



Ron
Lawson

The Visionary Whose Actions ^{P8} Led to the Creation of Today's Seventh-day Adventist Kinship



*Coming Out, Coming Home:
A Caribbean Story*

P4

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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, transgender, and intersex individuals and 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 a global organization which supports the advance of human rights for all people worldwide.

Founded in 1976 the organization was incorporated in 1981 and is recognized as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in the United States. Kinship has a board made up of thirteen officers. There are also regional and population coordinators in specific areas. The current list of members and friends includes approximately 2,500 people in more than forty-three countries.

Seventh-day Adventist 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 that are used to condemn homosexuals. Most of the anguish imposed upon God's children who grow up as LGBTI has its roots in the misunderstanding of what the Bible says.

REGIONS AND GROUPS WORLDWIDE

www.sdakinship.org/regions-groups

CHAPLAIN

Marcos Apolonio, chaplain@sdakinship.org

CONTACT/INFORMATION

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SUPPORT KINSHIP

Seventh-day Adventist Kinship operates primarily on contributions from its members and friends. Help us reach out to more LGBTI Adventists by making a tax-deductible donation to Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International. Please send your check or money order to the address below or donate securely online at sdakinship.org. (You can also donate using your Visa or MasterCard by contacting treasurer@sdakinship.org. You will be phoned so that you can give your credit card information in a safe manner.)



PO Box 69, Tillamook, OR 97141, USA
or visit Kinship's website www.sdakinship.org/resources
for information about

- Find a Gay Friendly Church
- *Homosexuality: Can We Talk About It?*
- *Living Eden's Gifts*
- Previous *Connection* issues
- ... and more.

RESOURCES

www.someone-to-talk-to.net
www.buildingsafeplaces.org
www.itgetsbetterforadventists.org
www.sgamovie.com
www.facebook.com/sdakinship
... and more

From the Editor



Every once in a while we shift gears. Usually the *Connection* is filled with a series of short articles and ads for wonderful upcoming events. This month the executive leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is holding a summit on "alternative sexualities" that includes *no* voices from the lives of those of us who, while we do not have a choice about our orientation, do choose to live it without shame. We've decided to just focus on our voices. In these pages are three stories: one of a marriage, one about the complicated coming-out story between a Caribbean young man and his family, and one about the life of one of Kinship's founders. Two of them are not short reads, but we hope you find them stories that somehow touch your own experience and encourage your life.

Most importantly, take very good care of yourself—for you are infinitely valuable.

Catherine

Calendar 2014

The annual pre-Kampmeeting Event *Women and Children First*

July 11-15

Angels Rest in Fayetteville, Georgia (south of Atlanta)

Kinship's Kampmeeting Event *SDA Kinship Kampmeeting*

July 15-20

The Lodge at Simpsonwood, Northeast Atlanta

The annual European Event *European Kinship Meeting*

August 28-September 1

St. Mark's College, Saffron Walden, England

Following EKM in Europe *EKM-Holiday*

September 1-8

Merman Farm, Tideswell, Derbyshire, England

"Visions of God" Book and the Beach *Mini-Kampmeeting*

September 18-21

Nags Head, North Carolina

9th Annual *Vermont Mini-Kampmeeting*

November 6-9

At the base of Okemo Mountain in Ludlow, Vermont

For more information about these events visit Kinship's website at
<http://www.sdakinship.org/index.php/coming-events/> ▼



Dear Mom, Dear Dad, Dear Family

Coming Out, Coming Home: A Caribbean Story

By Colin

Prologue

To my brothers: Hey guys! I love you! Please read this letter very carefully. I have not spoken to Mom or Dad nor do they know about this letter so please keep this between us! I will talk to them in my own time.

Hey, Mommy! :) Hey, Dad

Please watch this video again and remember the last words we said to each other ("I love you").

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rA-Vb3ZQkew>

I ask that you please read all of my note below. This was really difficult for me to send to you, but I love you; and, more than anything else, I want our family to get closer. We can talk about it whenever you're ready to, but please read all of it and watch all of the video attached to the end of the note! Lamar read it already, but I'm not sure if Allan has yet. I'll be off the plane by the time you're done reading it and watching the video. Again, I love you!

Your son,
Colin



My Letter

Dad, Mom, David, Terry,

You are my family whom I love very much. Most of my life, especially in my teen years, I closed myself off and have not been open about my feelings or the things I was going through at the time. I feel like we as a family

are improving our bond. My prayer is that we only grow closer together in love—Christ's love. This is why I feel I should tell you more about who I am in Christ and the man I have grown to be with your support.

For the past year and a half, I've been trying to formulate how I should go about our conversation; and it's taken me eight months to formulate this note. My journey here thus far has not been easy. Growing up, I've felt

many highs and lows, including my struggle with my weight. Most of my life I haven't taken responsibility for that weight. Even now it's still a struggle. But there was something in particular that I really hated about myself for a long time—something that I've been dealing with as far back as I can remember. I love you all, but I can't lie to you anymore.



I am gay. I know this might be shocking and unreal, but just try to hear me and understand what I have had to go through; and put yourself in my shoes for a bit. This wasn't suddenly something I had to deal with. Ever since I was a child, as early as I can remember, I knew something was different. The same way I know my skin is black. However, I never truly had to face it outwardly till I got to college. For a long time in middle school and high school I denied these feelings and tried to hide them in the dark for fear of being made fun of or beaten up. I also thought it was just some phase I was going through. But as time went on it never went away. When I was a kid I really didn't know exactly what was different. As I grew up I learned what was going on.

I thought for a long time that I was an evil person. I cried myself to sleep many nights. I prayed because I thought God would defi-

nately make me heterosexual. I got to Florida State; but, although it was a safe environment, my fear of what my family would think, fear of what I've been taught all my life about the Bible, was so engrained in me that I refused to speak of it to anyone. I felt even more alone.

I had endless questions. Why would God place being gay on my life? I thought the Bible says it's wrong. Doesn't the West Indian culture I grew up in say it's wrong? I would think about the stories of people being killed in some of those countries simply for loving someone of the same sex. Could that be me? I remember an Adventist Youth service at church when I was a teen where there was an open discussion about homosexuality. I heard about churches in California that opened their arms to gay men and women. I heard about an organization that had gay members formed out of the Seventh-day Adventist population. I have never felt more uncomfortable in my life! There was so much hatred in my own church where I grew up. Even though at the time I didn't identify myself to be gay, I still was very uncomfortable because I felt deep down like they all were talking about me. I felt incredibly unsafe in my church and with people I thought I trusted and called close. There have been moments where I even felt the same way about you all as my family.

I prayed and prayed for God to take these feelings and attractions away. As I got older I had to face this even more with people asking me and me saying, "Of course not," solely because of what I believed at the time. I believed with prayer, fasting, and faith God would certainly "take away the gay." I even emailed groups and pastors that had dealt with these issues in their personal lives or have counseled others in the same situation, but nothing happened.



For months and months and years I lived a double life. I acted how everyone wanted me to act when I was home for fear of being questioned about my love life or anything of that nature. With my new, close friends I could be myself without feeling judged or unloved. I became very angry with God. I tried walking away from what I thought was a "life-style." I read the Bible, read my devotionals, even asked three close friends to pray. It was very difficult to live in my own skin. I hated myself and began to hate God for putting me through this and not taking it away when I felt like I was doing everything I knew how to do. I wondered why God didn't let me die from the leukemia when I was a child to take away this agony.

My faith was so shaken that I walked away from God. If I have done this much and I am still gay, maybe there is no God. I stopped listening to Christian music. I had no desire to go to church, read the Bible, or read my devotional. When you encouraged me to go to church I pulled away from you. I was depressed and extremely angry. I hated everything about myself and hated the people around me. The hole in my life got deeper as I tried to turn my back on the church and my relationship with God.

I eventually missed the joy of having Jesus in my life. I realized God could not want me to endure such pain. He had kept me alive for some reason, and He died for me on the cross. I knew in my heart that God loved me, but how

could I be gay and love God and He love me?

I slowly started to rebuild the personal relationship I had with Jesus, because I felt like that was the first step in moving forward. It finally took something tragic to really bring to light all that has gone on. When I was diagnosed with leukemia in 2010 I was the most vulnerable I had ever been in my young adult life. Again, I asked God, *Why? Why? Why?*



I'm sure it was just as scary for you all too. I had everything going for me. With God's help I was winning competitions, getting lead roles, getting into programs I didn't even have to audition for. It seemed like God was showing me favor in classical music and singing then put it to a complete halt with cancer. I cried just as much as I did before when I was going through the struggle of my sexuality. While getting treated I looked at my life closely and differently because I had so much time alone to really reflect and think about everything. Every hour of every day I sat in the bed or on the couch, feeling sick, feverish, or whatever, not being able to help myself in the way I wanted to. My tears flowed with 103.5°+ fevers.

I prayed to God about both being sick and being gay. I came to believe that if I could finally love myself I could eventually be blessed with someone to love. God loves me. It doesn't make me less human. It doesn't make me less worthy of love or anything. I was still conflicted about the Bible, but finally I

worked up the courage to be honest with the person I had lied to for years— myself. "I am gay." I finally said it. I finally felt a little better because I finally told the person I lied to for so long—myself. I knew God still loved me. I felt it and I felt a small weight come off of me. I talked with two friends about finally accepting myself. Where do I go from here? I thought I should tell you, but I didn't want to add to the stress you were feeling with my illness.



As I began to get better I became a different man. I went back to school and everyone saw something different in me. I was more grateful for life, and I also began the process of loving the person God created me to be. I decided to not be afraid of what people thought of me! I wanted to live my life in love. Christ's love was all that mattered to me.

When I finally moved to Florida I felt even freer to figure out who I am. I began to have a new appreciation for you as my family. I also began dating for the first time. I returned to church and realized no one can tell me how to love my God, worship my God, or praise my God. No one can tell me how to have and build my relationship with the Lord because it's personal. I had to take responsibility for that.

I am not perfect and I slip up a lot. I say things I shouldn't. Sometimes I don't treat others as

well as I should. I think thoughts I shouldn't. I struggle with personal battles every day, but I feel like it's the process of growing up and building a strong faith. The bottom line is that God is love, not hate. If I am striving as a Christian to be like Him, I can live my life according to the love of God and bestow love on everyone I come in contact with. It doesn't change the kind of man I am or want to be. Being gay is just a small portion of who I am. I'm not a liar and I'm really, really tired of not being truthful about who I am.



I am much happier and at peace because I finally love myself for the man God intended me to be. I no longer have extreme hatred for myself. God doesn't make mistakes! I know there are passages in the Bible that, as they are translated, speak about homosexual acts. However, I don't want to get into a debate about that. That is not the purpose of this letter. I've done my own research; I've read books, including the Bible. I've watched videos and movies and read articles, and I hope that you will do the same. It took me years to get to where I am now, with lots of prayer and support from some friends, with many highs and plenty of lows. I love Jesus and that won't ever change, just like the color of my skin won't ever change, and just like my sex-

uality won't ever change. If God had wanted me to love a woman in "that way," He would have done it a long time ago. There are lots of gay couples and gay families that aren't what everyone perceives gay people to be. It's not all promiscuity, sexually transmitted diseases, and AIDS. Those also exist in the heterosexual community. There is such a thing as monogamy for gay people and families. A friend mentioned to me one day that if a kid or teen was able to express these feelings to his or her family and they knew and could trust that their family wouldn't try to change them but simply love them unconditionally like Christ and help them grow as a firm believer in Him above everything else, there wouldn't be the

powerful stigma that is placed on many gay people today. They would have that strong support in their family and wouldn't resort to other means to figure out this aspect of their life.

Many gays from Christian homes walk away from God and never go back because of how so-called Christians react and treat them. Again I recall that AYS discussion at our church and how it made me feel in my own church. The God I serve and know is a God of love! I feel that if I live my life to be the best person I can be, living according to the love of Christ which is the greatest love this world has ever known, I will live an abundant life here on earth and for eternity. I wanted to tell you because I want us to be

closer. I don't want our family to hold deep dark secrets from each other. I want all of us to be open and honest and to grow together. I love you and I hope that you can still love me and support me. I want to make you proud; and again, I love you!

Here is another link I would like you to read:
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/li-nda-robertson/just-because-he-breathes-learning-to-truly-love-our-gay-son_b_3478971.html.

*Love,
Your son, your brother,
Colin*



Ron Lawson: The Visionary Whose Actions Led to the Creation of Today's Seventh-day Adventist Kinship



By Bob Bouchard*

The Seventh-day Adventist Kinship we know today was founded in 1980. I feel totally confident in saying it would not have happened without the vision, the effort, and the contacts of Ron Lawson. Ron had the vision to try to put a meeting together of a number of LGBT Adventists and a select group of Seventh-day Adventist church officials. He was willing to put in the effort to talk each person into taking a trip out to a camp in Arizona to see if some understanding could result. And he personally knew a wide number of prominent church leaders and was willing to call them, be "out" to them, and convince them to "give it a try." No one else that I know of could have done it. And, even if he or she could, I don't know anyone else that would have been willing to try.

Ron created and coordinated the first Kampmeeting in July of 1980. He was part of the group that met in September 1980 to create the organization we call Kinship. He had a pivotal role in forming the organization, insisting, among other things, that (1) we must annually get together in one place (our Kampmeetings) to encourage each other to keep working to create a safe place for Adventist LGBT people. He passionately believed that (2) it was vital to invite clergy members to Kampmeetings to both present to us and, more importantly, to spend time with us so they could get to know us as people and go back to their churches or Adventist colleges and become listening ears to fearful LGBT parishioners or college students. For over fifteen years (3) Ron served as Kinship's "Church Liaison," contacting and talking to church leaders, inviting some to Kampmeeting, and otherwise working hard to create safe spaces.

**Bob Bouchard was a member of the first board of directors that founded Seventh-day Adventist Kinship in 1980. He has served a variety of leadership roles in the following 34 years, including president (1982-88, 2001-07, 2008-09), regional director, Connection editor, and board member. He is currently chair of the Kinship Finance Committee.*

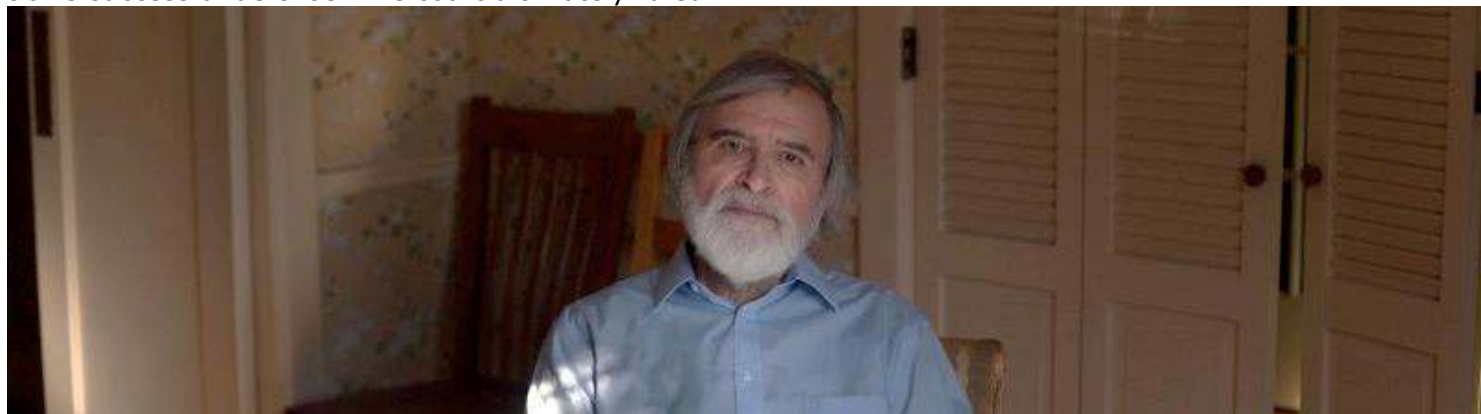
While Ron was dedicated to trying to create understanding within the Adventist Church, he was also fearless in defending LGBT people from abuse. When Ron learned that LGBT people were being sexually abused at Homosexuals Anonymous (HA), a “you-can-change” institute led by former Adventist pastor Colin Cook, Ron interviewed the attendees and wrote a detailed description which he sent to church leaders. The resulting newspaper investigations led to the closure of HA.

When the Seventh-day Adventist Church sued SDA Kinship in federal district court alleging trademark infringement, Ron helped lead the organization’s successful defense. The court ultimately ruled

that Kinship was not guilty of trademark infringement.

Ron, of course, has had a full life outside of Kinship. He was a professor of sociology and urban studies at Queens College (now retired) where he taught classes and did research; he has led the New York City Adventist Forum group in its weekly church services and monthly afternoon meetings for over forty years; he sings, he plays the organ, and much more.

Ron has always been passionate about the things he cares deeply about. Many of us are very grateful that he has cared deeply about SDA Kinship. ▼



Ron, in his own words:

I was born and educated to Ph.D. level in Australia, in a loving but religiously conservative Seventh-day Adventist family. Since I was born in 1940, my coming to sexual awareness occurred far in advance of the gay movement, at a time when the subject was almost never mentioned. When puberty struck around age 12-13, and my male friends started focusing their interests on girls, I quickly realized I was different, feared I had something the matter with me and was the only such one in the world. My first sexual experience came at the age of 14 in church camp. It was a good experience, especially in the sense that he was able to give me much-needed information. I heard the word homosexuality for the first time, and learned what homosexuals did together.

Apart from a couple of brief exploratory experiences with a friend, nothing much happened during my high school years.

When my dad went to Brisbane for church committee meetings, I spent time at the state library and read all I could about homosexuality. It was pretty depressing, limited to what psychiatrists like Havelock Ellis had written about patients who had come for help to overcome their sexual perversity. I also took every opportunity to check out stories written on the walls of men’s washrooms—they had more information.

When I moved to Brisbane for University I had more freedom; and, exploring, I found where gays met for sex. I had no gay friends or mentors; I took girls out, but went cruising after leaving them. I found I had no interest in kissing a girl, and tried to avoid that; since I was active at church, the girls understood that I had no wish to go “further” with them. I prayed incessantly to be changed, but without any result. I became so desperate that I went to the counselling office at the

university to tell them I wanted to be “normal,” and was given aversion therapy, which I found an excruciating experience that propelled me into a cruising situation after each session, and then further guilt. Realizing there was no solution there, I dropped out after six sessions. I sensed that if I took my “problem” to my parents I would only cause them sadness, for they would have no answer, and also, correctly, that this was not an issue I should talk to a pastor about.

I had become a well-known musician. I became organist at my home church at 13 and founded a successful church choir there at age 15. Between ages 13 and 16, I won four times 1st, 2nd, or 3rd prize for my age-group in competitions for young composers sponsored by the Australian Broadcasting Commission. Each time a reporter and photographer from the local paper would come to inter-

view me, though, my mother always managed to get into the story that I was going to be an Adventist "singing evangelist." (Thirteen of my "Australian Songs" songs, sung by me, are available on YouTube.) I was delighted when I won scholarships to both the Conservatorium and the University, and greatly frustrated that I had to choose between them. I ended up taking the university scholarship and studying piano, organ, voice, and clarinet at the Conservatorium.

When I arrived in Brisbane I was immediately asked to form a choir in the 500-member Central Adventist Church. I also sang in choirs at the university, including the Madrigal Society; and the director of the university choir invited me to become a paid member of the Anglican Cathedral choir, teaching me that I could earn much-needed money that way. I also became organist at weekday chapel services at the Presbyterian Seminary—more funds. I did Honors in History as an undergraduate, and then set out on a Ph.D. in both sociology and history. I thus became a historical sociologist. When that was done I won a Fulbright grant for post-doctoral study at Columbia University, New York, but chose to spend a year getting here, traveling overland as much as possible from Australia through Southeast Asia, around India, and then hitching a ride from Delhi through Pakistan, Iran, and the length of Turkey to Istanbul. After a side-trip to Israel, I continued up through what was then Communist Eastern Europe, ran out of time in Scandinavia, and then flew to New York to begin the semester at Columbia U.

I arrived in NYC in September 1971, only two years after Stonewall. I was still closeted, and in fact dated women after I arrived. I was incredibly lonely, except for the Adventist congregation on the Columbia campus.



I was supposed to stay in NYC for only two years; but when a paper I gave in a class caused a stir, a professor offered to pay my salary for two months if I would write a grant proposal to study tenant-landlord conflict through his institute. The result was a grant of \$200,000—I would stay in New York, it seemed. The grant made me sought after academically, and I was hired on a tenure-bearing line to teach sociology at Hunter College, the City U of NY.

By this time, for 15 years I had been asking God to change my sexual desires, with absolutely no change. It suddenly struck me that the prayer may not have been answered because God was perfectly happy with the way He had made me! That is, I had been praying for something that was not God's will. This came as a transforming revelation—suddenly I was open to getting to know gay people, to love someone perhaps. Tremendous relief. Soon after I fell in love for the first time—both of us were inexperienced and had no idea how to run a gay relationship, for that had not been part of the curriculum of growing up for either of us. To make matters worse, this was a long-distance

relationship, for he was in medical school in Rochester. However, just to experience love was amazing; and somehow from it I understood more about love in general, including the love of God. When I was asked to speak at a service at my church group at Columbia U, I came out to them as part of the sermon. This did not faze that very liberated congregation—they elected me president of the congregation about a year later, a position I have held ever since.

The next year I attended the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association. When I looked over the program, I discovered a session on homosexuality. What happened there appalled me: the organizer and chair of the session had set it up as an opportunity for him to attack the credibility of the new, gay-friendly research that had emerged in the wake of the Stonewall Rebellion. He asked Laud Humphreys, an Episcopal priest, whose dissertation had just been published as *The Tearoom Trade*, which he had dedicated to his wife, whether he was not, in fact, gay. I realized immediately that this was unethical, and afterwards found another

gay person there; together we put up notices around the hotel announcing that the "Sociologists Gay Caucus" was meeting in my room the next night. When my room overflowed, we had to find a meeting room. I was elected president, a position I held for four years, during which time I fought to have a session on homosexuality made a regular event each year and worked on a task force examining discrimination against gays and lesbians in the profession. I had unexpectedly become an activist and was proud of this.

During the summer of 1976 the man who had hired me resigned as chair of my department at Hunter College. I worked for the election of a Black radical to the post. However, I discovered that my gay activism was to cost me my job. I wrongly assumed that the new chair would also be supportive of other groups facing discrimination; and so, over a Sunday brunch with him celebrating his election, I told him about my activism. To my surprise, he did not say a word. However, he then made sure that I, still untenured, was not reappointed for the next year. I was later to discover that he was a closeted gay who apparently felt threatened by the presence of a colleague who was open about his sexuality. The issue against me was not clearly resolved until May, by which time it would normally have been very difficult to secure a new academic post for the school year beginning in September. But just at that time a position was advertised at Queens College, another college of the City University, which fitted my skills perfectly, and I was appointed with a promotion to Associate Professor. By 1983 I was a tenured full professor there. Remembering my need for a gay mentor while at university, I made a point of saying something when introducing myself to new classes that would allow gay students to

realize that I, too, was gay and easy to approach.



Meanwhile, I had become a gay activist within the Adventist Church. I sorely wanted to meet gay Adventists, and so ran an ad in *The Advocate*. Dozens from all over the country, but none close to NYC, responded. This was one of several ingredients that came together in the late 1970s and resulted in the formation of Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International.

When involved in my Ph.D. program at the University of Queensland I had wanted to do my dissertation on Adventists. The sociology of religion had been a revelation to me helping me to understand the dynamics of my church. My advisor had responded, "Do you want to get a job when you finish?" That dissuaded me, but I vowed I would return to the topic. After becoming tenured I launched a study of global Adventism. The research took me to 59 countries over several years. As part of the research I took a close look at an Adventist-sponsored "ex-gay ministry" in the United States, where the testimonies of changed orientation I had heard had seemed unbelievable. I interviewed 13 long-term participants in the program as well as the director, a former pastor who had been fired when caught in a "gay act" but who now claimed to be "cured" and was married with two young children. I discovered that 12 of the 13 participants had been sexually molested by the program director, and that no one was cured—the testimonies had all been given "in faith" that this was happening! (The lone counselee who had not been abused was much older than the others.) The interviews with the participants

were some of the most traumatic I have ever experienced—lots of tears and anger. Though it obviously put my research in danger, I felt obliged to blow the whistle on the director, writing a letter to the church president and, to make sure that he did not stick it in his bottom drawer, sending copies to 29 other prominent Adventists. The director confessed and resigned, and the program was closed.

This did not seem to interfere with my research. Indeed, I was often told by interviewees that they were telling me things that were not told to church leaders because I could not come back and destroy their careers. However, in November 2013 I was, for the first time, invited to take part in a conference of people researching Adventism in various ways that was held at church headquarters so that leaders could choose to attend. I prepared a paper that I thought would be really helpful for them. The conference was due to begin on a Monday morning, but on the preceding Friday morning I received an email from the conference organizer disinviting me. It turned out that the president of the church had looked over the program the day before; and, seeing my name, had demanded that I be removed from it. His reason was that as purportedly Adventism's "best-known gay activist" I stood against the position of the church and so could not be allowed to speak at church headquarters without "creating the impression that the church was going soft on homosexuality." The one act that had made me prominent as a gay activist was blowing the whistle on that abuser of young gays.

After a couple of less significant relationships, I met Scott, the love of my life, in 1988. I was 48, he 24. He was a fine musician—like me a pianist and organist and a talented composer. He worked

as an organist in churches, which gave him time to practice and write music. We had over 24 years together, and I loved him enormously. He came to church with me, where he played the organ. However, he developed psychological problems, which increased over time (he was bipolar). His depression led him to take overdoses several times, but each time he changed his mind, told me, and we rushed to a hospital emergency room. However, in July 2012 he took a huge overdose at 3.00 a.m. and did not wake me, so that we found him dead next morning. This was the most shocking, saddest day of my life. Recently I have found Tyler, who has been an enormous comfort and source of joy.

Because both of their children were in North America, my parents retired to Toronto, near both me and their grandchildren. When I took Scott there for the first time at the beginning of 1989, he made a strong positive impression on them. One morning after breakfast, Dad shepherded us all into the living room and then made a little speech, telling Scott how much they liked him, and welcoming him as a member of the family. He had obviously planned this with my mother. That was one of the most heart-warming, emotional moments of my life. Coming from a pair of devout Seventh-day Adventists, this was truly remarkable. Love triumphed over dogma.

What does it mean to me to be gay? It means that I look at guys, not women, when I walk down the street; that my dreams and fantasies are about guys, and that I have looked among guys for my special companion. Many of my closest friends are women—indeed, because they know I am gay, this removes a barrier—we can be more relaxed with one another. Many gay men share an artistic spirit, which fits my deep love for classical music, my wish



to perform. But there is also enormous diversity among gay males. Just as heterosexuals are very diverse, the same is true among us. Indeed, we enjoy expressing our individuality. Not every gay man loves classical music, or seeks a monogamous relationship, or is religious (though statistics show that gay men are on the average more religious than straight men in spite of the oppression that many of us have received at the hands of our churches and religious bodies. Somehow the spiritual side remains, the link to God; and that, to me, seems related to the fact that we are often artistic, or musicians, or actors.)

Because gays are so diverse, it is inevitable that the gay community in a huge city like NYC is also diverse. I do not feel the need to live in a gay ghetto like Chelsea, and I never go to bars or clubs. I have a friendship network, and I have always chosen to spend most of my time with my partner. I am strongly committed to pursuing full civil rights and equality for all LGBTQ people. I have a strong sense of identity as a gay person, and a wish to help gay people. I have a five-bedroom

house in Queens, with a grand piano and an organ in the living room; and over the years Scott and I gathered other needy gay musicians to be part of our "family" here, where the rent charged fits their ability to pay. This is one important way in which I express my gay identity and help to create community.

What advice would I give to my younger self? To think of churches as human organizations, products of their social environments in some past time, slow to change, and most certainly not right about everything. Also that society, Congress, and the Supreme Court, lag similarly. When I was young, churches really ignored the gay topic—my sense of my sexual orientation being a problem was created by a silent society and church—a silence that led me to put two and two together in a particular way. I needed to be told that it was natural and good to be gay, to be encouraged to bring gay friends to church, to be openly gay in my choirs and classes, to see examples of how to be a gay couple, and to be much more accepting of the way God made me from the beginning. ▼

By Reinder Bruinsma, Ph.D.

K Renato Lings is a Danish biblical scholar and linguist who has focused much of his academic work on the biblical stories and passages that are often quoted as having a negative bearing on homosexuality. In this new, independently published book he has provided us with a very comprehensive study on this topic. This substantial book can make a significant contribution to the ongoing debate among Christians about the biblical arguments for and against same-sex relationships.

The author deals in meticulous detail with the Old Testament and New Testament passages that are usually cited as the prominent anti-gay texts in the Bible. In this review I will just refer to the most important sections of the book and will add a few critical remarks.

Content

When dealing with the story of Noah's nakedness and the "sin" of Ham, Lings argues that the Hebrews text does not contain any homoerotic elements, but rather emphasizes the sin of disrespect for parents.

The treatment of the story of Sodom fills about 200 pages. In a careful analysis of the key words that the narrator of Genesis 19 employs, the author makes a convincing case for his view that what happened in Sodom does not provide ammunition for the debate regarding committed same-sex relationships as we know these today. The central issue of the story has to do with hospitality—an all-important facet of ancient culture. The interest of the men of Sodom in Lot's male visitors resembles what we today would call a gang-rape rather than a committed homosexual relationship. The compromise suggested by Lot to let the Sodomites "take" his two unmarried daughters, is perhaps more problematic; but Lings' conclusion that the frequent occurrence of legal terminology in the story may well suggest that these daughters were "given" as a "pledge" to seal Lot's honorable intentions with his two visitors, appears to be quite convincing.

Leviticus 18:22—often seen as one of the most striking condemnations of homosexuality in Scriptures—contains a number of serious linguistic complications and seems, after all, not to be as straightforwardly anti-gay as might appear on the surface. Issues of incest and family and property rights appear to be involved.

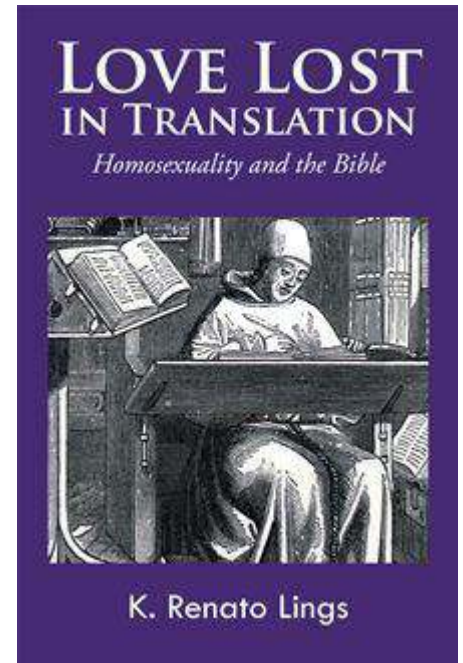
Lings argues on linguistic grounds that it is far from certain that *Deuteronomy 23:17, 18* refers to male temple prostitution, as most modern Bible versions assume. The Hebrew terms may refer to "consecrated" temple functionaries in a more general sense.

The Gibeah scandal that is found in *Judges 19 and 20* has justifiably been referred to as a "terror text."

This horrendous story has often been used to stigmatize homoerotic relationships, but Lings capably shows that many other factors probably play a much more prominent role. The story plays out against the backdrop of the struggle for political supremacy between the camp of Saul and that of David. It contains many parallels with the Sodom story, but neither story informs us in any significant way about the morality of homosexuality as we know it today. Lings maintains that the anti-gay bias that we find in our modern Bible translations is "the product of lengthy theological inertia perpetuated by authoritarian ideologies since the days of the early church, partly based on some letters attributed to Paul" (p. 19).

Lings' linguistic analysis of Paul's statement in *Romans 1:26, 27* sheds an interesting light on this passage that is also often regarded as a prominent anti-gay text, and as a clear statement that specifically also condemns lesbianism. However, originally Paul's reference to "unnatural" (*contra natura*) relationships was not understood as referring to same-sex relationships. This view only emerged when later theologians interpreted it along those lines. Paul describes some (not readily identifiable) acts that are shameful and dishonorable; his words indicate that these acts were socially unacceptable, without, however, pronouncing a theological verdict and calling them "sin." The significance of Paul's use of the *aorist* (the tense that puts the events into a considerable past) in these Bible verses is often not sufficiently recognized. Paul seems to refer to some well-known past scandal with which his readers are assumed to be familiar.

Lings furthermore argues that the Greek words



malakos and *arsenekoitai* in 1 Corinthians 6: 19, 20 do not necessarily have to be understood in the anti-gay sense they have often acquired in modern Bible versions. The former word may carry the sense of "weakling" or "softie," while the latter term could refer to exploitative forms of sex, rather than to male-male sexual relationships in general.

Approach

The author subjects the various stories and passages to a thorough linguistic analysis. He investigates whether the key terms are also used elsewhere in the original Hebrew and Greek, and if so, in what sense. He also frequently refers to rabbinic comments on Old Testament passages. His overall conclusion is that in most cases these terms do not carry the overtly anti-gay connotation that these texts did, over time, acquire. He points out that the Septuagint and the Vulgate played an important role in introducing an anti-homoerotic bias into later translations of these Bible passages. He cites many instances where early church and medieval theologians contributed to this tendency and discovers the same with regard to such early translators as Wycliffe and Tyndale.

An important step in Lings' argumentation is his demonstration how many of these anti-gay elements that are found in ancient translations and commentaries, have been accepted and often further reinforced by the translators of modern English Bible versions.

Only people with a considerable expertise in Biblical languages can fully evaluate the strength of Lings' linguistic arguments. I do not consider myself to be sufficiently qualified to do so. Nonetheless, a few important questions emerge in my mind. Is Lings' rather negative view of the Vulgate and, in particular, of the Septuagint (LXX), fully justified? Jerome, the main translator of the Vulgate, is widely recognized as a prominent scholar with great linguistic skills, and most scholars tend to attach great value to the rendition of the LXX, since the LXX translators had access to more ancient Hebrews texts than the Masoretes.

It would appear that Lings' selection of the twelve modern English versions that he consistently consults is rather arbitrary. Several important English versions would also be expected in his list, while some of the versions he has included are not all that prominent. His choice to include the *New World Translation*, produced by the community of Jehovah's

Witnesses, seems rather unusual. It would have strengthened Lings' study if he had provided a clear rationale for his selection and/or would have included a few prominent versions in other languages than English.

Lings points to the considerable anti-gay bias of many of the translators and commentators, who have mediated the Hebrew and Greek texts to us. But, in all fairness, it must also be recognized that Lings himself also writes from a particular perspective, i.e. as a Christian gay-advocate—a fact that inevitably influences his selections and interpretations.

Concerns

Perhaps my main concern is the one-sidedness of Lings' study. Even though his linguistic analysis is of great value, it, unfortunately, is not solidly embedded in a systematic theological framework. Lings has, I think, convincingly shown that the question of the morality of committed homosexual relationships, as we know these today, is not addressed in the specific Bible passages that are frequently used to condemn such relationships. However, a biblical theology of sexuality must have a much broader basis than a linguistic analysis of these key passages. A theology of sexuality will, however, gratefully use the building blocks that Lings has put at its disposal when it tries to provide us with a systematic Christian approach to the study of gender issues and sexuality. It would have been helpful if the author had given more attention to that aspect, or at least had stressed the need for additional study in this direction.

Yet, my overall reaction to Lings' book must be one of profound admiration for the thorough linguistic research he has undertaken and for the easily accessible way in which he has presented his findings. He has powerfully reminded his readers of the fact that translations are always interpretations, and that in the course of Christian history undoubtedly much anti-gay interpretation has been injected as the result of a growing aversion against intimate same-sex (and, in particular, male-male) relationships. When people argue that a number of Bible texts "very clearly" condemn all homoerotic practices, they may be referred to Lings' book where they can discover that this biblical condemnation is really *not as clear* as they may have hitherto thought. ▼

K. Renato Lings, *Love Lost in Translation: Homosexuality and the Bible*.
Trafford Publishing, 2013 (xlvii, 738 pages)

We're Legal!



By David Coltheart

Two years ago, John and I held a commitment ceremony near our home in Buderim, Queensland, to which all our friends and family were invited. There was nothing legal about the occasion; with no need for a celebrant, we simply spoke our vows to each other. But when New Zealand recently legislated for marriage equality, it seemed logical to complete the circle with a legal ceremony. We chose Queenstown, in the south island of New Zealand, for our wedding, because of its natural beauty.

Queenstown is a small resort town located on the edge of Lake Wakatipu and surrounded by some of the highest mountains in New Zealand. From every corner of the town there are stunning views of alpine scenery, mirrored in the glacial-blue waters of the lake. Billed as the "adventure capital of the world," Queenstown is the home for 220 high-adrenalin sports, including bungee jumping, whitewater rafting, skydiving, parasailing, and, in the winter, every form of snow sports. Just outside the town, the famous high-speed jet boat ride roars through the narrow canyon of the Shotover River.

The flight from Brisbane to Auckland took 3 hours. Then we flew another 90 minutes south to Queenstown. It was an emotional journey since I was born in New Zealand, but I have only been back twice in five decades. John and I spent several days vacationing in and around Queenstown, exploring the small towns and villages that make this part of New Zealand so picturesque. Arrowtown is an old gold mining town, the main street of which contains shops and historic buildings preserved from the mid-19th century. Glenorchy is a village at the base of the Southern Alps near where many scenes were filmed for the "Lord of the Rings" movies.

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Member of the Gay and Lesbian Press Association.

Our ceremony took place in the Queenstown Courthouse on Valentine's Day, 14 February. Michelle, the celebrant, was friendly and supportive and recounted humorous stories of other same-sex weddings she has conducted over the last few months. She took us through the official vows and then we signed the marriage license in the presence of Adrian and Brett, friends of ours from Brisbane who flew over especially for the occasion to be our witnesses.

In brilliant summer sunshine, the four of us walked a few hundred meters to the beautiful Queenstown Gardens for photographs. With the backdrop of the mountains and the lake, and surrounded by multi-colored blooms, the photos will be our permanent memories. We then continued around the lakefront to the restaurant where we had lunch on the terrace overlooking the sparkling water.

During the day, many people stopped to congratulate us and wish us well. They could hardly miss us, dressed in our dark suits and matching green ties and each of us wearing a white rose in our lapels! While marriage equality is no longer an issue in New Zealand, it is still a hot topic of debate in Australia, where the government is currently blocking any progress towards reform. Many of the people who wished us well were tourists from Australia—two-thirds of Australians support marriage equality.

During the weeks leading up to the wedding, I wondered whether we would feel any different. A few days after the event, I can say now that I don't "feel" any different—we already considered ourselves married two years ago. Then why go to all the trouble and expense of a wedding ceremony? We believe that marriage is a statement of commitment, love, and lifelong loyalty that needs to be made in a world of speed dating, infidelity, and divorce. We want to affirm the values and responsibilities that marriage implies. Besides that, we are both incurable romantics!

Marriage is the only statement that the world understands —our heterosexual friends and families will never "get" the significance of a commitment ceremony. Marriage is the one word that forever defines the nature of our relationship, symbolizes the strength of our promises, and expresses the depth of our love. Marriage is the institution that provides the ultimate equality and recognition of our status. Our wedding was the other half of our commitment ceremony, the unfinished business that somehow makes the whole process complete. ▼

David Coltheart and his husband John Plank live on the Sunshine Coast, in Queensland, Australia.



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