

30 September 2015

TO: Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2015 - OSCE
 FROM: The Rev. Mario J Bergner, Redeemed Lives, PO Box 451, Ipswich, MA 01938, www.redeemedlives.org
 Priest of the Anglican Diocese of Quincy, Illinois, the Anglican Church in America
 REGARDING: Intolerance and Discrimination Against the Christian's Right to Self Emancipation

WORKING SESSION 15: Monday, 30 September 2015, 3-6pm

Fundamental Freedoms II (continued), including: Freedom of Thought, Conscience, Religion or Belief

Central Recommendation: I am requesting the participating States of the OSCE acknowledge that some Christians with unwanted sexual attractions are denied their fundamental right to self-emancipation, through legislation that blocks acting on the convictions of their religious beliefs and conscience. These Christians –

- Have the fundamental freedom to the right to self-emancipation from unwanted sexual attractions of all kinds, because of the convictions of their religious beliefs and conscience that such practices are incompatible with the faith they hold.
- Freely choose to self-identify exclusively according to their Christian conscience, and do not self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) because they believe their only genuine identity is that of Christian.
- Suffer from *intolerance* when Social and Print Media assert they are living in a closet of lies, when according to their Christian belief system they are actually living in the truth of their faith.
- Are *discriminated* against when labeled as LGBT by Society and even some Christians, when they hold to the Christian conviction that human sexual behavior is a practice, not a constitutional orientation in which to invest their human identity.
- Are *discriminated* against when Governments outlaw therapies that may help them overcome their unwanted sexual attractions, when their Christian religious beliefs strongly motivate them to seek to inhibit sexual behavior outside of heterosexual marriage and to change the internal motivation that might lead them to violate the sacramental bond of Holy Matrimony, faithful Christian abstinence until marriage and the spiritual gift of life-long celibacy should they never marry.

Not everyone who experiences sexual attractions to members of the same-sex, concurrent attractions to members of both-sexes or the various attractions of transgenderism (transvestitism, heterosexual cross-dressing and transsexuality) *want* these attractions. Many Christians *choose to live in conflict with these very sexual desires* because they conflict with their religious beliefs and conscience. The societal unspoken rule is that sexual attractions classified as LGBT cannot and do not change is challenged even by some LGBT academicians (see Dr. Lisa Diamond's interview at <http://www.lgbtscience.org/lisa-diamond/>). Moreover, all religious people who believe the moral value of LGBT related sexual practices are incongruent with their faiths – Christianity, Judaism and Islam– are considered to be haters. Some people of faith are haters. But some are not. Christians, like myself, who have experienced some of these sexual attractions as unwanted are not haters. We simply hold to the Christian conviction that to act on these sexual feelings is not an expression of freedom. Still, we are told by many in society, many governments and even some fellow Christians, these sexual feelings are constitutive of “*who we are.*” We are publicly labeled as living “*a lie*” and “*in a closet.*” It is hate speech to categorize another person's religious choices to not act out on socially accepted sexual expressions as living a “*closeted lie.*” This is exemplified in an article published in the New York Times Magazine, *Living the Good Lie: Should therapists help God-fearing people stay in the closet?* (16 June 2011). The title itself is saying God-fearing people who do not live out their homosexuality are living a lie. Nearly all the persons featured in this article seeking therapy are Christians with unwanted same-sex attractions. But the reasons these attractions are unwanted are never explained. Allow me to give you two. First, LGBT behavior is not considered a freedom by many

Christians. The sexual impulses constitutive of LGBT sexualities are, for many Christians, something to be freed from, not something to be freed for. Second, Christianity promises we are freed for something. But, the journalist never indicates what feature of a Christian conscience might cause someone to believe freedom is found by inhibiting and resisting LGBT sexual feelings. Never are the Christian virtues of faith, hope and love mentioned as possible *positive motivating* reasons for seeking such change. That is the second reason, namely, we are freed through faith, hope and love for a new identity in Christ. Faith in God does indeed give many Christians the future hope for heterosexual marriage and the making of a home, with Christmas mornings filled with the sounds of screaming children. Until two Christians are brought together by God into Holy Matrimony, they are empowered to live as faithful Christians in abstinence or may even receive the spiritual gift of life-long celibacy should they never marry. Christians find freedom by faith in and loving the message of Salvation found in the Holy Scripture. The promising hope of eternal life, and reunion with loved ones now departed, brings a freedom from the hope of death. Denis Flanigan, a self-identified gay therapist interviewed in the NYT article, answers yes to question posed in the title. "I'm a very strong believer in people's rights." Mr. Flanigan counsels Christian men with unwanted same-sex attractions and helps them to remain faithful husbands in their heterosexual marriages. Still, he labels them as gay and as in the closet.

For the last thirty years, I have known and helped hundreds of Christians, who like myself, found motivation from our faith in Jesus Christ to seek freedom from a gay self-identification and freedom to identify as simply a Christian. We are first and foremost, persons created according the Image of God (see Genesis 1:26) and for whom becoming like Jesus is our destiny (see 1 John 3:2-3). On my website, <http://www.redeemedlives.org/books> you can find twelve translations of my book, *Setting Love In Order*, which documents the early years of my journey. On the website, free translations of the French, Italian, Portuguese and Russian editions are available as PDF files. The Christian faith, coupled with hope and love, effected a change in which I found freedom to self-identify as a Christian man. Then I became a Christian priest, then I became a Christian husband and then I became a Christian father of five children. These are not things I sought, these are new features of my personhood that God worked in me that today are constitutive of who I am. I am a Christian. I am a priest. I am a husband. I am a father.

The Christian freedom to leave behind a gay self-identification for a Christian identification, was not merely an act of my will. Actually, I resisted leaving behind my gay-identity as it gave me a place of belonging in a community of friends and colleagues I dearly loved. But, through my relationship with Jesus Christ, I was drawn into a new, unexpected change in identity. This new identity was jump-started when the divine power of Christ descended into me at a Church service thirty years ago. At that moment, there was a mobilizing of the spiritual power of my baptism and from that day forward I knew God's presence with me, and within me, in times of weakness (see 2 Corinthians 12:9). Suddenly, my pervious identity as a gay-man was no longer a non-negotiable feature of my personhood. I became open to something new, something I never expected. The previous same-sex attractions I once embraced as something I liked and sought to satisfy, became something I still liked, but no longer wanted to satisfy. Since then, when I face times in the wilderness of temptation, I do as Jesus did (see Matthew 14:1-11). I rely on my relationship with God the Father and my knowledge of the Holy Scripture. You can only be tempted by something you like. After all, who ever heard of being tempted to jab yourself in the eye with a pick-axe? The rewards from such arduous times are a deeper identification with Jesus, self-respect and proof to the power of love. The love in God's embrace, the love in my marriage and the love for my children consistently abduct me in my times of struggle, empowering me to move forward. None of what divine and human love has worked in my life could be accomplished by the human will. It is all

the result of living in the freedom of my Christian conscience shaped by Christian thoughts and belief, and the power of God's love.

- To the Social Media, visually or in print, to refer to people like me as living in a closet of lies is hateful – you are intolerant of who I am as a Christian.
- To Governments trying to outlaw all psychological therapies that help people like me overcome unwanted same-sex attractions – you are intolerant and by legislating the outlawing of psychological therapies that help people overcome unwanted same-sex attractions, you discriminate against my fundamental human right to self-emancipation.
- To those Christians who refer to people like me as non-practicing Gay Christians – you are intolerant, and need a basic course in Christian anthropology. You cannot modify being a Christian person with any word that cannot also be applied to the humanity and personhood of Jesus Christ.