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NEWS

LETTER

*December 2016*

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#MyChurchToo

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Dear Colleagues,

December 2016

I have been thinking about the complicated aspects of this holiday season. In the United States, so many people are inundated with the message that they must spend the month of December in a “Ho, ho, ho” attitude. Life is rarely like a bouncing Santa Claus.

This month I am writing to you in a way I would never normally introduce *Safe Places*. We had planned for the next issue to be to you in October. The copy was almost finished. In late September my mother began to bleed internally, landed in the hospital, and died on October 21. November 26 was the first Sabbath I have been home in ten weeks. Commuting each week between Newport News, Virginia, and Los Angeles, California, is an interesting adventure but I have found it tiring. The reason I chose to share this part of my life is that I know I am not alone among those of you who are reading this. You may have had a parent die. You may be worried about your children or your grandchildren. Your school or congregation may be facing issues you have no idea how to heal or all your ideas don't seem to be working. You may be at a stage in your relationship or marriage where you are wondering how to shift your communication patterns so you each can understand each other. You may be wondering where the denomination of your childhood went, the meaning of the elections, how to meet the complicated needs of various kinds of refugees, how to address or face violence in its many forms...the list goes on. What I think is important to remember is that each of us is dealing with issues of the heart at the very same time we are addressing issues of policy—like how the Adventist church cares for its LGBTI members. The reason we call this project Building Safe Places—for Everyone is to create a space where we all can be safe and respected in our conversations. We are glad you are part of it.

This issue includes an article I wrote for *Spectrum* on *Justice and Mercy*, Tom De Bruin's millennial response to Reinder Bruinsma's book, *Facing Doubt*, and an article by Hans Gutierrez that shares a look at the socio-cultural meaning of how the Adventist church addresses the LGBTI people in its midst. Our **Research** continues with an alphabetical list of topics around issues of sexuality and gender. Because we thought you might be interested in some think tank options, we are giving you the link to the Williams Institute in our **Resource** offerings as well as a link to Reinder Bruinsma's book and reminders of how to access both PFLAG and the Trevor Project in this time of year that can include much stress and isolation for those on the margins. We are also including a description of, and an invitation to, our

nurturing conversations and training that will take place in March 2017 in Germany. Finally, we continue with Jerry McKay's story of his journey to integrate his spirituality and sexuality.

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, I look forward to hearing from you. The address is [katgurian@aol.com](mailto:katgurian@aol.com).

We wish you many blessings,

*Catherine Taylor* for the Safe Places Team



# Content Safe Place Newsletter

December 2016

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*To Be a Blessing:*

Page 7

## *Lessons on Justice and Mercy from the Old Testament*

One sentence flows across a black granite wall in Montgomery, Alabama: *We will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.* Paraphrased from the book of Amos, this statement, engraved on a Civil Rights monument, crosses millennia to underscore unchanging lessons for humanity. Today I look at three Old Testament teachings about the way mercy, justice, and blessing contribute to safe and benevolent communities: Abraham's blessing, the Sabbath commandment, and the fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah. I then share some thoughts about how these notions of justice, mercy, and blessing can affect us and our Adventist communities today.

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## *Facing Doubt: Some Meta Musings*

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Spectrum Magazine asked me to review Reinder Bruinsma's latest book *Facing Doubt: A Book for Adventist Believers On the Margins*. As I was reading and thinking about Bruinsma's book, I decided that some of my musings would be worth a blog post.

I feel that Bruinsma has done an admirable job with this book. That said, I don't feel like I am the audience for this book, though I couldn't at first put my finger on why. After a while, I figured out what was at the core of my issues.

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## *The Sociocultural Meaning of LGBT Adventists*

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Like any other religious group, we Adventists face today a double challenge; be faithful to our own tradition and be faithful to reality. For various reasons, we have always considered important, indeed urgent to the point of exclusive, the first mandate but not the second. In a very Kantian way (Kant's deontological moral approach), we consider the Truth of our actions, of our message and of ourselves to be a matter of "coherence" with our own values and convictions and

not as a matter of meaningful “correspondence” with the reality outside. Coherence, in fact, means fidelity only to one’s own internal essence above all external solicitations.

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## *Recent Research*

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### *Choice*

Despite almost a century of psychoanalytic and psychological speculation, there is no substantive evidence to support the suggestion that the nature of parenting or early childhood experiences play any role in the formation of a person’s fundamental heterosexual or homosexual orientation.

### *Coming Out, Spousal*

In two million marriages in the U.S., at least one spouse is gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

### *Continuum*

Based on his survey of 18,000 people, Researcher Robert Epstein believes that the terms “gay” and “straight” can be highly misleading. “Sexual orientation actually lies on a smooth continuum and the way people state their orientation is often a poor predictor of their true sexual behaviors and fantasies.”

### *Controller*

Sexual orientation is controlled by the hypothalamus. It is half the size in the gay brain as compared to the heterosexual brain.

### *Corpus Callosum*

Several studies have shown that homosexual men have an increased prevalence of non-right-handedness and atypical patterns of hemispheric functional asymmetry.

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## *Resources*

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– The Williams Institute is dedicated to conducting rigorous, independent research on sexual orientation and gender identity law and public policy.

– Founded in 1998 by the creators of the Academy Award®-winning short film TREVOR, The

Trevor Project is the leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) young people ages 13-24.

– Founded in 1972 with the simple act of a mother publicly supporting her gay son, PFLAG is the nation’s largest family and ally organization.

– *Facing Doubt – A Book for Adventist Believers on the Margins* by Reinder Bruinsma

– Two Invitations for Conversation in 2017; Building Safe Places Europe – Odenwald, Germany

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## *Voices of the Heart*

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Chapter 10 of Jerry McKay’s *Journey*

In the introduction to my story, I mentioned that people have asked how my faith and my orientation intersected and collided. During that first year at CUC, there was a spiritual “event” that conspired against me to create great expectations on the one hand and disillusionment on the other. Those expectations intensified my internal conflict and would carry forward to the time when I was in reparative therapy. Because my spiritual formation was profoundly influenced by that event, I will explore it at some length. Bear with me as I get a bit theological.





### *To Be a Blessing: Lessons on Justice and Mercy from the Old Testament*



*By Catherine Taylor*

**O**ne sentence flows across a black granite wall in Montgomery, Alabama: *We will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.* Paraphrased from the book of Amos, this statement, engraved on a Civil Rights monument, crosses millennia to underscore unchanging lessons for humanity. Today I look at three Old Testament teachings about the way mercy, justice, and blessing contribute to safe and benevolent communities: Abraham's blessing, the Sabbath commandment, and the fifty-

eighth chapter of Isaiah. I then share some thoughts about how these notions of justice, mercy, and blessing can affect us and our Adventist communities today. You will probably note that my focus on the concept of justice is an emphasis on “justice for,” not “judgment against.”

After sin, after the Flood, after the tower of Babel, God began to rebuild an intentional human community.” *He called Abram and said, ‘I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing’*” (Genesis 12:2). He and his descendants were to be a blessing, wherever they went, with whomever they interacted. Their success and the longevity of their extended community depended on their choice. It was that simple: be a blessing. It was that difficult.

Later, in restructuring the Hebrew community at Sinai, the principles shared with Abram became more concrete. The fourth commandment of the Decalogue (Exodus 20: 4-8) encapsulates some of them. *The seventh day is the Sabbath*. From grammatical emphasis in the original text, I infer a level of importance placed in the lessons it teaches. The commandment was a gift of the God who had rescued them from bondage and protected them from a scorching desert sun. He lit the darkness at night and fed them in the morning. With the Sabbath, God offered yet another blessing. He reminded the community that He would make sure they were fed and that their crops and produce would be safe in the twenty-four hours they were not “in control.” Israel was to learn another aspect of trusting its God.

Nourished by this blessing, God’s Hebrew community was to respond on the seventh day by being a blessing, by showing justice and mercy not only to those who were vulnerable among themselves but also to those who were under their power. I believe that lesson was to be infused into Israel’s consciousness and actions. Children, servants, animals, and the sojourner who was “within their gates” were equal recipients of the mercy of God and should be equal recipients of the blessing of community. The future of the young nation depended on their understanding of, and choice to live, this lesson.

Hundreds of years and many wrong decisions later, Isaiah began to write. His work is packed with critique, counsel, and promise. In Chapter 58 the conditions for community blessing are concise:

- Loose the bands of wickedness; undo the thongs of the yoke. (vs. 6)
- Let the oppressed go free; break every yoke. (vs. 6)

- Share your bread with the hungry; bring home the homeless poor. (vs. 7)
- Cover the naked. Don't hide from your family. (vs. 8)
- Take away from the midst of you the yoke; the pointing finger and malicious talk. (vs. 9)

The wickedness, described in preceding lines, includes:

- Seeking own pleasure; oppressing workers (vs. 3)
- Quarreling, fighting, and hitting with wicked fists. (vs. 4)

I find it interesting that the justice and mercy focus of this week's lesson was also the focus of God's accusations. Wickedness was a lack of justice for oppressed workers. Wickedness was a lack of mercy played out in the field of neglect and violence (quarreling, fighting, hitting). While this message was certainly to be heeded by individuals, God's focus, through Isaiah, was also on the community.



We can think of ancient Hebrew as a “visual language.” It was highly metaphorical and, as we know, metaphors have hidden layers for the observant reader and listener. The brass serpent on the cross meant more than antitoxin in a crisis. The sanctuary in the desert meant more than a ritual religious bonding. Jesus, talking to the woman at a Samaritan well, discussed more than liquid refreshment.

I am certain that most readers or listeners to Isaiah's scrolls could think of instances when they had seen opportunities to share their bread with the hungry, care for their families, and clothe the naked. I believe they had also seen the effects of “the pointing

finger and malicious talk.” I believe that Israel had some understanding of the extended meanings of Isaiah’s pronouncements.

Our twenty-first-century community of Seventh-day Adventists has much to learn from these Old Testament pictures. If we are to be the ones who “raise up the foundations of many generations...are called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in,” if we are to “delight in the Lord” and “be fed with the heritage of Jacob” our father, we need to embody the lessons described in the texts we read this week.

Since we claim to be spiritually descended from Abraham we also have his mission: “you will be a blessing.” A blessing to whom? The texts in Genesis don’t restrict that blessing to particular individuals, populations, beliefs, systems, or lifestyles. There was no limit. There is no limit.

If we are to bless like Abraham, we need to be open to the world. That’s difficult. Do we draw limits with those for whom we seek justice and mercy and blessing? With liberals? Conservatives? The people who might be converted if we are nice to them? Our family? Immigrants? Refugees? Hard workers? Slackers? The lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender Adventists with whom we come into contact? The same group if they are celibate? Our church leaders? Our church leaders if they agree with us? The people of our town or province or country? The Adventists who are in favor of women’s ordination? The Adventists who are not? The Adventists who believe in a six-day creation? The Adventists who do not?

Daniel Duda recently said, “The church exists for one purpose; to create a community of unconditional acceptance.” I go over the list of people and groups in my purview and realize how different my life, my church, and my community would be if we lived these words and Abraham’s promise.

Under the umbrella concept of Abrahamic blessing, there are details. The Sabbath commandment and Isaiah’s sermon teach that we are to have rest if we allow that rest to include those who are vulnerable to us. At Sinai, the list included children,

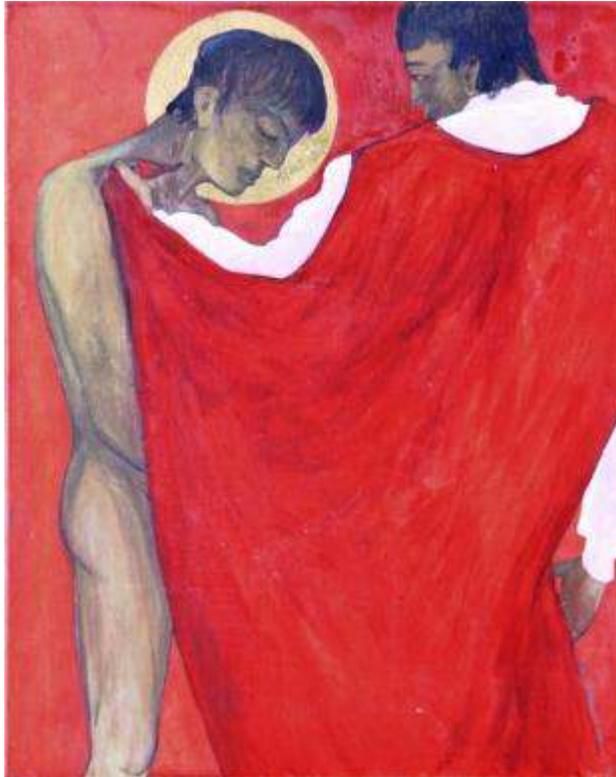
servants, animals, and guests harbored within Hebrew homes from desert dangers. I consider twenty-first-century corollaries.

Untold numbers of children today, all over this world, live in dangerous or abusive circumstances. Those contexts can range from poverty and neglect to sexual abuse or life in the killing fields of Syria. Resiliency theory teaches that if such children have one person, just one, who is safe, caring, accepting, and nurturing, that child has a high chance of building a healthy life. The one person can be as varied as a parent, school janitor, youth leader, bus driver, or neighbor. There is power in one. Do not underestimate the effect you can have on one life. From another perspective, we must think carefully about how we will be with the children and youth we encounter. How do we share mercy towards, and insist on justice for, the children who tell us they are having sex, doubts about God, using drugs, are gay or transgender, have parents who abuse them, are angry in Sabbath school, or run away from the community they have known? What about the children who say they are religiously conservative and want to know how to be with others? How will we be a blessing?

We may not have live-in servants. We may have cleaning help. Or people who mow our lawns. We may have people on our committees at church. We may have employees or teams we supervise. We may have influence over policies and procedures. We may be elders or deacons or denominational administrators. The lessons of mercy, justice, and blessing apply to all of us. How do we live them?

In this twenty-first century, the meaning of “stranger within our gates” is broad and varied. What is clear is that the person being described is not personally known to us and can come from any place. Who is this stranger? Is it a fellow traveler in our spiritual world? Is it a drunk? A military veteran? A child? A refugee? Are they fragile because they have eating habits or a lifestyle we would question? Are they a teen who was kicked out of their house because...? Are they just lonely? Are they old? What do they mean to us as individuals? To us as a local spiritual community? To us on the larger scene? Do we feel safe having strangers in *our home*? In our country? How do we deal with those we don’t understand who want to find sanctuary

in our church? How broad are our gates? How do we live the mercy, justice, blessing that are our Abrahamic mandates?



Adventists have done a great job of literally following Isaiah’s instruction to *clothe the naked*. I remember folding second-hand garments in third grade. They went someplace beyond my geographic knowledge. I remember the days Dorcas rooms opened their doors and the days volunteers boxed emergency clothing shipments to disaster areas. Being physically naked is a vulnerable way to live. So is being socially naked—our secrets out for everyone to see. The Samaritan woman’s solo trip to the well at the hottest time of day shows the life-threatening consequences of being socially naked. What about the suicidal teenager who has his secrets blared across social media? How about the times we have publicly failed in a church duty? Or a job? Or invested our retirement funds in a Ponzi scheme? Or made investment mistakes with church resources? How would you like your church community to be just with you, to be a mercy to you, to be a blessing for you?

I have never heard a sermon about the promise that includes “if you take away from the midst of you the yoke, the pointing finger and malicious talk.” I have never seen church discipline for it. But I have seen pointing fingers and malicious talk destroy individuals, relationships, and communities. I think a lot about Ellen White’s quote, “Do not set yourself up as a standard. Do not make your opinions, your views of duty, your interpretations of scripture a criterion for others and in your heart condemn them if they do not come up to your ideal. Do not criticize others, conjecturing as to their motives and passing judgment upon them.”\*

At the moment, we Adventists are dealing with at least three divisive issues: women’s ordination, sexual diversity, and creation. We also live with cultural differences, family stressors, abuse of various kinds, refugees, hunger, and war. We are a cauldron of viewpoints, opinions, values, hopes, and fears. As he considered how pastors care for their communities in the midst of these crises, Gerard Frenk wrote, “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.”\*\* Justice, mercy, blessing are individual acts that affect larger communities.

We are a “people of the Word.” We say we want to follow that Word. As in the issues mentioned above, a challenge to our community relationships often comes when our readings of texts in the Word differ. Even our theologians and scholars disagree on exegesis and hermeneutics. Given our conundrums and the effect they have on our personal and corporate communities, I very much appreciate Jeroen Tuinstra’s observation: “When a text has multiple ways to be explained, one chooses the explanation that causes the least harm, shows the most patience, and expresses closely the fruit of the Spirit.”

*And the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. Galatians 5:22, 23*

Mercy, justice, the fruit of the Spirit.

How will you and I and the even larger “we” live these building blocks of a community of blessing?

NOTES:

\* Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings*, 123, 124.

\*\* Gerard Frenk is secretary emeritus of the Dutch Union Conference.  
The quote is from his paper, *A Pastor Between a Rock and a Hard Place*.

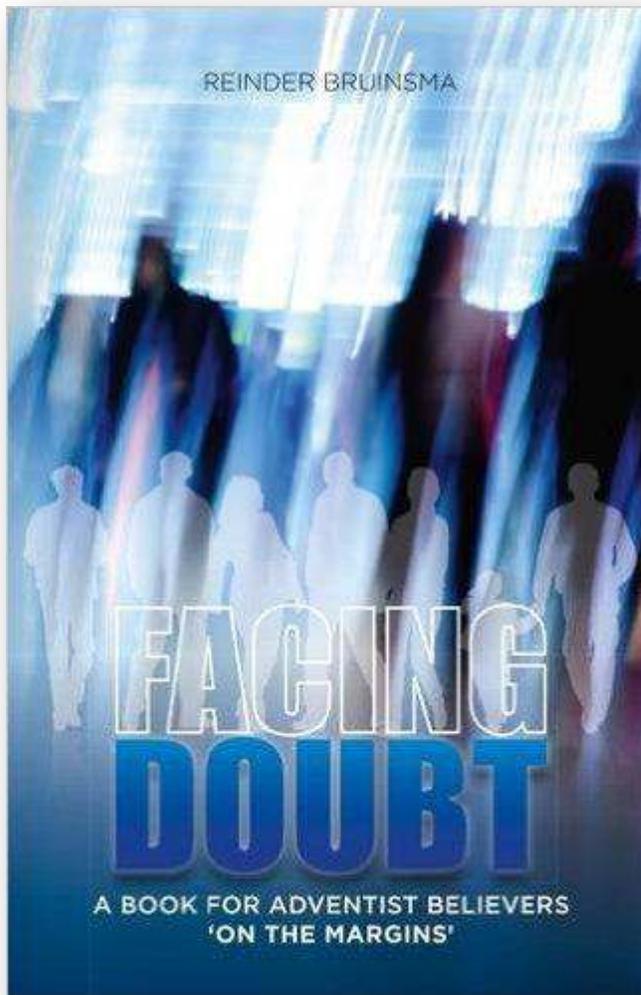
\*\*\* Jeroen Tuinstra is president of the Belgium Conference of the French Union.

Many thanks to Gerard Frenk for taking the time and patience to edit this paper.  
Much appreciation to Jacquie Hegarty and Carrol Grady for proofreading it.



Half of the harm that is done in this world is due to people who want to feel important. They don't mean to do harm but the harm does not interest them.

—T.S. Eliot, poet (1888-1965)



## *Facing Doubt: Some Meta Musings*



*By Tom De Bruin*

**S**pectrum Magazine asked me to review Reinder Bruinsma's latest book *Facing Doubt: A Book for Adventist Believers On the Margins*. As I was reading and thinking about Bruinsma's book, I decided that some of my musings would be worth a blog post.

I feel that Bruinsma has done an admirable job with this book. That said, I don't feel like I am the audience for this book, though I couldn't at first put my finger on why. After a while, I figured out what was at the core of my issues.

As I wrote in the review:

*My only true problem with the book is one that is not Bruinsma's fault at all. As I read the book, I didn't feel that I was the audience. Not because I lack doubt; not because I haven't thought of leaving the church; but because my worldview, and thus my reason for doubts, are different. Ultimately, I would estimate that this book answers more questions for Baby Boomer and Generation X readers than for younger ones.*

Ultimately, my issues with Bruinsma's book are because what I see as the problems with the church don't seem to be the ones Bruinsma points out. Allow me to muse a bit about why Bruinsma's doubts are the doubts of a Baby Boomer (which Bruinsma is) or of Generation X. Not—and let this be very clear—not as a critique of Bruinsma's book, but as an addition to the discussion.

### **Theodicy**

**M**y musings start quite close to the beginning, Bruinsma's first real personal example of why to doubt God, talks about loss, sickness, and death. These are universal issues, and they are hard to deal with. Bruinsma associates these terrible things with a questioning of God's goodness: if God is good, why does he allow death, war, etc. In short, without good theodicy, we will doubt. Now I've thought about this, and I can

honestly say this is not a reason why I would ever leave the church or the faith; yet it plays a large role in Bruinsma's book.

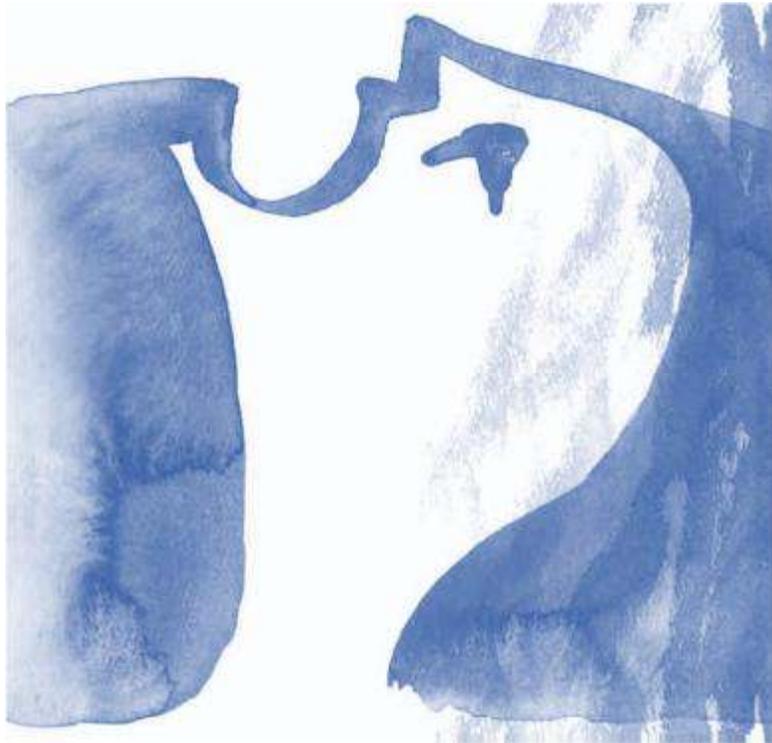
To be clear, Bruinsma is not making up this argument. Theodicy is a huge point of discussion in the contemporary atheist debate. A debate that includes some other issues, that Bruinsma discusses in sufficient detail as well, such as epistemology and empiricism. All of these issues suddenly became very popular in what is called "New Atheism," as championed by the likes of Richard Dawkins. Dawkins famously writes: *The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all of fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.* (Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006, 31.)

It should be quite evident that Dawkins has quite the beef with God. What is most strange is that New Atheism raised its head rather suddenly in the early 2000s. In 2008 Dueck wrote, quite hilariously:

*Those who puzzle at the phenomenon that is the "new atheism" — whether religious or irreligious — could be forgiven for wondering what new cosmological data or insight into human nature suddenly became available around the mid-point of the twenty-first century's first decade to instantly render belief in the supernatural remarkably less credible than in the millennia that preceded it. After all, it is not as though human beings just stumbled groggily out of a long epistemological hibernation to discover now, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, that God is not an empirical piece of data in the observable world, or that those who claim to bear his name do not always live according to the professed ideals and ethics of their religious traditions. (<http://theotherjournal.com/2008/03/07/the-new-atheism-as-inadequate-theodicy>)*

In this world, so heavily and irretrievably influenced by postmodernism, we seem to have stumbled onto a modernist debate: does God exist or not, and if God is meant to

be ontologically good, how can he allow evil? A debate that has been instigated by people who are now, generally, in their seventies. A debate that seems to rage between fundamentalists on both sides: religious fundamentalists and scientific fundamentalists. Now, this debate is uninteresting for me, and I imagine for many like me, for two and a half very simple reasons: (½) I am not a fundamentalist, (1) I am not interested in any proof for or against God because that does not influence my faith in a direct way, and (2) what postmodernity has been telling us for decades is that the only thing worse than religious wars are scientific/modern ones. The scientific rationalism that the new atheists are arguing for did not deliver us from the evils of violence, war, and hatred – it just made us more efficient at violence, war, and hatred: the Great War, the Holocaust, Hiroshima.



In other words, the questions that Bruinsma (rightfully) asks like “Why did God allow this?” and “Why, God, why?” (p 64) are not my questions and for me do not lead to doubt. For me, the problem of evil in the world is not a religious problem, it’s a human problem. Atheists need theodicy as well; they, too, need to explain the evil in this world. They generally simply blame chaos, so why can’t Christians?

## Theodicy in my generation

**T**heodicy is an issue for my generation, but not for the reasons Bruinsma names. We need theodicy because we desperately need God to be good. Otherwise, we are in big trouble. Because the real question, which I believe younger generations are struggling with is not “Why, God?” but “Why *God*?” Trying to understand why God allows evil is not as important as trying to understand why God is worth believing in, never mind if he exists or not. Time is scarce. Time is the only truly non-renewable resource. We are aware of this, and we are aware that we can only invest it in a certain number of things, so they better be worth it. Why is God worth my time? What makes God immediately worthwhile, not only for me but for everyone around me? God needs to be good, otherwise, God is a waste of my time. That is why theodicy is important.

Young people, the younger generations, are dreamers. They are driven by an informed naivety. Not only can they change the world, they will change the world (even if they don't). And they will do it soon. If they choose God, it better be immediately apparent how that is changing the world. Otherwise, there is Unicef, the Red Cross, or environmental start-ups. This leads us to the next musing that I had but it needs some introducing. For now, remember “I can change the world!”

## The church's teachings

**A**nother reason that Bruinsma discusses for doubting not God but the church is the church's teachings and decisions. He lists many, both very current and a bit more stale: women's ordination, 1844, the sanctuary, plain reading, creation, the nature of Jesus, Ellen White, homosexuality. What is at stake is the question of whether you can associate yourself with a church that has teachings that you disagree with. Many who, for example, cannot see Jesus moving from one room to another in heaven in 1844, might want to leave the church. Maybe because they feel unaccepted because of their variant thinking, maybe because they feel dishonest to support a church that they disagree with.

Leaving any of my own opinions aside, many of the topics Bruinsma raises would have been ones I would give in a similar list. They are the hot topics. Many of these are the same issues that younger people around the world are raising, and so famously raised on Twitter at the General Conference in San Antonio. But, and I imagine many think this might be strange, the reason is not the one that Bruinsma gives. The reason is not because young people cannot support a church that teaches things they would not necessarily agree with. It is because of the nature of a church. Let me try to explain.



### The glocal church

**T**he church as a worldwide body cannot be separated from the local church. Generation X (±1960–1980) has always been happy to find a little bit of paradise, like a local church, and thrive there. Millennials and Generation Z cannot and will not think like that. Global *is* local. There is only the *glocal* church. This is one part of the problem: we cannot hide.

The other part is that a church *should* be a force for good. It really should. It should bring peace, joy, love, and harmony to the world. If it does not do that, is it still a church? Can a church call itself a church if it does not embody the kingdom of God? Younger generations would not see any possibility in this. This is the crux of the problem, and why some topics are so important for younger people and others are not. 1844 is fine. Let the theologians argue what exactly happened. I can't see anyone under thirty-five lying awake at night about that. Gay rights, big problem. For a

young person, even if she personally does not see a biblical place for homosexuality, she cannot accept a church that engenders hate. Because then, no matter what, the church stops being a church.

This same argument is at the basis of the irritation with topics such as the changed Fundamentals. It is not a disagreement with the conclusions drawn, it is not a problem with having to believe in a worldwide flood (even if you voted against that change at the GC). The Fundamentals are fine. The problem is an Adventist church that forces its members to believe something is no longer Adventist. Our church was founded by people fleeing doctrinal oppression, and lo and behold, slowly we ourselves seem to be becoming a force of doctrinal oppression. Now, I must admit that Bruinsma does discuss this dogmatizing trend in the church.



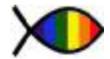
### **#MyChurchToo, don't ruin it**

At the GC millennials and GenYs were crying #MyChurchToo, while self-identifying as #badventists. The #MyChurchToo hashtag was started by women who felt disenfranchised by the women's ordination debate but morphed into a powerful battle cry for the new generation, who do not, will not, cannot fit the perfect Adventist mold of the twenty-eight. "It is our church too and you people have to stop ruining it," they cried. "You have to stop turning it into a non-church, an anti-church. Because, and this is very important so please pay attention, if the GC is evil, my local church is also

evil. And then where will I go? How will I change the world? I've invested too much time in my church for it to become meaningless now. It's #MyChurchToo.”

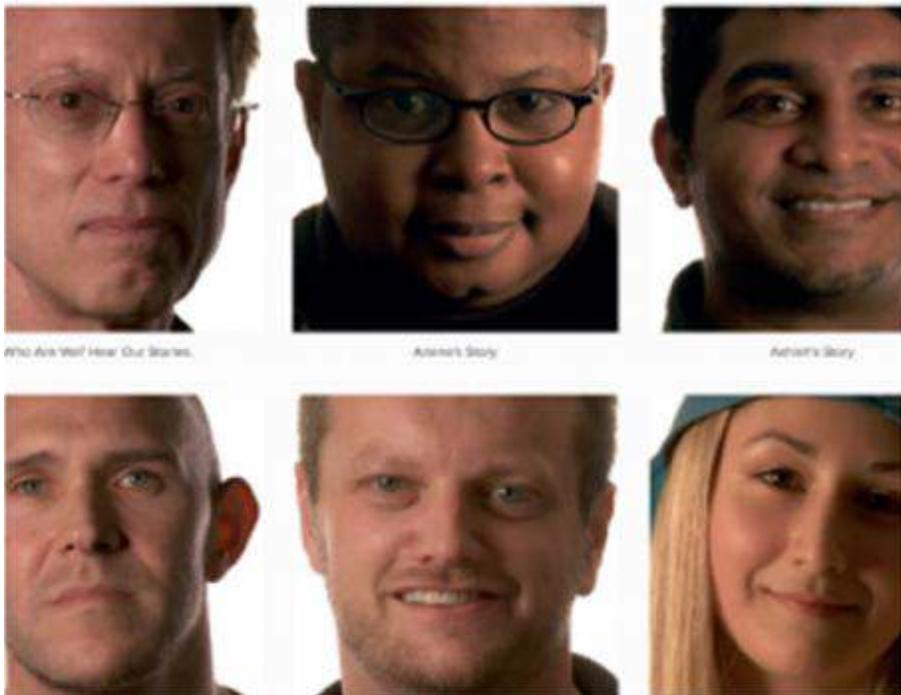
So if you ask me why I'd leave the church, it's simple: because the church would no longer be worth me and my time. Because my skills, my talents, my power to change the world would be wasted. I am definitely not there, but I have seen many leave for that reason. I have spoken to many young pastors who are planning exit strategies from ministry for this reason. I increasingly hear from peers that they cannot be bothered with a “misogynistic” church (i.e. one that does not ordain women). They can't be bothered with an autocratic church (i.e. one that won't give unions autonomy). They can't be bothered with a hate-engendering church (i.e. one that won't allow gay people to be members). They can't be bothered with a racist church (i.e. one that claps when the GC secretary announces a decline in membership in the global north). They can't be bothered with a church that is a church in name only.

The problem is not doubt, it's disillusionment. Dreamers need to dream. Can we still dream in the Adventist Church? I, at least, won't give up that need.



No fathers or mothers think their own children ugly, and this self-deceit is yet stronger with respect to the offspring of the mind.

—Miguel de Cervantes, novelist (1547-1616)



## *The Sociocultural Meaning of LGBT Adventists*



*By Hans Gutierrez, “Villa Aurora,” Florence-Italy*

This is not a generalized socio-cultural analysis of homosexuality in our contemporary societies. Today’s leading queer thinker, Judith Butler, has already done that in her book “Undoing Gender.” This article more modestly aspires to be a reflection on the socio-cultural implications of a religious community, like Seventh-day Adventists, in our pronouncements about homosexuality. As I write, I will use the category “social” not in its primary meaning of being the opposite of “individual” but rather in its derivative meaning signifying what is outside, beyond or different from, religion.

Like any other religious group, we Adventists face today a double challenge; be faithful to our own tradition and be faithful to reality. For various reasons, we have always considered important, indeed urgent to the point of exclusive, the first mandate but not the second. In a very Kantian way (Kant's deontological moral approach), we consider the Truth of our actions, of our message and of ourselves to be a matter of "coherence" with our own values and convictions and not as a matter of meaningful "correspondence" with the reality outside. Coherence, in fact, means fidelity only to one's own internal essence above all external solicitations. This religious trend and attitude are visible for instance in the most Adventist of all quotes: *The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.*" E.G. White, *Education*, 57.

This true but unilateral sentence fashions the very essence of Adventism. It is in this context that lies, in my opinion, the valuable and meaningful contribution of LGBT Adventists to today's Adventism. They remind us that trying to be faithful to the Bible without being also faithful to reality, is not only hypocritical but paradoxically also unbiblical. In this sense, LGBT Adventists represent not a problem, but an opportunity for the church. And going even further, I would dare to say that they incarnate (not that they are) a prophetic attitude, because prophets not only tirelessly worked to open up humanity to God and to high values, but also denounced the ideology, rigidity, and idolatry of high values when they betrayed the human reality and condition.

In three sections, I want to explore the importance of this social dimension so easily overlooked in Adventism but without which Adventism remains meaningless:

1. We have the urgent necessity of learning to face reality as it is.
2. We need to understand our official statements on homosexuality and interpret them in today's new socio-cultural context,
3. We need to have an honest confrontation with today's society and culture.



### Facing Life as It Is: the Virtue of an Open Realism

**W**hy should we learn to look at reality more positively? Simply, because, reality doesn't only represent a risk for our faith experience but a unique place in which we can test the true consistency of our faith and convictions. I have three arguments that call for us to positively open up Adventism to an honest face-to-face with life today that includes the presence of LGBT people.

#### The Psychological "Reality Principle"

In Freudian psychology and psychoanalysis, the reality principle (Realitätsprinzip) is the ability of the mind to assess the reality of the external world and to act upon it accordingly as opposed to acting on the pleasure principle. Allowing the individual to defer instant gratification, the reality principle is the governing principle of the actions taken by the ego, after its slow development from a "pleasure-ego" into a "reality-ego." It may be compared to the triumph of enlightened reason over blind passion, of wise rationality over a disruptive emotional mind. The result is the mature mind's ability to avoid instant gratification in favor of long-term satisfaction.

Much of Adventism, in its ideal world, would not like to have homosexuals in its membership. In fact, LGBT Adventists *are* members of the church. Can we ignore, hide, *disappear* them? Can we, in parallel, create a fake and delusional reality? The reality principle tells us we can't. The good news is (paraphrasing Jesus' words on the poor), we will always have them among us. Their presence is an irreversible fact. As much as we submit reality to our principles and values, we urgently need to learn also to confront, without discounting anything, our principles with reality as it is: a reality with LGBT people among us, in our churches, in our universities, in our workplaces and, what is more significant, in our own Christian- and Jesus' second coming-oriented families.

#### The Sociological "Contextual Principle"

The Reality outside not only challenges the individual and their situation; it configures itself as a complex socio-cultural entity we need to know to give meaning to our actions and to our identity. If the reality principle reminds us of the challenging difference and fracture between our internal ideal world and the external harsh reality, the contextual principle here reminds us that we need to be flexible if we want to cope with that external reality. Without learning to contextualize we remain an abstract and empty identity. We cannot be flexible and in touch with homosexuals without losing something of our religious and human certainties. But contextualizing helps us also to avoid confusing the map with the territory. Our religious and ethical convictions on sexuality are the map, not the territory. And if it's true that we can understand better the territory only through a map, it's also true that we constantly need to prove the veracity of the map with the reality of the territory. In this case the true human territory reminds us of the irreversible presence of LGBT Adventists among us.

#### The "Hermeneutical Principle"

The urge to approach life as it is doesn't come uniquely from the psychological "reality principle" or the sociological "contextual principle." It comes from within our own foundations, from the Bible itself, through the "hermeneutical principle." We

Adventists are not just “readers,” we are “interpreters” of the Bible. Hermeneutics does not exist in just reading the Bible, it exists only in interpreting it. We interpret the Bible because we need to apply its meaning to today’s world *and* because the Bible uses a “pluri-vocal” (various meanings) and not an “uni-vocal” (one meaning) language. Poetry, parables, and narratives are ambivalent by nature, having various possible meanings, among which we need to choose the one best fitted for our current situation. Interpretation is not an extra-biblical endeavor only; it is already an intra-biblical one. We can’t escape hermeneutics. Our destiny as Christians is to be interpreters as well as readers of the Bible.

Hermeneutically speaking, our church has made positive steps forward. In fact, we have passed from “rule-based” to “principle-based” hermeneutics. In the past, Adventism was entrapped in a reductive biblical fundamentalism through the implicit and sometimes explicit defense of the inerrancy principle. While there are still some sectors in our church that maintain this biblically reductive view, the official church has moved forward to what we could call a “principle-based” hermeneutics, developed by our best theologians. That stance has not come far enough because rule- or principle-based hermeneutics, though different and opposed, still share a common, intra-Biblical perspective. It means that they don’t confront themselves with the extra-Biblical reality.

A “rule-based” hermeneutic makes normative a circumstantial event, while a “principle-based” hermeneutic refuses the absolute pretention of a specific event by rescuing rather the universal principle behind. Strictly speaking, we still don’t find in them both a whole and complete hermeneutical process. There is true hermeneutics only when we preserve the two components of the “hermeneutical circle:” the “text” and the “extra-textual” component as incarnated in the reader and his world. In other words, there is hermeneutics only when we confront the meaning of the Bible and test it with the extra-biblical reality and its pressing challenges. In this sense homosexuals are as entitled to read the Bible as any of us. Additionally, we must acknowledge the new fact that, without homosexuality today, it is difficult, if not impossible, to interpret correctly and meaningfully the Bible. Homosexuality has become the visible

sign of the human condition, suffering, and existential search of us all. *In this sense, we all are homosexuals. This is what I call the hermeneutical relevance of homosexuality today.*



### **The Value and Limits of Seventh-day Adventist Statements on Homosexuality**

**M**y first reaction is to dislike the Seventh-day Adventist official statements on homosexuality. That said, the Holy Spirit and my wife keep telling me that we need to have a common starting point. So, I have learned to appreciate the positive aspects of those statements. The fact that we can't remain enclosed in the Bible, and can't skip confronting ourselves with the external reality and its demanding new challenges, is visible in the updated and regular publication of new statements on sexuality and LGBT issued by the General Conference.

The position of the Adventist Church on homosexuality is articulated between "official" and "unofficial" statements. Both are "public" and "representative" and thus relevant administratively, and in various ways binding, because they are produced and promoted by the General Conference. The more positive "official" statements (Statements), excluding that of 1987, are that of 1999 on "homosexuality" and that of 2004 "on homosexual unions," both reworked during the Autumn Executive Committee of the General Conference in October 2012. To these must be

added a third “official” document (Guideline) drawn up by the General Conference Executive Committee in the spring of 2014. The “unofficial” statements are those expressed by special representatives of the Adventist church, selected, invited and coordinated by the General Conference itself in official, worldwide conventions, such as the Summit held in March 2014, in Cape Town, South Africa, entitled “In God’s Image: Scripture. Sexuality. Society.” Unofficial statements made by territorial or sectoral bodies are important but not necessarily the expression of the General Conference. An example would be the latest statement made by Andrews University in October 2015.

What value, meaning, and perspectives do these statements open up for Adventism? Despite the limitations, ambiguities, and omissions present in these statements, some aspects of them are, in my view, positive. Homosexuality is a human reality of difficult conceptual and existential management and, for the clear majority of Adventists, also a new theme. For this reason, the statements made by the General Conference represent a good starting point on which we need to keep working with confidence, patience, flexibility, and capacity for dialogue. Four elements appear to be positive in these pronouncements:

- a. These statements seek to promote and defend solid convictions grounded in the biblical description and understanding of sexuality and homosexuality.
- b. Putting aside ambiguities and speculations, these statements attempt to describe reality and principles with clear and univocal terms in order to avoid the confusion and uncertainty that may be generated within our community.
- c. One of the distinctive traits of our church is its unity. In addressing this issue, we cannot easily give up on unity. We must try to preserve it.
- d. Recognizing a relative delay in manifesting greater understanding and empathy in front of the homosexual Adventist membership, these statements ask for an urgent renewal in our human and pastoral approach to homosexuals.



### **The Need of an Honest Confrontation with Today's Society and Culture**

**T**he four positive points mentioned above, however, relate to purely endogenous mechanisms within our system. They only describe a confrontation with ourselves. Here lies their greatest limit. Our ideals must show their strength and relevance in an honest confrontation with the external world. We cannot manipulate reality to adapt it to our ideals. It should be the other way around. It's the role, function, and prerogative of "reality" (the comparison with it) to highlight the limits, shortcuts, short circuits, one-sidedness, and omissions of the best ideals and noble convictions. This is a primary and basic human, psychological, sociological, and even Biblical principle. If we are doing well as Adventists in our approach to homosexuality (and sexuality in general), we certainly cannot tell it to ourselves. Others, homosexuals themselves, alone, are entitled to do it. And the "human reality outside," with which we urgently need to confront ourselves, incarnates itself in five specific confrontations.

## Confrontation with the Irreversible De-medicalization Process of Homosexuality

Since the 1970s, health professionals have been in a process to de-medicalize and de-pathologize homosexuality. Our official world church administration still refuses to acknowledge this change. We saw that in the Summit in Cape Town. Not only has psychiatry, psychology, social work, and other mental health fields depathologized homosexuality by removing it from the list of diseases and disorders in 1973 (DSM-II. A psychiatric manual) and in 1990 from the more diffuse MEDICAL manual (ICD-10) used by the World Health Organization (WHO), but medical and mental health professionals have also shown a transversal and continued refusal of the so-called “conversion therapies” designed to change sexual orientation. Here are some positions that disavow these therapies and report their inconsistency.

National health organizations in the United States have announced that there has been no scientific demonstration of conversion therapy’s efficacy in the last forty years. They find that conversion therapy is ineffective, risky, and can be harmful. Anecdotal claims of cures are counterbalanced by assertions of harm; and the American Psychiatric Association, for example, cautions ethical practitioners, under the Hippocratic oath to do no harm, to refrain from attempts at conversion therapy. Mainstream medical bodies state that conversion therapy can be harmful because it may exploit guilt and anxiety, thereby damaging self-esteem and leading to depression and even suicide. There is also concern in the mental health community that the advancement of conversion therapy can cause social harm by disseminating inaccurate views about sexual orientation and the ability of gay and bisexual people to lead happy, healthy lives. Mainstream health organizations critical of conversion therapy include the American Medical Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, the American Counseling Association, the National Association of School Psychologists, the American Academy of Physician Assistants. The American Psychological Association studied the peer-reviewed literature in sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE) and found a myriad of issues with the procedures used in conducting the research. The task force did find that some

participants experienced a lessening of same-sex attraction and arousal, but that these instances were “rare” and “uncommon.” The task force concluded that, “given the limited amount of methodically sound research, claims that recent SOCE is effective, are not supported.”

In 2014, major therapy professional bodies in the United Kingdom issued a joint consensus statement opposing conversion therapy. Professional bodies supporting the statement included the UK Council for Psychotherapy, the British Psychoanalytical Council, The Royal College of Psychiatrists, the British Association for Counseling and Psychotherapy, the British Psychological Society and the National Counseling Society. In 2015, with the support of the UK Government’s Department of Health, a wide range of UK organizations signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) setting out an agreed framework for activities by parties concerned to help address the issues raised by the practice of conversion therapy in the UK. In addition to many of the professional bodies that previously issued the consensus statement, signatories included the UK Association of Christian Counselors, the Royal College of General Practitioners, NHS England (National Health System), and NHS Scotland. The signatory organizations recognized a shared commitment to protecting the public from the risks of conversion therapy.

In 2013 Alan Chambers, president of Exodus International (one of the most important sponsoring organization of reparative therapy) stated that 99.9% of subjects to treatment, did not experience a change in orientation, and asked forgiveness for the slogan “Change is possible” and for damage caused to people who have turned to them for help. On June 19, 2013, he closed the organization with a public apology to the LGBT community, saying that “For quite some time we’ve been imprisoned in a worldview that’s neither honoring toward our fellow human beings nor biblical.” He remarked that he will now seek to create “safe, welcoming, and mutually transforming communities.”

In 2014 the American Association for Christian Counselors amended its code of ethics to eliminate the promotion of conversion therapy for homosexuals and encouraged them to be celibate instead.

Tonino Cantelmi, president of the Italian association for Catholic psychologists and psychiatrists says: “Catholic psychologists and psychiatrists have no difficulty today in recognizing the contribution of the scientific community, where there is now a consensus in saying that homosexuality is not a disease and that reparative therapy is not applicable.”

### **Confrontation with Irreversible Juridical Process of Decriminalization of Homosexuality**

LGBT rights are widely diverse in Europe per country. Thirteen out of the twenty-one countries that have legalized same-sex marriage worldwide are situated in Europe; a further thirteen European countries have legalized civil unions or other forms of recognition for same-sex couples. Austria, Germany, Italy, Hungary, and Switzerland are considering legislation to introduce same-sex marriage. Same-sex marriage will be enacted in Finland by March 2017. Slovenia has carried out a referendum to legalize same-sex marriage in December 2015, which failed to succeed. Malta is the only country in Europe that recognizes legally performed same-sex marriages overseas but does not perform them. Constitutions of Armenia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Latvia, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, and Ukraine recognizes marriage only as a union of one man and one woman. According to the 2015 Euro-barometer, the top five EU countries in terms of LGBT rights and approval of same-sex marriage are the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Spain, and Ireland.

On December 17, 2012, the Ugandan daily newspaper *New Vision* published an article reporting that the Adventist church president for East and Central Africa, Blaisious Ruguri, had delivered a speech at Mbarara Seventh-day Adventist Church in which he declared that Adventists “fully” supported the government’s “Anti-Homosexuality Bill” (which criminalized same-sex intimacy with lengthy prison

terms and demanded the death penalty for repeat offenders). The article quotes Ruguri saying:

*Our stand is “zero tolerance” to this vice and to western influence on this crucial issue because God says no to it. We are together with the President and the Speaker and we fully support the Anti-Homosexuality Bill. I call upon all religious ministers, all Ugandans, and all Africans to say no to Homosexuality. Let us stand for our sovereignty as Ugandans and as God fearing people even the heavens fall.*



On December 19, the president of Kinship International, Yolanda Elliott, sent a letter to Adventist world church president, Ted Wilson, and to the church’s public relations officer, Garret Caldwell, that read in part:

*Through Pr. Ruguri’s statements and the Adventist church’s continued membership in the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, the church is now justifying the prosecution, imprisonment, and potential execution of Ugandan LGBT people and their families. As Adventists, and regardless of the church’s statements on human sexuality, we believe that the Seventh-day Adventist church should never stand for the violation of basic human rights. The recent End It Now campaign is just the latest example of our church’s track record of standing against violence and abuse. Because of that track record, we do not accept that one of the church’s top-ranking leaders can support legalized violence against a minority group or use the pulpits and authority of the worldwide church to do so.*

Jamaica is widely described by rights organizations as among the most dangerous places in the world to be a homosexual, with the authorities often turning a blind eye to assaults and murders of gays, lesbians, and their allies. With more than a quarter of a million Seventh-day Adventists, Jamaica also has among the highest percentages of Adventists of any country in the world. Approximately 10% of all Jamaicans are Adventists. Numerous Adventists have served in prominent positions in government. In a November 2011 interview with a Jamaican newspaper, *The Gleaner*, Seventh-day Adventist and then-Prime Minister Andrew Holness rejected calls from Britain's Prime Minister David Cameron that he repeal Jamaica's "anti-buggery" laws, which criminalize same-sex intimacy with jail times of up to 10 years. Holness served as Prime Minister of Jamaica from October 2011 until January 2012, when he was succeeded by Simpson-Miller. In August 2013, the Jamaica Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists published an article on its website under the heading "Same-sex marriage is not a human rights issue," stating that the Adventist Church in Jamaica has "been very strident in its opposition of any softening or repealing the buggery law."

Another prominent Jamaican Adventist politician who has spoken against gay rights is Governor-General Sir Patrick Allen. In a November 2012 address, he urged his countrymen to follow the example of the biblical prophet Nehemiah, who demonstrated "zero tolerance of corruption and determined action to stamp it out." Allen lamented "a significant change for the worse...what is referred to as the 'new norm.' The trend began with the banning of prayer in schools and later, in state institutions in the former bastion of Christianity, the USA, under the banner of freedom of religion." He continued, "There is mounting pressure on states such as Jamaica to recognize specific rights for lesbians and gays, with even threat of withholding financial assistance from those who do not."

### **Confrontation with the Other Part of the Adventist Church**

There were two Adventist conferences on homosexuality before the Summit of Cape Town (2014). The first meeting was held in 2006 in Ontario, California. The

presentations were published in book form in 2008 under the coordination of some teachers (regular workers of the church) of the University of Loma Linda and La Sierra. The second meeting took place at Andrews University in 2009, promoted by the same university. The presentations were published in book form in 2011. Not only were the authors of the first book on homosexuality not invited to the Cape Town Summit (2014) but in that Summit itself, each delegate was given, not the two books on the subject (as it would have been logical), but only the second one produced by Andrews University. This fact evidenced the bias and the myopic refusal of our leaders to engage in an honest dialogue with the various sensibilities and representatives of our church.

In Cape Town, while the theologians present there, stubbornly defended “reparative therapies,” demonstrating their lack of knowledge of scientific updated data, Adventists specialists from other fields, however, in block, took distance from these therapies. Here are three unexpected pronouncements that even the unilateral and scrupulous GC organization couldn’t avoid.



*Dr. Curtis Fox*

Dr. Curtis Fox, psychologist, director of the department of Counseling and Family Services, Loma Linda University: “If homosexuality were a choice, conversion therapy would work, but for the most part it does not. In fact, reparative therapy has been denounced by most professional organizations in a position to know the evidence. We do know that the effects of societal prejudice against LGBT youths too often leads to depression and suicide. Such prejudice is fueled by some of the following myths: Most pedophiles are gay. Gay relationships are transient. Gays don’t make good parents. Gay parents make gay children. Being gay is contagious in terms of lifestyle.”



*Dr. Peter Landless*

**Peter Landless**, medical director of the health department at the General Conference said, “The big question: Is a person born gay or does that person become gay?” Landless gave a brief overview of brain development, neuroanatomical development, home environment, fraternal twins, birth order, and other literature suggesting genetic etiology for homosexuality. None is determinative; it is not known whether there is mere association or whether it is causal. His conclusion was “it is very complex and we don’t know.” He emphasized that clinicians should be aware that there is danger in reparative therapy, including significant risk. There is no scientifically valid answer to causality; medical science has not ascertained etiology.”



*Professor Peter Swanson*

**Peter Swanson**, psychologist, professor at the Theological Seminary of Andrews University: “Attraction comes to some, but not all. Sex is a central focus for some, others not. Some are very promiscuous, but not all—many have enduring relationships. There are more similarities between homosexuals and heterosexuals than differences. Some have a homosexual orientation without the behavior. Sex is only one aspect of their lives. However strong one’s attraction, God’s grace is sufficient. Young tempted souls need your patience and love; bind them to the church by love. There is a range of opinions about these issues and Swanson asserted that he does not speak for all psychologists. The American Psychological Association’s DSM (*Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*) eliminated homosexuality

in 1972, reasoning that it could no longer be considered a pathological disorder, and if it is not a diagnosable disorder then there is no treatment.



### **Confrontation with LGBT Adventist People**

This confrontation would enable us to verify the degree of consistency of our pretended openness. In fact, our inconsistency is immediately evident by the “abstinence” request that the church asks as a condition for accepting them. It is as if God had said to Abraham or David, he would accept them only if they were ready to give up intimacy with their various wives in a system that certainly was not part of his original plan. Or, as if we say today that we can accept and respect immigrants only when they behave well. It may seem consistent but this kind of reasoning is simply absurd and self-liberating because it does not only exclude “de facto” what it pretends to accept but in addition, it masks as virtue what is, in fact, its opposite.

### **A Real Confrontation with the Bible**

But the more difficult external confrontation is paradoxically with the Bible itself. Precisely because the Bible is not an Adventist or a heterosexual book. The Bible is the word of God addressed to all human beings. In the very moment we pretend the Bible is Adventist and that our heterosexual understanding of sexuality exhaustively represents the Bible, in that very moment we become blasphemous and idolatrous.

For this reason, the Bible will always remain an external reality to Adventism. And this is not a disadvantage but rather a guarantee and a protective blessing.

We still don't know completely what sexuality, homosexuality, male, female, and human relations are. Let us not use the Bible to say what it *simply does not say*. The Bible is an orienting, not a confirming, book of what we humans, homosexuals and heterosexuals, have to learn, sometimes with a lot of suffering, in a long pathway of blessed but challenging relations.



It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it.

—Upton Sinclair, novelist, and reformer (1878-1968)

## Recent Research

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### *Choice*

Despite almost a century of psychoanalytic and psychological speculation, there is no substantive evidence to support the suggestion that the nature of parenting or early childhood experiences play any role in the formation of a person's fundamental heterosexual or homosexual orientation. It would appear that sexual orientation is biological in nature, determined by a complex interplay of genetic factors and the early uterine environment. Sexual orientation is therefore not a choice. —The Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2007.

Heterosexuals and homosexuals can choose (at some level) the type of behaviors they will exhibit. But exhibiting some heterosexual behaviors will not remove a gay person's sense of same-gender attraction or make it go away. The reverse is also true. Much as a left-hander who is forced to behave as a right-hander, it is not the person's first choice and will usually be less comfortable. Human beings all get to make choices about how to conduct their lives, but not about their feelings of sexual attraction. (Marcus, Eric. *Is it a Choice?* p 9-12. NY: HarperCollins, 2005.)

Provides a table and description of things that can be changed and those that can't (e.g., sexual identity is unchangeable, sexual orientation is probably unchangeable). (Seligman, Martin E P., Ph.D. *What You Can Change...and What You Can't*. p 244-260. NY: Fawcett Books, 1993.)

“Nobody in science now believes that sexual orientation is caused by events in adolescence.... Homosexuality is an early, probably prenatal, and irreversible preference.” —Author and Geneticist Matt Ridley. Summary of 14 studies that show brain and body differences between heterosexual and homosexual individuals (e.g., inner ear, finger lengths, finger ridges, startle reflex, maternal side, etc.). Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance. Religious Tolerance.org  
[http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom\\_caus4.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_caus4.htm)



## *Coming Out, Spousal*

In two million marriages in the U.S., at least one spouse is gay, lesbian, or bisexual. When a husband or wife comes out of the closet, it is a profound crisis that cuts across race, socioeconomic class, religion, and age.

(Buxton, Amity Pierce, Ph.D. *The Other Side of the Closet—the Coming-Out Crisis for Straight Spouses and Families*. p xiii-xv. NY: John Wiley and Sons, 1991, 1994.)



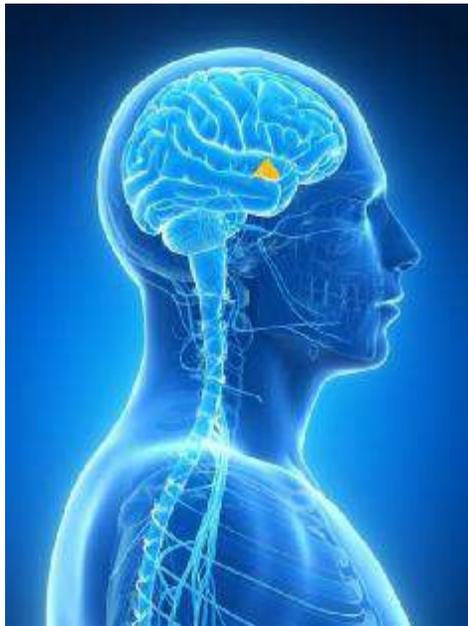
## *Continuum*

Based on his survey of 18,000 people, Researcher Robert Epstein believes that the terms “gay” and “straight” can be highly misleading. “Sexual orientation actually lies on a smooth continuum and the way people state their orientation is often a poor predictor of their true sexual behaviors and fantasies.” Studies have shown that the same continuum of scores exists in the United States and in the average of scores from a dozen other countries. Fewer than 10% of subjects scored as “pure” heterosexual or homosexual. Characterizing sexual orientation properly requires two numbers. One number reflects the person’s mean sexual orientation (e.g., the placement of the person on that continuum). The other number reflects the sexual orientation range (e.g., the amount of “choice” the person has in expressing his/her orientation, which also forms a continuum). According to Epstein, a quiz is available at the following URL: <http://MySexualOrientation.com> (*Scientific American Mind*: Feb/Mar 2006 issue for “Do Gays Have a Choice?” and Oct/Nov 2007 issue, [www.sciammind.com](http://www.sciammind.com))

## *Controller*

Sexual orientation is controlled by the hypothalamus. It is half the size in the gay brain as compared to the heterosexual brain. Between 5%-10% of boys have a smaller nucleus and a stronger biological tendency toward homosexuality.

(Gurian, Michael. *The Wonder of Boys*. p 232-233. NY: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1996.)



## *Corpus Callosum*

Several studies have shown that homosexual men have an increased prevalence of non-right-handedness and atypical patterns of hemispheric functional asymmetry. Non-right-handedness in men has been associated with increased size of the corpus callosum (CC), particularly of the isthmus, which is the posterior region of the callosal body connecting parietotemporal cortical regions.

(Witelson, Sandra F., et al. *Corpus Callosum Anatomy in Right-Handed Homosexual and Heterosexual Men*. Archives of Sexual Behavior. Volume 37, Number 6(2008), 857-863, DOI: 10.1007/s10508-007-9276-y



## Resources

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### *Williams Institute: University of California, Los Angeles School of Law*

<http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu>

The Williams Institute is dedicated to conducting rigorous, independent research on sexual orientation and gender identity law and public policy. A think tank at UCLA Law, the Williams Institute produces high-quality research with real-world relevance and disseminates it to judges, legislators, policymakers, media and the public.

Experts at the Williams Institute have authored dozens of public policy studies and law review articles, filed amicus briefs in key court cases, provided expert testimony at legislative hearings, been widely cited in the national media, and trained thousands of lawyers, judges and members of the public.



### *The Trevor Project*

<http://www.thetrevorproject.org>

Founded in 1998 by the creators of the Academy Award®-winning short film TREVOR, The Trevor Project is the leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) young people ages 13-24.



## *PFLAG - Parents and Families of Lesbians and Gays*

<https://www.pflag.org>

Founded in 1972 with the simple act of a mother publicly supporting her gay son, PFLAG is the nation's largest family and ally organization.

Uniting people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) with families, friends, and allies, PFLAG is committed to advancing equality through its mission of support, education, and advocacy. PFLAG has 400 chapters and 200,000 supporters crossing multiple generations of American families in major urban centers, small cities, and rural areas in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. This vast grassroots network is cultivated, resourced, and serviced by PFLAG National, located in Washington, D.C., the National Board of Directors and 13 volunteer Regional Directors.

## *Facing Doubt – A Book for Adventist Believers on the Margins*

*By Reinder Bruinsma*

On the surface, it may appear that I am quite negative about many things in my church and that I am pessimistic about the church's future. That would, however, be a wrong conclusion. I am not about to give up on my church but I try to take the long view. I believe current clouds can blow away and eventually new winds can begin to

blow. The last thing I would want to do is discourage any readers by my analysis of the crisis in Christianity in general, and in Adventism in particular. I would be devastated if my book drove people away from faith and away from their church. On the contrary, I hope with all my heart that it will help at least some readers to take a new “leap of faith” and then (re)-connect with their church.

I have written this book because I deeply care for all those who have ended up “on the margins.” I do not have the illusion that reading it will make all doubts disappear. I do hope and pray, however, that it will help those who read it to establish priorities in their faith experience and in their ties with the church and dare to live creatively with their uncertainties and doubts.

## *Two 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 Wednesday, March 8, at noon**. 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.

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 in attending, you can contact us at [katgurian@aol.com](mailto:katgurian@aol.com) for a registration form. We look forward to seeing you in March!



# Voices of the Heart

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## *Journey*

*By Jerry McKay*

### Chapter 10

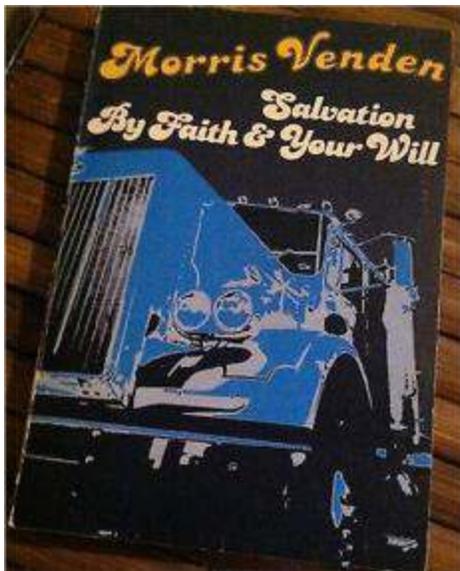
#### **Venden's Sermons**

**I**n the introduction to my story, I mentioned that people have asked how my faith and my orientation intersected and collided. During that first year at CUC, there was a spiritual “event” that conspired against me to create great expectations on the one hand and disillusionment on the other. Those expectations intensified my internal conflict and would carry forward to the time when I was in reparative therapy. Because my spiritual formation was profoundly influenced by that event, I will explore it at some length. Bear with me as I get a bit theological.

While I was in Japan, an Adventist pastor had been giving Week of Prayer lectures on Adventist campuses in the United States. I initially learned of Morris Venden through audio cassette tapes (showing my age again). While I enjoyed the taped messages, I was thrilled when I obtained a print copy of the fall 1975 *Student Movement*, the student newspaper for Andrews University. That 28-page issue was a transcript of Venden's Week of Prayer messages.

As was my practice with any spiritual material, I methodically worked my way through it ruminating over every word. I underlined, highlighted, circled, checked, and re-highlighted poignant comments that I felt related to my experience.

Venden's sermons were rich with illustrations promising a victorious life. They focused heavily on the loaded concepts of *continual obedience* and the *correct use of my will*. He used a road trip as a running parable. On this road trip, intimidating Peterbilt transport trucks represented the threat to my obtaining personal victory in the here and now as I moved toward the Kingdom of God.



In this parable, my temptation was to cling to control of my will—the steering wheel—thinking I could out maneuver those trucks myself. By clinging to the steering wheel, I would in effect be assigning Jesus to the passenger seat. My spiritual “work” was to surrender total control of the wheel—my will—to Jesus. Then I would experience continuous personal victory.

This quote sums up the heart of his message. “If as a Christian, you haven’t yet discovered meaning in the personal daily devotional life, don’t try anything else.... It is the entire basis of the Christian experience: on-going communion and fellowship with Jesus.”

Throughout those 28 pages, Venden repeatedly emphasized that the only way to access the benefits of the cross was through a faith relationship with Christ.

Of course, my ears perked up when he quoted from my cherished devotional companion to the Bible—*The Desire of Ages*. Quotes like the following pulled at my heart strings. “When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us.” And again, “If we abide in Christ, if the love of God dwells in us, our feelings, our thoughts, our purposes, our actions will be in harmony with the will of God.”

By now I think you can appreciate why I became preoccupied with Venden’s message. He insisted that a relationship with Jesus was comprised of Bible study, prayer, and the Christian witness— “the three tangibles by which all other intangibles are made tangible.” While his emphasis was not new, it reinforced what I had been doing since my baptism at age twelve—*diligently practicing a devotional life*. And now, I had a year of mission service to add to my list of tangibles.

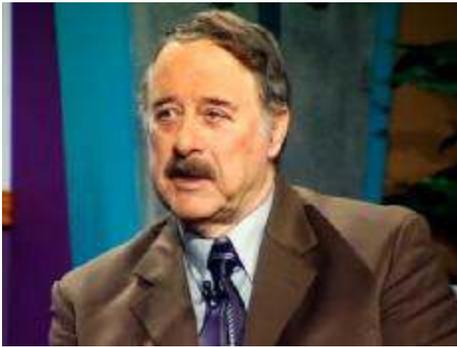
The inner conflict this created was intense as awareness of my orientation increased while not experiencing any of the promised benefits. Because I was not becoming heterosexual in any sense of the word, I could only conclude that Venden’s explanation applied to me.

“Now the only explanation for [not obtaining victory in the Christian life],” he insisted, is “that there must be an on-again, off-again abiding in a sense, to explain the failures that we have seen in our lives. Because,” he continued, “if we do not abide in Christ at any given moment—depending upon Him, leaving Him at the wheel, in the driver’s seat—our feelings, thoughts, purposes, and actions will not be in harmony with the will of God.”

What was I to think? The only conclusion I could come to was that I had not been intentional enough about my devotions or that I was not doing it correctly. Because I was already primed by years of personal devotions, I was ready to do, with a

vengeance, any variation on a devotional life I thought necessary to end my secret struggle.

I know I am repeating myself, but you must appreciate how deeply I identified with Venden's emphasis. When he said, "The only part that you can do in the fight of faith is an on-going daily personal fellowship," I took it to heart. I also took to heart the promise that if I came into this growing relationship with the Lord Jesus, "Jesus would fight my battles for me."



*Morris Venden*

Scattered throughout Venden's sermons were phrases gathered from Ellen White outlining the changes that would occur if God took control of my will and then gave it back to me with Him in charge. While the list was extensive, I became preoccupied with those that seemed to speak directly to me. When God is in control, Venden insisted: inclinations and affections change; thoughts and desires change; impulses and tendencies change; passions are subdued; and our feelings, emotions, and imaginations are transformed.

That is quite a list. While it is not unusual for a Christian leader to speak in these terms, nor for a Christian to seek these changes, I became preoccupied with them. To my detriment, I confused each characteristic with my orientation.

A non-Adventist might find it difficult to appreciate the force I gave to comments made by Ellen White. She holds a prophetic-pastoral role within Adventism, and the church would not be what it is today without her. She is what the Church Fathers are to Catholics, Luther to Lutherans, Calvin to Reformed Christians. Whether it was

White or the Bible, I frequently misread and misapplied what I read to my orientation. I did not read “change” statements as universal promises offering hope and encouragement. I read them as absolutes which I must experience if I were truly a faithful follower of Christ.

Therefore, if one thoughtful hour contemplating Jesus’ life was not sufficient, then maybe two thoughtful hours were necessary. While I did not follow a two-hour per day routine, the thought that I was not being faithful enough in my devotions haunted me. I often wondered if the Apostle Paul was correct. Perhaps, in some way, my devotions were misguided and that I was worshiping the creature rather than the creator. As a result, I was under God’s wrath and being “handed over” to these desires. I felt the implications were staggering, if not eternal, in consequence.

Earlier I mentioned expectations. Venden’s message heightened my expectation of a change in my feelings and attractions. However, because of my naïveté about the nature of sexual orientation, I was setting myself up for a great disappointment. At the time, I understood my experience in the same way many see it. To use a commonly used but equally confusing term, I saw my orientation as a *propensity*.

Propensity is a tricky word. Some definitions sound more like behavior, as in a *tendency* to eat too much, or an *inclination* to talk too much, or to have an angry *disposition*. When the term propensity is used to describe homosexuality, the person using it typically believes that I am heterosexual with homosexual *inclinations*. That was not how I experienced my orientation.

Other definitions sound more stable and enduring—even innate. This is where orientation fits in. If a heterosexual friend said he has a *deeply ingrained or strong natural proneness* toward the opposite sex, he would be describing his orientation as a state of being. Over the last 30 years, I have never heard one of my heterosexual friends describe his or her sexuality as a *propensity*. For them, it is who they are. Even if they remained celibate, they would still experience the world as a heterosexual. At least, that seems the case when I swap stories with my heterosexual friends.

Likewise, I often hear the misguided comparison of homosexuality to that of prostitution or adultery. Often it is spoken of in terms of an addiction like alcoholism or gambling. These are not orientations. Some are behavioral choices while others may reflect a propensity. All people can participate in these, irrespective of orientation. Likewise, people of either orientation can have the propensity to be greedy, arrogant, or just plain foolish. On the positive side, the fruit of the spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—can be seen in the lives of all despite their orientation.

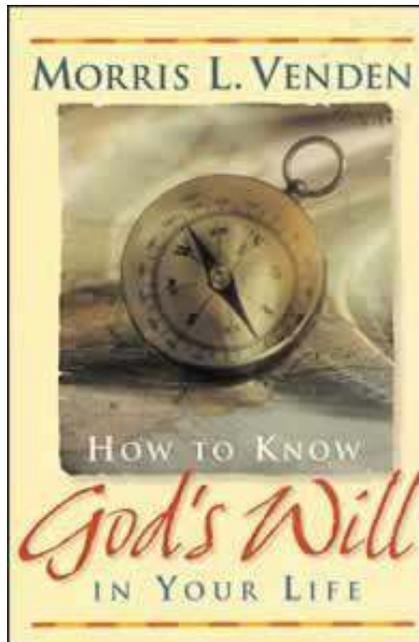
At the time, I did not make the distinction between the state of being and behavior. Some people don't like it when I express my orientation as a state of being because they would prefer that homosexuality were a propensity—in the behavioral sense. I have to live with reality, however, not what others believe or would prefer.

In this state of confusion, I embraced the belief that my spiritual practices would change my orientation. I expected the emergence of a totally different state of being. Had there been some shift in my experience, it would have suggested that Jesus was fighting this battle for me. But there was nothing! I went to bed wondering when I would no longer be the evidence or object of God's wrath.

Three words from Jesus' phrase "as a man thinks in his heart so is he" succinctly captures how I felt at the time. I was always trying to figure out how to purge the "so is he" from my person. It was like trying to split a theological or psychological atom. For me to hate the sin was to hate myself. Linking continual obedience with the elimination of my orientation was a recipe for insanity.

Put another way, my devotional life was being overshadowed by a set of destructive assumptions. Assumption One: The spiritual person will always be victorious. Assumption Two: My orientation should not persist if I were totally submitted to Jesus. Assumption Three: If it did persist, I was to blame.

Venden talked at length about the right use of the will. “One of the great misunderstandings in the Christian life,” he wrote, “is how to use your will and your will power.” The big question he admitted was how to know where divine power begins and human effort ends. He wondered how much God expects us to do and how much we could expect from God. How could Venden write with such certainty in the face of such questions? These “frustrating and heavy questions,” as he put it, plagued me for the next decade and more. It is out of my experience that I plead with pastors or counselors to examine the theological framework from which they ask others to live their lives.



It would be easy to blame Venden’s message for leading me into a quagmire of uncertainty. Believing that my devotions—prayer, Bible study, and witnessing—would result in a change in my orientation, I was left in spiritual turmoil. In this let-go-and-let-God theology, I eagerly anticipated some kind of divine intervention, but it never came.

The saddest part in all of this was that my devotional life was becoming a daily reminder of failure rather than the grace-filled space where I had always met with my Savior.

At this point of personal crisis, it would be easy for some to interject that if I had had a proper understanding of the gospel, I would have experienced the change I hoped for. By “proper,” they would mean a Reformation understanding in which Luther would have me locate my salvation in the objective life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. I would be introduced to that *Good News* when I started reparative therapy a few years later.

In that context, my counselor constructed a therapeutic approach focused on the external work of Jesus. I was encouraged to “claim” my heterosexuality by faith in the same way I would claim my salvation by faith in Christ. I was counseled to believe that what I held by faith—my heterosexuality—would become more and more tangible.

While learning about the *Good News* was life-changing, in that context I was asked to do things which now seem unethical. When I get to that part of my story, I will elaborate on how I was to apply “the right use of my will” in a gospel context to a change in my orientation.

I never told anyone about the significance I gave to Venden’s message—neither the hope nor the trepidation. At the same time, I was so enthusiastic, that I persuaded the college pastor to let a group of us—which included Donna—fix up a tiny old church that sat unused in the village of Lacombe. I was determined to fill the town with the hope of victory in Jesus while not experiencing it myself. Sadly, this marked my growing trend of ignoring reality.

We got as far as repainting the interior walls before academic demands dampened that dream. We were fired up, though, and throughout the year many study groups were spent dissecting Venden’s sermons. With all of this going on in the background, I continued with studies and attempts at dating.



### Continuing with Studies and Attempts at Dating

**A**s a healthy 20-year-old male, my libido was as charged as any of my friends and I was always affected by visual stimulation. Because this experience is beginning to sound routine you might be tempted to think I was growing accustomed to it. That assumption would be wrong.

As always, the dormitory was the primary source of visual distress. The “wanting” to look never ended and the constant modifying of my behavior was draining. I spent as little time as possible in those community showers even though there was a bit more privacy than back at Kingsway. Even though I could arrange my mornings so that I got in and out of the showers ahead of the others, I couldn’t avoid all the scantily clad guys moving about in the halls!

Awareness of my orientation was further heightened because finding a mate was taking on a serious tone. For us single theology majors, there could be a sense of desperation. Next to the degree itself, having a wife in arm at graduation was a not-so-unwritten expectation for employment. This little fact was not lost on me. In the back of my mind, there was a growing concern that all my dreams might be in jeopardy if I couldn’t find a wife.

Most of my friends were dating. Kelvin settled into a serious relationship. Despite the happiness I had for him, it was hard to watch him and Marcia together. I couldn’t help compare myself to Kelvin and others. Their obvious attraction to the opposite sex made me very aware of what I did not feel. Even the tender act of holding

someone's hand was out of my reach. When the desire to hold someone's did cross my mind—and it did—it was that of a male friend. In turn, that thought was followed by those “why” questions followed by a headache.

Naturally, some women were more physically appealing to me than others. I may not be sexually attracted to women, but I am not blind to aesthetic beauty. Still, even stunning beauty failed to arouse sexual interest. And that is the crux of the issue. Without physical attraction or emotional appeal driving me, little else could follow. My social interactions were similar to walking through that bee-filled shed. Everything was happening around me, but I was disconnected from it all. To function day to day, I had to suspend most feelings and emotions.

With my attempts to date, a trend emerged. Generally, by the time a second date might have occurred, I had identified a reason a relationship could never work. It was usually a superficial reason, often a physical reason. Before I elaborate, I feel I should do as TV stations do and state that any resemblance to any person is entirely coincidental, and to protect the innocent, names have been changed.

My dating year looked like this. If Miss September had a small mole on her neck at the beginning of the month, all I could see by the end of the month was a huge hideous growth. If Miss October was a full-figured girl on the first, by the end of the month, all I could see were breasts. If Miss November were less blessed “in that way,” by the potential second date, I was sure I should be dating the full-figured girls. Miss December's hips were too hippy by the end of the month; Miss January's slender arms were definitely too thin by the 31<sup>st</sup>; Miss February's hair was too curly or too short or too long. Miss March's ankles were too stout. Miss April was deficient in every way; and Miss May—well, the school year was over by then—proving there was just no one meant for me that year. Meanwhile, there were just-fine guys everywhere I looked. I can make light of this now, but at the time it was distressing. [Sounds familiar]

When I couldn't rationalize ruling out a potential a mate based on physical appearance, I used my field of study. As a theology major, there was the ministerial

“must-have list”—an unwritten list of essential characteristics a woman must possess in order to be a good pastor’s wife. She should be able to play the piano (even teach piano if need be to support our family). As well, she should be able to cook a fine meal, entertain, and get along with every church member. She must be able to create and manage the perfect Adventist home. No one ever met all those criteria. Subconsciously, this played right into my denial system.

Whenever I imagined a future that included a wife and children, there was no link between them. I had no fantasies about “knowing” a woman as Adam knew Eve. Even during those embarrassing nocturnal emissions—which I had no control over—women were never featured. And yes, Christian men studying theology have nocturnal emissions! Any children in my imaginary family had either been discovered under a cabbage leaf or delivered by a stork.

If there had been the slightest attraction, there would have been something to work with. I had *zero propensity* for the opposite sex. I thought about this day in and day out, week after week, and month after month.

My only ongoing relationship was with Donna, although there was never any mention of our being in a “relationship.” We were always doing things together. If we weren’t going shopping, we were attending prayer groups. Often, rather than attend a social function on campus, we would sneak away to make a campfire in the woods beside a nearby lake. Under normal circumstances, this would all have been so romantic. For me, it was only platonic.

After a year and a half at CUC, things literally changed one night. In early December, I got a phone call in the middle of the night. Night calls are disturbing because they often mean something serious. This was a serious call but for an exciting reason.

When my foggy head cleared, I realized it was the director of the language schools in Japan. Bruce was calling to ask if I wanted to come back to Japan for another year. Silly question! For the last year and a half, I had been chattering about Japan every opportunity I could get. The only problem—Bruce didn’t need me at the end of the

school year. He needed me that January.

Although Kelvin was supportive, he told me years later that he wondered why I hadn't decided to finish my degree and then go back to Japan as a pastor. There were any number of reasons why I jumped at the opportunity, but two stand out. Life in Japan was more exciting and rewarding than working on my degree, and it was an escape from the growing conflict between career expectations and my orientation. There was one other good reason. Donna was already there! `



Whatever the case, the next couple of weeks flew by. I had to write exams, finish papers, and make a trip home for Christmas. By early January, I was thrilled to be back in Tokyo.

