



Ci scrivono

## Cattolici e psiche

A proposito dell'articolo "Cattolici e Psiche" di Tonino Cantelmi, comparso sul n. 2/08 di Psichiatri Oggi, riceviamo questa precisazione.

**G**entile Direttore, ho letto con molto interesse l'articolo di Tonino Cantelmi, "Cattolici e psiche", pubblicato su *Psichiatri Oggi* di aprile 2008, con il quale sembra riaccendersi un dibattito sorto alla fine del 2007, che credevo ormai sopito.

Con la presente intendo esporre alcune considerazioni in relazione al brano in cui si fa riferimento all'operato mio e dell'ordine che rappresento.

Mi dispiace, infatti, che le dichiarazioni da me rese nell'intervista rilasciata a *Liberazione* siano state "manomesse", inducendo il lettore ad una erronea interpretazione, anche attraverso l'uso

malizioso dei puntini di sospensione. Mi limito qui a contestare solo l'affermazione che l'Ordine abbia assunto una "posizione così forte minacciando indagini e provvedimenti". Rispondendo al giornalista che domandava "C'è chi sta chiedendo interrogazioni parlamentari per chiedere l'espulsione degli psicologi coinvolti. Come ordine farete qualcosa?" ho semplicemente affermato che l'Ordine avrebbe accertato "eventuali responsabilità di colleghi psicologi", adempimento cui non può sottrarsi, essendovi tenuto ai sensi degli articoli 12 e 27 Legge 56/1989. D'altra parte, le mie dichiarazioni non si riferivano certo a persone determinate, bensì solo all'eventualità che vi fossero psicologi coinvolti nella vicenda. A dimostrazione di ciò, mi preme sottolineare, peraltro, che l'unica istruttoria disciplinare aperta a carico di un iscritto all'Ordine degli Psicologi del Lazio si è conclusa con una decisione di non luogo a procedere.

Vorrei inoltre fare alcune precisazioni in merito all'asserzione del dottor Cantelmi relativa al documento *Position Statement on Therapies Focused on Attempts to Change Sexual Orientation - Reparative or Conversion Therapies* dell'American Psychiatric Association. Nell'articolo si afferma che io sarei "perlomeno non informata correttamente" sul citato documento, che sapevo benissimo provenire solo dall'American Psychiatric Association, ma i cui principi generali sono espressi anche in una risoluzione dell'American Psychological Association (*Resolution on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation*, peraltro successivamente menzionata dallo stesso Cantelmi).

In relazione al *Position Statement*, Cantelmi asserisce che "in tale documento non è presente un disconoscimento in assoluto dei trattamenti volti a modificare l'orientamento sessuale del paziente, ma solo di quelli che partono da-

gli assunti che l'omosessualità sia per sé un problema e che il paziente, a priori, debba modificare il proprio orientamento omosessuale", omettendo però di riportare alcuni brani del medesimo documento da cui si evince la netta condanna delle terapie "riparative".

Per completezza ed onestà intellettuale, riterrei opportuno che *Psichiatri Oggi* riportasse il testo completo del *Position Statement*, in cui, come ho accennato, si afferma, tra l'altro, che le terapie riparative contrastano con la posizione scientifica espressa dall'American Psychiatric Association sin dal 1973 e che le modalità psicoterapeutiche volte a "riparare" l'omosessualità sono basate su teorie la cui validità scientifica è opinabile.

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*Position Statement on Therapies Focused on Attempts to Change Sexual Orientation (Reparative or Conversion)*  
segue a pag. 13



## Ci scrivono

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segue da pag. 12

*Therapies*) - Approved by the Board of Trustees March 2000 -  
Approved by the Assembly May 2000

#### Preamble

In December of 1998, the Board of Trustees issued a position statement that the American Psychiatric Association opposes any psychiatric treatment, such as "reparative" or conversion therapy, which is based upon the assumption that homosexuality per se is a mental disorder or based upon the a priori assumption that a patient should change his/her sexual homosexual orientation (Appendix 1). In doing so, the APA joined many other professional organizations that either oppose or are critical of "reparative" therapies, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, The American Counseling Association, and the National Association of Social Workers (1).

The following Position Statement expands and elaborates upon the statement issued by the Board of Trustees in order to further address public and professional concerns about therapies designed to change a patient's sexual orientation or sexual identity. It augments rather than replaces the 1998 statement.

#### Position Statement

In the past, defining homosexuality as an illness buttressed society's moral opprobrium of same-sex relationships (2). In the current social climate, claiming homosexuality is a mental disorder stems from efforts to discredit the growing social acceptance of homosexuality as a normal variant of human sexuality. Consequently, the issue of changing sexual orientation has become highly politicized. The integration of gays and lesbians into the mainstream of American society is opposed by those who fear that such integration is morally wrong and harmful to the social fabric. The political and moral debates surrounding this issue have obscured the scientific data by calling into question the motives and even the character of individuals on both sides of the issue. This document attempts to shed some light on this heated issue.

The validity, efficacy and ethics of clinical attempts to change an individual's

sexual orientation have been challenged (3-6). To date, there are no scientifically rigorous outcome studies to determine either the actual efficacy or harm of "reparative" treatments. There is sparse scientific data about selection criteria, risks versus benefits of the treatment, and long-term outcomes of "reparative" therapies. The literature consists of anecdotal reports of individuals who have claimed to change, people who claim that attempts to change were harmful to them, and others who claimed to have changed and then later recanted those Claims (7-9). Although there is little scientific data about the patients who have undergone these treatments, it is still possible to evaluate the theories, which rationalize the conduct of "reparative" and conversion therapies. Firstly, they are at odds with the scientific position of the American Psychiatric Association which has maintained, since 1973, that homosexuality per se, is not a mental disorder. The theories of "reparative" therapists define homosexuality as either a developmental arrest, a severe form of psychopathology, or some combination of both (10-15). In recent years, noted practitioners of "reparative" therapy have openly integrated older psychoanalytic theories that pathologize homosexuality with Traditional religious beliefs condemning homosexuality (16-18).

The earliest scientific criticisms of the early theories and religious beliefs informing "reparative" or conversion therapies came primarily from sexuality researchers (19-27). Later, criticisms emerged from psychoanalytic sources as well (28-39). There has also been an increasing body of religious thought arguing against traditional, biblical interpretations that condemn homosexuality and which underlie religious types of "reparative" therapy (40-46).

#### Recommendations

1. APA affirms its 1973 position that homosexuality per se is not a diagnosable mental disorder. Recent publicized efforts to repathologize homosexuality by claiming that it can be cured are often guided not by rigorous scientific or psychiatric research, but sometimes by religious and political forces opposed to full civil rights for gay men and lesbians. APA recommends that the APA

respond quickly and appropriately as a scientific organization when claims that homosexuality is a curable illness are made by political or religious groups.

2. As a general principle, a therapist should not determine the goal of treatment either coercively or through subtle influence. Psychotherapeutic modalities to convert or "repair" homosexuality are based on developmental theories whose scientific validity is questionable. Furthermore, anecdotal reports of "cures" are counterbalanced by anecdotal claims of psychological harm. In the last four decades, "reparative" therapists have not produced any rigorous scientific research to substantiate their claims of cure. Until there is such research available, APA recommends that ethical practitioners refrain from attempts to change individuals' sexual orientation, keeping in mind the medical dictum to first, do no harm.

3. The "reparative" therapy literature uses theories that make it difficult to formulate scientific selection criteria for their treatment modality. This literature not only ignores the impact of social stigma in motivating efforts to cure homosexuality; it is a literature that actively stigmatizes homosexuality as well. "Reparative" therapy literature also tends to overstate the treatment's accomplishments while neglecting any potential risks to patients. APA encourages and supports research in the NIMH and the academic research community to further determine "reparative" therapy's risks versus its benefits. Ringraziando sin d'ora per l'attenzione che *Psichiatri Oggi* vorrà dare a questa mia segnalazione, porgo i migliori saluti.

Il Presidente dell'Ordine  
degli Psicologi del Lazio  
Dot.ssa Mariadori Zaccaria