes to Satan. *"I feared giving up God more than I feared giving up porn. So I remain a*

¹² Anthony Venn-Brown, "The Sy Rogers Story," *Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International*, Dec 1, 2007, 2007.

¹³ Colin D, "Sexual Temptation" (paper presented at the MKC11 Men Living Outside the Garden, Katoomba, 2011).

¹⁴ *My Christian Marriage is More Important Than My Same Sex Attraction.*

¹⁵ Colin D, *Hope in the Darkness, Men Meeting the Challenge Conference* (2019).

¹⁶ Colin D, *Sexual Temptation, Elephants in the Room* (Jannali Anglican Church, 2014).

Christian because of the warning God gave me. Once I walked away, I could not have come back," he's said more than once.

When you put all these things together, fearing the loss of eternal life, software on your computer that blocks you from looking at gay porn, the need for regular accountability with the wife and certain friends about all your thoughts and actions, it doesn't sound like "*freedom*" to me. It sounds like the life of a prisoner, with constant surveillance and electronic monitoring.

Colin, like many of us who lived in these situations for years, is not an intentional deceiver, but has been moulded into the most insidious form of deceiving: denial and self-deception.

BE was based at St Paul's Carlingford, in Sydney's "Bible belt". St Paul's is an evangelical, youth/family-oriented Anglican church, in the Diocese of Sydney. It's important to pause and understand Sydney Diocese Anglicanism, a context which has birthed "ex-gay" ministries like Beyond Egypt and Liberty Christian ministries and been at the forefront of opposing gay rights for decades.

Sydney Anglican Diocese and the gays

The Sydney Anglican diocese is a strange animal; unlike anything else in the world really. If you are not from a religious background, you may think all Anglican churches are the same. Far from it. Anglicanism comprises essentially three separate streams: Anglo-Catholic (high church), Evangelical Anglicans (low church) and Liberal Anglicans.

Having a strong Anglo-Catholic heritage of priests on both sides of the family, I recall my parents often spoke disdainfully about Sydney Diocese theology, worship and decisions... just too protestant... too "Baptisty". Some Anglo-Catholic parishes exist in the Sydney diocese, but as my mother often said, "they are as rare as hen's teeth".

Anglo-Catholicism has always been a haven for gay men, who felt at home with the ritual, music, and theatre that the high church offers.¹⁷ In a society that considered homosexuals to be deviates and perverts, and with the threat of arrests ever present, these churches were safe spaces for friendship and fellowship, where voices and musical gifts were welcomed, and no one questioned the interests of "sophisticated" men. These gay enclaves gave low church proponents another reason to dislike Anglo-Catholicism; too much openness and tolerance. In Sydney, both Christ Church St Laurence and St James' Church have attracted gay men since the 1890s. Interestingly, famous Australian author (and Nobel Prize winner) Patrick White and his male partner attended a service at St Paul's, Castle Hill for five years, but didn't get involved in parish life. White's religious faith did not fit easily with Sydney Anglicanism. Later, they drove into the city and attended Christ Church St Laurence, where he appreciated the music, the theatre and the handsome servers.¹⁸

Low and high church Anglicanism being so diametrically opposed to each other makes for an uneasy relationship. It's like two separate denominations with the same name; neither wanting to own the other. I found out just how prickly the relationship can be when I was invited to speak at the more liberal Holy Trinity Anglican Church in Dulwich Hill. Father David Smith, the parish priest, received a personal visit from Archdeacon Cox with the message from the diocese hierarchy, that under no circumstances was I to speak at the upcoming morning service... or at any Sydney Anglican

¹⁷ Hilliard D., "Some Found a Niche: Same-Sex Attracted People in Australian Anglicanism," in *New Approaches in History and Theology to Same-Sex Love and Desire (Genders and Sexualities in History)*, ed. Mark D. Chapman and Dominic Janes (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

¹⁸ D. Marr, *Patrick White: A Life* (Penguin Random House Australia, 2012).

church for that matter.¹⁹ It wasn't that I was immoral, preaching heresy or anything else that churches often veto people over, it was that in telling my story or reconciliation of faith and sexuality, I'd be "promoting homosexuality" apparently.

Sydney Anglican Diocese is well known for its anti-gay stance. It goes back at least five decades. In the early 1970s mental health professionals were realising that homosexuality was not an illness that needed to be cured. At the same time, progressive church leaders and denominations were coming to understand that their previous interpretations of certain scriptures about same-sex activity had been misinterpreted and mistranslated. Sydney Diocese was having none of it. In their publication, the *Australian Church Record*, they reprinted an article from the leading American Evangelical magazine, *Christianity Today*, "Homosexuality in Biblical Perspective".

"The remarkable and distressing thing is that not only have church spokesmen lost sight of the biblical condemnation of homosexual acts; they have also abandoned the biblical message of healing and restoration for those involved in homosexual sin," author Dr. Klaus Bockmühl stated in the article. When attempting to dispel the growing belief that homosexuality is an innate natural variant in the human experience, he went on to say that the problem lies *"in the greater number of those who have chosen homosexual behaviour, so that homosexuality threatens to become an aggressive social epidemic."*²⁰

A few months later, in the Jesus People-styled magazine, *Sydney Town Express*, the same thoughts were regurgitated to the youth of the diocese in the article "Gay is a Prison". The 1973 article was a response to Pride Week being celebrated in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, and Brisbane (5 years before the first Mardi Gras). Encouraged by the thousands of people in the US rallying annually since the Stonewall riots in 1969, Pride Week was Australia's first LGBT national celebration and protest. The emerging gay rights groups worked together. The week aimed to *"change the mind of the prejudiced, the fearful, the conditioned, the sexually repressed, all those who in oppressing us oppress themselves."*²¹

Queers visible? Saying they are proud perverts? Shouting for their rights? **The publication had to remind young evangelicals what God thought of homosexuals.** After quoting once again the all too familiar six passages from the Bible, author Philip Wilson, finishes with *"However the Scripture recognizes homosexuals as people in need of redemption and from our own experience this is confirmed. 'Gay' people are sad people. David Wilkerson says, 'The majority are sad, lonely, full of fear, shame, guilt, anxiety and torment.' Consequently, we as Jesus people need to have a balanced, Scriptural viewpoint of homosexuals, and all unregenerate society, if we are to act out the Lord's' love in this corrupt age."*²² (emphasis mine). For evangelicals, it is always about the scriptures; well, their interpretation of them!

In the previous year, Peter Bonsall Boone was sacked as St Clement's Mosman church secretary after he and his partner, Peter de Waal, appeared on the ABC TV's current affairs program, Chequerboard. "This just happens to be a part of me".²³ The two Peters were founding members of

¹⁹ Staff writer, "GAY CHRISTIAN BANNED FROM PREACHING," *Star Observer*, 28 July 2009, <https://www.starobserver.com.au/news/national-news/new-south-wales-news/gay-christian-banned-from-preaching/14808>.

²⁰ Dr. Klaus Bockmühl, "Homosexuality in Biblical Perspective," *Australian Church Record*, 26 July 1973.

²¹ "HOMOSEXUALS COME OUT - Gay Pride Week - Why Gay Pride," *Tharunka* (Kensington), 4 September 1973, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/230397624>.

²² Philip Wilson, "GAY is a prison LIBERATION is not making your prison more comfortable " *Sydney Town Express*, Vol.2 No.9 September 1973.

²³ Watch the Chequerboard show here <https://youtu.be/EtitmyS4C-w>

the pioneer gay rights organisation CAMP Inc.. Bonsall Boone, or Bon²⁴ as he was known, during the 45 minute interview, had spoken candidly about the importance of his Christian faith, but had not identified what church or denomination he was a part of.²⁵

Other more liberal dioceses around Australia had been looking at homosexuality from a pastoral and legal standpoint, and committees tabled reports. These reports were usually brief, compassionate and in favour of decriminalization. **Not Sydney diocese.** Its report, which was endorsed by Sydney's Synod (church council) in October 1973, took two years to produce and was over 60 pages; 10 of which were devoted to scripture and appendices included. **It warned Sydney believers that this developing tolerance to homosexuality was a threat to the fabric of society and a rejection of biblical standards.**²⁶

The report recommended that repeat offenders deserved gaol sentences, but a more "compassionate" approach should be adopted for those who'd been arrested who were not "fixated" with homosexuality. The committee's report concluded "*that both God and science agreed that homosexuals were called upon to abstain from sexual relations, and to adjust their lives ('their job, their circle of friends, reading habits, or places where they frequent') to reinforce this decision; to seek the help of qualified counsellors, but also to explore the option of sexual reorientation*"²⁷ (emphasis mine).

To ensure the entire diocese was "educated" about the homosexual issue, the 60-page report was published in booklet form and available, not just for the Synod, but to all Sydney Anglicans, for a nominal fee. In response to a critic of the report in the Australian Church Record, Bruce L. Smith, Chairman of the Ethics and Social Questions Committee, said the synod had recommended "*its publication in sufficient quantity for distribution to influential members of the community and for sale to the general public*" and the Synod also urged "*its immediate circulation to parliamentarians in the ACT in the hope that it might prove useful in the debate in the House of Representatives*".²⁸

The gay activists, from Anglo-Catholic congregations, were not giving up and remained a "thorn in the flesh" for some time. To further counteract this, a motion was passed in the 1983 Sydney Synod

²⁴ Sadly, it wasn't until after Bon's passing in 2017 that I discovered our connections. Bon's mother Winnifred was a close friend of my mother's, who often visited our home and was the local parish secretary. We sang in the choir together. Apparently, Win and my mother had had conversations about their homosexual sons in the late 1960s when I had attempted suicide and was seeing a psychiatrist. I was completely unaware of this until only recently. I don't recall meeting Bon as he had already met his partner Peter de Waal, and they were living together at Balmain, but we would have been at number of events at the same time. In 1972 after I'd escaped from the residential conversion therapy program, one of the first gay things I went to was a fundraising dance at the newly formed gay rights organisation, CAMP, in Balmain. Bon and Peter were both there. I remember walking around upstairs and downstairs and most people seemed more involved in deep conversations than partying. Our orbits didn't connect again till over 40 years later during Australia's campaign for marriage equality. How interesting that we were in each other's worlds those times and yet had such different journeys. Bon and Peter went on to have a happy 50-year relationship and remained activists. Bon founded Australia's first gay Christian organisation, Cross+Section and soon after Anggays. Me however, believing my homosexuality was something to be rejected, married, had children became a famous preacher and didn't come out until 1992. I didn't begin my advocacy until 2000. I'm sure Bon and I would have had many interesting conversations had we known of our connections. If Bon had spoken to me about accepting my sexuality, I would not have accepted it. I was too loaded down with shame and guilt. I wanted to be free and "normal". There is a happy note to this story though. Bon's partner, Peter de Waal, and I have become good friends and often catch up to chat about those times when we were so close and yet never connected.

²⁵ "When the Shouting Is All Over," *Camp Ink*, vol. 2, no. 12 1972.

²⁶ Church of England in Australia. Diocese of Sydney. Ethics and Social Questions Committee, *Report on homosexuality: report of the Ethics and Social Questions Committee to the Synod of the Church of England Diocese of Sydney* (Sydney: Church of England Diocese of Sydney, 1973).

²⁷ Graham Willett, "Anglicanism and Homosexuality in the 1970s," (2000).

²⁸ "The Report on Homosexuality," *Australian Church Record* 10 January 1974, 1553, Letters.

that a sub-committee be set up to report back about homosexuals' place in the church. This was intended to deal with agitators who were active members in their local congregations, and Synod representatives from their churches. In 1985, the report, *"Homosexuality and Ministry"*²⁹ was endorsed by Synod. Homosexuals were defined as *"persons who engage in homosexual acts or follow a homosexual lifestyle"*. The accepted report stated that homosexuals *"cannot properly occupy any office or perform any duty which involves ministry within the Christian fellowship"*. Positions of ministry included churchwarden and parish councillor, Sunday school teacher, youth group leader, organist, choir member, parish secretary or Synod representative.

According to the Sydney Morning Herald, this empowered Sydney Anglican ministers to use the authority of the church to take action in their congregations. *'Evil doers': Church weeds out gays and bans them*", the 1992 Sydney Morning Herald front-page article headlined.³⁰ On page nine the story continued, *"several homosexuals have been, in effect, excommunicated - denied communion and cut off from any role in the Church, even singing in the choir. It is impossible to get numbers, as the exercise is done secretly. But the Herald has interviewed two excommunicated people who have broken years of silence on what they describe as 'a most devastating' and 'brutal' experience"*.

One of those was Andrew, a medical student who, at 22, had confided to the rector of St Alban's Frenchs Forest, that he was a homosexual. A few weeks later, the minister handed him a brief letter which stated, *"I have been advised that in the present circumstances I am justified in not administering the sacrament of Holy Communion to you"*. A lesbian who had been in a 12-year relationship was told repeatedly that she was not to take communion. She eventually received a letter from the rector saying the parish council had unanimously carried a motion in her absence supporting his view that *"unrepentant sinners including homosexuals should repent and not attend the Lord's Supper whilst unrepentant"*.

Sydney Diocese has little or no understanding of the devastating impact their black and white, legalistic culture and practices have had on LGBTQ people both in and out of the church.

There have been some recent attempts to be more caring and compassionate. At the 2018 Sydney Synod, a resolution on pastoral care for church members who were same-sex attracted was adopted which included a statement that it *"recognises that psychological practices such as 'reparative therapy' or 'gay conversion therapy', which seek to re-orient sexual attraction to heterosexuality, have been highly ineffective for those who experience exclusive same-sex attraction, and have caused distress to many who have participated in such therapy,"*³¹ **I'm not sure why that statement didn't ever get out to the media.**

²⁹ Anglican Church of Australia. Diocese of Sydney. Standing Committee., *Report of the Standing Committee on 1983 Synod motion on homosexuality and ministry* (1985).

³⁰ Graham Williams, "Evil doers': Church weeds out gays and bans them," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 Feb 1992.

³¹ "2nd Ordinary Session of the 51st Synod -Anglican Church of Australia Diocese of Sydney", (Sydney, 2018).

| Old "Ex-gay" message | New celibacy message |
|---|---|
| Homosexuality is abnormal/unnatural | Homosexuality is abnormal/unnatural |
| Homosexuality is against God's chosen order. Adam and Eve. | Homosexuality is against God's chosen order. Adam and Eve |
| Homosexuality is caused by improper development or sexual abuse. | Homosexuality is caused by improper development or sexual abuse. |
| God can heal your brokenness | God can heal your brokenness |
| Homosexuality can be cured through prayer, faith, spiritual counselling, "therapy", willpower or combination. | You will struggle with "unwanted same-sex attraction". Support groups, accountability, prayer, faith, willpower or combination. |
| You can become a "situational heterosexual" in a mixed orientation marriage. | You must remain celibate. You can never fall in love, have a relationship or lifelong partner. |

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All the compassion and caring in the world have minimal impact if the fundamental flawed beliefs remain. *"Remember same-sex attraction, same-sex sexual temptation and same-sex sexual activity are different. Experiencing a disposition towards a certain sin is not the same as struggling with temptation or succumbing to sin."*³² the pastoral guidelines directed ministers and church leaders.

Probably the poison icing on the cake happened during the marriage equality debate in Australia in 2017. Whilst other ministers and dioceses were supporting the legislation to grant same-sex marriage, **the Sydney Anglican Diocese donated \$1,000,000 to the "No" campaign.**³³

I am an optimistic person, but I can't see Sydney Anglican Diocese ever really changing. They have locked themselves in a theological straight-jacket they can never be freed from. After decades of "holding on to The Truth", to backtrack now and become more aligned with other LGBTQ affirming clergy and dioceses would be a complete denial of the identity they have created, **the identity they consider superior to Anglo-Catholicism.** And it's not just about the gays, and women priests, it's a hard line on a number of things. In the final analysis, all these are about their uncompromising belief in the complete infallibility of the Bible, and their literal interpretation of it. I have more hope of change within the Australian Pentecostal world³⁴ than I do from Sydney Anglicans.

It is this fundamental, literalist, evangelical culture that has birthed groups like BE. Groups who continue to reject science and believe that same-sex orientation and transgender identity are about deficit, dysfunction, and that an all-powerful God, through faith in His Word, "heals" and "changes".

³² Church of England Diocese of Sydney, *Same-Sex Attraction: A pastoral guide*, (2019), <https://www.sds.asn.au/same-sex-attraction-pastoral-guide>.

³³ Lane Sainty, "The "No" Campaign Got \$1 Million From The Sydney Anglican Diocese To Fight Against Same-Sex Marriage," *BuzzFeed News*, 9 October 2017.

³⁴ Anthony Venn-Brown, "Why Australian Pentecostals Will Embrace LGBTI People," *Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International*, 11 November 2009, <https://www.abbi.org.au/2009/11/gay-pentecostals/>.

The Beyond Egypt story

In some ways BE has not been like the other ex-gay/reparative/conversion "therapy" para-church organisations that have come and gone in Australia. First, **it was late off the starting block**. A coalition of independent Australian ministries had formed in 1985 which created Exodus Asia Pacific, 21 years before BE was launched.

Another thing that stands out about **BE was that it was incredibly secretive**. Unlike other organisations and individuals that welcomed telling their "success" stories of "deliverance" from the "homosexual lifestyle", BE was missing from the media landscape except in name only. And their public naming was mostly because I mentioned them to journalists who were inquiring for their articles. For most of its existence, and to most people, BE was nothing more than an email address (info@beyondegypt.org.au).

Possibly the reason for keeping a low profile was that they had seen the treatment that similar organisations had received in the media. As I mentioned in our 2018 report on *LGBTQ conversion practices in Australia*³⁵, generally speaking, our country had moved on and journalists were not accepting the "homosexuality is a sin" or believing the "I've been healed of homosexuality" messages some leaders were declaring. "Ex-gay" leaders interpreted this as an unsympathetic and biased media.

To ensure that no one could get past the wall of secrecy, first names only were used whenever speaking about people involved in the BE ministry and support meetings were held in confidential locations. Those who knew Colin say this was by design.

You may be wondering how people were actually able to connect with BE without a website, public "poster boys" or media coverage. As the journalist at Crikey said, *"Beyond Egypt is reported to still offer conversion therapy, but it keeps its internet presence minimal and has a rigorous vetting process in place to ensure its methods remain secretive from the public"*.³⁶ BE built a network through referrals from Sydney Diocese Anglican churches, and similar "sexual and relational brokenness" organisations that promised "support" and "healing" (more about this later). **I imagine that over the 15 years of operation the database was substantial.**

BE never responded to media email requests for interviews. Journalist, Tessa Hoffman, from *The Australian Doctor*, Australia's leading publication for General Practitioners, contacted them, and at least got a reply. Hoffman wrote in her article "Beyond Egypt also says it does not offer conversion therapies 'of any kind'. 'We're a Christian support group, offering support and prayer to people who ask for it in their journey through unwanted sexual and relational struggles,' the organisation said in an email response to *Australian Doctor*. **"We don't wish to be interviewed, as the entire premise that we are involved in some kind of 'conversion therapy' is false. We do not and have never in any way supported such therapies."**³⁷

Rather a strong message wouldn't you say? *"We do not and have never in any way supported such therapies"*. **Really?**

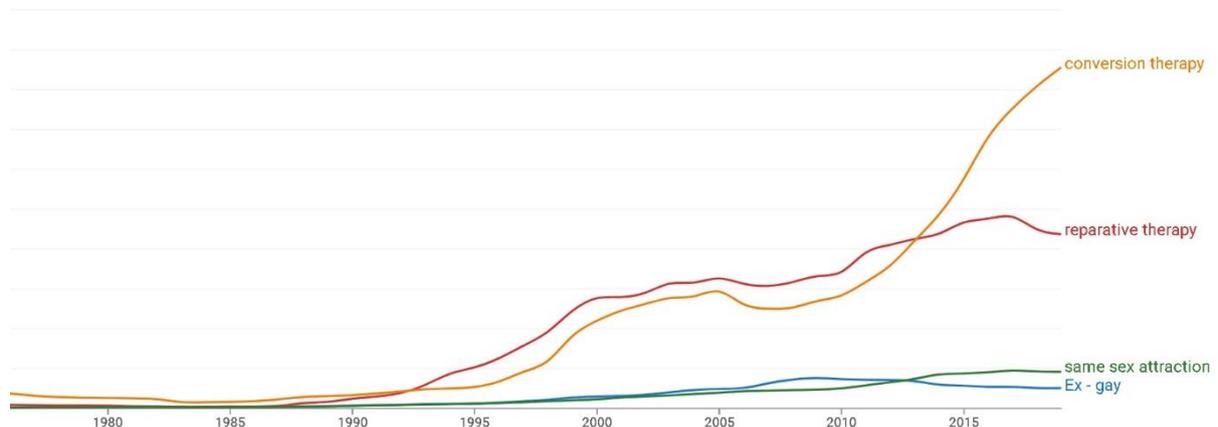
³⁵ https://www.abbi.org.au/2018/05/gay-conversion-therapy-in-australia/#_Toc510272208

³⁶ JOSH TAYLOR, "How churchies went from 'pray the gay away' to 'gay without the lay'," 9 AUG 2016.

³⁷ Tessa Hoffman, "'Pray away the gay': conversion therapy still takes place in Australia," *Australian Doctor*, 29 Feb. 2016.

Conversion "therapy"?

It would be helpful to pause once again and explore the term "conversion therapy" that BE is so strongly denying it had ever practised. Conversion therapy has become the most popular term these days to describe sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts (SOGICE), although ministries like BE would never use the term (see evolution of terms below). From the mid 70s the term "ex-gay" was quickly adopted to describe "former homosexuals". "Reparative therapy" became popular within these ministries in the 1980s as they attempted to legitimise "pray the gay away" as a form of scientifically based therapy. Then in the 1990s, not wanting to own the word "homosexual" or "gay", people often described themselves as "struggling with unwanted same-sex-attraction (USSA)" or "I have SSA". Around this time academic literature began using the term "same-sex attraction" instead of "sexual orientation", and by adopting the term SSA, it further legitimised the area these groups worked in. Another popular description over the last two decades has been "healing sexual and relational brokenness". The graph below shows the increasing use of the term "conversion therapy" within the mainstream media and the decline of other terms. Whichever term was used, it was always talking about the same thing; ministries and practices that believed homosexuality was disordered/unnatural/abnormal, a sin, and dysfunctional development that can and must be changed, healed or suppressed.



The term "conversion therapy" is a misnomer; there is no "conversion" and it is not "therapy". For us in the LGBTQ world, the term has become a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it has created an awareness that the practices still exist, and the harm caused (*Boy Erased*³⁸ is a good example). On the other hand, the media has often referred to medical attempts to cure homosexuality used in the 50s and 60s when talking about conversion "therapy". The stories often told are the most sensational ones, and can include things such as torture,³⁹ thus giving a distorted view of the contemporary experience of thousands of LGBTQ people in Christian churches. The distorted view created by the media's sensationalist portrayal of conversion therapy experiences makes it easy for groups like BE to emphatically deny anything to do with "conversion therapy". When the term "gay conversion therapy" is used in the media, it also excludes the experiences of transgender, and other gender and sexual identities which were treated similarly in churches. Churches where conformity to the Genesis narrative of God creating only a heterosexual male and female is the accepted norm, and foundational to much of their teaching. Hence the tired and hackneyed saying often used **"God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve"**.

³⁸ <https://www.focusfeatures.com/boy-erased>

³⁹ ,A Venn-Brown, "What is conversion 'therapy'? (and what it's not)," *Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International, Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International*, 22 October 2017, <https://www.abbi.org.au/2017/10/what-is-gay-conversion-therapy/>.

The second side of the sword is the media's misguided portrayal gives ex-gay/reparative/conversion therapy organisations and conservative Christian individuals and groups an additional anti-LGBTQ argument. Around the world these groups⁴⁰ and individuals, in response to legislative changes to protect LGBTQ youth, have claimed the term was created by LGBTQ activists to shut down their anti LGBTQ agendas. As Martin Iles, the managing director of the Australian Christian Lobby, wrote *'Conversion therapy' is not a term known to any religion. It's a term made up and thrust upon us by haters of religion. It evokes thoughts of barbarism - boot camps, electric shocks, coercion. None of these misguided and barbaric things are happening in Australia today. When they did happen—decades ago—none of them were exclusively religious.*"⁴¹

"Conversion therapy" was NEVER an invention of LGBTQ activists. I've worked in this space for over 20 years and I can tell you "conversion therapy" just became a simple and convenient term that evolved and became more widely used, often by people who didn't understand the full implications of what they were speaking, or writing, about. Over the last two decades, **I have engaged with literally thousands of survivors and anti-conversion practice activists. Not one single person has ever indicated they are happy with the term.**

Several definitions have been offered for the term "conversion therapy". To summarise these, there are common elements:

- First, it is based on the false **belief** that a non-heterosexual, transgender or queer identity is abnormal and the result of damaged development.
- Second, conversion "therapy" can involve a variety of **practices** including personal prayer, informal or formal spiritual counselling, by qualified or unqualified individuals, face to face or online formal programs and support groups.
- Third, the **goal** of these practices is to change, eliminate or suppress a gay, lesbian or bisexual person's orientation, or to keep transgender individuals from transitioning from their birth gender.

Beyond Egypt Ministry – support groups



BE, since its formation, had been running support groups and building a network of supporting churches throughout Sydney Diocese Anglican churches. As advertised in one local church bulletin, *"Beyond Egypt is a 15 week support group for men and women struggling with sexual and relational*

⁴⁰ "If it's us now, it will be the pastors next' - Mike Davidson on why gay conversion therapy should not be banned," *Christianity Today* 16 July 2020.

⁴¹ Martin Iles, "Calls to ban LGBT "conversion therapy" are dishonest dog whistling," *Australian Christian Lobby*, 17 July 2020, https://www.acl.org.au/blog_mi_lgbt_conversion_therapy_dog_whistling.

brokenness (including unwanted same-sex attraction, pornography, masturbation and sexual promiscuity). It is a ministry of St Paul's Anglican Church Carlingford and is held at a confidential location in the Central West of Sydney. New in 2009, the Beyond Egypt support group will include time for men and women to separate for gender-specific teaching, discussion and accountability. For more information please contact **** * or email: beyondegypt@gmail.com. See also brochure on our notice board".⁴²

What were these support groups like? As described in an email to one of our Freedom2b members who'd previously had contact with them: *"I've attached a brochure which might help you to know more about what we offer. I can guess that you find yourself sexually attracted to other men, and you don't want to, or that you don't feel like you can live in the role of a man, and that living as a woman may be better, although you don't want that either. If either (or both) of those are true, then yes, absolutely, our support group will be able to help. Each week we watch a sermon/talk/presentation or DVD, discuss it, have some food, sing, pray, teach some extra material (usually on a whiteboard), discuss it, and then have accountability, which involves talking about how things are going in each person's struggles, and praying for each other."*⁴³

Beyond Egypt Conferences and speakers

The first BE conference, *"Someone I Know Is Gay"*, was held in August 2010. The two key speakers were Ricky Chelette ([Living Hope Ministries](#)) and Sue Bohlin ([Probe Ministries](#)⁴⁴) from the US. The program topics included:⁴⁵

- Why? Understanding the Roots of Male Homosexuality and Gender Identity (Ricky Chelette)
- Raising Gender Healthy Kids (Sue Bohlin)
- How Does Healing Really Happen (Ricky Chelette)
- When Someone I Love is Gay (Ricky Chelette)
- The Nature of Lesbianism & Relational Idolatry (Sue Bohlin)
- Reaching Youth Who Struggle (Ricky Chelette)
- When Someone I Love is Gay
- Questions & Answer Panel Discussion (Ricky Chelette, Sue Bohlin, Paul (Beyond Egypt))

Both Ricky and Sue were, and still are proponents of "Change is possible" through discipleship and reparative "therapy"; the message preached by all Exodus affiliates at the time.⁴⁶ Unlike others who have moved to a total celibacy message or to a complete affirming position, like the former leaders of Exodus, Chelette and Bohlin have remained dangerously consistent for decades. When the film *Boy Erased* was released in a 2019, THV11 did an interview with Chelette and my friend John Smid (former leader of Love in Action portrayed in *Boy Erased*). The journalist wrote *"Chelette is unapologetic about terming much of his ministry "recovery" from living a sinful lifestyle and points to he and others as examples that it does work if the goal is to live as a heterosexual"*. Chelette said, *"Our ministry has been around for 30 years and we've had thousands of people who when they came*

⁴² St JOHN'S FAMILY BULLETIN, (ANGLICAN PARISH OF ASQUITH / MT COLAH / MT KURING-GAI, 22 February 2009).

⁴³ Scotty101, 16 June 2010, <https://freedom2b.org/forums/a-new-sydney-based-ex-gay-ministry-emerges-and-long-running-liberty-christian-ministries-set-sights-on-expansion-t970/>.

⁴⁴ Probe, possibly not the best name for a Christian Ministry.

⁴⁵ <https://web.archive.org/web/20101220002608/http://www.stpaulscarlingford.org.au/ministries/be/>

⁴⁶ "For 30 years, Exodus has served men and women who are affected by homosexuality. Freedom is possible through Jesus Christ!" <https://web.archive.org/web/20110106133732/http://www.exodusinternational.org/>

never imagined that they could even have a heterosexual relationship with a person of the opposite sex, or be a father or a mother".⁴⁷

As expressed in their talks at the conference, Chelette and Bohlin both believe that everyone is **born heterosexual** and that through lack or deprivation in individuals' lives (brokenness), people take on a gay⁴⁸ or trans identity. "God knew what He was doing when he chose each child's gender, and we would be wise to support His choice"⁴⁹, Bohlin teaches.

"Gay is a cultural identity to be rejected. Homosexuality is a lifestyle choice. Same-sex attraction is a feeling".....is the simple formula given to "strugglers" with USSA.

Madison magazine's journalist, Clair Weaver, went undercover to the "Someone I Know Is Gay" conference. Her exposé was an honest account from an outsider's perspective of what was taught. Chelette, Bohlin and BE didn't come out looking good as Weaver quoted some of their more extreme and bizarre beliefs and concepts proffered.⁵⁰ For example, Bohlin said that women who weren't nurtured or breastfed by their mothers end up sexually attracted to females. Quoting an "ex-gay" counsellor, she says: "They want to rest in another woman's arms; they want to suckle at a breast. They want to gaze into the eyes of another woman like a baby would a mother." This level of scrutiny would have further reinforced BE's "under the radar" modus operandi.

The Q&A at the end of the day conference would be funny, if it wasn't frightening to think people believed these "experts".⁵¹

The question was asked. **Stereotypical homosexual relationships are not generally long-term relationships but my relative appears to be in a long-term stable relationship. How can this be explained?**

Sue answers: Usually when it's really long term it's usually women and the reason for that is that women are relational by nature and they can stick it out. It's not necessarily helpful and what may look like stability is often the inability to live without the other. So for example, a friend of mine, her mother got into a lesbian relationship when she was four years old and he has been with this woman for 20 years. They can't stand each other but they don't know how to do life without the other. So one has learned helplessness the other is the caretaker and there's alcoholism problems and there's all kinds of things. From the outside to their neighbours they look like this quintessential stable lesbian couple and they're desperately unhappy, but it looks good from the outside. So often it's a matter of, as one woman put it, "we don't have partners we have prisoners". I'm not saying it can't ever be a stable relationship but generally it's they don't know how to extricate myself from the relationship. (emphasis mine)

My lesbian friends, many of them in loving, long-term relationships, would be highly offended at Bohlin's inaccurate and misleading generalisations.

⁴⁷ Rolly Hoyt, "Controversial gay conversion therapy still remains an option in the South," (THV11 News, 15 February 2019), Video. <https://www.thv11.com/article/news/controversial-gay-conversion-therapy-still-remains-an-option-in-the-south/91-5a86de07-c137-4c04-94ba-12108d2bbade>.

⁴⁸ Living Hope Ministries, "WHY? UNDERSTANDING MALE GENDER DEVELOPMENT - DVD." <https://www.livehope.org/product/dvd-understanding-homosexuality-gender-development-males/>.

⁴⁹ Sue Bohlin, *Cherishing Your Child's Gender* (Probe Ministries).

⁵⁰ Clair Weaver, "Undercover at a gay "cure" group," *Madison*, <https://www.abbi.org.au/2011/12/undercover-at-a-gay-cure-group/>.

⁵¹ Living Hope Ministries, "Down Under Tour Q & A WITH RICKY, SUE AND COLIN - AUDIO." <https://www.livehope.org/product/q-a-with-ricky-sue-and-colin/>.

Another question. **What about rough and tumble⁵² men such as footballers who say they are gay?**

Ricky responds: *Sue and I talk about the fact that the rough and tumble sensitive person is on a continuum between sensitive and rough and tumble. So you can have a person that's more still ultimately at their core a sensitive person but is more toward the middle of that. **Which may be a person who plays footballbut still at their heart of hearts, is still a sensitive person.** That's not to say too, that there's not some exception out there, that you have a truly rough and tumble guy who for some reason, ends up being a person who also struggles with homosexuality. **I haven't met any of those yet but I'm not I'm not ruling out the fact that they could exist.** (emphasis mine)*

Colin adds: *There was an Australian footballer Ian, I forget his last name,⁵³ who very famously came out. This great big butch football player who came out and said I'm gay and I'm asking all my teammates to back me up and all that sort of stuff, but he's an actor as well. I went to see a stage play of Shakespeare, and it was just like, **oh wow, it's Ian Roberts and so you know, obviously there's a sensitive side to his rough and tumble.** (emphasis mine)*

Ricky and Colin couldn't see past their naïve stereotyping, know nothing of the reality of gay men's lives, and obviously knew nothing about the Bingham Cup⁵⁴ or our winning team The Sydney Convicts.⁵⁵

When Chelette was directly asked: **Do you still struggle with same-sex attraction today. If so, how do you deal with it yourself? (anonymously submitted by journalist Clair Weaver)⁵⁶:**

Ricky responded: *It's all semantic. What is struggle? Can I ever find myself attracted to another male? **Yes.** Do I want to go have sex with a man? **No.** Do I at times have occasions where I feel drawn to somebody in a way that I know isn't probably appropriate? **Yes.** How do I deal when I look at that draw? I recognise what it is that's taking place and why I feel the way I feel? And I decide that in that moment I still really love Jesus and my wife more than I love what momentary pleasure I might get by sinning with an individual. So I decide to choose Jesus and my wife and my commitment to her over my temptation. **And to me that looks like deliverance.** To me that is being delivered. **I still have a struggle on occasions. It's nothing like it was when I was 20 or 25 or 30 even but it occasionally happens.** (emphasis mine)*

Ricky, I think you're right. It is all about semantics. If you still have those thoughts and feelings at 47, like I was at 40 after 22 years of "struggle", you're still gay, no matter how you play with words (semantics) or do mental gymnastics.⁵⁷

The questions from the attendees demonstrated naivety and gross stereotyping. The responses from the "experts" were frightening and demonstrated the same naivety. What is even more terrifying is one of Chelette's Living Hope Ministry options - secret online forums.⁵⁸ I raised the dangers of these

⁵² "Rough and tumble" is the quaint expression often used in these circles to describe masculine or "butch" gay men. The "sensitive" Chelette refers to of course is a gay man who is feminine in his mannerisms, speech or dress (the obviously gay men). Women are rarely separated into similar categories.

⁵³ Ian Roberts came out as gay in 1995, becoming the first rugby league player in the world to do so. He discussed his sexuality in magazines and on television over the following year. His biography *Ian Roberts: Finding out* was published in 1997.

⁵⁴ "International Gay Rugby (IGR) ", <https://igrugby.org/ingham-cup>.

⁵⁵ The Sydney Convicts Rugby Union Football Club <https://sydneyconvicts.org/>

⁵⁶ Weaver, "Undercover at a gay "cure" group."

⁵⁷ A Venn-Brown, "Ex-gay = contradictions, denial and mental gymnastics," *Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International*, 3 November 2012, 2012, <https://www.abbi.org.au/2012/11/ex-gay-contradictions-denial-and-mental/>.

⁵⁸ "Forums," accessed 7 November 2020, <https://www.livehope.org/forums/>.

with my fellow anti-conversion "therapy" friends in the US, flagging that this style of ministry was potentially more harmful than the face to face support groups. Two young men had already told me of their suicide attempts whilst they were doing the Door of Hope/Setting Captives Free 60 day online program. Timothy, one of those, told his story to the media to highlight the danger.

"My mentor was a man in Ohio, who was middle-aged. He had apparently completed the course which qualified him to be a counsellor to me and a mentor throughout the program. I only knew his first name and email address and he would email me every day making sure I was doing the work and reading the bible and giving me tips on how to overcome temptation."

Things escalated quickly at the end of each day when the mentor asked his pupil what would become a series of increasingly invasive questions.

"(He) asked the same questions — Have you masturbated? Have you thought about men? Have you sinned? — and required that I go into detail in my response. I felt strange disclosing these things to a random man that I had never met. I didn't know who else was seeing my responses. The content was very shaming."

Timothy's shame turned to suicidal thoughts and eventually an attempt to take his own life.

"I was not making any progress and thought that I never would. Suicide seemed to me like less of a sin than homosexuality," he said.

"It made me feel disgusted with myself, as if I was sick and outside of God's love because I could never fulfil what they wanted of me. I couldn't change who I was."

"I was so densely full of anger and hatred and pain and I finally couldn't take it anymore and it all came up and exploded out."

"He said only when sitting in a mental health ward with bandages on his arms did he realise that his mind had been poisoned."⁵⁹

We do not and have never in any way supported "conversion therapy"???

BE's ministry connections also reveal that the denial, *"the entire premise that we are involved in some kind of "conversion therapy" is false. We do not and have never in any way supported such therapies"*, was either a smokescreen or intentional ignorance about the breadth of the term "conversion therapy". Journalists should always press further beyond the initial rebuttal with questions like, "So you believe it is okay to be gay or transgender then?". Or cut straight to the chase and ask, "So you affirm same-sex relations?" Then one gets closer to the truth.

As I mentioned before, BE's web presence for ages was nothing more than an email address. After the 2010 conference they were listed as a partner ministry on the Liberty Christian Ministries site.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ ROHAN SMITH, "Gay conversion therapy still thriving online despite condemnation of ex-gay ministries," 28 May, 2015, <https://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/real-life/true-stories/gay-conversion-therapy-still-thriving-online-despite-condemnation-of-exgay-ministries/news-story/135833e1074eba4ac673122c9dce0ee3>.

⁶⁰ "Other useful contacts," Liberty Christian Ministries, 2010, <https://web.archive.org/web/20101128084656/http://www.libertychristianministries.org.au/content/view/20/48/>.

Other "ex-gay" ministries listed included Exodus Asia Pacific, Living Waters, and Exodus International in the US who were all promoting "change is possible".

When the American Psychological Association (APA) criticised the work of these organisations, *Christianity Today* wrote:

Alan Chambers, president of Exodus International, said it is wrong to assert that sexual orientation cannot change as a result of therapy.

"That flies in the face of the testimonies of tens of thousands of people just like me," said Chambers, a married father of two who credits God and counseling for helping him leave a homosexual lifestyle. "That's not to say that you can flip a switch and go from gay to straight." ⁶¹ (emphasis mine)

In 2010, BE appeared as a ministry on the St Paul's Carlingford site⁶², a significantly bold step for an otherwise conservative community church to promote such things. And BE was also later listed as a referral organisation on the Exodus Asia Pacific site.⁶³

The claim "We do not and have never in any way supported such therapies" is sounding rather hollow wouldn't you say?

The next year, 2011, another conference was held in July under the same title "*Someone I know is gay*".⁶⁴ This time the presenters were people involved in BE and other local ex-gay/reparative/conversion therapy ministries. One speaker, who was one of the original founders of Liberty Christian Ministries, GP Dr Trevor, taught that there was no genetic basis for homosexuality. In other words, **no one is born gay**. James C, from Living Waters, who runs a weekly accountability group for guys called S.A.L.T. (Sexual Addicts Learning Trust), spoke for an hour about all the things he did to stop himself from masturbating, being turned on, or "*giving into sin*". He also spoke about times when all the strategies didn't work and how to get out of that.⁶⁵

The Q&A session was pretty much the same as the previous year but with more panellists. Two gems that stood out for me was Dr Trevor's suggestion that **one way to overcome masturbation was to think of "washing machines"**. Apparently, it was the advice given to him by a counsellor in his youth. The other gem came from an audience question. The person admitted that they had a body image problem and that in admiring a friend's well-formed body, could that develop into USSA and end up with a "homosexual problem". According to Colin, **envying another man's body can make you gay**.⁶⁶

In 2013, another conference was held titled "*Our Broken Sexuality, and the God Who Heals*". It was billed as "A day conference that addresses the big sexual issues, such as pornography,

⁶¹ BOBBY ROSS JR., "No Straight Shot," *Christianity Today*, 14 SEPTEMBER 2009. Alan Chambers reversed this in 2012 saying "The majority of people that I have met, and I would say the majority meaning 99.9 percent of them, have not experienced a change in their orientation"

⁶² "Ministries - Beyond Egypt," 2010, <https://web.archive.org/web/20101220002608/http://www.stpaulscarlingford.org.au/ministries/be/>.

⁶³ "Exodus Asia Pacific Regional contacts," Exodus Global Alliance, 2011, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110809135135/http://www.exodusglobalalliance.org/regionalcontactsc876.php>.

⁶⁴ "Beyond Egypt - Someone I Know is Gay," 2011, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110930022818/http://www.stpaulscarlingford.org.au/ministries/be/>.

⁶⁵ Beyond Egypt - "Someone I know is gay" conference, *Interview (James C)* (2011).

⁶⁶ *Session 3 – "Q & A Panel Discussion" (James D, Trevor, Nicky, James C, Colin) Someone I know is gay* (Beyond Egypt).

homosexuality, and transgenderism". About 80 people attended according to David Peterson, the chairman of Liberty Christian Ministries.

For this conference D'Ann Davis, previous Women's Ministry Director of *Living Hope Ministries*, was one of the speakers. In her article *How Do I Help My Gay Friend?*, she suggests that Christians should be straight shooters. *"It does our gay friends no favor to teach a false gospel, that God's word is not true or is unclear about his sin, as we would likely never do this to our lost friends who are mired in the sins of alcoholism, heterosexual promiscuity, self-righteousness, adultery, thievery, or godless religion."*⁶⁷ It is clear where Ms Davis stands re homosexuality, or same gender attracted (SGA), as she nicely puts it.

By 2014 the support groups had gone from 15 weeks to 9 weeks, according to St Faith's Narrabeen newsletter. It appears that this ensured they could run four a year, one each school term and give leaders breathing space between working with "strugglers".

Beyond Egypt's educational mission

One of the missions of BE was to not only "help" people with "unwanted same-sex attraction" but also to "educate" churches and other Christians about sexuality issues. Colin was invited to speak in a number of churches in the Sydney Diocese, sometimes a series of talks over several weeks. In 2018 the BE newsletters mentioned that he'd been invited to speak in six Sydney churches. Colin's presentation style is very conversational and easy to listen to. This style along with his personal examples, mixed with Bible verses would have made his teaching and concepts very believable in evangelical circles. This is why churches and conferences would have invited him to speak, particularly in churches where the local minister was completely out of his depth on the subject of homosexuality and preferred someone else speak about tender topics of sex, masturbation, addictions, etc..

Colin also spoke several times to hundreds of students at the *Mid Year Conference* (MYC) for evangelical university students. These conferences attracted over 700 attendees. Colin always spoke on the topic of *"Sexual Brokenness and Healing"* and giving personal testimony about his journey with pornography and USSA.

As one attendee reported, *"I think I have a better understanding about gays. Not to shame them, but understanding their sin is the same as mine. And it was quite interesting learning the basics of becoming gay. The person who spoke himself used to be gay and watched porn etc for over 10 years⁶⁸ even though he also said he was Christian and helped the church. But with God's help, he eventually turned away and went from being gay to dating then marriage."*⁶⁹

Another blogger reported on what they learnt at the MYC: *"Who says homosexuality is worse than a liar? Or who says, adultery is worse than greed? This is the great lie the world tells us that God measures/weights some sins when the fact is – in His eyes, sin is sin. In Romans 1:18-32⁷⁰, it*

⁶⁷ "HOW DO I HELP MY GAY FRIEND?," Living Hope Ministries, <https://www.livehope.org/article/how-do-i-help-my-gay-friend/>.

⁶⁸ It would be good to note here that at the Katoomba Christian Convention it says he had it licked after 5 years.

⁶⁹ "MYC 2014-Love. Sex. Marriage. Gospel," *Wordtography* (((: , 18 July 2014, <http://wordtography.blogspot.com/2014/07/myc-2014-love-sex-marriage-gospel.html>.

⁷⁰ This is one of the 6 passages in the Bible that has been used to condemn homosexuality. It is not referring to same-sex-orientation as we know it today, but a bloodletting pagan ritual temple priests/prostitutes and followers of Aphrodite engaged in. More information here <https://www.abbi.org.au/audio-resources/what-does-the-bible-really-say-about-homosexuality/>

(homosexuality) is listed with other actions God is not pleased with, as 'simple' as disobedience to parents."⁷¹

Of course, the misguided notion is that "homosexuality is a sin". Homosexuality is a sexual orientation, as heterosexuality is. If homosexuality is a sin, then so is heterosexuality.

At this MYC conference the controversial Christian sexologist, Dr Patricia Weerakoon, also spoke. *"Sexual activity is anything that arouses sexually – and this can be even as 'basic' as holding hands. And if sexual activities present outside of marriage, then it is sexual immorality"* was her message to these young Christians. What does she think about homosexuality? In the Sydney Diocese magazine, the *Southern Cross*, she was quoted as saying that there are *"some for whom their sexual attractions are a biological disposition"* but *"about a third of those with a homosexual orientation will change to a heterosexual"*.⁷²

I find it deeply disturbing thinking about the impact that these kinds of teachings had and are having on the lives of Christian young people. They look up to people like Weerakoon, Colin, Chelette, Bohlin, Davis and others as mature "authorities" and "experts" who give them hope and yet an intrinsically warped sense of reality and life. They feed young, already fragile senses of self with doubt, fear and misinformation.

Mixed messages

In the same Southern Cross article, once again we see the doublespeak of organisations like BE.

"Both Liberty and Beyond Egypt explicitly state that they do not aim to "cure" people of homosexuality. Even so, both organisations have come under scrutiny in the media from those who advocate a same-sex lifestyle" the author writes. (emphasis mine)

I've been hearing these denials for decades.

In the very next paragraph Nic T, who is one of BE's leaders says, ***"there is hope for people who come because the gospel carries with it the truth that you can change, and that people's sexual identity is not concrete"***. (emphasis mine)

And a few lines further down: ***"Tom, after about five years as a Christian, did become attracted to a certain woman and is now happily married. But there was a period where he needed to work through and accept that he might be called on to stay single."*** (emphasis mine)

"That is also the experience of many, and the goal of Liberty and Beyond Egypt is not to try to "make" people heterosexual. Rather, the aim is to help them live holy lives in God's sight." (emphasis mine)

I'm not sure whether it is the naivety or plain stupidity of these leaders concerning the incongruence of their message, that heterosexuality is not the goal. Around the world, as in Australia, leaders of these "ex-gay" groups were married. All the way down from Alan Chambers, the president of Exodus International to Australian leaders, like Liberty Christian Ministries' Christopher Keane, Simon Riches, and Haydn Sennitt, Living Waters' Ian Lind, and Ron Brookman, Liberty Inc's Paul Wegner, Purple

⁷¹ yen_tt, "Love, Sex, Marriage, and the Gospel," *Sojourn with the Father*, 27 July 2014, <https://sojournwith.wordpress.com/2014/07/27/love-sex-marriage-and-the-gospel/>.

⁷² MCINTYRE, "Broken, bound, forgiven."

Hearts' Deborah Hirsch, Renew Ministries' Shirley Baskett, regular visitor to Australian mega churches international speaker Sy Rogers and BE's Colin. All married and most with children which always "happens" to be mentioned in testimonials and articles about them coming out of the "homosexual lifestyle".

Imagine this for a minute. You are a young man in a biblically based church. All you've ever heard is that God's plan has always been man/woman and homosexuality is a sin. You begin to become aware that your attraction is to guys, not girls. You can't tell a soul about this, in your mind it's too shameful to talk about. You pray hard.... really hard that it will go away. You do this for days, weeks, months, even years, but nothing changes. Eventually the inner torment gets too much. You've become depressed and even thought about ending your life. In fear and trepidation, you pluck up the courage to tell your pastor or youth leader about your struggle. They suggest there are organisations and support groups that help with your problem of "unwanted same-sex attraction". You go and meet with a leader from the group. They tell you they will help you with your "struggle" but remind you that heterosexuality is not the goal. As they talk more about their journey, they tell you they left the "homosexual lifestyle" and are now married and have children. The latter is the young man's goal. He wants to be rid of this "curse" and be "normal" like everyone else—to be a husband and father. **Do you see the incongruence of the message?** The leader's words are in complete conflict with their lives—they have what the young man really wants. The words "heterosexuality is not the goal" goes in one ear and out the other. And so begins the journey of rejection, suppression, denial, fuelled by a false hope, that for many.....lasts decades.

The beginning of the end

In January 2019 it was announced in the BE newsletter that they were severing their ties with the St Paul's Carlingford Church. *"The need for ministries like ours is increasing, but so is the challenge in running them. To help manage the increased risk, and as a part of the ministry growing and maturing, we are moving from being a ministry of St Paul's Carlingford and North Rocks Anglican to being an independent ministry, supported by partner churches"* Chairman James Davidson wrote.

I guess it is safe to assume that the "risk" mentioned would be negative press for the church, considering the growing awareness of and opposition to LGBTQ conversion and suppression organisations. The movie, *Boy Erased*, had been released in Australia late in 2018, and there'd been an increasing number of states in the US who were banning "conversion therapy". Earlier in the same year, the state of Victoria passed legislation against the practices. *"It's illegal, it's bullying, it's traumatic on people and it needs to stop,"* Mental Health Minister Martin Foley said. The Health Complaints Commissioner *"now has the power to financially cripple and criminally prosecute organisations and individuals engaging in the so-called "pray away the gay" practices"*, the ABC article went on to report".⁷³

Along with the announcement, Mr Davidson called for financial donations of \$3,038; \$2,200 for insurance and a further \$838 for start-up expenses. Colin was stepping down as BE's ministry leader mid 2019.

By the end of February, the amount had been raised and more. **All was looking good.**

In the next newsletter Davidson reports that support group leaders, John and Scott, were training new leaders but, *"Sadly the group had to end early because some participants had scheduling*

⁷³ "Gay conversion therapy to be investigated by Victoria's health watchdog," ABC News, updated 17 May 2018, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-05-17/gay-lesbian-conversion-therapy-police-survey/9768746>.

conflicts with other activities, and the group became too small to be sustainable. We are already in contact with several people who are keen to join the next group though, which will start in late July."

Finding new leadership was also challenging. *"We continue to look for a new ministry leader, to replace Colin when he steps down after July this year. The search has been difficult, as the candidates we've consulted lack either the time or the skills."* A meeting was organised to pray about this.

The July newsletter stated that BE had been registered as a charity.⁷⁴ The Australian Charities and Not For Profits Commission (ACNC) website said that it had been set up to help gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or intersex persons. The constitution submitted on the ACNC website⁷⁵ is generic for an association incorporated except for the appendix begins on page 20. After Part 1, which is a doctrinal statement of evangelicals' beliefs about the infallibility of the Bible, the sinfulness of the human race, and redemption only found through Jesus Christ, Beyond Egypt's statement on human sexuality follows.

It begins *"Scripture teaches that sex is God's gift to humanity, only to be expressed within the marriage of a man and a woman"*

The oft used, yet mistranslated verses, of 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 are quoted.

"Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God"

This is the same passage that got famous Australian rugby player Israel Folau into so much trouble and ended his career with Rugby Australia.⁷⁶

The document finishes off with:

Some with same-sex attraction testify to ending up in happy, sexually fulfilling heterosexual marriages. However, such an experience should not be our goal. Our goal is not heterosexuality, but rather, being transformed by God into the image of Christ.

We believe that churches ought to be supportive of those in their midst who struggle with same-sex attractions or who have a same-sex attracted family member. Christians who are caught in sinful behaviours, attitudes or thoughts, may find such things as prayer, counselling, pastoral help, and healthy friendships to be of great assistance in their growth in Christ-likeness. Beyond Egypt's goal is not 'orientation change', but for individuals to have a life-transforming, personal and growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

Insurance was taking time to organise. *"We won't be able to have it sorted out in time to run our third term support group. So we've decided to postpone the group until fourth term,"* Davidson told his readers in the same newsletter. As no new leader had been forthcoming, Colin had agreed to stay on till the end of 2019.

⁷⁴ <https://www.acnc.gov.au/charity/6829e9b42df8373d62562b236c3879ac#history>

⁷⁵ <https://www.acnc.gov.au/charity/6829e9b42df8373d62562b236c3879ac#financials-documents>

⁷⁶ "Israel Folau to be sacked by Rugby Australia over homophobic comments," *ABC News*, 11 Apr 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-04-11/israel-folau-set-to-be-sacked-by-rugby-australia/10993856>.

Advertisements for a new leader were placed on the Sydney Anglicans site, and *Southern Cross*⁷⁷ and *Eternity* magazines⁷⁸.

For the final term of the year a support group was going to commence with a total of 8 people signed up for the group (2 leaders, 2 trainees, and 4 participants), "*which is refreshingly larger than we've had in previous groups*" the October newsletter said. **One wonders how big the previous groups had been.** According to the next newsletter they had another two people join at the last minute. Mr Davidson said, "*It's been a while since we've had a group that large, which made it both refreshing and challenging*". Just under half were leaders though.

Some applications for the leader position had come in and interviews were happening. 2020 was looking promising. The interviewees however were proving unsuitable.

Already six months over the deadline, Colin encouraged the followers to pray. "*I genuinely believe that God has a future in mind for Beyond Egypt, more than just shutting the ministry down*", he said. "*He is the only source of true healing, freedom, and satisfaction that we can know. God has shown us that he prefers to give us what we need at the last minute. This happens all the time! What we must do is pray. What we have always had to do is pray. Beyond Egypt belongs to Him, and we must continually bring the ministry and the needs of his people to him in prayer, because he delights in answering our prayers. But how can he answer them if we are not bringing them to him? So please keep praying, trusting that he will continue the ministry that he started 14 years ago, and has faithfully sustained since then.*" he continued.

Something went wrong.

Three months later it was announced that BE was closing and had to wind down the infrastructure set up over the previous 12 months.

"We are saddened to report that, after over a year of searching, the Committee has not been able to find a suitable replacement for Colin as Ministry Leader of Beyond Egypt. This is a genuine surprise to us, because we have seen God work in the ministry countless times in the past, and we were expecting that He would raise up the right person to continue the work after Colin steps down. In His wisdom, however, God has chosen not to do this, and in light of that, we have little choice but to close the ministry down."

Well, there you have it. Another one bites the dust.⁷⁹

The rise and demise of Beyond Egypt – lessons learned

Now BE has gone, what can we learn?

1. **It's not over.** The closure of these organisations doesn't mean that people will no longer seek or offer help to people struggling with USSA. As I've often said, the ministries and

⁷⁷ <https://issuu.com/sydneyanglicans/docs/sc201910> page 28

⁷⁸ <https://www.eternityjobs.com.au/company/774/beyond-egypt/>

⁷⁹ Anthony Venn-Brown, "Ex-gay Ministry – Two thirds gone in Australia and NZ," *Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International*, *Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International*, 2012, <https://www.abbi.org.au/2012/07/ex-gay-ministry/>.

organisations are not the cause, they are the symptom.⁸⁰ The root cause is the belief that homosexuality is a sin, same-sex relationships are never a part of God's plan, and LGBTQ people are flawed because of wrong development. If you are in a church that believes these things then you are vulnerable to being negatively impacted psychologically, spiritually and emotionally. Impacted by well-meaning but ill-informed pastors and leaders who want to support you in your "struggle" to conform. The only safe and healthy place where you can grow and thrive is an affirming church.⁸¹

2. **In a conservative Christian culture? You're not getting the full story.** I often think of LGBTQ young people who, because of their circumstances, are getting a very limited diet. So many have grown up in Christian families, gone to Christian Schools, go to age-specific Christian youth groups, the majority, if not all, of their friends are Christian and they'll only have Christians within their social network. Others became converted in their teen years during some crisis, or level of personal dissatisfaction led them into a Christian experience. Many are attracted to the amazing youth programs where the music, instant social network, being reminded weekly to follow your dreams and that God makes his children successful, meets the needs of security, belonging, personal growth and identity so important at that time of life. They will attend some form of Christian meeting once, twice, three, even four times a week depending on their level of commitment. Whilst this in itself is not a bad thing it is problematic for LGBTQ youth.

It is within that environment the young LGBTQ person begins to become increasingly conscious of their difference. But what do they know about these feelings, emotions and thoughts that have begun to surface uninvited into their lives and consciousness? **Nothing positive.** In fact, quite the opposite. This creates what is known as "cognitive dissonance" - a stress and anxiety about the conflicts of their inner and outer worlds. The sexual drive is already considered lustful outside of marriage to someone of the opposite gender but their same-sex thoughts and desires are worse. They have never been told that what they are experiencing is normal, but that it is sick, even evil, and therefore must be resisted. Their masturbation includes fantasies of the same gender which intensifies the cognitive dissonance. The real self, that is the gay self, is perceived as evil, lustful, out of control, and self-hatred and self-loathing begin to set in.

The really tragic thing is that within that world there is no one they can really trust with what they are struggling with. They have no idea just how normal they are and that there are thousands of LGBTQ young people going through the same thing, who, in a relatively short time, have come to a place of acceptance of themselves and by their families and friends. For many, their coming out will be celebrated.

Sadly, they will get the opposite within their Christian world. And so begins a torturous journey to control, resist and suppress their true selves. As one survivor, Scott, told me of his experience attending a support group in Perth at a Pentecostal church after becoming a Christian in his mid-teens, *"One thing I do regret though is that while other people my age were out enjoying themselves, I was living in torment. I LOST a DECADE of my life"*.⁸²

⁸⁰ Anthony Venn-Brown, Presentation at the "Building Community to End the Harm Caused By Heterosexism & Reparative Therapy" Palm Beach Florida, "Australia's Ex-gay World - the clock is ticking," *Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International*, Nov 20, 2009, <https://wp.me/p7nC3p-RE>.

⁸¹ Anthony Venn-Brown, "Welcoming, Accepting and Affirming," *Ambassadors and Bridge Builders International* 8 March 2017, <https://www.abbi.org.au/2017/03/welcoming-accepting-affirming/>.

⁸² "Conversion therapy survivors – testimonials not found on 'ex-gay' organisations' sites," *Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International*, May 3rd, 2012, 2012, <https://www.abbi.org.au/2012/05/conversion-therapy-survivors-2/>.

In one way Scott was lucky. I received an email recently from a man who told me **"After 30 years of support groups, programs, conferences, books, tapes, you name it I did it, I feel at this time that I have to be honest with myself as well as others. God does love me just the way I am. I just want to learn and live the way God has planned and that me being gay is ok"**.

3. **What you resist, persists.** I have no doubt that many of the people who attended BE support groups had addictions/obsessions with pornography, masturbation, chat rooms, anonymous sex at beats or venues. It was BE's target market. I have worked with over 3,000 survivors in the last 20 years. Many of them tell similar stories-mine too. The famous psychologist, Carl Jung, taught **"what you resist, persists"**. Nothing could be further from the truth in this context. What groups like BE don't realise is that they have either created or fuelled the addiction/obsession by their teaching and focus.

Wise words also from Joseph Campbell **"The cave that you fear to enter holds the treasure that you seek."** For so many of us this is true. We have been given a picture of gay life as being out of control and promiscuous. Most likely we have heard the term "gay lifestyle"⁸³ which is presented as parties, nightclubs, drugs, and lots of sex. We fear giving into our "lust" because it will overcome and destroy us physically and spiritually. From my experience and the experience of many others, quite the opposite is true. Self-acceptance and self-love calm the battle within us and the drive to "act out" diminishes. **Who would have thought?**

4. **Language is important.** Within the conversion "therapy" movement there are certain buzzwords and phrases which one needs to be aware of. Talking about "sexual or relational brokenness" is referring to an individual's orientation or gender identity, which has supposedly come about because of past trauma or "damaged" development. As you've no doubt seen, "same-sex attraction" is also referring to one's sexual orientation. Using the term "same-sex attraction" instead of "orientation" is intentional. Saying I have "same-sex attractions" is intended to reduce one's core orientation to a feeling/emotion. By only thinking in terms of "attraction" instead of "orientation", they are attempting to diminish the thing so fundamental to our lives. It is our orientation that exists at the core of our being and provides us with so many of life's glorious experiences. Love, intimacy, affection, partnering; all spring from our sexual orientation.
5. **Identity.** This is something laboured greatly within the movement. You can never say you are a "gay Christian". Remember, the same-sex-attraction is "unwanted". Saying you're a "gay Christian" would be taking ownership of something you are not supposed to own. "Gay is a cultural identity" you'd be reminded, and your identity is in Christ as a child of God. Sadly, these people will never experience "gay pride" with their existing philosophy. Any LGBTQ person will tell you how essential it to get to that place of not just acceptance but pride (celebration) in who you are.⁸⁴ David Peterson said, Colin gave an excellent talk at the Liberty Christian Ministries annual meeting in 2013 entitled '*Guilt, Shame and Pride!*' **According to Colin, guilt comes from God, but shame and pride come from Satan.**

Also listening to the teachings of groups like BE, one becomes conscious of how important a masculine male and feminine female identity is to these people as they try to match their lives to a narrow band of what they perceive true masculinity and femininity. Desperately

⁸³ Anthony Venn-Brown, "GAY LIFESTYLE – What is the gay lifestyle?," *Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International*, <https://www.abbi.org.au/2017/09/gay-lifestyle/>.

⁸⁴ Anthony Venn-Brown, "Stages of Coming Out and Reconciling Our Sexual Identity," *Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International*, 10 Jan 2015, <https://www.abbi.org.au/2015/01/coming-out/>.

trying to be something they're not, in order to be happier in themselves and hopefully more acceptable to others. I gave up monitoring my mannerisms, voice, and wardrobe years ago. If people have a problem with that, it's their problem not mine. I'm happy being a gay male. I'd rather be rejected for who I am, than accepted for who I'm not. People are unaware of how draining and stressful it is to constantly, unconsciously self-monitor, until they free themselves. Letting go of the self-monitoring is like sitting down in a comfortable lounge chair after a tiring day and putting your feet up. Ahhhhhhhhhh

6. **Compassion.** I'm sure that some will find it strange that I have compassion for the strugglers with USSA and people like Colin. Listening to their stories of "struggle", even self-torture and the unnecessary ends they go to makes me feel sad. I know what it is like to be in internal torment about your homosexuality and the perceived conflict that faith and sexuality creates. I had over 22 years of it. It can drive you to the depths of depression and cause you to think terrible things about yourself that aren't true. If only they could find the freedom thousands of us have. Maybe reading this will help someone get there.

Colin, yes, I feel for Colin, and other leaders as well. Some would label these people as evil but from my experience, generally they are not. Some are nasty individuals who are unaware of the damage their internalised homophobia has impacted them and how they are unconsciously projecting that often on those around them and the people they are "helping". Listening to the talks Colin has given, in preparation for this article, I sense a genuinely caring person. I find it sad to see that caring, well-meaning motivation being channelled through such misinformation and a culture that locks out the alternatives that will set him free.

As I often say, **"The enemy is not churches, religious leaders or conversion "therapy" leaders or organisations, the real enemy is ignorance. Change is created not by attacking the former but focusing on transforming the latter".**

Gay is **NOT** a cultural identity to be rejected. Homosexuality is **NOT** a lifestyle choice. Same-sex attraction is **NOT** a feeling.

It took the "change is possible" movement, preached by Exodus, nearly 40 years to realise that the message was flawed and admit that it was a lie. My hope and prayer is that the "celibacy" movement will not take as long. Since the very beginning of this Christian movement in the early 1970s, one by one, thousands of former "ex-gays" leaders came out and admitted it hadn't worked. I think of friends of mine like John Smid (former Love in Action Director), Jeremy Marks (former leader of Courage UK), Randy Thomas (former Vice President of Exodus), Julie Rodgers (former Living Hope and Exodus), who all preached celibacy at one stage. **But something happened-they fell in love.** All are now married to their same-sex partners. Randy and Dan have announced their engagement.

We watch and wait for the current celibacy preachers to do the same, as one by one they fall in love with someone of the same gender and realise that it wasn't actually about sex it was about love, and **the reason for the "unwanted" needed to be explored and not the "same-sex attraction".**

HAS THIS HELPED?

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Any questions??? Contact us on info@abbi.org.au

About the Author:

Anthony Venn-Brown OAM, is one of Australia's foremost commentators on faith and sexuality. His best-selling autobiography '[A Life of Unlearning – a preacher's struggle with his homosexuality, church and faith](#)', details his journey from being one of the first in the world to experience religious gay conversion therapy, becoming a married, high-profile preacher in Australia's growing mega-churches, such as Hillsong, to living as an openly gay man. Anthony was the co-founder and former leader of Freedom2b. He is an [educator and consultant](#) on LGBT/faith issues and leader in [deconstructing the ex-gay/reparative/conversion therapy myth](#). Anthony is the founder and CEO of [Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International](#). Anthony has been recognised on a number of occasions for his contribution and impact including being twice voted one of 'The 25 Most Influential Gay and Lesbian Australians' (2007 and 2009) and in June 2020 he was awarded the '[Order of Australia Medal](#)' (OAM) for service to the LGBTIQ community.