

CULTURE, *et cetera*

Movement puts major focus on changing homosexuals

By Larry Witham
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

A gathering of Transformation Ex-Gay Ministries tomorrow in Falls Church will be small compared with the numbers involved in the American sexual revolution, but its topic is no less explosive.

Former homosexuals will talk about how they were "healed" by counseling, behavior changes — and religious awakening.

The group, one of about 200 such ministries in the nation, is the Washington chapter of Exodus International, the largest umbrella group in the movement.

"This is growing rapidly to be a worldwide ministry," said Transformation director and former homosexual Anthony Falzarano, whose offices are in the District. "What Alcoholics Anonymous is to the alcoholic, Exodus will be to the homosexual."

Whatever the group's enthusiasm, its programs and theories are pitted against an establishment much larger than itself.

The idea of "reparative therapy" or spiritual "healing" has been rejected by committees of the nation's two associations of psychologists and psychiatrists and condemned by homosexual-rights advocates.

The daylong conference at Falls Church Episcopal Church weighs into the "nature vs. nurture" debate on whether genetics or experience shape sexuality and pits the two high priests of the West — the minister and psychiatrist — against each other.

"Ex-gay ministry merges Christian life with the psychological," Mr. Falzarano said. "We don't drag anyone in here, but our phone rings off the hook."

Homosexual-rights groups and some professional clinicians have called the trend quackery.

"These quacks and their so-called therapy are only making an impact on the vulnerable people," said Douglas Hattaway, spokesman for the Human Rights Campaign Fund, a large gay-rights

Professionals reject claims of 'healing'

organization.

Bryant L. Welch, a committee head for the American Psychological Association, said at a 1990 gay-rights news conference that "homosexuality is neither mental illness nor moral depravity."

He added: "Nor is homosexuality a matter of individual choice. Research suggests that the homosexual orientation is in place very early on in the life cycle, possibly even before birth."

The American Psychiatric Association fact sheet states: "There

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is no published scientific evidence supporting the efficacy of 'reparative therapy' as a treatment to change one's sexual orientation."

Mr. Falzarano and others say these statements come from small committees, often under pressure from lobbies or homosexuals in the profession.

But a 1979 American Psychiatric Association survey found that 69 percent of psychiatrists viewed homosexuality as a disorder, according to the book "Homosexuality and American Psychiatry."

When 207 psychologists were asked in a recent Research Corp. survey whether homosexuality could be changed, 53 percent said yes, 25 percent said "not sure" and 22 percent said no.

The debate over changing homosexuality gained prominence with the gay-rights movement.

In 1973, an American Psychiatric Association committee deleted homosexuality from its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).

The category of "ego dystonic homosexuality," or feeling conflict with one's same-sex attraction, was deleted from the DSM in 1987.

"Homosexuality is an arrested emotional development from failure to bond with the same-sex parent figure," said David Forster, a former homosexual and Hollywood actor who directs Mastering Life Ministries in Nashville, Tenn.

Mr. Forster, a speaker tomorrow, said this need for same-sex love can make young people vulnerable to homosexual abuse by adults.

"The homosexual is looking for the love of his father," he said. "You could get that healing through therapy, but it's much tougher. We would add the power of God."

After more than a decade of homosexual living and prostitution in Hollywood, he said, "I was healed with a supernatural bonding with God the Father."

The secular school of therapy is called "Aesthetic Realism," which holds that homosexuality arises from a learned fear or hate of the opposite sex.

But it is the religious approach that is growing.

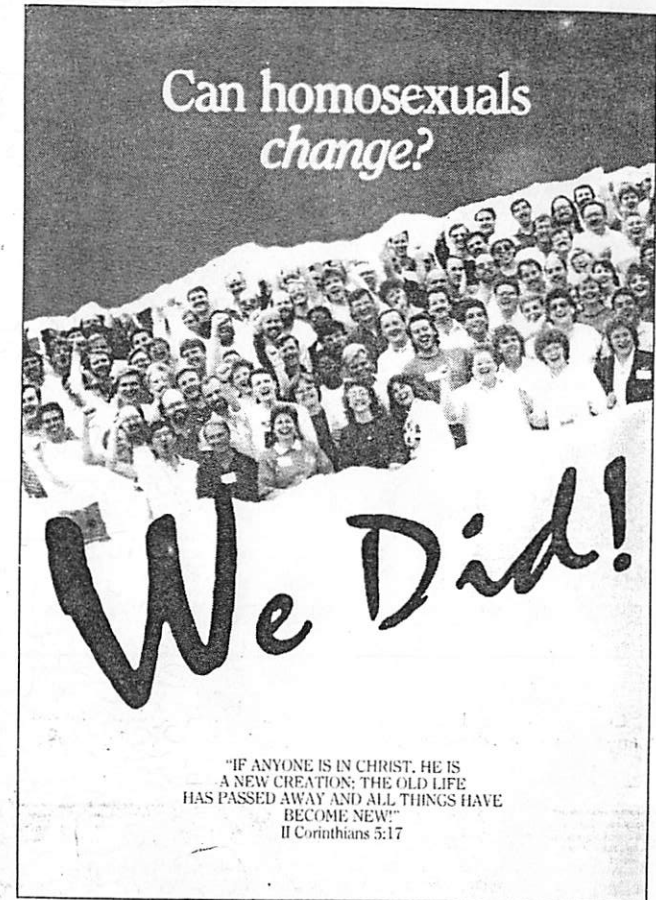
"If there's a non-religious movement it's less visible than the ministries," said Joe Dallas of Genesis Counseling in Orange, Calif.

That's probably because, he added, religion takes beliefs seriously, whereas psychology looks at behavior or biology. "It's a person's world view that shapes their sexuality in my view," Mr. Dallas said.

He said the "ego-dystonic" distinction was helpful because it clinically allowed persons to reject or accept their homosexual behavior on the grounds of beliefs. "It allowed mutual respect," he said.

All of this puts reparative therapy on the nurture side of the nature-nurture debate.

"When we hear the other side we can make a choice," said Marjorie Hopper, 63, a former lesbian who



"IF ANYONE IS IN CHRIST, HE IS A NEW CREATION; THE OLD LIFE HAS PASSED AWAY AND ALL THINGS HAVE BECOME NEW!"
II Corinthians 5:17

This poster of Exodus International is adamant in its assertion that homosexuals can — and should — change their sexual orientation.

heads Another Chance Ministry in Vancouver, British Columbia. "Now I've made a choice."

Miss Hopper, also a speaker tomorrow, was close to having surgery to become a man after 30 years of lesbian life.

Judith Reisman, a researcher in the field of sexual abuse, said that homosexual media can persuade people to choose homosexuality.

"What you see helps create who you are," Mrs. Reisman said.

She will present to tomorrow's conference her study of "in search of" ads in the Advocate, the nation's upscale gay magazine, compared with Washingtonian magazine ads for the same years, 1988-1992.

"The data on the Advocate confirms what its reader will accept what they will tolerate," she said.

She found that while 86 percent of white males in Washingtonian ads used language seeking a long-term heterosexual relationship, only 2 percent of Advocate ads for same-sex relations implied a long-term commitment.

"It disproves the argument that homosexuals are no different than heterosexuals," she said.