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# N EWS LETTER

*September 2016*

*The Pastor between a Rock and a Hard Place*

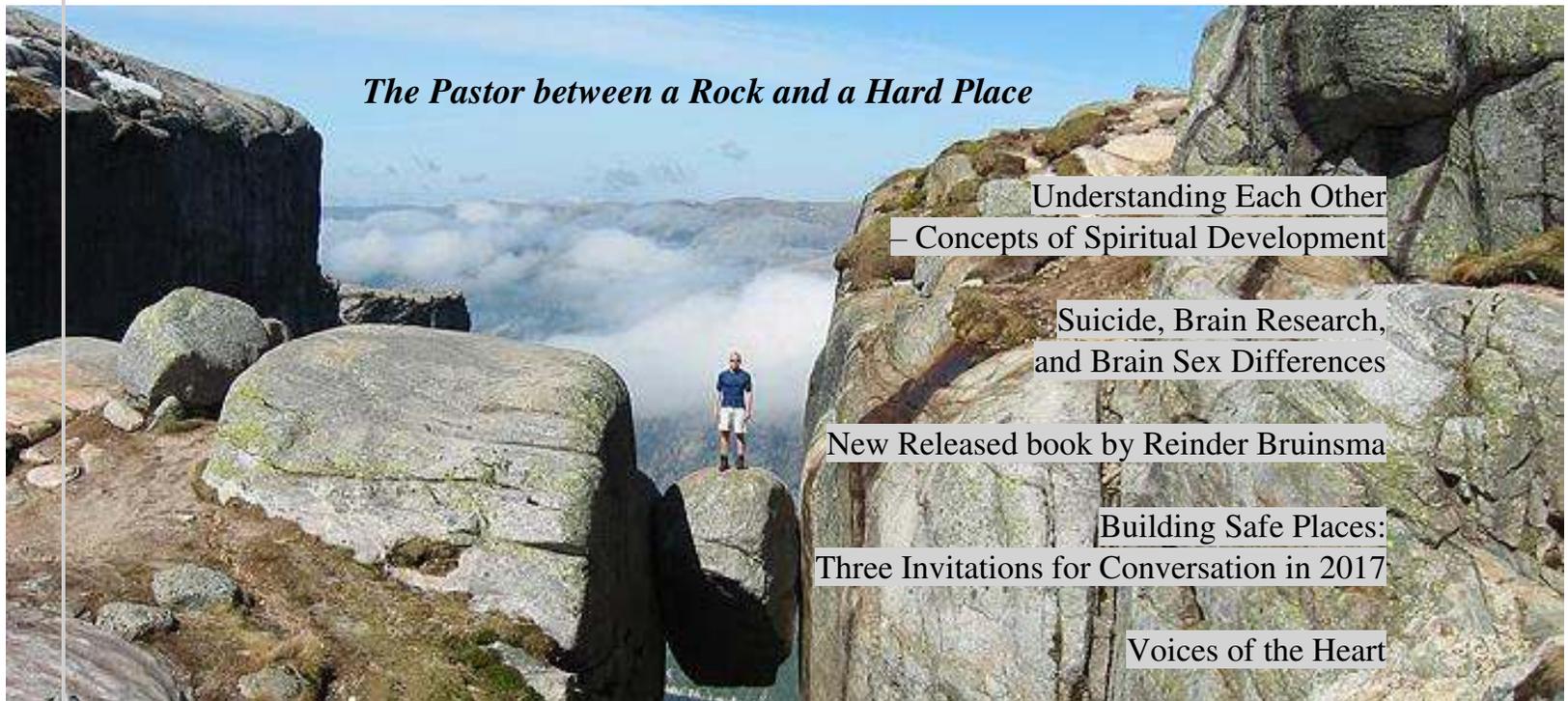
Understanding Each Other  
– Concepts of Spiritual Development

Suicide, Brain Research,  
and Brain Sex Differences

New Released book by Reinder Bruinsma

Building Safe Places:  
Three Invitations for Conversation in 2017

Voices of the Heart



Dear Colleagues,

September 2016

In each issue, I want to begin my note by letting you know we are thinking of this group of readers, hoping that your summer or winter has gone well and wishing you blessings for the next days of your work. In each issue, I want to write something that feels less formulaic, more creative, and more personal. As I sit at my computer, nothing else comes to me by way of greeting. I think it's because these simple wishes are really what our team feels. If we are going to strengthen a project that is focused on "Building Safe Places—for Everyone," this process includes caring about not just a group that we are trying to reach, with whom we would like to converse, whose members we'd like to meet at a training session, but about individuals whose thoughts and journeys matter. Our focus is about creating a conversation where a variety of respectful voices, opinions, and understandings are valued and included. So, yes, we hope that each of you has had some time to rest and to think, to be with people who feed your soul, to laugh, and to have support through the difficult times.

This month, in **Visions of God and the Church**, Gerard Frenk shares some ideas of what it is like to stand in the midst of an ideological cacophony and listen to the single voice of someone who wants to speak their truth and their heart. In the second article for **Visions**, Anja and Jan Rokus Belder begin a seven-part series on spiritual development. Often, when we plan specific training for our Building Safe Places workshops, we develop a series of articles in advance to give all participants a similar foundation. The 2017 Building Safe Places meetings will focus on building bridges inside Adventist congregations and communities using an understanding of individual and corporate stages of moral development.

The first **Research** report is about a study done in Israel on adolescents and suicidality. The researchers noted the higher rate self-harm by LGBTI teens from religious families. The second part of **Research** is our continuing series of brain-related studies.

We have two different kinds of **Resources** this month. We're delighted to be sharing Reinder Bruinsma's announcement of his new book *Facing Doubt: A Book for*

*Adventist Believers on the Margins.* We're also announcing and describing our 2017 Building Safe Places—for Everyone training in the United States and Europe.

For the first time in **Voices of the Heart**, we are including an interview with an Islamic LGBTI imam. We also included a short thought on the shooting in the Pulse nightclub, written by the Adventist mother of a gay son, and the continuing series by Jerry McKay of his journey toward integrating his sexuality and his spirituality.

As usual, we've included links to make it easier for you to access the article you want and way at the end of the article that you can send comments to the writers.

And as always, you are most welcome to share this newsletter with anyone you think would enjoy and/or benefit from it. If you have questions or comments, we look forward to hearing from you. Our address is [info@buildingsafeplaces.org](mailto:info@buildingsafeplaces.org).

We wish you many blessings,

*Catherine Taylor and the Building Safe Places Team:*

Frieder Schmid, Ingrid Schmid, Dave Ferguson, Floyd Pönitz, and Ruud Kieboom.



We can never be the better for our religion  
if our neighbor is the worse for it.

*-Unknown*

# Content Safe Place Newsletter July 2016

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## *The Pastor between a Rock and a Hard Place*

Page 6

There are a number of certainties. In our profession, it is always good to know that there is a solid and enduring base on which you can stand.

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## *Understanding Each Other—Concepts of Spiritual Development*

Page 20

Why do I (re)act the way I do? Why do others do that differently—so many times? Why am I the way I am? These kinds of questions pop up from time to time. In the coming issues of Safe Places, we will look at spiritual development from the perspective of Kohlberg's individual moral development stages. For the interested reader, we point to the ideas of spiral dynamics as an extra model to look at developments. We will start each article with a general summary of the stage discussed, then we will look at Biblical examples of behavior that reflects that particular stage, and finally we will see how this may help us understand the church.

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## *Recent Research*

Page 24

*Suicide:* A new study presented at the European Symposium of Suicide and Suicidal Behavior in Tel Aviv examines, for the first time, the suicide rates among different segments of Israeli youth.

*Brain research:* Brain imaging: Gay males and women responded to two odors (thought to be involved in sexual arousal) in the same way. Heterosexual males responded differently.

*Brain Sex Differences:* Research has discovered more about how male versus female brain differentiation occurs.

## *Resources*

Page 28

*Facing Doubt: A Book for Adventist Believers 'On the Margins'*, a just released new book by Pastor Reinder Bruinsma

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Three Invitations for Conversation in 2017

Schedule and information about upcoming meetings in the USA and Europe.

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## Content Safe Place Newsletter July 2016

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### *Personal Stories*

Page 33

*Homosexual Imam: “My call to make Islam more progressive”* (Page 33)

As a homosexual imam, Ludovic-Mohamed Zahed has broken many taboos. He was the first French Muslim that married another man (in South Africa). In 2012 he established an “inclusive” mosque in Paris where LGBTs are as welcome as any other, the first in Europe. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of August, he sailed on the World Religion Boat during Gay Pride in Amsterdam. As a homosexual imam, he lives in a world of two apparent paradoxes that often clash. We ask him about his thoughts and ideas.

*When Gay Children Die* (Page 38)

A reaction by Carrol Grady (*Someone To Talk To*) on the Orlando massacre.

*My Journey (V); Back in Canada and Alberta Bound* (Page 39)

The return to Canada hit me hard. A lot of energy is spent preparing people for the shock of a new culture, but little is spent on preparing them for the return home. I left Tokyo late one evening, and I was back at my parents’ home the next and in my old bed the next night. That first morning, I felt like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz waking from a fantastic dream. Everything was as it had always been, yet everything seemed totally different. Of course, I was the one who had changed. It was unsettling to realize that no one would ever understand what the last year had been like. All the letters I had sent home couldn't capture my experience. How could they? All I could do was to try to pick up where I had left off.

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## *The Pastor between a Rock and a Hard Place*



*By Gerard Frenk*

**T**here are a number of certainties. In our profession, it is always good to know that there is a solid and enduring base on which you can stand.

First: Organizations like Kinship are not going away. They will continue to question church leadership at all levels. LGBTI people are everywhere. Particularly in the developed countries, they are very much aware of how tradition, theology, policy, and church politics work. They are aware of vested interest, pressure groups, the

power of numbers, and money. They will not simply disappear because of a statement and they will not acknowledge what, in their view, are inadequate answers to the questions they ask of the church. They are there. They consider themselves Adventist and want to be recognized as such.

Second: “Alphabet people” are not alone in their questioning and demand. Sections of the church and in our own congregations live in (post)modernity/metamodernity. That is irreversible. They are no longer prepared to submit unconditionally to the views of the larger body. They refuse the yoke of church policy and rigid dogma. They are part of the church on their own terms and consider their view on theology and membership to be a legitimate part of the conversation.

Third: World leadership and large sections of the church, including members of our own congregations, consider this questioning of authority, leadership, and theology to be unacceptable. This group believes that questioners should not be considered loyal Adventists.

Fourth: It could be that you share the views of the post-/metamodern member. That need not be the case! But whether you share the views or not, you will have to function in the diversity of the church as it is. You are pastor to all members of your congregation.

A fifth certainty is that all these voices are talking at once and non-stop. Your ears are pounded by high-level administrators, church boards, influential people in your congregation, parents, friends, pro or contra movements. They all want you to embody and promote their particular view. Well now, how do you work and survive in such an environment? I have no idea! There’s no ABC, no book called *Seven Ways to Pastoral Peace!* We all operate in unique settings in which the mix is different.

Knowing all this, may I offer you a sixth certainty? In such a cacophony, we run the danger of not hearing the two most important voices: our own and the voice of someone, who in the middle of all the noise, asks your attention for his or her personal story.



As far as our own voice is concerned, we may be paid by the church, but we have not surrendered our mind and our own experience of faith. As such, we are a legitimate part of the conversation and have a right to be heard, whatever our convictions. The same applies to *the other* who wants to speak. Utopian? Well, maybe; but if we surrender our voices others will presume to speak for us.

These are the certainties. There is no solid and enduring base. The church in which we now live is a cauldron, a boiling pot. And what we seem to be producing is *double, double, toil and trouble* as the witches sing in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

My central concern in what follows is the tension between the individual and the collective. There are three quite diverse components to this discussion:

- The uniqueness of the person
- Ways the church's self-image may be creating scapegoats
- A vision of an open church

### **The unique person**

**J**oachim is a member, in good and active standing, of an Adventist church in Germany. He recently attended a pastors' meeting of the North German Union Conference. It was the first time gay church members were officially invited to such an event and invited to tell their story. In his report of the meeting in the *Safe Places*

(January 2016) newsletter, he wrote:



*Lots of people have asked me if I thought the meeting was a success, if I think we have reason for hope. I answer “yes” to both questions. What stands out to me about this meeting is that the pastors asked gay and lesbian people to join them. They wanted to talk with us and ask us questions. All I have ever heard before this meeting was that church leaders wanted to talk about us but not with us. At the meeting, the pastors told me about their education and how it had not prepared them or their congregations for what to say or do when a brother or sister comes out as gay. Most “alphabet people” they met were left alone or told to go to the Bible or told God would help them if they pray.*

Joachim described a shift in mood as the meeting went on. *At the beginning, I got lots of questions. Here are some of them:*

- Can you at least try to not live your homosexuality?
- Do you want to be free from it?
- Who is to blame for your homosexuality?
- What role do you have in your partnership?
- Is healing possible if you believe and act right?
- How do you deal with the Bible texts?
- Is it not a twisted sexuality you live?
- In gay social circles, isn't the focus all on being youthful?
- Why do you live in these circles?
- Can you be happy there?

*I want to be clear that these questions were not asked to devalue or denigrate me. They were more about “This is what I have learned about homosexuality; what do you have to say about it?” But as the meeting went on, the pastors began to think so differently that I heard questions of a very different quality.*

- How can we deal with the Bible texts?
- How is your life of faith?

- What place does faith and God have in your life?
- Do you feel confirmed and strengthened by God in your life?
- What does your partnership look like?
- What would be your position in the congregation?

What Joachim experienced was a shift in the grammar of relationship. He began as an *object*, the embodiment of an abstraction called *homosexual* about which we think we know something, about which we can hold views and have convictions. This objectification is why some of the early questions were judgmental and came forth from prior conviction. Some were impertinent because of ignorance. But in the end, Joachim was telling *his* story as an independent, unique *subject*.

We know nothing of the other until he or she is prepared to tell us his or her story. The person facing me is unique and I know nothing about him or her until I have listened. *Never lose sight of the person with whom we are in pastoral contact* is the first and last rule of pastoral care. He or she is not an object of theology, psychology, church dogma, or politics; not an object I already know; not an object subordinate to church legislation. I am talking to a fellow human being, and if he or she is in any way connected to a Christian church, I am talking to a fellow believer and his name may well be Joachim: *raised up by God*.

Imagine Joachim in conversation. The pastor holds before him the church position. God created humans as male and a female. He joined them in marriage so that they might find companionship and populate the earth. That was God's ideal and goal from the beginning of creation. This is how it was and is meant to be. This is how it



shall be in the age to come. The pastor tells Joachim that the church makes a humane distinction between orientation and practice. What Joachim hears in capital letters is SIN.

The pastor is telling Joachim that he is an aberration, the result of a creation gone wrong. He is a degenerate form of human life. Joachim concludes

that he is the result of a willful, deviant choice or, at best, the result of the degeneration of creation by sin. Whichever is the case, he is not a person that fits God's ideal. When the conversation ends the pastor prays that God may give Joachim wisdom to deal with the situation and that the Spirit may grant him a peaceful heart.

Sadly, Joachim's own positive experience of an accepting God carries no weight. Such a faith can only be characterized as unbiblical, inadequate, wrong.

We might say the pastor is caught between a rock and a hard place. But that's not true. He is caught between an impersonal will and a real person. To whom should he listen? To my mind, there is only one choice that is compatible with the gospel. But I am only one voice.

#### **The once-only sacrifice**

**M**any years ago Roy Branson said that the delay of the second coming has generated two prevalent responses in the church. There is the *view* which holds that Christ's return is dependent on the gospel going to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. The second view states that God is waiting until he has a people whose faith makes them "*perfectly safe to save.*" In Branson's view, *both* approaches confuse good works with redemption. Somehow "*the church thinks that its good works achieve the salvation of the world. Too often the church regards itself as the hinge of history. It is not. The center of history is the cross and resurrection of Christ.*" (*Pilgrimage of Hope*)

Allow me to expand on this in a slightly different direction. The two views summarized by Branson are part of the church's self-image. *We are the remnant upon which God is waiting.*

There seems to be a deep-rooted fear in some circles of Adventism that as the delay of the second coming continues, this remnant called to vindicate God will be exposed as just another failing church. That fear has surfaced with some regularity for the last 160 years. I quote Branson: *Now, beginning in 1856, and reaching a peak in 1857,*

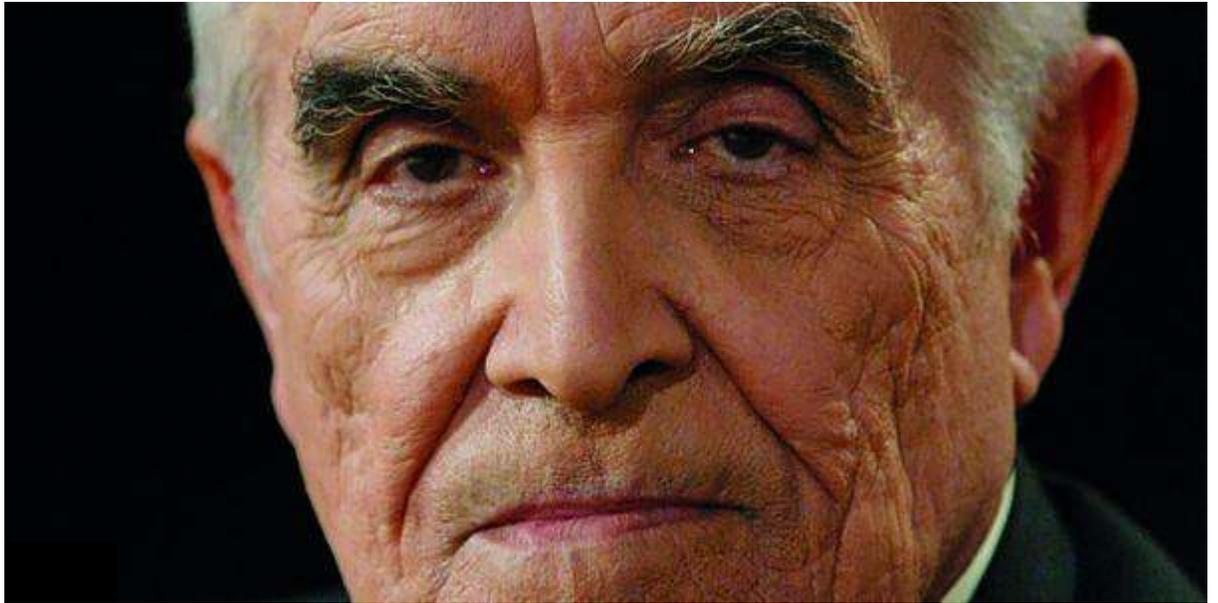
*Adventists who had accepted the sanctuary truth and the Sabbath confessed that they themselves were guilty of delaying Christ's return by slipping into a Laodicean condition. James White sounded the warning on October 16, 1856.*

The issue was raised most recently just before the 2015 GC session. For that occasion, the Revival and Reformation Committee of the GC produced a video in which it was made clear that the second coming has been delayed because the Seventh-day Adventist Church members and leaders have not surrendered fully to the leading of Jesus. As a result, the work was still not completed. In one of his published sermons, Ted Wilson asked the question *why are we still here?* He is convinced that there has to be a reason because time ought to have ended in 1844, the end point of biblical prophecies. The suggested *answer* is that we as members and leaders have failed in our task in the more than 150 years that have passed unnecessarily. It could have been otherwise. The suggested *solution* is that we lay off our Laodicean habits and humble ourselves before the Lord and buy of Him “*gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye-salve, that you may see.*”

A holy and spotless, hard-working and well-led church is apparently the precondition for the return of Christ. That places a huge burden on the community and its leaders. The phrase *fear and trembling* may well be used. I think that whenever the prospect of failing as the vindicating remnant of God raises its ugly head, it results in a renewed emphasis on sanctification and purity.

It seems to be endemic, or as we tend to say today, *it's in the genes*. The periodic stress on revival and reformation may be regarded as a recurring symptom of such a fear of failure. What is unsettling is that, with the exception of Jan Paulsen, all other church leaders in my time, starting with Robert Pierson, have been capable of narrowly defining what the sanctification of the church requires. Time and again we have heard that for the remnant to achieve its God-given goals, and for failure to be averted, it is not enough to be more zealous in prayer, more strongly committed to

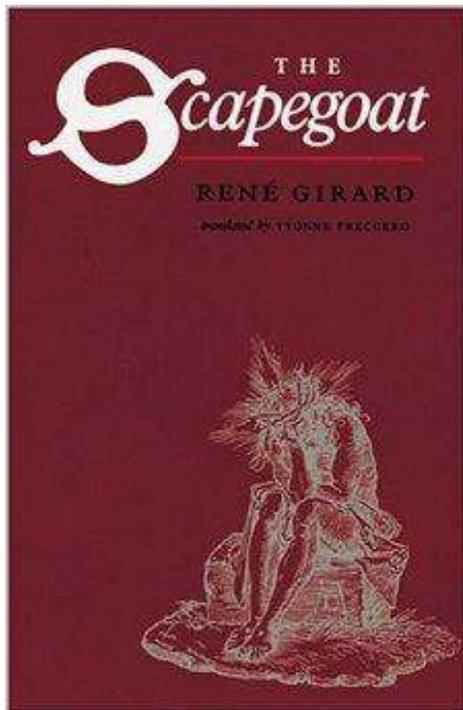
evangelism, more submissive to the leading of the Spirit. In addition, the community must ward off perceived defilement of internal origin. One of the aspects of sanctification, *separation*, is now turned inward. And thus the liberal theologian, the deviating scientists, the cultural Adventist, the straying pastor, and dare we include the gay Adventist, become suspect. The failing of the church now has a number of identifiable internal loci. All sorts of likely scapegoats appear.



Use the word *scapegoat* and someone will say René Girard. This French-born philosopher died in California on the November 4, 2015, at age 91. He spent a great deal of his life thinking about the role of sacrifice in religions and cultures. His views are not uncontested and there are legitimate questions about his conviction that the sacrificial scapegoat is the prime origin of religion and culture. That said, his insights into the reasons why we create sacrificial scapegoats to solve dangerous and threatening tensions in and between communities are helpful. More importantly, his work is a warning.

Girard believed that we learned to control internal conflict by projecting our violence outside the community onto a scapegoat. It proved so effective that we have continued to use the mechanism to control violence ever since. How? The successful use of a scapegoat depends on the community's belief that they have found the cause and cure

of their troubles in this “enemy.” The community is convinced that he is *actually* guilty of all the problems that threaten the collective. He, therefore, *deserves* expulsion, ostracism, death. The community regards itself as innocent and as acting out of necessity. Once the enemy is destroyed or expelled, the community experiences a sense of relief, calm is restored. All anger and fear have been projected outward. It is a means of pacification and unification.



When Girard published *The Scapegoat* in 1982, he had also come to the conclusion that this mechanism ought to be unthinkable in a truly Christian environment. Why? Because in the Christian story of atonement, the victim of the crowd’s violence is recognized to be *innocent*, *falsely* accused by both religious and secular authorities, and put to death in the most shameful of circumstances. Jesus is not portrayed as *the cause* of the community’s problems, but as the innocent victim of its blindness. The death of the divine scapegoat, in fact, exposes the guilt of the community. It is an act of violence in which an innocent victim is thought to be justifiably sacrificed for the greater good.

From this perspective, if a *Christian* community makes use of the scapegoat mechanism, it has failed to realize that its guilt cannot be expiated by the death or expulsion of a new and self-chosen victim. The only truly Christian reaction is confession. We are ourselves the cause of the tensions we are projecting, the fears that grip us. The only true solution lies in our turning to God, the *God* who has willingly become our innocent victim and thereby shown us we must not, need not create new scapegoats. The scapegoat mechanism is exposed as idolatrous because the god to whom it is sacrificed is one of our own making: our well-hidden self-

interest, our ideologies, our western values, our national identity. We should, therefore, speak of *extreme* irony when the scapegoat mechanism is used within the church to defend our view of God, our theology, our self-perceived need for purity. In Girard's view, we then empty the cross of its true meaning.

It is a truly frightening mechanism because we recognize it all around us but seldom in ourselves. This blind spot puts us at risk of harming an innocent person or group without ever realizing it. A heightened sensitivity to the danger of the scapegoat mechanism might help us as a community to focus on a form of sanctification characterized by justice and equity. In this type of community, the "other" is no longer a competitor, a danger or an object, but someone to whom we may be a true neighbor.

Such a heightened sensitivity might also enable us to critically evaluate the effects of our dogmas. How many of our fundamental beliefs are actually focused on community instead of separation? How much of our theology, church literature, apologetics, and evangelism is based on contrast, antinomy, and dilemma—us versus them? Are we *truly* interested in another person's faith? Are we willing to actually expose our theology to another's critical gaze? These questions are central to an interesting article by Mark Carr, "The Slow Death of Adventist Sectarianism," published on the *Spectrum* website in June 2016.



Is there a church model in which the danger of scapegoating is likely to be avoided or at least diminished? Let me share with you the ecclesiological utopia of Gerhard Schneider.

### **A vision of the church**

**I**n our western environment, many members regard the church as a communicative web in which they voluntarily participate. They tend to remain in the church as long as there is a group of like-minded individuals with whom they can identify.

Identification with a central authority is minimal and in fact comes under further

tension when leaders appeal to authority, be it bureaucratic or theological. It is a phenomenon which has been with us for many decades. One of the practical theologians who was aware of it at an early stage was Schneider. His concern was primarily the qualitative growth of the church (member).

He looked at *Gemeindebildung* as something that *concerned empirically existing, distinctive individuals.*” I translate, “Real people! The goal is not primarily the growth or the continued existence of the church as a corporate body, but the growth of individual members. Growth, he argues, consists in the creation of authentic relationships with others. It is in relationships that one’s own humanity may be experienced and developed. Because *relationships* are the catalysts of personal growth the church should not only be thought of as a totality of individuals but also as the sum of groups. It is within *a group* that personal development takes place. Development needs dialogue, conversation. Such groups may be seen as representing the interest(s) of the individuals which belong.” Schneider comes to the conclusion that a church, be it local or otherwise, needs to be led by a “board” in which these interests are represented and protected. The “board” itself is also a locus of conversation and communication. Plurality on the board is vital and necessary to protect the structures that make plural conversation possible. Does that sound like a church?

Is the goal of such a body fully reached when individuals achieve ultimate personal development? Is the notion of group interest in line with the scriptural notion of a community as the body of Christ? Schneider is aware of these questions and as a theologian adds the necessary layer. A *Christian* congregation or community, so he says, is present *when authentic communication and acceptance takes place and where the cause of Jesus is never used as an instrument of power.*

Now, whether or not we share his view, two things are very clear. Schneider takes the unique individuality of members seriously and questions the assertion that a bureaucratic leadership (in whatever form) is the subject of the church. In doing so he has, at least in my view, read the signs of the times well.

In the church Schneider holds before us, the individual member is a true subject, an independent voice in an ongoing conversation. The same is true of the pastor, the administrator, the academic. In whatever calling we serve, we are not called to dissolve into a larger body. The surrender of autonomy is dangerous and should not be asked for, nor expected. We know how things derange when autonomy is surrendered to huge impersonal heteronomous subjects. We know that independent egos are necessary if a healthy questioning of power structures is to remain alive.

The New Testament shows us that we are members of a body to which we are added when heeding the gospel. Jesus is head of that body. The body itself consists of members who are all equally necessary and important. They *are* equal. This well-known metaphor should immediately make all talk about the institutional church as subject impossible. Leadership in the church can never supplant this head and should, therefore, be continually wary of unhealthy identification. Leadership is part of the body. No more, no less. However, individual members also must attend to the metaphor. The individual as subject needs to forego power and remain aware of the equality of others in the body.

This open church may well be thought of as a community of individuals. But because they have heard the call of Christ in the gospel they feel moved to voluntarily create an environment in which acceptance, justice, and reconciliation is practiced. The task of leadership can be no more than to encourage, enable, and maintain such a community, while continually realizing that neither the community nor its leadership is an end in itself. It is there as an environment in which people may experience the gospel through interaction and help each other to grow into the body of Christ. To paraphrase Schneider again: A Christian congregation or community is present when authentic communication and acceptance takes place and where the cause of Jesus is never used as an instrument of power. *G. Schneider, Grundbedürfnisse und Gemeindebildung, Soziale Aspekte für eine menschliche Kirche, München 1982.*



This vision of the church is fundamentally at odds with the view put forward by Manuel Rodríguez when he was still working at the Biblical Research Institute. In an article titled “Ecclesiology and Reorganization: the Oneness of the Church” (Biblical Research Institute Silver Spring, MD January 2006), he wrote: *In order for the ecclesiastical organization to accomplish its responsibilities it must retain a global center of final authority. There, plans and programs may be developed to strengthen the **unity of essence, actions, and thought** of the world church. Such an organization should develop ways **to ensure** that the global goals are implemented in the life of the church in local congregations and throughout its different institutions. If the church is significantly decentralized, the threat of fragmentation will increase. Global planning and communication, accompanied by **oneness in thought and action, are indispensable for the unity of the church** and the fulfillment of the mission of God’s remnant people.*

It is well to remember that this is the voice of Manuel Rodriguez though he may also be voicing the conviction of others. I need not and do not share his view. That is my good right as an Adventist pastor.



In the church I envision, Joachim will not be an object about which we vote. He will not be put in a position of a scapegoat for our own possible failure and he will be heard as a full member of a community in which the cause of Christ is never used as an instrument of power.

The sad fact is: we don’t have such a church. Here and there we discern small pockets of change; local churches in which much is possible; a union or part of a division willing to take risks. As these individuals or groups take a stand to be communities without scapegoats, all around them are heard words of vociferous opposition. Both sides appeal to the gospel for justification. That danger needs to be recognized and

addressed. The solution lies in some form of mutual accommodation. How do we achieve it? No one quite knows. What is certain is that leaders should not add fuel to a fire heating the boiling cauldron which is now our church. A little less fear of plurality, a less constrained view of church unity, could help Adventism to survive in the west. Ultimately it will probably help Adventism to survive worldwide. For the times they are a-changing. Everywhere.



*Gerard Frenk is retired Ministerial Secretary of the Dutch Union Conference*

When it is dark enough, you can see the stars.

- Charles A. Beard

## Understanding Each Other – Concepts of Spiritual Development

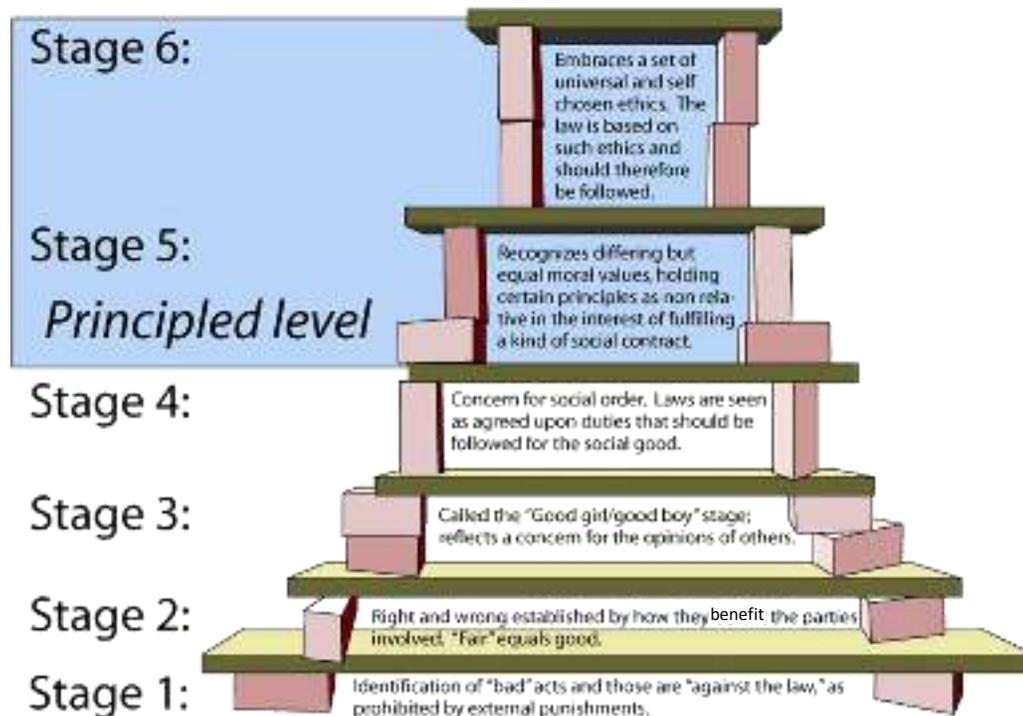


By Anja and Jan-Rokus Belder

Introduction to both models:

Kohlberg's Stage

### Kohlberg's individual moral developmental stages (1976)



(source: <http://businessstrainingadvisor.blogspot.nl/2013/06/kohlberg-theory-of-moral-development.html>)

**K**ohlberg compares his model with the various stages a child passes through in her or his development. The motivational changes move from the purely physical (most basic) needs to communal needs and finally to the level of spiritual needs. Each stage has its own merits. It is necessary for the child to pass through that stage in order to reach the next level. There is no wrong in any stage when the child's circumstances reflect the appropriate stage. For example, on the purely physical level, a child must not walk before the bone structure is strong enough to carry its weight. Likewise, on a mental or moral level, we cannot expect a child to react beyond its level of development.

Kohlberg describes the various stages as fairly distinct, separate from each other, defining clear boundaries.

As we use these models in our search for personal spiritual development, we realize that not everyone will go through every stage nor needs to.

### Spiral Dynamics

**W**ith a different model, Spiral Dynamics attempts to shed light on similar developments, albeit on a larger scale. It focuses on the development of thoughts and ideas within cultures and culture groups. "...It is a framework for understanding human development and human systems. It unveils the hidden codes and dynamic, spiritual forces



that shape human nature, create global diversities, and drive social change...

“Spiral Dynamics shifts the focus from the *what* of human behavior, the surface issues, ideas, beliefs, actions, and artifacts...that fragment or unify human groups, to the *why* and *how* of such behavior..., the core value systems awakened by changing life conditions and manifested as a dynamic spiral of levels of human existence.”

*Source: Dr. Caleb Rosado; [www.rosado.net](http://www.rosado.net)*

(For those interested in a more in-depth understanding of Spiral Dynamics, please read some of the very interesting articles on Rosado’s site. They are there to help us, as Christians. And it may interest you to read about this from an Seventh-day Adventist perspective.)

Spiral Dynamics hands you a more “fluid,” less static approach.

People tend to move from one tier to the next, according to the situation, stage of their lives. This movement may even take place from one moment to the next. In church, a person may display (re)action that belongs to a different level or tier, than when at work, in the car, or in the gym.

Peter’s reaction to Jesus’ announcement of his death is maybe typical of such movement. One moment he declares himself ready to die with Jesus and the next he curses and denies even knowing the Man. (Mathew 26)

We hope you enjoy and find useful an exploration of these models and thinking about ways to apply them to ourselves personally, our congregations, and the community in which we live and work.

We will stress that these models, when used as we do, are meant to help understand yourself. Why am I the way I am? Why do I react the way I do? And to understand the other. Why are you the way you are? So often are not like me? Why do you react the way you do?

It is our purpose to create bridges of understanding. Help understand the *why* of human behavior, so I may better love and appreciate myself and my fellow humans.

It also is our purpose to show that there is a way of growth. That each individual is at a certain stage of growth. These stages are not to be seen as superior or inferior, simply seen as a stage, necessary and befitted for that person at that stage of life's development.

It is our purpose to stimulate discussion and growth. We were touched by the introduction to the Sabbath school quarterly, 3rd quarter 2016:

*“What did Jesus mean when he said: ‘Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.’?” Luke 18:17*

The writer points us to a very obvious, though mostly overlooked, truth; namely that the one essential and true thing that all healthy children have in common and do naturally is growth!

Jesus encourages His children to grow, continually. It is our wish that we may contribute to just that!

Over the next six issues, we will briefly describe the stage under observation, then find biblical examples of that particular stage. Next, we will look at that stage with a special focus on the church to see if there is any recognition of that stage in church-life.

We will try to refrain from drawing too many conclusions, as we believe it best to leave that to you. May God bless and keep you as you continue to grow.



## Recent Research

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A new study presented at the European Symposium of Suicide and Suicidal Behavior in Tel Aviv examines, for the first time, the suicide rates among different segments of Israeli youth, Kipa reports. According to the study, which examined the scope of non-documented suicide attempts among Israeli youth in several communities, it appears that 3.5% of the young people interviewed attempted suicide.



The study indicates that most of the victims did not receive emergency room treatment, and therefore were not included in the Ministry of Health’s records on suicide. The study, which determined that the number of suicide attempts among Israeli youth is 20 times higher than reported in official statistics, examined a total of 1,134 teens.

The most significant statistic was recorded in the segment focusing on suicide rates among the LGBT community. A staggering 20% of the homosexuals and lesbians surveyed reported suicide attempts—112 times the rate among the general population.

But the rate is even higher among religious LGBTs. According to Dr. Chana Bar Yosef, the study’s director, “This is a sector that does not get enough notice, and it is a hotbed for suicides that you later hear about after the fact. The suicide rate among the religious homosexuals is the highest because they experience more distress when confronting their families.”

HOD, the organization for religious homosexuals, has been working for several years now to decrease the suicide attempts of religious homosexuals “by increasing awareness of the issue in the educational and rabbinic institutions.”



## Brain research

**B**rain imaging: Gay males and women responded to two odors (thought to be involved in sexual arousal) in the same way. Heterosexual males responded differently. (Dowd, Maureen. *Are Men Necessary?* p 152-156. NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005.)



The preoptic anterior nucleus seems to regulate masculine brain functions (e.g., mounting in response to female signals). In humans, this area of the hypothalamus is about twice as large in males as in females. (Wilson, Glenn. *The Great Sex Divide*. p 35-36. England: Peter Owen Publishers, 1989.)

Homosexual males tend to have fewer neurons in the 3rd interstitial nuclei of the anterior hypothalamus (INAH-3) as compared to the straight male brain (but more than in the female brain). (Blum, Deborah. *Sex on the Brain*. p 42-48. NY: Penguin Books, 1997.)

The hypothalamus is the sex center. Less than an ounce in weight and about the size of a cherry, it is larger in the male brain than in the female brain or in the brains of homosexuals or transsexuals. (Pease, Barbara and Allan. *Why Men Don't Listen and Women Can't Read Maps*. p 190-200. NY: Broadway Books, 1998.)

The anterior commissure (one of the three main bridges between the hemispheres) is 10%-12% larger in the female brain and in the brains of homosexual males. (Blum, Deborah. *Sex on the Brain*. p 45-47. NY: Penguin Books, 1997.)

The third interstitial nucleus of the anterior hypothalamus is of similar size in the brains of females and homosexual males; twice as large in heterosexual males. (Howard, Pierce J., Ph.D. *The Owner's Manual for the Brain*. p 223-226. GA: Bard Press, 1994, 2000.)

The brain areas of males and females related to sex differ. Genes create the basic template, primarily during gestation, that is acted upon by hormones. (Carter, Rita, Ed. *Mapping the Mind*. p 73. CA: University of California Press, 1998.)

The female brain is less arousable than the male brain and responds differently to visual/auditory arousal stimuli. Study: levels were higher in males than females after viewing an erotic film. Influenced by testosterone, norepinephrine tends to rise with hyperactivity, euphoria, self-assertion, and aggressiveness. (Durdens-Smith, Jo, and Diane deSimone. *Sex and the Brain*. p 243-254. NY: Arbor House Publishing, 1983.)

The preoptic anterior nucleus seems to regulate masculine brain functions (e.g., mounting in response to female signals). In humans, this area of the hypothalamus is about twice as large in males as in females. (Wilson, Glenn. *The Great Sex Divide*. p 35-36. England: Peter Owen Publishers, 1989.)

Homosexual males: the anterior commissure is larger (than in heterosexual males) and is about the size of that in the brains of heterosexual females. (Baron-Cohen, Simon, Dr. *The Essential Difference: The Truth About the Male and Female Brain*. p 111. NY: Basic Books, 2003.)



## Brain Sex Differences

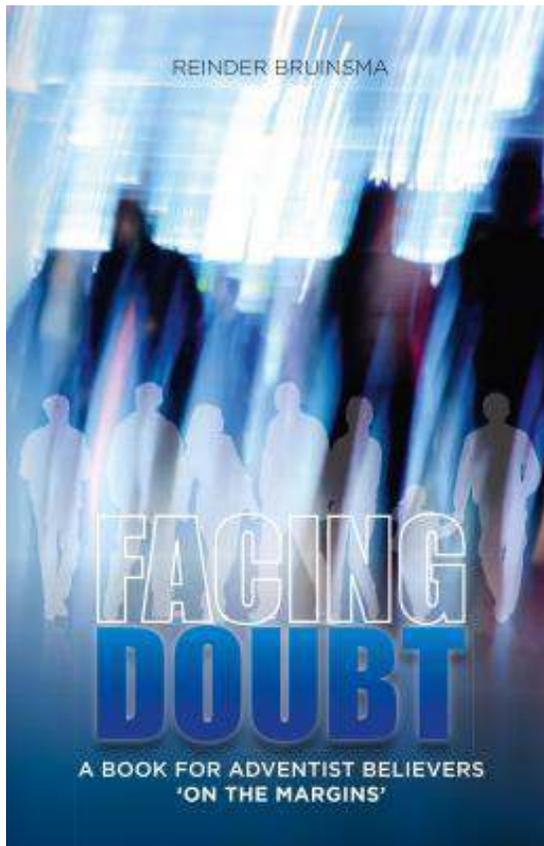


**R**esearch has discovered more about how male versus female brain differentiation occurs. They altered female rat brains by giving estradiol, a testosterone derivative that triggers a mechanism by which certain genes in the brain are "unsilenced," allowing them to initiate the process of masculinization. This process involves a group of enzymes known as DNA methyltransferases or Dnmts that modify DNA to repress gene expression. Physically, these were female rats, but in their reproductive behavior, they were males. (Bridget M Nugent and Margaret M McCarthy, et al. "Brain feminization requires active repression of masculinization via DNA methylation." *Nature Neuroscience*, 2015; DOI: 10.1038/nn.3988)



## Resources

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*Facing Doubt: A Book for Adventist Believers 'On the Margins'* is written for the alarmingly fast growing group of Seventh-day Adventists who have doubts about issues of the Christian faith, especially in its Adventist version, and who worry about a number of trends in their church. Among these concerns are, in particular, the growing fundamentalism, the intolerance for diversity in viewpoints, the discrimination of women, and gender issues.



The author is Reinder Bruinsma, a retired Dutch pastor-administrator who has had a long church career in different parts of the world in a range of different functions and has written more than twenty books. In

this new book, he honestly acknowledges his own questions and doubts. But he is not thinking of leaving his church and he explains why. He deals with the basics of having faith, or re-finding faith, and with the importance of believing together with others and of knowing what one believes. However, he argues that not all doctrines are of equal importance and that the Adventist *Fundamental Beliefs* may not be used as a yardstick for one's orthodoxy. The book wants to point the reader to ways of creatively and constructively facing one's doubts.

The 192-page paperback book may be ordered at Amazon.com. It retails for \$14.90. Also available as e-book. (<https://smile.amazon.com/Facing-Doubt-Adventist-Believers-Margins-ebook/dp/B01JN1NJMW/#nav-subnav>)



## Building Safe Places

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### *Three Invitations for Conversation in 2017*

Building Safe Places Europe – Odenwald, Germany



**Safe Places: Team Support** is generally for people who have attended Safe Places in the past or may be in a position to teach or create policies. It takes place Monday, March 6, at 4 PM to noon on Wednesday, March 8. This year Team Support will have two primary conversations: continuing to develop a theology of inclusivity, and discussing ways to include Kohlberg's stages of spiritual development to train pastors and laity in their congregations or church communities.

**Safe Places Local Wisdom** has generally been for pastors, educators, counselors/psychiatrists, family life directors, lay leaders, youth directors, etc. who would like to talk to people, have some training in, and/or gain new ideas about how to work with congregations. It will take place Wednesday, March 8, at 4 PM to Friday, March 10, at noon.

There will be four foci for this session:

1. Presentations by Reinder Bruinsma about deeper levels of Biblical teaching concerning LGBTI issues and ways to incorporate them into congregational or educational discussions. These will be followed by narrative discussions with the group.
2. Presentation by Gerard Frenk about Kohlberg's work and some ideas about ways to include them in our work. This will be followed by reactions and thoughts by participants.
3. I will give some clinical ideas about building bridges in communities where there are different opinions and/or values in ways that can help develop benevolent systems.
4. Stories shared by LGBTIQA (“alphabet”) people with Seventh-day Adventist backgrounds.

We are planning small work group sessions to build some ways for incorporating these ideas into their work. This group is open to anyone who wants to attend but has a base of people who have been together for two years now.

## Safe Places First Conversations

**Tentative dates: Friday, March 10-Sunday March 12** – This is primarily a narrative-based discussion time for pastors, teachers, administrators, counselors, youth leaders, and lay leaders, who want to know how to better care for LGBTI Adventists in their community. Dr. Bruinsma is committed to present his Biblical insights into the issue. We will confirm this group when we have at least seven registrants. On our website ([buildingsafeplaces.org](http://buildingsafeplaces.org)) you can find the list of topics under Training. The group gets to pick what topics are priorities for them.

As you can probably tell, these meetings were initiated by a discussion about LGBTI Adventists but are conversations we can have and skills we can develop for any people on the fringe or for any congregations that need to build skills to discuss opposing opinions.

We want this time to be also nurturing for the people who attend. You are welcome to bring your partner/spouse. Our location is described at the following link: <http://www.seminarhotel-odenwald.de/>. There is time each day for walks in the area or rest or reading or private conversations. The cost is € 150,00 per person per session. You can attend more than one session. You are welcome to invite anyone you think would like to attend. If you are interested, we will send out registration forms in September or early October.

If you have thoughts or questions, feel free to contact me.

Blessings,

Catherine – [www.buildingsafeplaces.org](http://www.buildingsafeplaces.org)

## Building Safe Places – United States (Palos Verdes, California)



Our Palos Verdes meeting is scheduled for February 19 and 20.

Our topics will include:

1. Building Bridges: Ways of working with individuals and groups using an understanding of spiritual stages of development.

2. Development of an Inclusive Theology: The Team Support group that is meeting in Germany a couple of weeks after we meet is focused on that issue. We want to make sure our group has some input on this project. The Bible Conference on Homosexuality that took place in the Netherlands in June got a start on sharing some ideas. There were pastors, teachers, and theologians from all over the Trans-European Division. We will be sharing some of their work in the Safe Places newsletter.
3. The Brain and... Floyd Pönitz will be presenting some research about the brain that Dr. Arlene Taylor has researched and put together.

Here are the rates available to us this year at the Mary and Joseph Conference Center.

- Commuter rate: \$ 60.00 per day per person.
- Overnight rates with five meals: \$ 170.00 in a shared room or \$ 210.00 in a single room.

Our group can be from seven to fifteen people. We will accept registrations on a first-come, first-served basis. If you are interested, please let us know by October 15 and we will send you a registration form. If you know of anyone else who would benefit and enjoy coming, please feel free to invite them.



Whatever you do or dream you can do—begin it.  
Boldness has genius and power and magic in it.

—Johann Goethe

## *Homosexual Imam:*

*“My call to make Islam more progressive”*



*Source: nu.nl 9 july 2016 by Rikki Hendriks.*

*Translation: Anja Belder*

**A**s a homosexual imam, Ludovic-Mohamed Zahed has broken many taboos. He was the first French Muslim that married another man (in South Africa).

In 2012 he established an “inclusive” mosque in Paris where LGBTs are as welcome as any other, the first in Europe. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of August, he sailed on the World Religion Boat during Gay Pride in Amsterdam.

As a homosexual imam, he lives in a world of two apparent paradoxes that often clash. We ask him about his thoughts and ideas.

**Many people think that Islam and homosexuality can't go together. What does the Koran say about homosexuality?**

“Many people don't know that the Koran doesn't speak about homosexuality. There is one verse in the Koran that Islamic extremists use to justify their phobia. This is about two men that rape men and women. They were violent, they stole and plundered. Homophobes interpret this verse differently than I do. The sin is, the way I interpret it, not the sex with men but the rape of people.

“Besides that there are many people mentioned in the Koran, who are manly females and feminine men. People that we call, with the modern terminology, homosexual. The prophet Mohammed defended these people. While others wanted to kill these people he took them in his home and gave them a job.

“On the subject of gender and sexuality the Koran says totally other things than those dogmatic Muslims talk about. The Koran is very inclusive, even from the beginning. That was four hundred years ago, so we should be more progressive than then. It is our call, as Muslims, to make Islam more progressive.”

**Why is there still homohate in many Islamic countries?**

“Because of illiteracy or political or economic chaos, people are patriotic. Look at the Islamic State. It has nothing to do with spirituality. It's a known phenomenon in psychology: in troublesome times communities become more violent. It's not right, but it's nature's instinct. They call the other 'a lesser person' than themselves because they feel threatened.

“Actually, the real sodomites are the police, the army, and the heads of state in the corrupt countries that murder, abuse, and punish people without justification. “

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*“There are more and more organizations that show that it can be different; they need support.” Ludovic-Mohamed Zahed*

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**What can the government do to stimulate progressive Islam?**

“It's their duty to make sure that people are not afraid of Muslims. There are more and more

organizations that show that it can be different; they need support. For example, Maruf in Holland, and in other countries there are inclusive mosques. That's the Islam that has the future and there the government should find allies. People do not have to be afraid of Islam. Sometimes when I say I'm Muslim, even though I say I'm progressive and homosexual, people are afraid. Islam is a philosophy of life, not a law. We decide what is good and bad for us."

**In 2012 you established the "inclusive" mosque in Paris. What has changed since?**



"In Paris, the Muslims are less afraid to talk about sexuality. That's exactly the reason why we established the mosque. People did need a place to pray if they were too feminine or too manly for the norms of the society. Even if you are homosexual, heterosexual, transgender, or whatever you are, it started because the community asked for it. I see a great change for these people."

**And in an overall view?**

"Overall I see a great difference from ten years ago. In Europe, we are a part of the LGBT community and the Muslim community. We are more visible and that's important. We expose ourselves more even though this is dangerous sometimes."

**You say this is dangerous. Can you give an example where you felt unsafe?**

"I went to a mosque in the North East of Paris. I went there every Friday evening to pray. I lived in a multicultural, poor, troubled neighborhood. When in 2011 I made my marriage with my first husband public, the problems started.

"On the Friday our marriage came into the media, the imam talked about homosexuals. He said that we (my ex-husband and myself) were not Muslims. I was there and he knew that. Everybody, about four hundred people, started to shout that we were indeed not Muslims.

"For me, this was a traumatic experience. I never went back to that mosque. I was in bed for two days, afraid and stressed. I saw no future; my neighborhood was my home and was very

important to me. I bought an apartment there.

“Now I look at it in another way. I know we just have another view on Islam. Their Islam is very patriotic and conservative. I do understand that, but I do not respect the fact that they condemn me. Besides that, I get death threats on Facebook.

“Since I’m more visible and the organizations are more visible, it’s less. They have to know we are not dirty and we do not try to kill Islam like they say.”

### **How do you react to people who wish you were dead?**

“I almost always start the conversation. Once I met a man who shouted at me and was disrespectful. I started a conversation with him. At the end, he said: ‘I still do not agree with you but if somebody would try to hurt you I would be the first one to defend you.’ He said: ‘I understand that you suffer and that you have a right to live in society’.”

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*“Being homosexual and Muslim felt like I had to choose which arm I had to cut off.” Ludovic-Mohamed Zahed*

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### **Beside homophobia in the Muslim community, do you also experience Islamophobia in the LGBT community?**



“Yes, for example, in 2011 we tried to work with the largest French LGBT organization in Paris. They refused. They said, ‘We know how Muslims think about homosexuality so we can’t trust you.’ This came as a shock to me because we discovered something new: “homonationalism.”

Not all homosexuals are white and western; not all are atheists or have a Christian background. They fought for good LGBT rights, but only for those that serve their purpose. They were not open to other perspectives. And what they do not see is that if you exclude the Muslim community you encourage extremism.”

### **Did this become worse after Orlando?**

“Yes, and it is understandable that this happened. It is the fear and Muslims like him that confirm this fear. Do not forget that this man (Omar Mateen) was not a spiritual Muslim. He was probably having problems with his sexuality. This makes it even more important what we do: Show that you can be Muslim as well as homosexual.”

**What was it like for you to come out of the closet?**

“Being homosexual and Muslim felt like I had to choose which arm I had to cut off. Finally, there was no choice. My mother already knew and was waiting for the moment I would tell.

“My father reacted more mildly than I expected, but he did say, ‘You will be expelled from the community. Do not expect a shoulder to cry on’.”

**How did you become an imam?**

“I studied theology for five years in Algeria. After that, I did a master in neuropsychology and a Ph.D. in anthropology on the subject, Islam and Homosexuality. When we started establishing the mosque, I was pushed forward. That’s how you become an imam.

“Nowadays you see more and more homosexual imams. There are homosexual imams in Europe, South Africa, North America, and Australia. Even in Indonesia, there is a transsexual imam. If you have the knowledge and the courage, become an imam. I call upon women, transsexuals, and homosexuals to come forward. If people do not see that we exist, they stay ignorant.”

**Finally, what would you like to say to the Muslims that are struggling with their sexuality?**

“Be your own role model. Help yourself and others. I discovered myself by helping others. A positive charisma is an answer to isolation and exclusion. Do not let them tell you you’re abnormal.”



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## *When Gay Children Die*



*By Carrol Grady*

**W**hen I first heard the terrible news about Orlando, my heart was breaking for all those who lost their life, or the life of their partner or good friends. Then very quickly my thoughts went, as I'm sure so many other parents' thoughts did too, to the parents of all those precious men and women, and with that, the realization that undoubtedly some of them didn't even know their



child was gay or lesbian. What a dreadful experience to learn that at the same time they found out their child was dead. Oh, how our mother- and father-hearts go out to those parents at this grieving time. And that reminded me of our Heavenly Father/Mother whose grief surpasses our own.



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*Journey (V)**Back in Canada and Alberta Bound*

*By Jerry McKay*

**T**he return to Canada hit me hard. A lot of energy is spent preparing people for the shock of a new culture, but little is spent on preparing them for the return home. I left Tokyo late one evening, and I was back at my parents' home the next and in my old bed the next night.

That first morning, I felt like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz waking from a fantastic dream. Everything was as it had always been, yet everything seemed totally different. Of course, I was the one who had changed. It was unsettling to realize that no one would ever understand what the last year had been like. All the letters I had sent home couldn't capture my experience. How could they? All I could do was to try to pick up where I had left off.

Some things had not changed—those themes. Being back at home, I was once again immersed in the dynamics of my family. I was intentional about my devotional life throughout the summer and my orientation remained right by my side. The only change was a unique summer job that brought with it an excellent illustration of my psychological state of mind.

Although I missed Japan, it was nice to be at home—sort of. I had forgotten what our family dynamics were like. Although living under the same roof, my parents lived separate lives. When dad was downstairs, mom was upstairs. When dad was at home, mom was out. Dad’s drinking—usually on the weekends—affected us deeply. It didn’t matter that I was twenty; I still felt the sadness associated with my parents’ arguments. The mood in the house threw me back emotionally to childhood, and I remembered the fear that I might have been the cause of their marital problems. That feeling is hard to shake.

I was still the “religious” one in the family. Not only did I “have to” go to church every week, I was now the returning missionary. Although I didn’t flaunt the fact, it added to the impression that I walked on water. The only thing I remember doing that irritated my father was playing religious music on weekdays. I think dad was concerned that I was becoming a religious fanatic. In addition to my regular Bible study and prayer, I found other ways to share my faith. That included talking about Japan.

The next best thing to being in Japan was bringing Japan home. With a slide show and a suitcase full of souvenirs, I shared my experiences with anyone who would listen, whether at church or in a welcoming living room. I know I went on and on about Japan. If people were tired of listening to me, no one said so.

I made great effort to stay in touch with friends. Despite the cost—\$10.00 for a three-minute call to Tokyo in 1976—I contacted a few of my dearest friends. I also wrote letters.

Decades before Facebook and other social media allowed us to connect with hundreds of people instantly and simultaneously, I wrote letters. Letter writing served two purposes. It lifted me out of my mundane summer, as well as being an extension of my Christian witness. Each letter included some form of encouragement for people to persevere in their journey of faith.

At one point, I corresponded regularly with nearly 100 people. No one was forgotten

as I recorded the date I wrote a letter and the date I received a reply. If too much time passed before hearing from someone, I would send off another letter.

I also put my faith into practice in another way. While I hated selling things door to door, I had no problem giving things away. I recruited a church member to go with me one evening a week, or as our schedules allowed, to give out literature.

And there was Wednesday night prayer meeting. As they had been for decades, they were simple and predictable events usually in a church member's living room. I participated, but they were nothing like the Bible study groups in Tokyo. It was at those meetings that I missed Japan the most. Just when I was feeling the most homesick, however, Donna came for a visit with a Japanese friend of hers. Reminiscing over green tea and rice crackers lifted my spirits.

The most spiritually enriching moments that summer, though, were the few scattered hours spent back on my uncle's farm. When I walked in the fields or the forest, I felt at peace—the closest to God. Hanging out with the animals did more for my soul than most church services. When I looked into the eyes of one of the animals, and it returned the gaze, I felt connected to something beyond myself. During those few hours, the angst of my orientation melted away.

Because I didn't interact with many people that summer, my orientation was less of a burden, but it was always present. Occasionally, a tanned shirtless road worker or brawny farm hand working in a nearby field would trigger my angst. The greatest source of distress, however, was closer to home.

My sister, now sixteen going on seventeen, was dating. Although I was protective of her and had her spiritual welfare in mind—concerned that one of her suitors might lure her from the faith—her visitors made me anxious for a different reason.

Like some nosy neighbor, I would watch from behind my bedroom curtain when her male friends arrived. When one of them would take Marilyn for a ride on his motorcycle, it was envy, not concern that consumed me. I wanted to be the one on the back

of that bike holding on to the guy for dear life.

Right behind the envy were feelings of condemnation. “What normal guy,” I repeatedly asked myself, “would be jealous of his sister’s boyfriend?” Each time that happened, I felt I was adding a new twist to the 10th commandment. Thou shalt not covet thy sister’s boyfriend!

Many times I was left standing behind the curtain with chest pains brought on by those “why” questions and feelings of abnormality. While this may seem a rather pathetic picture, it is easy to miss what was motivating my behavior. I was lonely and I longed for companionship. When my loneliness emerged, it was a male companion that I wanted. I couldn’t explain why or change that fact. Of course, I told no one.

When I wasn’t involved in church activities, I was working—with bees. That summer, I worked for a church member who managed hundreds of hives for a living.

I was never afraid of bees as a child, and curiosity often got the best of me. Like most boys, given the chance, I poked at a bee’s nest a time or two just to see what would happen. Usually, the bees won. Managing bees as opposed to teasing them is a different story.

To achieve optimal production, we had to constantly monitor the hives. That meant occasionally examining them. Yes, opening them! That’s when the fun began.

Knowing how bees behave works in your favor if you can trust theoretical knowledge. The secret is in knowing that warm sunny days make for busy bees, and busy bees are friendlier bees. That’s when we could dismantle a hive with surprisingly little reaction. Bother them on a cool cloudy day, and we paid the price. The downside is that I had to work on the hot days. While Harry often worked unprotected, I was always cloaked in gloves, a hat, and netting. Even then, the occasional bee worked its way onto my side of the veil! That was too close for comfort.

A fully loaded hive can weigh 200 pounds. Although we would lift the hives together, it didn’t help that Harry was six feet tall and I was 5’ 6” and all of 125 pounds. My

lift was always more demanding. It was a “man’s job,” and I survived even though I would have preferred to be at home reading a book or setting an attractive dinner table.

One incident with the bees illustrates my state of mind in general.

One afternoon, I had to walk through a hive—so to speak. We needed to get a piece of equipment from a shed where we extracted the honey. To get the equipment, someone needed to walk through the shed all the way to the back. That would not have been a problem except for the fact that the bees had found the shed. Bees have scouts, and they had discovered where we had taken their honey. They weren’t angry, just out in full force to reclaim what had been stolen. When I opened the door, thousands of bees were inside either crawling on everything or in flight coming and going in every direction.

With my knowledge of bee behavior in mind, I knew “theoretically” that I should be able to walk through all that activity, retrieve the object, and get back out safely. Bees brushed by me as I walked slowly to the back of the shed. I was focused on my task; they on theirs. It worked. It was an amazing lesson in the suspension of emotion. While suspending emotion helps to control the fight or flight response, it is damaging to one’s emotional health if it becomes a permanent state. I made the connection years later when I started to get in touch with how I suspended my needs and emotions in order to manage the angst around my orientation. When I did participate in social activities, I was usually disconnected emotionally. I could be “one of the group” physically yet detached psychologically. Like in that bee-filled shed, I passed in and out of life with numbed emotions. Understandably, the more I suspended my needs and emotions the greater my loneliness. This is what being “closeted” did to me.

By late August, my quiet bee-filled summer had come to an end, and I was ready to get back to school and friends I had left behind the previous year. I was anxious, though, because there had been a significant change, and that change meant a major relocation. While in Japan, the Church moved the theology program from Kingsway to its college in Alberta.

I drove the 3500 kilometers to Alberta with the beekeeper and his wife in his one-ton truck. It was loaded with beekeeping supplies destined for a bee-keeping relative in Edmonton. The drive was an experience in itself. Even though I had driven the truck, I was not used to using a standard shift on hills like those in northern Ontario.

At one point, we came to a complete stop on a steep hill because of road construction. Try as I might, when I wanted to move on, I couldn't get out of first gear. Harry bit his lip a number of times as I ground the gears trying to get the truck in forward motion without rolling backward into the cars stopped behind us. To my embarrassment, we had to shut off the truck and switch seats. Although my ego took a hit, the incident didn't add or subtract anything to my orientation. That was already well-established. On the prairies, the stick shift issue disappeared.

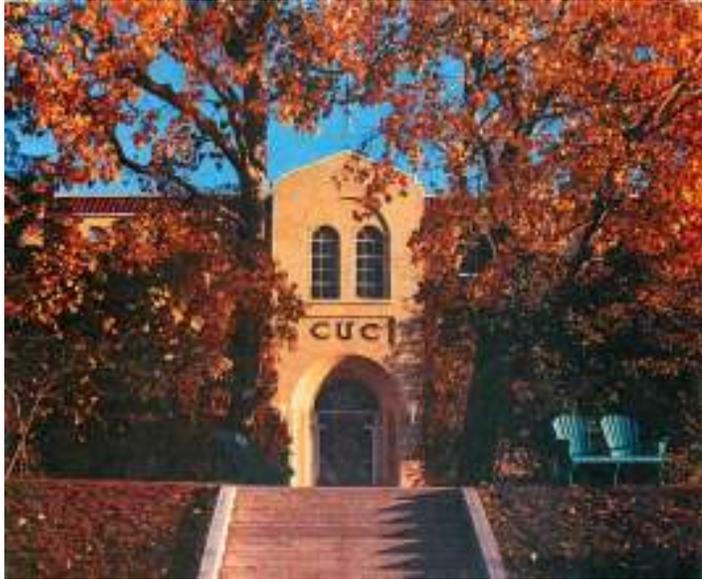
We arrived in Edmonton early on a Friday afternoon. We had enough time to deliver our load of supplies and make it to the college campus for worship as the sun set that Friday evening. One of the first people I met was my roommate Kelvin. He also moved to Alberta to continue his college education. I was pleased to be starting a new year at a new school with my "old" roommate. As well, since it was an Adventist institution, I was at home with the culture and expectations. In addition to Kelvin being there, Donna was there, as well.



*Burman University (formerly CUC)*

Located just outside of the town of Lacombe, Canadian Union College (now Burman University) sits on a hill overlooking Highway 2—the main route between Calgary and Edmonton. From that vantage point, I had an impressive view of the plains that eventually become the foothills that lead to the Rocky Mountains. It was the furthest north I had ever been.

During the summer, the sun came close to never setting. By the winter solstice, I would not see the sun if I were indoors between 9 and 4. Many mornings I watched the sun rise during a nine o'clock class. While living on that hilltop, I experienced my first Chinook and spectacular Northern Lights.



*CUC*

Like at Kingsway, I worked on campus. My first job was at the book bindery stamping the titles on the spines of newly bound books. Later, I finagled a cushier job as a monitor in the men's residence.

Unlike Kingsway, I was now one among a larger identifiable group—the theology majors. While that may seem like an obvious designation, it was a title that carried a loving but cautionary warning among the student body because we were the nerdy ones on campus—even beating out the science majors.

We wore not-so-coordinated suit jackets and ties and rushed about with briefcases full of very important theological texts and documents. Because of all the “God stuff” we had to master, we were a bit of a sober group. Although a part of that group, a few of us periodically defied those norms.

Even though my program was only at the bachelor level, the courses were interesting, and I enjoyed my studies. There were crash courses in Old and New Testament (NT)

studies. NT studies included a race through the book of Romans. I don't remember any comments on Romans chapter one; and, of course, I never brought up "those texts" for discussion or clarification. In 1976, the subject of homosexuality was still not on the radar of Adventist educational institutions, which may explain why the text was not explored.

And then there was NT Greek. Languages were never my strength to begin with. I had not done well in French with its masculine and feminine nouns and points of grammatical agreement. If two genders were too much to handle, Greek presented a greater challenge with its third gender—neuter. We were required to take two years of Greek. Although I earned an A the first semester, by the time I finished I could only muster a C. But a C was all I needed. I had a good sense, then, that I would not be pursuing a specialization in Biblical languages.

My program required electives to round out my studies. I bought a trombone and joined the band. I started taking piano lessons to fulfill a childhood dream. And, surprisingly, I signed up for a physical education class. No, not basketball or floor hockey. No potentially shirtless male team sports for me. Fortunately, there were more options now from which to choose. I opted for cross-country skiing. The teacher was a little more rugged than I was, and I think he would have liked me to be more aggressive in my technique. I passed the course nonetheless. Yes, he was attractive in his mustache and sports attire!



*Jerry 2<sup>nd</sup> from  
right, back row*

Outside of class, I was involved in recruiting the next group of volunteers to be student missionaries, and for one semester, I was the Theology Club Executive Secretary-Treasurer!

Naturally, my spiritual life was full. Although I was majoring in theology, I never considered those studies an extension of my personal devotions. I regularly sought opportunities to have my thoughtful hour to contemplate Jesus' life. When I wanted more privacy than my dorm room allowed, I slipped away to a "secret place."

The men's dormitory was a very old building. Not long after arriving, I discovered a rickety staircase behind a nondescript door in the recreation room. It led to a storage space that resembled a basement. No one ever went down there except to store furniture or personal belongings most of which had long since been forgotten by its owner. You could barely walk around without stepping on something. What was actually a fire trap became my private sanctuary.

Under one 60-watt light bulb that dangled from the unfinished wood frame ceiling, I set up a small wooden table and chair I had found among the abandoned items. The stacks of boxes dampened any noise making it so quiet I could hear my heart beat. I spent many hours that year cocooned there reading my Bible and praying for family and friends.

Once again, I emphasize my consistent intentional devotional life because it contrasts with the image people often associate with "the homosexual." So many have been conditioned to believe that homosexuality cannot co-exist with a vibrant faith experience. Mine does, and my experience is by no means unique.

And again, I must emphasize that I had not yet named my experience or self-identified as anything in any way. I never prayed about my orientation specifically. My feelings and attractions were open to God only in unspoken ways; my heart groaning with those "why" questions.

