

NARTH Member Christopher Rosik Responds to Presbyterian Web Site

Covenant Network of Presbyterians (www.covenantnetwork.org) has posted a statement, "Sexual Reparative (Conversion) Therapy Revisited," by C. Richard Carlson, a marriage and family therapist who opposes reorientation attempts. NARTH member Christopher Rosik, Ph.D., a fellow Presbyterian, responded as follows:

June 17, 2004

Dear Editor,

As a current member of both NARTH and the American Psychological Association, I think I am in some position to comment on Mr. Carlson's article posted on the Covenant Network web site. I cannot hope to respond to all of the statements that Mr. Carlson makes that deserve some sort of comment, but I will try to bring a few issues to light as a necessary counterpoint.

I would first direct the reader to the references. Here you will find a heavy reliance on Wayne Besen's recent book, which should really be identified as an ideological diatribe. Besides being a more radical gay activist, Mr. Besen is a self-described secular Jew who reserves great venom for orthodox religion. This is seen, for example, in his allegation that reports of experiencing the promptings of the Holy Spirit are signs of mental illness.

If individuals such as Besen are the authorities the Presbyterian Church(USA) should rely on for clarity in this debate, then we truly have entered into a time of great moral and religious confusion.

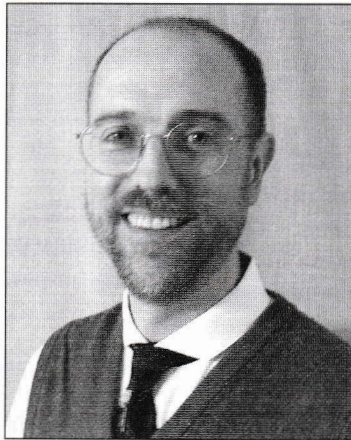
Contrary to the impression Carlson gives in his article, most NARTH members are not of the belief that gay, lesbian and bisexual persons simply choose their sexual attractions (although I can reference some articles where some individuals, especially women, do report this). Nor do most believe that all GLB individuals can simply change their same sex attractions (SSA).

We do believe that anyone with SSA should be allowed the opportunity, if desired and freely chosen with proper informed consent, to pursue a therapeutic course toward change. We also believe the experiences of our clients that real change does in fact occur.

The mention of aversion therapy is a "red herring," and NARTH would tell anyone willing to inquire about their

position on it that it was discredited decades ago as a treatment for SSA.

Spitzer's study was not intended to prove that all clients can change from gay to straight. It only laid the groundwork for further research by suggesting that some people do report change (some nearly complete change, some partial) that they experience as emotional and spiritually beneficial.



Christopher Rosik, Ph.D.

One of the problems I have with the critiques of research such as Spitzer's study is that the opponents of change-oriented therapies set up a straw argument by defining success as the complete elimination of all SSA. This is an unrealistic and unfair standard that is not applied to any other psychological condition.

It is comparable to demanding that success in the treatment of depression or bereavement be defined as the patient never again having a depressive thought or mournful feeling. No treatment could be considered effective if it had to meet such standards.

I repeat, in the Spitzer study many subjects reported enhanced self-image and functioning even when the change in their SSA was not complete.

If Carlson and opponents of change oriented therapies want to prove their sincerity and scientific fair-mindedness, they would repeatedly and loudly call for large-scale studies to further research the topic rather than simply carp about a lack of research. As it stands right now, most of the research being done in this area (and most of the members in the professional organizations listed) have zero contact with the religious populations where change is most commonly reported.

Thus we have opponents in the professional organizations using their vast resources (grants, university and foundation funding, etc.) to do their research almost exclusively among the gay-affirmative populations. With such empirical "preaching to the choir," can anyone be too surprised at the findings? Meanwhile, NARTH and other ex-gay groups that actually have access to those who report change generally have to conduct such research in their spare time without any financial underwriting.

If you want to find out whether someone on either side of the debate is serious about science or primarily using sci-

ence to promote a sociopolitical agenda, find out if they have argued for research that is inclusive of both gay-affirmative and ex-gay populations. I literally pray for the day when a nation-wide representative study of thousands of people is conducted that would involve input from both opponents and proponents of change-oriented therapies in the construction of the survey instrument.

But I am not optimistic that opponents are serious enough about such science to actively pursue such a cooperative venture, one that I have no doubt NARTH would jump at if given the opportunity to participate in.

Many other counterpoints (with extensive references from scientific journals) to Carlson's piece can be found in an article of mine posted on NARTH's web site: <http://www.narth.com/docs/conversiontherapy.html>. The reader interested in more details can find them there.

Sincerely,

Christopher Rosik, Ph.D.
Member and psychologist
First Presbyterian Church
San Joaquin Presbytery
Fresno, California

