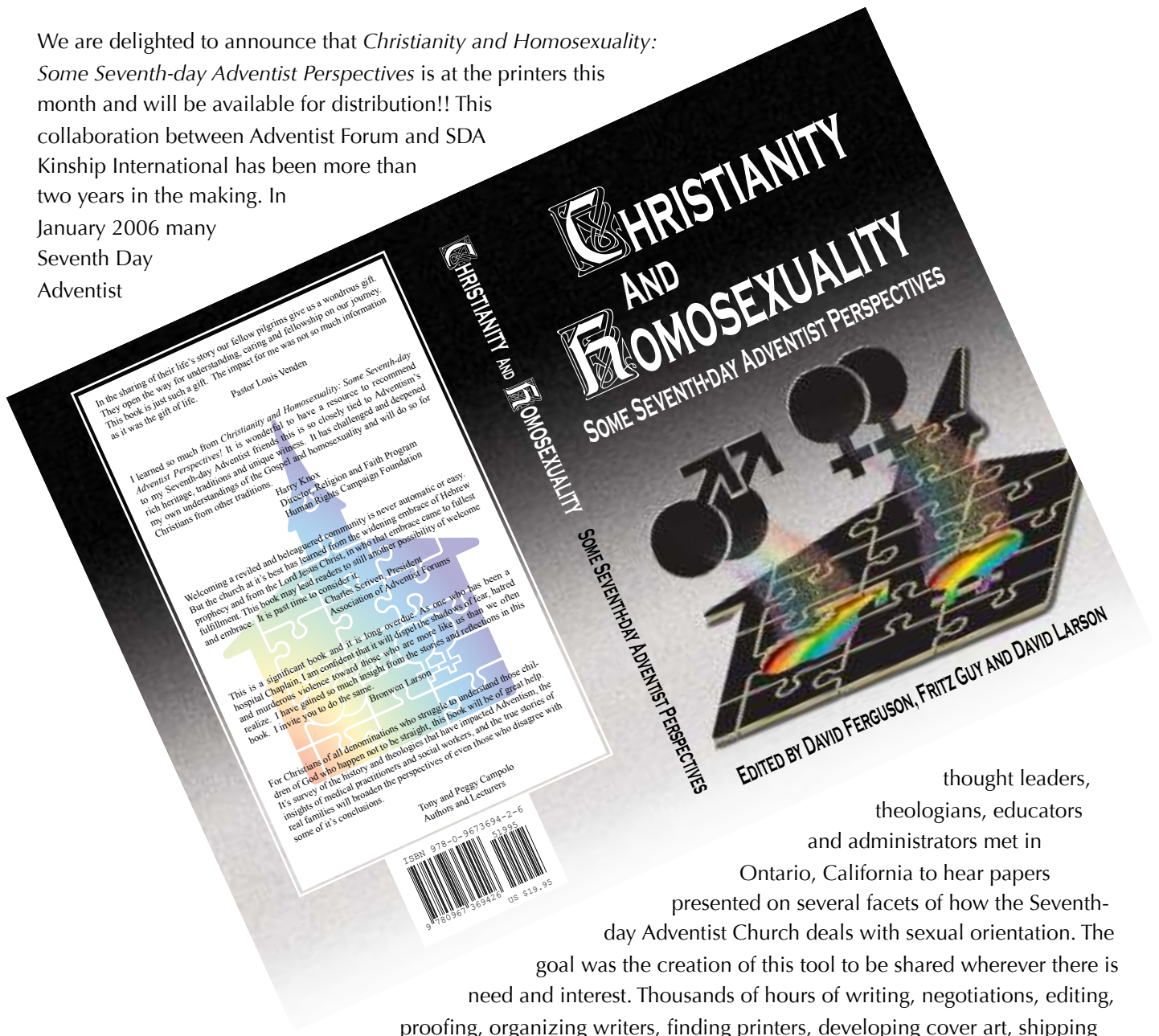


connection

The Journal of Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. March 2008 Vol. 32 No. 2



We are delighted to announce that *Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives* is at the printers this month and will be available for distribution!! This collaboration between Adventist Forum and SDA Kinship International has been more than two years in the making. In January 2006 many Seventh Day Adventist



thought leaders,
theologians, educators
and administrators met in

Ontario, California to hear papers
presented on several facets of how the Seventh-
day Adventist Church deals with sexual orientation. The

goal was the creation of this tool to be shared wherever there is
need and interest. Thousands of hours of writing, negotiations, editing,
proofing, organizing writers, finding printers, developing cover art, shipping
out contracts, researching people who might find this book helpful, building mailing
lists, fundraising and many tasks too numerous to list have been spent. The result is a miracle of much
hard work and Heavenly intervention. Because most of the original papers were synopsized in the
February, March and April 2006 issues of the Connection we're only including some short excerpts in
this issue to further whet your appetite. We're also including some reactions of people who
participated in the conference and in the creation of the book...

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Who we are...

Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. is a non-profit support organization. We minister to the spiritual, emotional, social, and physical well-being of current and former Seventh-day Adventists who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and intersex individuals, their families and friends. Kinship facilitates and promotes the understanding and affirmation of LGBTI Adventists among themselves and within the Seventh-day Adventist community through education, advocacy, and reconciliation. Kinship is an organization which supports the advance of human rights for all people.

Founded in 1976, the organization was incorporated in 1981 and is recognized as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in the US. Kinship has a board of up to 15 officers and 13 regional coordinators. The current list of members and friends includes several thousand people in 43 countries.

SDA Kinship believes the Bible does not condemn, or even mention, homosexuality as a sexual orientation. Ellen G. White does not parallel any of the Bible texts, which are often used to condemn homosexuals. Most of the anguish imposed upon God's children who grow up as LGBT has its roots in a misunderstanding of what the Bible says.

Support Kinship

Kinship operates solely on contributions from its members and friends. Help us reach out to more LGBT Adventists by making a tax-deductible donation to SDA Kinship International. Please send your check or money order to the address below. (You can also donate, using your Visa or Master Card, by contacting Karen Wetherell at treasurer@sdakinship.org. She will phone you so that you can give your credit card information in a safe manner.)

SDA Kinship, PO Box 69, Tillamook, OR 97141, or visit SDA Kinship's Web Site at: www.sdakinship.org.

On Being a Part of This Project

Dave Ferguson

What an incredible journey this has been! When we started the Kinship Advisory Board in 2000, we knew that we needed to find allies within the church who could help us build bridges of understanding. Initially, many of the members of the group were very reluctant to have us even publish a list of their names with our Board. Over the next several years, as they started to take ownership of projects like the DVD that featured interviews with well-known Adventist leaders with gay children, they became more willing to let others know of their support for GLBTI Adventists. Then, the idea of developing a workshop started to emerge in late 2003. As plans developed over the next two years, all of us became excited about the possibility for this workshop. Initially, we thought about having a weekend of information for key leaders of the church to attend and having a large group invited. As we moved forward we were led to have a smaller group attend who could provide feedback to the authors with the idea of eventually having these presentations printed. The workshop was a wonderful success with terrific papers and a very enthusiastic response from those who attended representing many levels of church leadership and most of the colleges in North America.

I had no idea what I was getting myself into with this book! The process has been eye opening from the time we first asked the authors to re-write their papers based on the feedback they received at the Workshop. Then the editors reviewed each paper and made additional suggestions to the authors for ways to reduce the size, avoid duplication, review how they were expressing themselves and assess their choice of documentation. As we moved through this process we started to see what a valuable tool this book would be and realized that while many denominations had done work in this area, our book was truly charting new territory. Once this work was completed we selected

people from the various fields represented in the book to respond to groups of authors. This provided us with the opportunity to have the book get people thinking about more than one way to look at the various topics. It also helped us to meet our goal of beginning a discussion of a topic that has been treated in many local churches and various levels of leadership as a “don’t ask, don’t tell” issue. To further enhance this focus on discussion of the topic, we asked authors to develop questions for the end of each chapter. We picture groups discussing homosexuality for the first time with a resource from their own denomination and with authors who are well recognized and respected in the church. When this facet was complete we editors worked with the copy editor to review the papers for flow of thought, grammar, documentation review and development of a flow for the book that did not detract from the individuality of each author. Then each author was given their manuscript to review again. Papers were sent to our layout editor to begin the actual design of the layout of the book, the cover and eventually the several indices that would be included in the book. Every stage took longer than this neophyte and impatient editor expected. The manuscript was reviewed by a group of three proofreaders who read the entire book and made comments to one of our editors who had final say over the changes that were suggested by the proofreaders. During this process, we also got the endorsements in place for the back of the book and began plans for a major press release for the book.

An invaluable suggestion for the marketing of the book was to provide complimentary copies of the book to church leaders. The process for leaders to receive the book includes having someone call them one week before the shipping date and ask them to read it when it comes. Two weeks later a follow-up call will be made to be sure they received the book and again ask them to read it. Nearly six hundred books are scheduled for this shipment. The next marketing step

with other groups is still in discussion (you don't expect us to share all our secrets ☺). Our focus is to help the book have a major impact not only in our denomination but in other similarly conservative denominations. We are on the verge of something that could be very big. If you have not ordered a copy of the book for yourself, your parents, members of your church, college friends and other business acquaintances, please go to sdagayperspectives.com now. If you read the book first, you will be even more enthusiastic about encouraging others to buy the book themselves.

Bronwen Larson

I helped to organize the book-building weekend workshop in January 2006. At its end, I was exhausted but exhilarated. The exhilaration came because I felt I was making a difference in other people's lives. It gave me a purpose. As a child, teenager and early adult I felt very misunderstood. As I grew through study and therapy to understand why I felt this way I wanted to share my newly found freedom with others who also felt misunderstood, albeit for very different reasons. Seeing five people from the General Conference administration gradually relax and be more open to supporting this project was exciting. I had worked at the GC from 1992-1997 before moving back to California. There I had often felt the resistance to facing controversial issues. Our workshop proved that education is a vital ingredient. Why did I put myself at risk of criticism in an area where homosexuality is strongly denied? For some people this issue is a matter of life and death. If I can help save a life by listening, supporting and encouraging, I have partly fulfilled my purpose in life.

Carrol Grady

As the Adventist Forum/Kinship book about Christianity and homosexuality is about to be birthed, I feel both hope and gratitude. I hope that this book will fuel fulfillment of a long-standing dream of mine: a serious, redemptive dialog in our church about homosexuality. I feel gratitude to all those involved in this project who have been willing to speak out, regardless of any possible harm to reputation or career. I am especially grateful to the editors and others who

have volunteered so much of their time and efforts to bringing the project to completion. The integrity to stand behind one's personal beliefs, no matter the cost, is what I believe will bring about new understanding in the church. I am happy that I could be a part of this process.

René Drumm

It has been an honor to write about the social/emotional realities of gay and lesbian Adventists. I think their stories of isolation and pain are so often overlooked. I hope this may in some small way bring healing to hurting people through enlightenment and awareness.

David R. Larson

The topic of "Christianity and Homosexuality" has long been of deep interest to me for at least two very different reasons. The first is that there is no issue of greater theoretical importance to people who study Christian ethics as I do. More than any topic I know, this one requires us to integrate Scripture, History, Science and Experience. Things are theoretically easy for those who attend to any one of them. They are more difficult for those who take any two of them seriously, yet more so for those who are concerned about three. But to do justice, or at least to make the attempt, to all four is an extremely challenging task! The editors of this project think that no one person is up to the task. This is why our book is a collection of essays by different specialists.

The second reason why Christianity and homosexuality is of interest to me is that this is a practical matter that focuses on nothing less than life and death. Our ideas always shape how we live and die and how we live and die always shapes our ideas. Sometimes we doubt this. We should never do so, no matter how thin the line between ideas, on the one hand, and life and death, on the other, appears--and I emphasize "appears"--to be. What we say, write, teach and preach often makes all the difference in a person's will to live. Some of those I have most loved, now rest in their graves awaiting a better world in which, to paraphrase Martin Luther King, people will be judged not by the contours of their orientations but by the contents of their characters.

Those of us who live in that hope are enjoined by our Master to make our own lives here and now anticipations and partial incarnations of what will be full and complete only there and then. I expect that our book, on which so many have lavished the kind and amount of time, money and energy that only intense and genuine love generates, will help us do just that. I know it is not perfect, especially my chapter! But I am certain that it will be helpful. This is "as good as it gets!"

None of us knows how people will respond to our work. I think it reasonable to expect a mixed reaction, however! I have resolved no longer to debate these issues with any one who is not an "existential stake holder." By this I mean all those who do not have a firsthand experiential reason for getting involved. We are not launching a concert tour; we are offering an opportunity to converse about very important things with those who are fellow travelers on this part of the journey we call life. My first question will be: "Why are you interested in discussing this?" No existential reason, no discussion! End of sentence. Full stop. Period. That's it!

Working with others in convening the conference and editing the book that resulted has been an extraordinarily rich experience for me, one that I am reluctant to see end. But it must, it will, it almost has. And so to everyone who "pitched in," but especially to Bronwen Larson, Fritz Guy, David Ferguson and Peter Massey, I offer my profound respect and gratitude. We can add their names to the list of the courageously faithful in Hebrews 11!

Harry Wang

Shortly following the murder of Matthew Shepherd, my wife Janice and I visited friends in Oregon and heard heart-wrenching stories of how their gay son was harassed in two different Seventh-day Adventist high schools. Having a gay brother-in-law and being a child psychiatrist had already made me aware of the prejudices and challenges faced by gay and lesbian individuals, but the stories and Shepherd's brutal murder were devastating to us. During our drive back to Sacramento, we decided to do something to educate administrators and teachers about the destructive and potentially deadly results of gay-bashing.

We talked to students and parents at Sacramento Adventist Academy and learned that gay epitaphs were spoken on a daily basis. One heterosexual student was called a "fag" throughout his entire high school, as was his closeted gay friend. Another student left the school because of repeated verbal harassment. We learned that elementary students called dodge ball "smear the queer" without any response from teachers. We were further horrified to see homosexual orientation described as "part of Satan's effort to sabotage God's plan for men and women" in the seventh and eighth grade science textbook. Homosexual behavior is described as "Satan's substitute" and "not part of God's plan."

We eventually met with the school principals and gave a faculty in-service in August 1999. We brought three parents of gay youth and a prominent Seventh-day Adventist attorney to join in discussing the psychosocial challenges facing lesbian and gay youth and the legal responsibilities of the school should harassment occur. Aspects of this training were then presented to the Northern California Conference Principal's Council in September, 1999.

Preparation for these trainings brought us in contact with Carrol Grady, Virginia and Walt Cason, Ben Kemena and others. Through participation in the Kinship Advisory Group (KAG), we met George Babcock and began videotaping some of our conversations. The DVD *Open Heart, Open Hand*, through the sponsorship of Kinship and help of members, was the result.

It has been a privilege to participate in KAG, the January 2006 conference and the upcoming book. It is my hope that these efforts will help educate the Seventh-day community and lead to a safer and more accepting environment for LGBTI individuals.

Catherine Taylor

I had a plausible reason for being at the conference. I edit this journal. What could possibly be better copy: perhaps if the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference suddenly became an open and affirming administrative body? Plausible, however, really had nothing to do with my presence there. Wild horses and bad airplane rides could not have kept me away. I was drawn to Ontario, California by a Force that could sound like it came directly from Star Wars but most

likely was sent from Heaven. I have spent my entire adult life learning to deal with being both a lesbian and a Seventh-day Adventist Christian. As a therapist and workshop presenter, I hear stories of the awful way gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people have been treated by our church. I have ached for a bridge to connect these facets of my soul and my community. I have prayed for a religious world much safer than the ones all the Matthew Shepherds of our time have tried to escape. The memory of learning about a workshop designed to fairly discuss homosexuality, the Bible and my church still makes my heart beat a little faster. It seems like a miraculous answer to a prayer of decades. The three days were amazing. It wasn't just the stories or the academic papers. They were powerful enough. It was the Spirit and spirit of those present. Curiosity

arrived through those doors. Conversation made a large appearance. Laughter-how often do we have a lot of that commodity at any church gathering? Meal time anecdotes. Questions. Vulnerability. Honesty. Church leaders I had never met seemed to be willing to listen. More, they seemed to be willing to change their minds. Looking back, I think I was in the presence of a rolling miracle. Writing a five-page response to the sociology chapters was a more difficult gift. I look at it and think "I should have written those ideas better!! What was I thinking?!" Proofing the completed final draft of the book was remarkable. I cannot wait for you all to read these chapters. I cannot wait to hear the responses and the conversations. Each ripple in the pond that this book causes will be part of a miracle. Some miracles are very hard work.



Excerpts from the book...

Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives

From Sherri Babcock –

"Learning to Spin the Coin of Truth"

One day, while I was agonizing on the way to clarinet practice, I silently cried out, "God, what is WRONG with me?" I immediately got my only audible response, as I heard a voice booming through the hallway, "Sherri, you are a homosexual." I spun around to see who had spoken, and if anyone else had heard, but the hall was empty. I started to cry and ran out of the building screaming "No, God, anything but that! I'd rather die!" After running through the woods and fields around the school for an hour, I ended up on a large rock in the middle of a pond. I was exhausted and still crying as it began to rain.

From Leif Lind –

"A Pastor's Perspective: Growing up Adventist and Gay"

Before I knew it, my high-school and college years had passed. Hindsight often distorts or changes one's outlook, and it can be hard to remember exactly what one was thinking at the time. I don't believe I knew or fully understood who I was when I made the decision to marry. I worked at that time as a pastor in Norway while corresponding with my fiancée in Canada. What did I really expect? Perhaps I just hoped everything would turn out all right after getting married. In any case, I was once again making the "right choices" in life.

This quest for doing right (even perfection) is, of course, commonly held within Adventism. I believe it is also common among gays and lesbians, who may try to overcompensate for their perceived inadequacies by showing their church and families that they can be successful, or “make good,” in life. Concerning marriage, I asked myself, didn’t almost every man get married? Despite my sense of humor, I have always taken life seriously. I had never engaged in premarital sex—straight or gay. I had high ideals for marriage (I still do), and wanted to make a happy home for my wife and children. The option of not marrying simply did not occur to me.

Even Paul himself said it was better to “marry than to burn” (1 Cor. 7:9), although some of his ideas on marriage are hardly considered the norm. Scripture also says it is “not good that man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18), a text I consider as relevant today as when it was written. So my fiancée and I married, and I continued to deny the inevitable. My conservative church upbringing did not prepare me to accept the overwhelming sense of devastation and loneliness I faced when I finally admitted a mental attraction to men that no amount of my praying or fasting would change. Yes, I believed God could do anything, but for some reason, it seemed, he was not answering my pleas.

From Carol Grady –

“Homosexuality and Seventh-day Adventist Families”

All three of our boys graduated from Far Eastern Academy and went on to Pacific Union College. We returned to the United States after Paul finished academy. When he was in college I noticed little signs of rebellion, such as sometimes staying home from church; and I sensed even more strongly that something was troubling him, but I still didn’t know what was wrong. I thought we were talking about all the things that were important to him but I later realized he was holding a lot back as he began to come to terms with his sexual orientation. While we were at the General Conference, where Bob was in the Church Ministries Department, and while Paul was a junior English major at PUC, we first learned he was gay.

From Ben Kemena –

“Homosexuality – Is it a Choice or Innate – Biology or Sin”

There is still little certainty on the subject except to say that sexual orientation is not a conscious choice. The degeneracy pyramid has been discredited at great human cost and it has given way to scientific investigation that has more legitimacy. Studies of childhood suggest that sexual orientation trends can be identified as early as the ages of three or four years, but predictions for each child are far from 100 percent certain. Body structure and studies of twins suggest a strong genetic link with homosexuality, as does direct gene analysis. Furthermore, efforts to alter sexual orientation—no matter how extreme the means—have failed dramatically. Some efforts are currently underway to control libido and arousal with chemicals, and these raise many ethical issues. However, these efforts do not change the basic gender type attraction and desire. Furthermore, hormone levels cannot be used as predictive markers for sexual orientation. Given the lack of demonstrable pathology among loving consensual homosexual adults, most professional medical and scientific organizations currently view homosexual orientation as a human normal variant, similar in nature to right- or left-handedness, and they condemn societal prejudice and bigotry against homosexual persons on the most basic humanitarian grounds. Homosexuals are born as gay individuals and, to date, we can neither predict nor alter this course. Some people argue that the world would be a better place without homosexuals, but the consequence of eliminating them from society might be catastrophic.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church claims to be committed to a responsible health-care message, scientific training, and charitable evangelical mission, but its current policy in regard to homosexuals is antithetical to scientific evidence and ethical conduct. There are now probably more than one million gay and lesbian Adventist “refugees” who are either living dishonest, “closeted” lives or have been purged from church society. This is a human tragedy of epic proportions. Just as one might imagine God cast as white or black, man or woman, Jew or Gentile, it could also be said that gay children are created in the image of an unfathomable and loving God. May we pray for

change in the institutional church, and may we understand that until the Word of God is presented to gays and lesbians in a way recognizably Christ-like, the promise of a Second Coming will remain unfulfilled.

From Harry Wang –

Psychiatry, Anti-homosexual Bias and Challenges for Gay and Lesbian Youth

Adolescent Development

Normative tasks of adolescence include separation-individuation; intensification of peer relations; identity formation, including sexual identity and formation of plans for the future.

Separation-individuation is the process of attaining psychological separateness from one's parents. This involves a realization of what is liked and disliked about one's parents and what values are accepted or rejected. The end result is an adolescent able to negotiate the world separate from his or her parents and capable of disagreeing with them without feeling unduly distressed.

Peer relationships provide a sense of belonging through the mutual sharing of activities, ideas and emotions. Friendships for lesbian and gay youth are complicated by feelings of isolation with an awareness of being "different" from peers, often by the age of four. Opportunities to associate with other gay and lesbian youth may be limited and interactions with heterosexual youth may be awkward. When I was around 5 or 6 years old, I felt that I was different from others. I didn't have a name for it at first, but around 10 or 12 I realized what these differences meant. It was a very painful experience. It was not something I wanted...I couldn't speak to anyone about my feelings. I was convinced that if anyone knew, I would be subject to prejudice and hatred. I didn't know how common homosexuality was. I thought I was probably the only one in the world. So I lived in an atmosphere in which I always had to hide. (Ron, a pseudonym)

Identity formation is the end result of answering the question "Who am I?" One's beliefs and values are a large part of this, but identity formation also encompasses ethnicity, culture, religious beliefs, and sexual orientation. This process can be compromised if important parts of one's identity (for example, ethnic or

religious) reject one's sexual orientation as "wrong," "sinful" or "depraved."

Entrance into puberty brings on an increase in sexual feelings, thoughts and behaviors. An awareness of same-gender attraction has been reported by the median age of thirteen. Many homosexual youth, however, engage in opposite-gender dating in denial of same-gender feelings and/or to conform to societal expectations. Opportunities to understand and explore same-gender feelings may be limited.

Finally, teens need to set goals and make plans for their future. The support of friends, parents and mentors can be invaluable if they are available. Homosexual youth often struggle with uncertainty and doubt about their future knowing that they face personal and professional challenges because of their sexual orientation.

From Ron Lawson –

"The Welcoming, Caring Church: The Seventh-day Adventist Church and Its Homosexual Members"

In 1983, Charles Bradford, the president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America, invented a new slogan, which was disseminated widely: Adventism styled itself "The Caring Church." Some twenty years later, the newly reelected president of the world church, Jan Paulsen, preaching on the final Sabbath of the General Conference Session in 2005, laid out his vision of a "welcoming church." "Throughout his sermon, Paulsen frequently referred to the need to open the Church's doors." He "encouraged the widely diverse church to welcome everyone into the church, not keep them out because of their differences." "God has set before us an open door," he said, "which is not our privilege to close and keep others out....I have a word of caution to anyone who is looking for bad grapes in the church: only God can safely grade people. God loves all people globally...I want the Adventist family around the world to be known as a compassionate family."

This paper tests the truth of both slogan and vision by exploring the evolution of the relations between the Adventist Church and its homosexual members. It asks to what extent the Church welcomes and cares for a group of members who are stigmatized by society.

From Rene Drumm –

“Interaction and Angst: The Social Experiences of Gay and Lesbian Seventh-day Adventists”

Experiences in Adventist Schools -

Gay and lesbian students in Adventist schools experienced a wide variety of interactions and reactions with teachers, administrators and fellow students in terms of gay acceptance. Some of the most difficult circumstances existed when students exposed another student's sexual orientation. I was a sophomore at [a Seventh-day Adventist] university. I was confused about the feelings I was experiencing. I knew something was different but was so afraid because I thought I was the only one experiencing these feelings. I was attracted to someone in the dorm. One evening, we were talking on the phone and he said he wanted to take our relationship to the next step with me that night. His roommates were going to be gone for a few hours that evening and wanted me to come down to his room. I was so excited. In my mind I was going on my first date. I was nervous. I walked down to his room at eight o'clock that evening. I entered into his room. He had the room all romanced out with black lights and everything. We talked for a moment then I placed my hand on his upper leg. At that point he stood up and said, "What the [explicative]?" He turned on the main lights and the few friends I had and his roommates jumped out of the closet or from under the bed. My world came to a crashing halt. I was so distraught and at that point I was ready to kill myself. (Tom)

Administrators were also known to discover and expel gay students. When I was a resident advisor in the dorm, I was pulled into the witch hunts and the administration wanted me to tell on friends and confirm that they were gay. The purpose was to dismiss them because they were a bad influence. With about thirty to forty people that I knew on campus at various stages of coming out/selfacceptance, telling on one or two was not going to change the scene. I did not comply with any of their requests and somehow survived them myself. (Hector)

In contrast, some faculty members at Adventist institutions helped gay and lesbian students deal with their struggles. The first quote below notes the help of

an Adventist professor, the second from an Adventist university administrator. It was an Adventist professor who helped me accept who I was. This professor came and spent an afternoon with me going over the Scriptures and helped me to understand what those Scriptures were really saying and what they were not saying. The turning point for me was when this person asked me, "Did you ask God to change you?" I told her yes, many times. She replied, "Do you think God is big and powerful enough to answer those prayers?" I, again, answered in the affirmative. She then said to me some profound words, "Did it ever occur to you that God doesn't want you to change or he would have answered your prayer? Maybe you are asking for the wrong thing. Maybe, God wants you to be the best gay man that you can be under the direction of an almighty God." Those words stuck with me and for the first time in my life the war inside of me was over, that war that I carried for years, decades now were over!!! What peace I enjoyed. (Gregory)

I went to see him [the administrator] and I told him, "This is who I am [lesbian]," and I asked him "What does this mean spiritually?" He pulled out books that explained Bible texts with the real Hebrew meaning. I took it from there. It was like the whirlwind inside me stopped and I was able to meld my spiritual and sexual identities. (Irene)

From John Jones –

“‘In Christ there is neither...’ Toward the Unity of the Body of Christ”

The Gospel According to Paul

For Paul, the fact that the core of the gospel is the divine initiative toward humankind, centering in Jesus' death and resurrection, provides the lodestone from which he constantly takes his theological and ethical bearings. His construction of Christian theology around the cross of Christ provides the decisive standard for Christian life; nothing must be allowed to impinge on the believer's freedom, purchased at highest cost. It is for the sake of freedom that Christ has liberated us. This is no trivial matter; we are summoned to stand firm in that freedom, refusing to compromise the efficacy of Christ's cross by reintroducing superstitions of either pagan or Judaic origin into our walk by faith.

At the same time, this is no license for irresponsible or profligate behavior. “For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence” (Gal. 5:13; compare v. 16). For Paul, flesh and spirit represent two opposite principles at work in human life. Even with all of his instinctive holism, he juxtaposes the works of one and the fruits of the other as setting the terms of our reach toward wholeness and freedom in Christ.

The implications are many and far reaching. But when it comes to how we shall live as Christians in this world, Paul is nowhere more pointed than in his famous summation at the close of Galatians 3: “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.” This single visionary statement demonstrates what the cross of Jesus means for Paul. It provides a focal lens through which to view all of his pronouncements on human relations, and points the trajectory for our own ongoing hermeneutic as we take up the task of appropriating his principles for our own time.

In light of Paul’s first pairing above, our first question, “What biblical implications can we find for the ethics and boundaries of sexual expression in the context of loving same-sex relationships?” gets pulled directly into the second, “How does scriptural fidelity relate to a religious heritage that vests its sexual norms in precisely those distinctions that are overcome in Christ?”

We have observed the Levitical conviction that sex between Israelite males breaches the ethnic identity of the Hebrew people, who defined their chosenness and ceremonial purity in terms of their descent from Abraham. Now when these cultural and national bounds are transcended in Christ, the ground is cut out from under the proscriptions in Leviticus 18 and 20. When Paul affirms the equality of Jew and gentile before God, he is dismantling the framework on which these proscriptions stand.

To be sure, the distinction remains between God’s holy people (“saints,” as Paul regularly addresses them) and an unholy world. But if the distinction is now to be marked along nontribal lines, then any of the

traditional markers must now be shown to carry other water, or go the way of that central symbol of tribal identity, circumcision. Paul’s principle becomes more interesting as he pushes further: Just how far does this erasure of difference, in Christ, extend?

Clearly it goes far enough that when Paul wants to differentiate between life in the Spirit and the life of fleshly indulgence, he can readily reach beyond the Judaic pale to gentile norms for support. His frequent use of catalogs of vices (as well as of virtues) appears to be shaped not so much by one-to-one correspondences with specific behaviors in a given situation as by conventional listings in popular Greco-Roman literature of the day. Whether appropriated directly from commonplace moralizing in the larger world or mediated through Hellenistic Jewish tradition, these concatenations provide Paul with ready-made markers for the bounds of conduct for those who belong to the Kingdom.

Sexual references make limited appearances in these lists. Unsurprisingly, the general term pornos, designating a fornicator, adulterer or otherwise sexually immoral person, is the most common sexual term in such New Testament catalogs, occurring at 1 Corinthians 5:9, 10 and 11; 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10; and Revelation 21:8 and 22:15. Same-sex considerations do, however, arise at two points, in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10, with the terms arsenokoitēs and malakos.

From Fritz Guy –

“Same-sex Love: Theological Considerations”

Sexual intimacy symbolizes a profound personal and moral relationship.

Human sexual intimacy is a symbol that both points to a reality beyond itself and participates in that reality, thus opening up levels of reality that human beings would not otherwise be able to experience. The reality to which sexual intimacy points and in which it participates is a relationship of permanent, preeminent concern for and commitment to the total well-being of one’s sexual partner. Sexual intimacy expresses this reality and also enriches it. Conversely, the experience of sexual intimacy is enhanced by an awareness of this symbolic meaning in the same way that the enjoyment of a meal is enhanced by the presence and participation of a cherished friend. The food itself does

not actually taste better, but the total experience is certainly better. As humans, we are not only homo sapiens but also homo symbolicus.

Because humanness is by its very nature multidimensional, physical intimacy is intrinsically relational. This is why there is no such thing as “casual” intimacy, although many people want to be casual about it. Even if it is not a celebration of an intimate relationship, every occasion of sexual intimacy “does constitute some kind of bond with the partner.” Besides its expressive dimension as a “natural symbol,” it has also a biopsychological dimension, and both contribute to personal bonding.

Thus sexual intimacy carries inevitable and often profound consequences for whatever relationship exists, whether or not the partners intend them. What both partners need—and at some level really want—is the intimacy of two persons blended into one emotionally and spiritually. When this occurs, the result can be an ecstatic, self-transcending experience of love in which two persons let go of themselves and concentrate their attention on enhancing the physical pleasure and emotional fulfillment of the other. Although for many men sexual intercourse “does not mean in the first instance loving intimacy, sensuous playfulness, babies or the eros that draws us into communion with all else” but may be merely “a happening, a sexual event involving our genitals,” there is no good reason to suppose that profoundly meaningful sexual experience is unavailable to men, including men in relationships of same-sex love.

Since human fulfillment and flourishing entails morality, the moral dimension is essential to sexuality’s distinctively human quality. The depth and power of sexual desire and the exquisite pleasure of sexual intimacy make the moral considerations especially significant—even though, as in other human activities, much sexual intimacy is morally ambiguous.

In the light of biblical materials such as the Seventh Commandment (Exod. 20:14) and the Golden Rule (Matt. 7:12), specific moral criteria for optimal sexual intimacy are immediately evident. It does not compete with any other relationship or violate any prior commitment. It is not coercive, exploitive, or manipulative. It is not instrumental or strategic, an exchange for some other desired good—financial consideration, professional advancement or other

favorable treatment. It is truly mutual and egalitarian. The desire to experience pleasure does not in the long run exceed the desire to give pleasure, or in the short run overwhelm it. It respects the vulnerabilities it engenders. It includes concern for each other’s safety, security, and comfort in the broadest and deepest sense. It presupposes and expresses trust, and it evokes and sustains trust.

Taken seriously, these moral criteria carry important practical implications. They call for a rigorous self-discipline and an “ethic of tenderness.” They exclude sexual seduction. They also explain why a genuinely loving relationship intended to be permanent provides a uniquely valuable context in which mutually vulnerable, intimate knowing is facilitated and the intrinsic goal of love can be given fuller expression.

These criteria, furthermore, are theologically significant insofar as sexual intimacy at its best symbolizes the desire of Divine Reality to give pleasure to, and (in some sense beyond our comprehension) receive pleasure from, human reality. Thus, in spite of its motivation by a negative view of human physicality, the traditional allegorization of the Song of Songs as a metaphor for the relation between God and humanity is not entirely misguided. The mistake is denying the obvious meaning of the Song’s sexual content instead of seeing in just that content a symbol of God’s own desire to give to and receive pleasure from human reality.

From David Larson –

“Christian Sexual Norms Today, Some Proposals”

Love as Intense Loyalty

Although the First Testament of Scripture uses several words for love, its richest and most distinctive is *chesed*. Various translations as “graciousness,” “mercy,” “kindness,” loving kindness,” “love,” “steadfast love,” “unrelenting love” and “covenant love,” its significance in Hebrew is so basic and powerful that in English no one word or combination of words fully captures its meaning. Nevertheless, if we must choose only one expression, “intense loyalty” is probably it.

Chesed occurs 270 times in Scripture. The 70 or so times it appears in the Psalms are especially telling because they almost always refer to God’s passionate

and persistent affection for the people of Israel and, through them, all others. One Psalm, for example, celebrates God's unrelenting love in lines that leaders of worship and their congregations still read responsively. Each recital of one of God's activities is followed by, "for his steadfast love endures forever" (Ps. 136). This love is "fixed, determined, almost stubborn steadfastness." It is "sure love, love unswerving." It encompasses "fidelity, firmness, truth, firm adherence and determined faithfulness to the covenant." It is "the strength, the firmness and the persistence of God's sure love." No theme is more central to Hebrew life and thought.

Three famous relationships in Scripture illustrate this kind of love at work. The story of Ruth and Naomi is the account of a widow who left her homeland and settled in a different culture out of loyalty to her mother-in-law. "Do not press me to leave you," she pled, "or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God" (Ruth 1:15–17). The story of David and Jonathan is about two men who might have fought each other to the death because one was a son of the king and the other a challenger. But David, the shepherd, and Jonathan, the prince, formed an intense friendship that endured despite all odds. After David had become king and Jonathan, the throne's rightful heir, had died in battle, David arranged for Jonathan's son, crippled Mephibosheth, to live in the royal household. "I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan" (2 Sam. 9:7), he declared. The story of Hosea and Gomer is the portrait of a man who persists in loving and caring for his wife despite her flagrant unfaithfulness. Scripture says that Hosea's painful but constant love was like that of the Lord, who "loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes" (Hos. 3:1).

Covenant is a word Scripture often uses in connection with these relationships. When described as "an agreement enacted between two parties in which one or both make promises under oath to perform or refrain from certain actions stipulated in advance," it sounds much like a modern business contract that specifies minimum requirements legal systems will enforce. Sometimes ancient covenants were this formal and coldly legalistic. More often they

were emotionally exuberant promises to be faithful in ways that went far beyond that which was minimally required. In these cases, a covenant was a solemn and emotional promise to be loyal; it was a vow to honor not only the one to whom one makes a vow but also the promises one makes.

Josiah Royce, California's first and foremost native-born philosopher, probably explored the moral meaning and importance of loyalty more thoroughly than any other modern thinker. He depicted it as a supreme moral good, the one from which all others derive and find their significance. "In loyalty, when loyalty is properly defined," he wrote, "is the fulfillment of the whole moral law."

At the outset of his study, Royce defined loyalty as "the willing and thoroughgoing devotion of a person to a cause." Such complete devotion is admirable even when the cause to which it is directed isn't, he held. For example, thieves who are loyal rightly receive more ethical admiration from us than do those who betray each other. Nevertheless, Royce went on to contend in language that echoes Scripture's praise of covenant faithfulness without actually quoting it, loyalty is truest when it is devoted to commendable causes, and the best of these is loyalty itself. We should be loyal to loyalty, he held. "In choosing and in serving the cause to which you are to be loyal, be, in any case, loyal to loyalty."

"Loyalty to loyalty" may sound overly abstract, perhaps even similar to Diotima's teaching, except that Royce put "loyalty" where she spoke of "beauty." Although this may be so, his point seems importantly different. Royce held that in selecting the causes to which we will be loyal we ought to select those that will also aid and further the practice of loyalty in ourselves and others. Anything we do that enhances our own loyalty and makes possible and encourages more loyalty in others is ethically right; everything that doesn't is wrong.

Much like Scripture's praise of covenant faithfulness, Royce held that loyalty is more than the thoroughgoing devotion people can have for each other. It is something of its own, it is an additional factor that includes and sustains those who are loyal to each other. "Loyal lovers," Royce wrote, "are not loyal merely to one another as separate individuals, but to their love, to their union, which is something more

than either of them, or even of both of them viewed as distinct individuals."

This "something more" is what too many of our sexual relationships lack today, as they have in all generations. Voyeurism and exhibitionism are such cases because by definition each depends upon there being no intense loyalty in the relationship between the parties. The same can be said about coprophilia, necrophilia, pyromania, fetishism, bestiality, frottage, troilism, klismaphilia, coprolalia, pornography and prostitution. None of the relationships in which these occur embodies anything analogous to God's steadfast love.

Fornication occurs when we intentionally exclude intense loyalty from our sexual relationships. Such relationships alienate one's sexual powers from the rest of one's total self. They alienate one's whole self from the total self of one's partner. These liaisons alienate us from God as well because they are so unlike the steadfast love that God bestows upon each of us. "Adultery is unfaithfulness or infidelity. It is worse than fornication because it more seriously offends what it means to be loyal: The worst epithets are reserved for the sin of betrayal. Worse than murder, worse than incest, betrayal of country invites universal scorn. Betrayal of a lover is regarded by many as an irremediable breach. For the religious, betrayal of God is the supreme vice. The specific forms of betrayal—adultery, treason, and idolatry—all reek with evil". (George P. Fletcher, *Loyalty: An Essay on the Morality of Relationships* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 41.) Fornication is the refusal of intense loyalty; adultery is its destruction. This is why in Scripture adultery is often a metaphor for human perversity in general.

Some recent modifications of Royce's proposals about loyalty helpfully distinguish between its minimal and maximal expressions. At the very least, those who are loyal do not betray each other. Many intensely loyal persons go beyond this and fuse their lives into new social entities that become cells in the body of society without eliminating each person's individuality. This is what we mean when we say that sexual relationships should be characterized by love, and when we specify that, among other things, we Christians understand this love to be intense loyalty.

From Mitch Henson –

"Ministering to Gays within the Church Community: A Pastoral Perspective"

Some time in the early 1980s, we began to notice in our staff meetings discussions about certain young men who were beginning to attend our church. During this time, AIDS was becoming an epidemic in America. We would get calls asking if we would be willing to minister to or visit or at times to bury young men who had died of AIDS.

As Senior Pastor Rudy Torres tells the story, one day a young man, Carlos Martinez, came to our church and "came out" to a Bible study group. He indicated that he had contracted AIDS, but he believed that God continued to love and care for him. Soon Carlos was in the hospital. Torres and I visited him, and, in the course of those visits, we had numerous conversations with nurses and other attendants. We found there were many young men in the hospital who, when it was discovered they had AIDS, lost all church affiliation. As we continued to minister to Carlos and others, we became known as pastors willing to reach out to young men facing an illness that, at that time, was considered inevitable death.

It was during this time that I began to work through the prejudice that I held in my heart toward gays and homosexuality in general. I knew that, according to my understanding of Scripture, no homosexual would be in the Kingdom of God; yet here were young men reaching out to us in their time of need. The gratefulness that they and their families showed us moved my heart and forced me to reevaluate my beliefs. I began to understand God's grace, forgiveness and acceptance at a deeper level. After burying eight or ten of these young men, I realized that, for me, ministry would never be the same again.

Let me be very specific as to why Glendale City Seventh-day Adventist Church continues to minister to all who come. I believe the attitude that existed toward blacks in the Church when I was a young man exists today toward homosexuals. It's not that we don't allow them to attend (as long as we "don't know who they are"). It's not that we might not even encourage them to become members (as long as they declare celibacy). But we certainly would not want their considerable talents to be used or put them into positions of

leadership knowing they are gay. We might find ourselves in embarrassing situations, trying to explain to conservative activists and those who seek to “protect the reputation of the church” how we can maintain high standards while accepting and allowing homosexuals to be actively involved.

I believe many younger members of our churches are waiting to see how we handle this important issue. Are we going to develop a better understanding of the Holy Spirit's ministry? Are we going to leave it in His hands to comfort and guide people into a better understanding of God's will for their lives? Are we going to actualize the words of Christ, “whosoever will, may come unto me”? At times, our determined efforts to change people socially betrays a weak belief in the wooing, changing power of the Holy Spirit, who continues to work in the lives of individuals long after they have become church members and leaders.

The black hole of Christian theology is the subject of sexuality. Old Testament Scripture is abundantly clear that sex is for procreation. In the New Testament, Paul warns that it would be better to “marry than to burn” (meaning “burn with passion”), because time is short. In recent years, as we have incorporated the understandings of psychology (including the need for intimacy and personal contact) into our teaching about sexuality, and since technology has provided us with easy and noninvasive ways of interrupting the natural procreation process, I think we can safely say that, in the Western world at least, 99 percent of all sexual activity, both marital and extramarital, is for other than procreative purposes. Yet many Christians continue to interpret Scripture referring to sex, intimacy, and marriage in traditional ways.

As heterosexuals, we have expanded the biblical meaning to include sex for pleasure and intimacy, but we have stopped short of understanding sexuality in a broader sense—not just genital stimulation or procreation, pleasure and intimacy, but sexuality as a statement of who I am as a human and how I relate to life as a sexual being. Perhaps we have avoided this because of the loaded connotation of the word sex; or perhaps we have simply not studied it carefully because “time is short,” and we have more pressing matters. Nonetheless, as time continues, we find ourselves increasingly challenged to revisit and define more clearly our views on sexuality, singleness,

celibacy, celibacy in marriage and a wide range of sexual behaviors and mores that continue to be practiced in our culture.

From Mitch Tyner –

“Public Policy Issues Involving Homosexuality: An Adventist Response”

To be faithful to Scripture, our positions on public policy issues should work to maximize human freedom to the highest appropriate level. Arguably, the most revealing Scripture passage that involves freedom is not the little horn or Revelation 13, but Luke 15, the passage we refer to as the story of the Prodigal Son, although it might better be called the story of the Waiting Father.

A young man, raised on an affluent but remote farm went to his father and said “Dad, I’m bored. I’m tired of living way out here. I want to experience the world for myself; I want to go to the big city; I want to do my own thing. And Dad, I want you to give me an advance on my inheritance to finance the trip.”

Nothing in either Jewish or Roman law gave the father any obligation to grant that request, but he did. The son left, wealth in hand, and headed for the bright lights. As long as the money lasted, so did his social status. But soon he found himself in a descending socioeconomic spiral. His money gone, he was forced to earn his livelihood by doing something most hateful to a young Jew: feeding hogs. He awoke one morning in the pigpen, looked around him, and said, “What a miserable state of affairs! What a genuine wreck I have made of my life.”

To put this story in Seventh-day Adventist terms, imagine a young man from a farm in the eastern Montana who, having gone to New York, awakens in a drug-induced stupor in one of those neighborhoods you don’t want to enter at night. He has been making his living dealing drugs. He awakens and thinks, “This is Sabbath morning. Mom and Dad are in church, and look at me. Look how far I’ve come.”

The Bible simply says, “He came to himself.” He realized his position. He looked around and said, “I have ruined my life, I have nothing: nowhere to sleep, no means of support, nothing to eat, and I can’t go home. I’ve had my share of the family wealth and I’ve squandered that. It’s gone. Even my dad’s hired hands

out there on the farm are better off. I ought to go home and just ask Dad to hire me.”

He sat there in the mud and composed the speech he would offer his father. He would say, “Father, I have sinned before you and before God. I am no longer worthy to be called your son—just hire me and let me live out in the bunkhouse with the hired hands.” With that, he started home.

Imagine the father, sitting on the veranda of one of those old farm houses—the kind with the long porch that ran the width of the house. The family sat there in the evening catching the cool breeze, talking about the weather, the crops and family news. The father has been sitting there every afternoon since his son left. He’s never given up on his son’s return. Then one day, far off down the road, he sees a pathetic figure limping along. He’s lame, he’s ill-kept and he’s dirty. But the father immediately recognizes him as his son. The father doesn’t wait for the son to come to him. Instead, the father hurries off the porch, down the path, through the gate and down the road to meet his son. As they meet, the son begins his prepared speech of contrition: “Dad, I’ve blown it, I’m not worthy to be called your son....” and he never gets to finish the speech.

It’s as though the father said, “Son, I know, I understand. We’ll talk about that another time. For now, all that matters is that you’re home. Come inside, we’ll celebrate your return!” With that, he covered this filthy figure with

his best cloak, put a ring on his finger, and led him to the house, where the celebration began. The older son heard the sound of the celebration and asked one of the hired hands what was happening. He was told, “Your brother’s back and your father’s throwing a party.” But the older brother refused to join the celebration. Eventually, the father came to him and said, “We’re celebrating your brother’s return—come in and join us!” The elder brother said, “Look, Dad, I’ve been with you all these years. I have obeyed your every command. I have done everything you have asked but you never threw a party for me. Now this son of yours comes home after wasting your money and his life and you expect me to celebrate? Why should I?”

Notice that the elder brother was factually correct, which merely shows that one may be quite correct but very wrong as to the correct interpretation and application of those facts. Notice also that the elder brother referred to “your son”, not, “my brother.” The father replied, “Your brother was lost, and has been found; he was dead and he is alive to us again. It is proper that we celebrate!”

Who was right in that story, the father or the son? The father, of course. The father represents God, our Father. The son represents us, for each of us has at one time or another wandered away from our spiritual home. Why did the father let that happen? The father could have prevented it. He didn’t have to

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connection

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give his son the money, but he did. It can even be alleged that by funding the journey of the prodigal, the father aided and abetted prodigality. Why? Because the father was more interested in his son than in his money. Because ultimately he was interested in his relationship with his son. Because he wanted a relationship with his son that was possible only when the son was ready to enter into it voluntarily. The father would not force his son to stay at home. He would not be satisfied with coerced obedience.

Isn't that a marvelous parable of our heavenly Father! Our Father put such a high value on his relationship with us that he paid the price of Calvary to avoid coercing us. He could have forced us to stay at home with him, and no one could have faulted him for doing so. But he will not be satisfied with coerced obedience. Yes, he's interested in our conduct. But when we come back to him, he doesn't say, "All right, before you come in the house let's talk about that time in the pigpen. Let's talk about what you did, let's talk about the money you wasted, let's get all of this straightened out." No, he puts his robe of righteousness

around us and says, "Come inside. The party is ready to start—in your honor."

Here is a parable that illustrates an important facet of the great controversy between good and evil, a key historic Adventist teaching. God could have created us in such a manner that we could not have sinned. He didn't, because he wanted a relationship with us based on our choice to establish it. He refused to coerce us. But doing that cost him dearly. It cost him the life of his son at Calvary, paid so that we could relate to him freely. Every man, woman, boy and girl is free to relate to God freely, according to his or her conscience, not someone else's.

What are we to learn from this story? First, that God put a tremendous value on freedom. He could have prevented Calvary, but didn't, because he would not coerce our obedience. Second, we have no business, like the older brother, being more judgmental with each other than our Father is with us. Third, we have been given an example that speaks to our own attitudes and actions: If God went to that length to not coerce us, then how dare we, his children, coerce each other?

