

X Factor Malta silences ex-gay singer's Christian testimony

Dr. Carys Moseley, Public Policy Researcher
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An X factor auditionee's testimony of finding God and leaving homosexuality was taken down from YouTube and Facebook this week. Carys Moseley comments on the wider implications this could have on society.

This week a young Christian ex-gay man called Matthew Grech auditioned on the singing contest X Factor Malta in an a cappella group, singing a version of the chorus of 'Where Is the Love' by Black Eyed Peas. What happened next is very revealing.

Ex-gay man's testimony of following Jesus Christ

According to English-language news site Lovin Malta, in an X Factor pre-audition interview, Matthew Grech said that he used to live as a gay man until he became a Christian and followed Jesus Christ¹. He also said that he believed any 'marriage' other than between one man and one woman is a sin. This made some LGBT activists and allies who were viewing the show very angry. The news spread from Malta to the gay press in Italy² and to Pink News in London³.

Facebook and YouTube enforce gay censorship

According to the Maltese press, LGBT activists and their allies managed to get the video clip of the interview taken off Facebook and YouTube within minutes. They also slammed the judges of X Factor Malta for not criticising Matthew Grech's comments about homosexuality and God's pattern for marriage. It appears that they expected music judges to judge the beliefs and attitudes of contestants as well. The excuse they had for this stance was that the television station that broadcasts X Factor, TVM, is state-funded, and that as such the interview amounted to advertisement for 'gay conversion therapy', which has been illegal in Malta since 2016.

Maltese Equality Minister admits social attitudes to homosexuality aren't liberal

Maltese Equality Minister, Helena Dalli, criticised the TVM station for allowing the interview with Grech to be broadcast⁴. Responding to a question by Byron Camilleri, Labour Party Whip, she said:

"That interview should never have been aired in the first place. It did untold damage to our efforts to change social attitudes towards minorities, including LGBTQ youths. Gay youths don't need forgiveness or healing, they need understanding."

The truth is that this is a tacit admission that social attitudes to homosexuality in Malta perhaps aren't as liberal and affirming across the board as the government and gay activists would like them to be. The Minister's comments seem to reveal the real reason for the anti-therapy law – to try to get people to change their views on homosexuality. Clearly not everybody is on board with this.

Questions about media censorship

It is worth asking a few questions about types of media censorship here. The clip of the singing audition itself is still on YouTube⁵. It is the pre-audition interview that isn't. This means that ex-gays like Matthew Grech can sing in public (for now) but they mustn't tell their testimonies in the mainstream media as LGBT voices will ensure they are censored.

It is also important to say that because the interview clip was pulled from social media platforms, it is nearly impossible for anybody to conduct an assessment of the interview and the testimony within it. We cannot tell whether or not Matthew Grech initiated talk about the nature of marriage or whether this came about in response to a question by the panel. This is a violation of the freedom of expression not only of Matthew Grech but of the panelists themselves and of viewers, because freedom of expression under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights includes the freedom to receive and impart information⁶.

It would be easy to think that this censorship only happened because the interview was broadcast on national Maltese television (i.e. mainstream media). It would also be easy to assume that if Christians stopped giving testimonies in mainstream media, gay activists opposed to the Christian faith would stop censoring them. This attitude is incredibly naive and completely misguided. Opponents of the ex-gay movement will never stop this kind of intimidation tactic and censorship. Given that they managed to get the interview clip deleted from the major social media platforms

(Facebook and YouTube), we should assume that they will come for Christian media companies next, as they also use social media platforms. Are we prepared for this?

Therapy ban laws entail media blackout of ex-gays

The whole fiasco around Matthew Grech's interview raises the question as to whether the ex-gay movement is being suppressed in the western world. Malta was the first country to ban therapy for unwanted same-sex attraction and gender identity, and its law did not have a lower age limit. The law prohibited advertising of such therapy and offering it. The fact that the press report on Matthew Grech suggests he was not actually advertising any type of therapy shows how distorted the media treatment of this topic has become. It seems that the meaning of 'advertising' has been stretched to mean simply talking out loud about leaving homosexuality behind. In addition, the real coded meaning of the term 'conversion therapy' here appears to be 'choosing to leave homosexuality regardless of whether therapy is involved in the process'!

Unfortunately for the censors it seems that individuals are still leaving the gay lifestyle. The fact is that not everybody who leaves the gay lifestyle chooses to see a counsellor or a therapist as part of that journey. So we have to ask, is it just therapy that gay activists want to ban, or is it evidence of people leaving the gay lifestyle? It seems the latter. Censoring the mere mention by someone that they themselves are ex-gay amounts to a total media blackout on the very existence of ex-gays. It is as if the powers that be really do not want people to be able to leave the gay lifestyle at all.

It is fair to say that this is a deliberate attempt to push the ex-gay movement, including and especially Christian ex-gays, underground across the western world. Everybody is forced to pretend that the Emperor has new clothes and that ex-gays don't exist.

How should Christians deal with attacks on the ex-gay movement

First of all we should recognise that the aim of therapy ban bills across the world is to destroy the ex-gay movement by pushing it underground so that it has no freedom of speech or assembly whatsoever. Anybody who denies this should heed the warning of Peter Lynas from the Evangelical Alliance in

Northern Ireland. Peter Lynas participated in a television debate with Patrick Strudwick, the gay activist and journalist who infiltrated a conference on therapy for unwanted same-sex attraction, going undercover and entrapping Christian counsellor Lesley Pilkington by pretending to be a client with unwanted same-sex attraction⁷. Lynas recalls how Patrick Strudwick responded to the idea that Christian belief is in direct opposition with same-sex sexual behaviour by saying that he wanted Christianity to come to an end⁸.

Christians must take seriously the fact that the UK government says it intends to ban therapy for unwanted same-sex attraction and gender confusion⁹. Perhaps your church does not do or support this type of pastoral work, but don't presume that other kinds of Christian pastoral work will be left unaffected by a therapy ban. Once therapy bans are in place they form a precedent for bans to be pushed through for other types of pastoral care. This is partly because people involved in pastoral care may also be involved in counselling or psychotherapy, as well as theologically-rooted care. Opponents of the Christian faith may well start looking for ways to ban types of pastoral care which they do not like. We must recall the fact that true Christianity entails discipleship and pastoral care. It means reaching out to people of all kinds and taking risks in dealing with problems that can be of great profundity and enormous complexity. It may frequently entail being misunderstood by people both within the church and in the wider world.

¹ <https://lovinmalta.com/opinion/reactions/x-factor-contestants-audition-pulled-from-facebook-and-youtube-after-gay-conversion-backlash/>

² <https://www.gay.it/x-factor-malta-matthew-fech-ex-gay>

³ <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/10/22/x-factor-malta-criticised-ex-gay/>

⁴ <https://lovinmalta.com/news/equality-minister-hits-out-at-tvm-for-allowing-gay-conversion-comments-on-x-factor-malta/>

⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_OPUQuQeTo&app=desktop

⁶ <https://christianconcern.com/comment/ten-reasons-not-to-restrict-same-sex-attraction-therapy/>

⁷ <https://archive.christianconcern.com/our-concerns/sexual-orientation/christian-counsellor-targeted-by-homosexual-activist>

⁸ <https://www.eauk.org/culture/reviews/undivided-thoughts-on-vicky-beechings-new-book.cfm>

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-government-action-plan-pledges-to-improve-the-lives-of-lgbt-people--2>