

The Church of Scotland has lost the mind of Christ

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Carys Moseley comments on the Church of Scotland's decisions to support the Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy and allow ministers to conduct same-sex 'marriages'

This week the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland voted to allow ministers to conduct same-sex 'marriages'¹. It also voted to support the Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy in the UK². Both decisions are seriously concerning as they show the Church of Scotland has lost the mind of Christ on creation, marriage and the Christian life.

It is very important to understand that these two votes fundamentally reinforce one another as I explain below.

Biblically faithful pastoral care damned as 'hostile'

This is what the Church of Scotland Faith Impact Forum said introducing support for the MOU at the General Assembly³:

"In 2011 the General Assembly adopted the following statement on the pastoral care of homosexual Christians:

"It is contrary to God's will that Christians should be hostile in any way to a person because he or she is homosexual by orientation and in his or her practice. In other words we view homophobia as sinful. We do not include in the concept of homophobia both the bona fide belief that homosexual practice is contrary to God's will and the responsible statement of that belief in preaching or writing. It is the duty of the Church to welcome, minister, and reach out to people regardless of their sexual orientation and practice. The Church should strive to manifest God's love to all of his people. In particular, the Church should recognise the heavy burden which a homosexual orientation continues to place on some who find it difficult or impossible to reconcile their orientation with their understanding of God's purposes as revealed in the Bible. There is a particular need for the Church to reach

out pastorally to them and to make them welcome."

This sounds as if the Church of Scotland in 2011 was still allowing ministers to refuse to endorse same-sex behaviour in the name of God. However, this turns out to be a false reassurance, because the Faith Impact Forum went on to say this:

"In light of this position, the Faith Impact Forum recommends that the Church of Scotland should concur with the position of the Church of England General Synod and the Methodist Conference, namely that there should be a ban on Conversion Therapy. We note the support of the Church of England and Methodist Church to use the 'Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy in the UK', as an important and widely understood definition of Conversion Therapy that is backed by more than 20 health, counselling and psychotherapy organisations including the Association of Christian Counsellors.

In the creation of legislation to ban Conversion Therapy we hope there will be wider attempts with and within religious institutions to address issues of spiritual abuse or psychological pressure. There is no place in pastoral care for activity which is coercive or exploitative. We aspire to the highest standards of conduct and practice that is done in the name of the Church. Through provision of pastoral care, ministry and support to individuals, Church ministers, elders and members should follow best practice in their conduct and we recommend that the policies of Pastoral Care UK and the Confederation of Scottish Counselling Associations be understood and followed. The Church has its own Safeguarding policies and procedures for work with children and vulnerable adults."

It is highly significant that the concept of 'spiritual abuse' is endorsed here. This is a concept that has been heavily criticised from different angles, not least because it paves the way for handing over to the criminal court matters of theological discernment. It is also

clearly not going to be consistently applied. Is the Church of Scotland as it is now ever going to discipline pastors who pressure young people to 'come out' as LGBT? I doubt it somehow.

Last but not least, the Faith Impact Forum finishes its statement by saying this:

"Information about how to complain about the inappropriate or unethical behaviour of someone involved in the life the Church of Scotland is available on the Church's website."

To understand what counts as 'inappropriate or unethical behaviour' we need to look more closely at the MOU.

Church of Scotland extends 'conversion therapy' ban into churches

The Church of Scotland's vote to support the MOU may mean that it will sign the MOU as a supporter organisation. There is a special category for signatory organisations that are not mental health professional bodies. The first supporting organisation was Stonewall back in 2016.

This vote is very significant because it confirms our long-held suspicion that the MOU is being aimed at counselling and therapy in church settings, including ministers' homes, not only professional mental health settings. There is little doubt that the Church of Scotland has been persuaded to support the MOU in order to put pressure on other denominations to do so. The end result of that would be to increasingly stigmatise denominations that won't do so as inherently hostile towards LGBT people. This much is evident from the way in which the Faith Impact Forum interpreted the 2011 church statement as paving the way for supporting the MOU.

Refusing to marry same-sex couples could be 'conversion therapy'

The current version of the MOU gives an expansive definition of 'conversion therapy' which basically assumes that it can be hidden behind other undefined practices:

"For the purposes of this document 'conversion therapy' is an umbrella term for a therapeutic approach, or any model or individual viewpoint that demonstrates an assumption that any sexual orientation or gender identity is

inherently preferable to any other, and which attempts to bring about a change of sexual orientation or gender identity, or seeks to suppress an individual's expression of sexual orientation or gender identity on that basis. These efforts are sometimes referred to by terms including, but not limited to, 'reparative therapy', 'gay cure therapy', or 'sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts', and sometimes may be covertly practiced under the guise of mainstream practice without being named."

Essentially this means that anything and everything could be concealing 'conversion therapy'.

It is clear here that the MOU is targeting 'mainstream' counselling and therapy, whatever that means. The truth is it could mean anything, as neither counselling or therapy are defined in law in the UK. This is precisely why the MOU can be used to target pastoral care by Christian ministers and lay workers as well. There is no doubt that it could be used to target ministers who refuse to marry same-sex couples. For this would be to be guilty of attempting to 'suppress an individual's expression of sexual orientation', and therefore to fall foul of the MOU.

Undermining the mind of Christ on creation

The MOU's definition of gender identity also normalises rejection of embodiment as male or female, as God created us. To prohibit preferring one 'gender identity' over any other is to say that a minister should not tell parishioners that if they are biologically male, they should only live as men. In endorsing the MOU the Church of Scotland has therefore tacitly endorsed ministers who are prepared to play along with cross-gender identification as well as cross-dressing. The Bible clearly prohibits cross-dressing.

Jesus Christ affirmed the truth of creation as found in Genesis 1-2 when He taught about marriage (Matt 19:3-9). The MOU attacks this at full throttle.

The current MOU allows for use of puberty blockers

If these problems weren't enough, the 2019 version of the MOU added the right for mental health professionals to prescribe drugs, i.e.

puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones for clients. Section 6 says this:

“Nor is [this version of the MOU] intended to stop psychological and medical professionals who work with trans and gender questioning clients from performing a clinical assessment of suitability prior to medical intervention. Nor is it intended to stop medical professionals from prescribing hormone treatments and other medications to trans patients and people experiencing gender dysphoria.”

The British Psychological Society is currently being investigated by the Charity Commission⁴ over its involvement in this matter. Given this, why is the Church of Scotland even considering supporting the MOU?

Creating a culture of suspicion

These two votes definitely put Biblically faithful Christians in the minority in the Church of Scotland. They may now be treated with more suspicion both by some in their own denomination and by those outside it. This is because support for the MOU was couched in terms of combatting ‘spiritual abuse’.

This is highly significant when we consider that the MOU was not drafted in consultation with churches. This should be a clue to the problem here, namely the speed with which the Church of Scotland has uncritically adopted this highly contentious secular policy.

The Church of Scotland has lost the mind of Christ

Sadly, the only interpretation that makes sense of all this is that the Church of Scotland has lost the mind of Christ on creation. The truth is that this probably happened quite some time ago, but now we are seeing the full fruit of this rotten tree. Promises that ministers will be allowed to choose whether or not to officiate at same-sex weddings ring hollow when we really dissect the MOU on Conversion Therapy. Currently non-religious psychiatrists and psychotherapists are being targeted by LGBT activists on the basis of the MOU. Even openly gay professionals are not exempt.

It's not hard to see that Church of Scotland pastors, elders and members will now become targets of similar stings, though perhaps born of infighting as much as incursions from hostile outsiders. This is a denomination now in thrall to Queer Theory – something thoroughly unsurprising to those of us who know the theology faculties where Church of Scotland ministers have been trained for centuries. Lord have *mercy on the Church of Scotland*.

¹ <https://churchofscotland.org.uk/news-and-events/news/2022/articles/general-assembly-approves-scheme-to-conduct-same-sex-marriages>

²

<https://www.christiantoday.com/article/church.of.scotland.general.assembly.backs.calls.for.ban.on.conversion.therapy/138658.htm>

³ https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/93359/faith-impact-forum.pdf

⁴ <https://christianconcern.com/comment/british-psychological-society-investigated-over-puberty-blockers/>