

Born a Gay and Born Again? Adventism's Changing Attitude Toward Homosexuality¹

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It is no secret that the attitudes of some Seventh-day Adventists are changing on the question of homosexuality. One does not need to follow Adventist discussions on the internet or at annual professional meetings of Bible scholars to be aware of this fact. The changing attitude is reflected in articles that have been published in some of our church publications during the past twenty years.² Also, this changing mood was reflected in discussions at the General Conference (GC) sessions in Indianapolis (1990), Utrecht (1995), and Toronto (2000) over the wording of certain portions of the *Church Manual*. Apparently, because the women's ordination debate eclipsed all other deliberations at these two GC sessions, few people were fully aware of the issue of homosexuality.

A retired theology professor and former dean of the SDA Theological Seminary has aptly captured the reason for this changing attitude in the Christian church. He writes:

¹In this article, the term "homosexual" or "gay" will be applied to any person (male or female) who, for whatever reasons (genetic, hormonal, environmental, situational, etc.), has an erotic attraction to, or sexual preference or desire for, members of the same sex; "lesbianism" refers to a female homosexual. While a "bisexual" is one who has an erotic attraction to members of both sexes, a "heterosexual" is a person who has an erotic attraction to members of the opposite sex. Gay or homosexual theology refers to the attempt to make homosexuality compatible with biblical Christianity.

²At my last count, no less than 135 published works (articles and letters) on the subject of homosexuality have appeared in Adventist publications during the past 20 years (1978-1998). For a detailed discussion of published Adventist views on the subject from the early '50s to the mid '80s, see Michael Pearson, *Millennial Dreams and Moral Dilemmas: Seventh-day Adventism and Contemporary Ethics* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 1990), 240-265.

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The gay crisis has come to church. Some homosexuals are coming to church not only for forgiveness and mercy but to say to the church, as they have to the world, 'Homosexuality is not sinful; it is natural to me. God made me this way. He accepts me and my homosexuality as good. Therefore the time has come for the church to accept me as I am and join me in saying that gayness is good.'³

It is this desire to make homosexuality compatible with the Christian lifestyle that has made the issue of homosexuality a "hot potato" item on the theological menu of many churches, including our own Seventh-day Adventist church. The issue of homosexuality is so "hot" that anyone attempting to touch it today is bound to be "burned"—in one way or the other. For this reason, many Adventist thought-leaders have chosen to be silent (or at most ambiguous) on this subject.

I have, however, accepted this invitation by the Adventist Theological Society to address this "hot potato" issue, not because I enjoy being burned, but because, sometimes, it is a betrayal of Christ and His gospel when, for reasons of political expediency, we choose to remain silent or neutral on established biblical teachings that are being undermined.⁴ Moreover, since the advocates of homosexuality are freely disseminating their opinions in the church, it is not out of place for Bible-believing Adventists to also express their views on the subject.

The Need to Address Issue. The need for the church to understand and address the crucial issues raised by gay theology also arises from the fact that the issue of homosexuality is creating some confusion and hurt in the church. On the one hand, those who consider themselves homosexual in orientation are hurt because they often feel misunderstood, discriminated against, and even persecuted. On the other hand, those who believe that homosexuality is a violation of the teachings and norms of Biblical Christianity are also hurt because they feel that the church has betrayed their trust by accommodating itself to the objectionable practice of homosexuality, thereby encouraging and exposing its members to gross sexual deviations. A truly caring church cannot refuse to respond to an issue that is creating so much confusion and hurt.⁵

³Raoul Dederen, "Homosexuality: A Biblical Perspective," *Ministry* (September 1988): 14.

⁴I am aware that, in today's climate of theological pluralism, it is almost suicidal for anyone to speak out against homosexuality and other disputed theological or ethical issues. Already, in certain quarters of the church, those who forthrightly express their views on such issues as racism or tribalism, women's ordination, contemporary higher-criticism, and homosexuality are considered "divisive," "controversial," and "extreme fundamentalists." For my views on the other issues, see my "Saved by Grace and Living by Race: The Religion Called Racism," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 5/2 (Autumn 1994): 37-78; *Searching the Scriptures: Women's Ordination and the Call to Biblical Fidelity* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventists Affirm, 1995); my three chapters in *Prove All Things: A Response to Women in Ministry*, ed. Mercedes H. Dyer (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventists Affirm, 2000), 17-44, 179-218, 287-312; and *Receiving the Word: How New Approaches to the Bible Impact Our Biblical Faith and Lifestyle* (Berrien Springs, MI: Berean Books, 1996).

⁵Cf. Richard J. Foster, *The Challenge of the Disciplined Life: Christian Reflections on Money, Sex and Power* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), 107.

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Purpose of this Paper. This presentation, “Born A Gay And Born Again?” is only a first step in what should be a comprehensive response to gay theology. My intention is threefold: (1) Attempt to explain why Adventist attitudes are changing on the issue of homosexuality; (2) summarize the three major options for the church’s dealing with homosexuals and homosexuality; and (3) briefly respond to some of the main arguments being put forth by those attempting to reconcile their “born a gay” experience with the Bible’s “born again” theology. A future work should address the question of how to deal redemptively with homosexuals seeking help to overcome their sin.

I. Changing Attitudes to Homosexuality

Homosexuality is not a new phenomenon of sexual behavior that has suddenly burst upon our modern culture; the practice has been present in almost every human society. Not unexpectedly, the Bible also deals with the subject in such texts as Gen 19 (cf. Jude 7; 2 Pet 2:6-10); Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:24-27; 1 Cor 6:9-11; 1 Tim 1:8-11.

If there is anything new about the practice of homosexuality, the “newness” lies in the fact that unlike the past centuries of Christian history, many churches in our day are accepting homosexuality as a morally legitimate lifestyle. The favorable disposition of some toward the practice of homosexuality may be attributed to a number of factors.

1. Campaigns by Pro-Homosexual Groups. The successful campaigns by various homosexual lobbying and civil rights organizations to end not only discrimination against homosexuals generally, but also to decriminalize homosexual practices between consenting adults and to liberalize public opinion, attitudes, laws, and policies on homosexuality, have contributed to the favorable attitude of some on homosexuality.

For example, in 1973 the American Bar Association voted that laws which had in the past placed homosexuality in the category of *crime* should be abolished. That same year, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its official list of mental *illness*, and the American Psychological Association also decided that homosexuality was no longer an *abnormal* behavior. Once homosexuality was removed from the categories of crime, illness, and abnormal behavior, it did not take long before Christian churches began to hear calls from pro-gay advocates urging the church to remove homosexuality from the category of *sin*.

In the effort to remove homosexuality from the category of sin, advocates of gay theology have often presented testimonies of homosexuals and “latest research findings” (scientific and biblical) in such a manner as to silence or challenge the Bible’s negative valuation of homosexuality. They argue that biblical texts which have been understood historically as condemning homosexuality are either obscure or refer to the *abuse* of homosexuality, i.e., to certain kinds of

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homosexual practices, notably gang rape, idolatry, promiscuity, and prostitution, and not genuine homosexual orientation as we know it today.⁶ Finally, some Bible characters are put forward as examples of alleged healthy and loving homosexual relationships.⁷

2. Departure from Biblical Revelation to Empirical Research: The changing attitude toward homosexuality may also be attributed to the skepticism in certain quarters of the church about the trustworthiness and reliability of the Bible. Under the influence of contemporary higher-criticism, the Bible's sole authority is being replaced by other sources: reason, tradition, and experience. If the Bible is not authoritative in matters dealing with science, history, psychology, etc., why should it be relied upon in dealing with homosexuality?⁸

Thus, those who seek to neutralize the biblical witness against homosexuality often do so on the basis of alleged research findings (scientific, statistical, etc.), or on the basis of testimonies by homosexuals of their happy, healthy, and

⁶It should be noted that in the literature on homosexuality, a distinction is often made between "constitutional" and "situational" homosexuals. "Constitutional" or "true" homosexuals (also referred to as "inverts" or "ontological" homosexuals) are those who are believed to have been born gay, and therefore are considered to be genuine homosexuals. Because their *condition/orientation* is said to be a permanent part of their constitutional make up (and not a transitory phase of life nor an accommodation to situational pressure), it is maintained that those who are "ontological" homosexuals should not be held morally responsible for their condition. In and of itself, homosexual *orientation* is morally neutral, like the normal condition of heterosexuality. On the other hand, "situational" homosexuals (also referred to as "perverts") are not true homosexuals but are heterosexuals who are forced by circumstances (e.g., restrictions on their sexual expression, such as is the case in prison, military camps, boarding schools, monasteries, and other single sex environments) to resort to homosexual practices to gratify their sexual needs. Because situational homosexuality is believed to be a transitory phase in their lives (i. e. they engage in homosexual practices merely to accommodate to situational pressure), their homosexuality is regarded as a perversion of true sexuality; those who engage in these practices are culpable for their actions. See D. S. Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (London/New York: Longmans, Green, 1955), xi; H. K. Jones, *A Christian Understanding of the Homosexual* (New York: Association Press, 1966), 20-23.

⁷Thus, the friendship love (*philia*) between Bible characters like Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1-4), and David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 18-20) is interpreted to mean a sexual love (*eros*), and consequently, these Bible characters are presented as Christian models of lesbian and gay relationships. Others consider Joseph and Potiphar (Gen 39) as well as Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel (Dan 2, 4) as genuine models of homosexuality. In the case of Ruth and Naomi, it is often argued that they exchanged their lesbian marriage vows when Ruth said to Naomi: "Wherever you go, I will go with you, wherever you stay I will stay with you; your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. . . . *Till death do us part*" (Ruth 1:16-17; my translation). As far as David and Jonathan are concerned, the argument goes like this: Jonathan "loved" David (1 Sam 18:3), David declared publicly that Jonathan's love was "wonderful"—passing even "the love of women" (2 Sam. 1:23), Jonathan "stripped" in David's presence (1 Sam 18:4), they "kissed" each other (1 Sam 20:41), and they "exceeded" (1 Sam 20:41)—a term taken to mean ejaculation! (Readers may like to read the Scriptural account of the relationship between David and Jonathan to ascertain what the Bible actually says).

⁸In *Receiving the Word*, I have attempted to show how higher-critical assumptions and conclusions are shaping discussions on homosexuality, the use of alcohol, creation, etc. See chapter 5 of the book, 101-194.

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fulfilling relationships, instead of on Scripture. For example, on the basis of a highly questionable study showing that homosexuals in the San Francisco Bay area who are involved in reciprocal, permanent, and sexually exclusive relationships tended to be the happiest, healthiest, and most well-adjusted people of the entire group being analyzed, an Adventist ethicist concluded: “Christians therefore have every reason to encourage homosexuals who are honestly convinced that they should neither attempt to function heterosexually nor remain celibate to form Closed-Coupled homosexual unions.”⁹

Notice that the reason given for endorsing closed couple homosexual unions is not Biblical revelation, but rather an empirical finding regarding the experience of homosexuals. This new way of knowing truth (epistemology) is also illustrated in the testimony of one lesbian who describes herself as an “Adventist-connected” theologian, Bible instructor/academy teacher turned minister.

She speaks about her naiveté in blindly following the teaching of the Seventh-day Adventist church that “told me that my own nature was sinful, so looking to myself would be my downfall. . . . It did not tell me to look at the rest of the natural world and discover that same-gender nesting occurs in many species.” She explains, however, that following “an unusual calling” or “Martin Luther experience” (the “ecstasy and torment” of her lesbian encounter), she came to value the importance of “inner knowing”—listening to “the voice of God within me.”¹⁰

The above examples illustrate the increasing departure from Biblical revelation toward empirical experience as an authority base on religious issues. Not only does this trend raises questions for Bible believing Christians regarding the starting point for discussions on homosexuality—Should it be *observation*, *introspection*, or biblical *revelation*?—but it also explains why some will jettison biblical teaching for the “latest research findings.”

3. Impact of Behaviorist Philosophy on Recent Research Findings. Another factor that is shaping the homosexual debate is the impact of behavioristic

⁹David R. Larson, “Sexuality and Christian Ethics,” *Spectrum* 15 (May 1984):16.” For a detailed challenge to the dubious research of Kinsey, see, for example, Judith Reisman and Edward W. Eichel, *Kinsey, Sex, and Fraud: The Indoctrination of a People* (Lafayette, La.: Lochinvar-Huntington House, 1990).

¹⁰Lin Ennis, “Seeker of Truth, Finder of Reality,” in *In Our Own Words: Women Tell of Their Lives and Faith*, ed. Iris M. Yob and Patti Hansen Tompkins (Santa Ana, CA: Adventist Women’s Institute, 1993), 237, 238, 230-235. She explains: “I was so naive about God, so blind to the real needs of human beings, so willing to be led as a sheep, mindlessly following, not thinking for myself, except just enough to afford me the illusion of independence of thought. Far more than I cared to admit, I did what the church said, what the *Church Manual* said, what the ministers and evangelists I had worked with said” (ibid., 234). But after she discovered the truth about God by looking at herself (apparently, the “inner knowing” of listening to God “within me” [p. 234]) and “the rest of the natural world,” and after she claimed to have rightly understood “the Bible,” “I realized that to continue to be active in the Adventist Church in the way I had always been before would not work for me” (237).

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philosophy. This philosophy, which has adherents among biologists, zoologists, physicists, and other social scientists, simply states that individuals have practically *no choice* in their moral actions, and therefore may not always be held morally accountable for their actions. Human behavior, it is said, is largely, if not exclusively, *predetermined* by one's environment and one's genetic code.¹¹

Given the impact of the behavioristic philosophy, it is not coincidental that researchers are discovering that some are "born gay," that is to say they hold their homosexual orientation or identity from birth.¹² Although the findings of genetic research are at the present time inconclusive, already some Adventist writers are making the following deductions from the "new light" of scientific research: (a) homosexuals are born gay, (b) homosexuality is a normal or "natural" condition, (c) what is "natural" cannot be immoral, and (d) "blaming the homosexual for his or her sexual orientation is both wrong-spirited and wrong."¹³

Observe that while perceptive critics, including some homosexuals, have questioned the value of these "born a gay" discoveries, and while others have exposed the intellectual and psychological inconsistency in this "outmoded ver-

¹¹*Time* magazine (August 1, 1977):54-63 alerted the world of the growing impact of another version of this behavioristic philosophy when it devoted its cover article—"Why You Do What You Do"—to *sociobiology*, a new theory which maintains that social behavior has a biological basis. One leading sociobiologist at Harvard University is quoted in the *Time* article as making this prediction: "Sooner or later, political science, law, economics, psychology, psychiatry and anthropology will all be branches of sociobiology." In partial fulfillment to this kind of prediction by the prophets of sociobiology, "discoveries" are being made in recent times by researchers that what in the past were considered as habitual sins are actually of biological origin. Thus, it is said that some individuals are "born to smoke," "born alcoholics," and even "born murderers"; such persons cannot legitimately be held accountable for their moral actions. According to a *Time* magazine cover story, even infidelity may be due to our genes! (See Robert Wright, "Our Cheating Hearts," August 15, 1994, 44-52.)

¹²The studies often cited as evidence that homosexuality is inborn include: (1) the 1991 study of neuroscientist Dr. Simon LeVay on the brain structures of 41 cadavers; (2) the 1991 research by Northwestern University psychologist Michael Bailey (a gay rights advocate) and Boston University School of Medicine psychiatrist Richard Pillard (who is openly homosexual) on homosexual twins; and (3) the 1993 study by Dr. Dean Hamer of the National Cancer Institute on the genetic markers on 40 non-identical gay brothers. But these oft-quoted "research findings" have been shown to be misleading and exaggerated (at best inconclusive). For a succinct review and evaluation of the findings of the above cited researchers, see Joe Dallas, *A Strong Delusion: Confronting the "Gay Christian" Movement* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1996), 107-131.

¹³According to the then editor of *Insight*, a homosexual orientation may be so much a part of one's persona that it seems like "a way of *being* and *feeling*—whether or not those feelings are ever translated into sexual acts." Thus, for this Adventist scholar, "blaming the homosexual for his or her sexual orientation is both wrong-spirited and wrong." "Being a homosexual [in tendency or temptation] is not a sin," he asserts, though he considers homosexual lust, whether in thought or action, just as sinful as heterosexual lust outside marriage and insists that the Bible demands chastity, purity, and celibacy of everyone not married. See Chris Blake, "Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation," *Insight*, December 5, 1992, 6, 7, 11.

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sion of natural law,”¹⁴ for some Adventist advocates of homosexual theology, these research findings validate their new “understanding” of “the truth about homosexuality.” They argue that “whatever may cause a homosexual orientation, it is not something a person *chooses*.”¹⁵ Another writer approvingly explains the “born a gay” argument using the words of an Adventist homosexual (notice her emphases):

“As God is in His heaven I did not *choose* this orientation, this lifestyle. Why would I *choose* a lifestyle that’s kept me from following my choice of profession? Why would I *choose* a lifestyle that’s kept me from marrying any of several girls who offered me a “normal” lifestyle with a home and family? Why would I *choose* to live in a world that thinks I am disgusting, repulsive, and totally unacceptable? Why would I *choose* a lifestyle that can lead to loss of employment, friends, family, and love? If I would *choose* this, then I truly need to be put away! . . . What I am saying is that I did not *choose* this lifestyle. God allowed it, though He did not give it to me. I cannot change, because I have tried.”¹⁶

¹⁴Perceptive critics, including some homosexuals, reject this “born a gay” discovery because they fear that other research findings showing some unacceptable conditions (like alcoholism, schizophrenia, cerebral palsy, etc.) as genetically related will soon make homosexuals look like they are “abnormal,” or less than human (cf. *World* 6 [September 14, 1991]:11). J. B. Nelson exposes the intellectual and psychological inconsistency in this “outmoded version of natural law” which seeks to make a fine distinction between homosexual orientation and behavior. Responding to the view that “while homosexuality as an *orientation* is contrary to God’s created intention, the homosexual *person* ought not to be adversely judged or rejected by the church,” Nelson counters that while some may deem such a position a more tolerant and compassionate view than outright condemnation, “it places gay men and lesbians in at least two impossible binds”: “One, of course, is the individual’s recognition that her or his own sexual orientation is as natural and as fundamental to identity as is the color of the skin. It is both naive and cruel to tell a lesbian or gay man, “Your sexual orientation is still unnatural and a perversion, but this is no judgment upon you as a person.” The individual knows otherwise. The other bind concerns churchly pressure toward celibacy. When the church presumes to be non-judgmental toward orientation but then draws the line against genital expression, it is difficult to understand how the sense of guilt—even in the celibate—will be significantly alleviated.” See J. B. Nelson, “Religious and Moral Issues in Working with Homosexual Clients,” in *Homosexuality and Psycho-therapy, a Practitioner’s Handbook of Affirmative Models. Journal of Homosexuality* 7, Nos. 2-3, ed. J. C. Gonsiorek (New York: Haworth press, 1982): 168-69.

¹⁵Kate McLaughlin (pseudonym), “Are Homosexuals God’s Children?” *Adventist Review*, April 3, 1997, 26 (emphasis hers); cf. *idem*, “A Homosexual in My Congregation?” *Ministry*, November 1996, 10-11, 29.

¹⁶Suzanne Ryan, “When Love Wasn’t Enough,” *Insight*, December 5, 1992, 3 (emphasis hers). While not condoning homosexuality, Chris Blake agrees: “nobody chooses to be homosexual. . . . Whether a person is born with the orientation or it develops as a result of his or her upbringing, or it’s a complex combination of both (which is most likely), it is *not* a matter of choice. A child chooses neither how she is born nor how he is raised. We shouldn’t hold a person responsible for her or his sexual *orientation* any more than we hold a person responsible for skin color (nature) or how a preschooler is dressed (nurture)” (Blake, “Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation, 6-7; emphasis his). Blake is frequently mentioned in this article not because he is a crusader for homosexual rights—he isn’t—but because by devoting an entire issue of *Insight* to the problem in hope of helping teenagers

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The belief that homosexual orientation, like the color of the skin, eyes, or hair, is inborn—i.e., the homosexual was “born gay,” and has no choice over his/her homosexual condition—is one of the main reasons for the changing attitudes within Adventism on the question of homosexuality. Some go so far as to say that if God has allowed some people to be born gay, why should we not accept the person’s sexual orientation? More, probably, see homosexuality as an unfortunate birth defect, like a hare-lip, crossed eyes, or Down syndrome, to be corrected if possible. My contention, however, is that if we accept homosexual orientation as something inherited or acquired rather than *chosen*, it is *inevitable* that we will soon be called to see it as natural, then normal, then acceptable, and finally laudable. (Consider, for example, how those with AIDS are now valorized for their courage.)

4. New Sexual Paradigms. The acceptance of homosexuality as a morally legitimate sexual expression in certain quarters of the Adventist church should also be seen as a reflection of the growing challenge to traditional Adventist views on human sexuality. In what is emerging in the church as a “new sexual paradigm,” permissible sex is no longer limited to sex within the biblically prescribed monogamous, heterosexual, marriage relationship. Instead, it is one which is engaged in by consenting individuals, according to their own self-imposed boundaries. Accordingly, premarital sex, masturbation (also known as solo sex, self sex, or partnerless sex), and homosexuality are all viewed as morally justifiable.

For example, one former Adventist chaplain and teacher who argues for pre-marital sex and masturbation writes that “sexual exploration and experimentation before marriage” is acceptable as long as a person does not put his or her unmarried partner “in the position of feeling guilty or sinful.”¹⁷

Another Adventist, a professor of psychology, defines sexual sin as “*behaving* in a way that *harms* yourself or others.” Among the “radical reforms of the Adventist sexual paradigm” that he recommends to the church is this: “The pleasures of occasional guilt-free orgasm ought to be available to all post-pubescent parishioners.” The “guilt-free” sex includes sex with “myself”

show more compassion and helping young homosexuals feel more support in their struggle against temptation, he inadvertently provided the most quotable Adventist defense for the born a gay theology that differentiates between homosexuals and homosexual practice.

¹⁷Steven G. Daily, *Adventism for a New Generation* (Portland/Clackamas, OR: Better Living Publishers, 1993), 298. According to Daily, the Seventh-day Adventist church’s negative valuation of pre-marital sex and masturbation arises from “our Victorian heritage, which has been well preserved through the work of Ellen White. Most Adventists are not aware of what bizarre and extreme views of sexuality were commonly held by our nineteenth century ancestors. Books like *Messages to the Young People* have served to perpetuate such baggage throughout much of the twentieth century as well” (ibid., 296-297). At the time he wrote his book, Daily was a chaplain and teacher at La Sierra University, a Seventh-day Adventist institution in California.

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(masturbation), with “a person of the same gender” (homosexuality), and with “someone [‘not-yet- married’] of the opposite gender” (pre-marital sex).¹⁸

5. Climate of “Enlightened” Ethical Sensitivity. Our generation is painfully aware of the existence in our world of injustice and bigotry—slavery, racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, homophobia¹⁹ (fear, hysteria, disgust and/or hatred of the homosexual), etc. Because ignorance and religious bigotry have often played a part in these oppressive acts, it has become potentially harmful to quote the Bible when questioning anyone’s sexual conduct—however objectionable it may be. Thus, the condemnation of any of today’s “new sexual paradigms” is perceived as a judgmental act that may hurt the ethical feelings of “sexual minorities”—individuals with alternate sexual preferences or orientations.

In the desire to appear more “informed” and “compassionate,” those who have adopted this posture of “enlightened” ethical sensitivity are treating biblical prohibitions of certain sexual deviations as culturally-conditioned or offensive relics of a “pre-scientific” (or puritanical) morality.²⁰ Additionally, biblical virtues such as love, compassion, and acceptance are emphasized in such a way as to counter any efforts not to accept the “new sexual paradigms.” Bible-believing Christians who speak against homosexuality are accused of being *judgmental* (as in the case of Christ’s disciples, who condemned a congenitally blind person as a sinner [John 9]) and un-Christlike (Didn’t Jesus say, “Judge not, lest ye be judged?” And didn’t He also say to the woman caught in adultery, “Neither do I condemn thee?”²¹).

Given today’s climate of “enlightened” ethical sensitivity, anyone who does not accept homosexuality as morally justifiable is looked upon as being legalis-

¹⁸John Berez, “About Orgasms and Other Things,” *Student Movement* [Andrews University Newspaper], February 26, 1997, 9, 11. A few weeks later Berez published another article in the *Student Movement* in which he offered “suggested boundaries to Christian solo sex [masturbation].” See his “An Essay on a Sensitive Subject,” *Student Movement*, April 2, 1997, 5.

¹⁹“Homophobia” is an irrational fear of homosexuality which leads to hostility toward homosexuals and others who seek to give them help.

²⁰Thus, morally neutral expressions are now being employed for once forbidden sins: fornication is now premarital or nonmarital sex; adultery is referred to as an extramarital or co-marital affair; permissiveness is euphemized as sexual variation; the promiscuous is multifriended; and homosexuality and sodomy are now alternate lifestyles (See, for example, John Leo, “Cleansing the Mother Tongue,” *Time*, December 27, 1982, 78). In this “politically-correct” age, sin is no longer perceived as sin but rather as sickness, and habitual sin is now regarded as an addictive or compulsive behavior. Thus, not too long ago, a newspaper had an article about a 34-bed clinic that had just opened in Southern California to treat “Christian sex addicts.” See, Nicole Brodeur, “Center Aids Christian Sex Addicts,” *Orange County Register*, February 13, 1989, 1.

²¹It seems that Jesus’ statement, “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more” (John 8:11), has been abused by all classes of Christians in their attitude to homosexuality. On one hand, strong advocates of pro-gay theology would read the statement as: “*Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin . . .*” On the other hand, some strong opponents of gay-theology would adopt the attitude: “. . . *I condemn thee: go!*” A true Adventist position does not condemn the sinner (“neither do I condemn thee”), but it does condemn the sin (“Go, and sin no more”).

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tic, insensitive, hypocritical, and in our case, bigoted and homophobic—characteristics that are incompatible with acceptable Christian behavior. This strategy exerts a powerful psychological pressure on Christians to either endorse the homosexual lifestyle, or at a minimum, remain silent on the issue.

6. The AIDS Crisis. During the early phases of the AIDS epidemic, when it was discovered that AIDS is largely a sexually transmitted disease, the disease came to be perceived as a judgment from God against all forms of sexual perversion—of which homosexuality was the chief. Since many Adventists viewed homosexuality as *the* “unpardonable sin” of sexual immorality—the one sin that sealed the doom of Sodom and Gomorrah, and which would signal “the end of time,” AIDS became associated with homosexuality and the disease came to be seen as a “gay disease.”²²

But as heterosexuals and non-promiscuous individuals started coming down with AIDS, Christians were forced not only to rethink their judgmental stance toward victims of AIDS, but also to reconsider their negative valuation of homosexuality. The reasoning was: If both homosexuals and heterosexuals fall to AIDS, perhaps homosexuality is not as sinful as it was traditionally pictured.

Also, when compassion for victims of the AIDS disease soon turned into compassion for homosexuals, it was not long before compassion for the struggling homosexual turned into an acceptance of homosexuality as a morally acceptable lifestyle. This seems to be the unspoken message in an article in *Adventist View*, titled “I’m Homosexual, I’m Adventist, and I Have AIDS.”²³

7. Kinship’s Pro-Gay Theology. Another major reason for Adventism’s changing attitude toward homosexuality is the influence of the work by the pro-homosexual organization known as Kinship. Billing itself as “a support group for gay and lesbian Seventh-day Adventists,” Kinship has been quite successful in converting some Adventists to its belief that “God can bless a committed homosexual relationship.” As a result, an increasing number of homo-

²²This prevalent understanding is reflected in a 1977 *Sabbath School Lessons*: “Jesus said that one of the signs of His near return would be a condition of morality similar to that among the antediluvians and Sodomites. Not only have the same deviant sexual patterns become prominent in our times, being pursued with open boldness, but some professed ministers now defend such practices, organize churches for persons of this lifestyle, and ordain some to the ministry. Such sinful brazenness indicates again the eroding morality of our times and the approaching end of the age” (*Sabbath School Lessons*, October 1977, 48 [British edition, 330]; cf. Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, 1:232).

²³See the story of Jim Miller (as told to Celeste Ryan), “I’m Homosexual, I’m Adventist, and I have AIDS: The Jim Miller Story,” *Adventist View* (Winter 1993), 9, 15. Cf. Ron (pseudonym), “A Cry from the Valley of Death,” *Ministry* (November 1996):23-25, 29; Beth Schaefer, “Homosexual Warfare,” *View* (Special 1999 issue):18-21 (*View* is a quarterly publication by the Young Adult Ministries of the North American Division of SDA; this special 1999 issue has the theme, “Is There Room for Me in Your Church?”).

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sexuals are coming out of the closet and demanding that their homosexuality be accepted as either natural, or a “gift from God.”²⁴

This may explain why in the 1993 Adventist Women’s Institute’s book referred to earlier, an “Adventist-connected” theologian, Bible instructor/academy teacher-turned-minister, writes that her lesbianism is “an unusual calling” from the Lord and why her lesbian partner also felt that the lesbian relationship was “God’s gift for her conversion.”²⁵

A year earlier the November 4, 1992, issue of the Andrews University student newspaper (*Student Movement*) created a sensation on campus when it published a letter from an Andrews university homosexual couple pleading for acceptance.²⁶ In the center-page article of that issue, some anonymous staff members and students discussed their homosexual and lesbian relationships. Among them was “Ann,” a 28-year old lesbian who was seeking the transfer of her church membership to the Pioneer Memorial Church at Andrews University. Speaking about her committed homosexual relationship in which God plays an important role, Ann summed up the basic belief of Kinship: “I am a lesbian because God knows that that’s the best thing for me. My homosexuality has actually brought me a lot closer to God than if I was a heterosexual.”²⁷ (Dare we hear God’s response in Malachi 2:17): “You have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet you say, ‘How have we wearied Him?’ In that you say, ‘Everyone who does *evil* is *good* in the sight of the LORD, and He *delights* in them,’ or, ‘Where is the God of justice?’” [NASB, emphasis added])

8. 1980 Declaration by Some Scholars. Within the Seventh-day Adventist church, the most significant event that signaled the changing attitudes toward homosexuality occurred when, in August 1980, the church commissioned six

²⁴According to Elvin Benton, “in early January 1977, a handful who had responded to a newspaper ad placed by a gay Adventist met in Palm Desert, California. It was the beginning of Kinship, and by April there were 75 members, a temporary chairman and four committees: membership, educational, social, and spiritual. . . . The organization was incorporated in March 1981 as Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Incorporated. Its mailing list in 10 countries now approaches 500 and includes a broad spectrum of occupations. The ratio of professional people is disproportionately high. A significant number are denominational employees, most of whom, understandably, use pseudonyms in their relationship to Kinship. Almost all are or have been Seventh-day Adventist church members. Several are friends of Adventists and would become church members except for what they perceive to be the church’s negative attitude toward their homosexuality” (Elvin Benton, “Adventists Face Homosexuality,” *Spectrum* 12/3 [April 1982]: 33). Because the pro-gay stance of Kinship is at variance with the position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the SDA church has dissociated itself from Kinship. For a discussion of the relationship between Kinship and the SDA Church, see Michael Pearson, *Millennial Dreams and Moral Dilemmas: Seventh-day Adventism and Contemporary Ethics* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 256-265.

²⁵Lin Ennis, “Seeker of Truth, Finder of Reality,” 227-239, 232.

²⁶The entire issue of the November 4, 1992, *Student Movement* was devoted to homosexuality. The letter from the homosexual couple is found on page 15 of that issue.

²⁷Yoonah Kim, “The Love that Dares Not Speak Its Name,” *Student Movement*, November 4, 1992, 9

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well-known representatives to attend a camp meeting (or “*kamp* meeting”) organized by the pro-homosexual group Kinship.²⁸

Although the church representatives consisted of six influential Bible scholars and pastors,²⁹ to the surprise of many, the biblical and theological scholars at the Kinship camp meeting concluded that the teaching of Scripture on the subject of homosexuality is not sufficiently clear to settle the question of the morality of homosexual acts or relationships in our world. The three scholars, all of whom were then teaching at the church’s leading theological seminary at Andrews University, declared: “A simplistic English reading of the few scriptural references to homosexual acts would not suffice to determine the Lord’s will for homosexual persons today.”³⁰

Given the ensuing civil-war between liberals and conservatives over the legitimacy of contemporary higher-criticism in biblical interpretation, the declaration by the church’s authorized scholars at the Kinship camp meeting has been understood by some as another indication of the flourishing of the liberal methodology in the church.³¹

In any case, declarations such as the one above, and the official opposition to such a position by the church in the volume *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .* (1988)³² and in the GC Biblical Research Institute’s book *Homosexu-*

²⁸The idea of having a special camp meeting (or *kamp* meeting) for homosexual Adventists was born at an early 1980 Kinship board meeting. According to Benton, the August 1980 camp meeting “was a major event in the long story of Adventist homosexuals” (Benton, “Adventists Face Homosexuality,” 32, 33).

²⁹The six scholars and pastors consisted of three biblical and theological scholars (James J. C. Cox, Lawrence Geraty, and Fritz Guy), two representing pastoral concerns (James Londis and Josephine Benton), and one, an outspoken opponent of Kinship, who had run a recovery ministry for homosexuals for many years and disagreed with the majority conclusion (Colin Cook). For a summary of the meeting, see Elvin Benton, “Adventists Face Homosexuality,” *Spectrum* 12/3 (April 1982):32-38.

³⁰Benton, “Adventists Face Homosexuality,” 35. At the time of the 1980 Kinship camp meeting, James J. C. Cox was professor of New Testament at the Andrews University Theological Seminary; he has since served as president of Avondale College in Australia. Old Testament scholar Lawrence T. Geraty was professor of archeology and history of antiquity at the Seminary at Andrews University; he has since served as president of Atlantic Union College and currently serves as president of La Sierra University. Fritz Guy was professor of systematic theology at the Seminary; he currently teaches theology and philosophy at La Sierra University, Riverside, California.

³¹See my *Receiving the Word*, chapters 4 and 5 (part 1), 75-113.

³²*Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Washington, DC: Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988), 303. Produced by some 194 SDA thought leaders around the world, this “carefully researched” volume is to be received “as representative of . . . [what] Seventh-day Adventists around the globe cherish and proclaim,” and as furnishing “reliable information on the beliefs of our [SDA] church” (*ibid.*, vii, iv, v).

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ality in History and the Scriptures (1988),³³ have made the issue of homosexuality a hot potato item within Adventist scholarship.

9. Troubling Views in Church Publications. At the same time that homosexuals have demanded that the church accept their homosexuality as natural or a “gift from God,” and at the same time that the church’s Bible scholars have been quietly debating the issue, the homosexual issue has come out of its academic closet into the mainstream Adventist debate. This has taken the form of carefully written yet troubling articles in such church publications as *Ministry*, *Adventist Review*, *Insight*, and *Adventist View*. These articles, sometimes by anonymous authors, have called for new “awareness and understanding on the subject of homosexuality.” A careful reading of some of these works reveals a subtle shift from the church’s categorical rejection of homosexuality to its qualified acceptance.³⁴

The vexing questions raised by these articles can best be illustrated by calling attention to the December 5, 1992, issue of *Insight*, a publication for Seventh-day Adventist youth. This particular issue is devoted entirely to the subject of homosexuality. While the then editor of the magazine maintains that “there is no scriptural support for practicing homosexuality,” he nevertheless asserts: “There’s a difference between *being* a homosexual and *practicing* homosexuality”; “Nobody *chooses* to be homosexual”; “Changing one’s homosexual orientation is difficult and rare”; “Homosexuals can be genuine, model Christians” [if celibate], and “Being a homosexual is not a sin” [if it is not practiced].³⁵

Perceptive readers will recognize that the above position differs from the church’s traditional understanding but is in accord with what the 1995 *Church Manual* states: the church has officially condemned “homosexual *practices* and lesbian *practices*” as examples of “the obvious perversions of God’s original plan,” and *made these practices a basis for church discipline* (see the note below).³⁶

³³The articulation of the official church position on homosexuality was taken up by the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference. See Ronald Springett, *Homosexuality in History and the Scriptures* (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1988).

³⁴See, for example, Kate McLaughlin (pseudonym), “A Homosexual in My Congregation?” *Ministry*, November 1996, 10-11, 29; idem, “Are Homosexuals God’s Children?” *Adventist Review*, April 3, 1997, 26-29; *Insight*, December 5, 1992, 1-16; Jim Miller (as told to Celeste Ryan), “I’m Homosexual, I’m Adventist, and I have AIDS: The Jim Miller Story,” *Adventist View*, Winter 1993, 9, 15; Beth Schaefer, “Homosexual Warfare,” *View*, Special 1999 issue, 18-21. Beside these church publications, *Adventist Today*, an independent publication based in La Sierra, CA, recently devoted an entire issue to the subject. In it, some Adventists have argued for homosexuality. See articles by Norman Brown, Ben Kemena, Kate McLaughlin, Jim Miller in the July-August 1999 issue of *Adventist Today*.

³⁵Chris Blake, “Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation: A Christian Response to the Question of Homosexuality,” *Insight*, December 5, 1992, 4-16.

³⁶*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (1995), 154, 169, emphasis added. The wording in the current (1995) *Church Manual* is based on the revisions made at the 1990 GC session in Indianapolis

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10. Obliteration of Gender Role Distinctions. One overlooked reason for Adventism's changing attitude toward homosexuality is the impact of feminist theology on sexual role distinctions. This fact is evident in the liberal (radical feminist) and conservative ("egalitarian" or "equalitarian") reasoning for ordaining women as elders or pastors. Though employing different sets of arguments, both liberal and conservative proponents of women's ordination are united in their denial of male headship and gender role differentiation *at creation*. To them, a belief in the biblical teaching of sexual role distinctions before the fall of Adam and Eve suggests the absence of "full equality" and the existence of superiority/inferiority among the first pair.³⁷

We should not miss the connection between the above arguments and those used to promote homosexuality. Just as feminists seek "full equality" by getting

(see 1990 *Church Manual*, 147, 160, 173). It may be argued that the 1990 and 1995 *Church Manuals* do not explicitly condemn "homosexuality and lesbianism" as tendencies (which would have implied an adherence to the *non-acceptance* position), but merely condemn "homosexual practices and lesbian practices" (which implies a tacit endorsement of the *qualified-acceptance* position). Chris Blake makes this argument (see his "Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation," p.11). However, by making the *practice* of homosexuality the basis for church discipline, the delegates at the 1990 and 1995 GC sessions made it clear that they still adhered to a "non-acceptance" position on homosexuality. Ronald Lawson, the "liaison" between the SDA Kinship organization and the SDA Church, maintains that the subtle shift in the position of the SDA Church is attributed to the role of an SDA Kinship "kampmeeting graduate" who was on the committee drafting changes in the Church Manual. The original drafted document had explicitly condemned "homosexuality and lesbianism." The "kampmeeting graduate," Lawson explains, "feeling that the presence of large numbers of conservative Third World delegates would make it impossible to liberalize the statement once it reached the floor [1985 General Conference Session], he got together with friends, including several other veterans of kampmeetings, to try to modify the draft in advance. As they read the situation, it was impossible at that stage to avert the change totally. Consequently, they focused their efforts on changing language which would have condemned 'homosexuality and lesbianism', a sweeping rejection of their very being, to a somewhat more limited condemnation of 'homosexual and lesbian practices.' They were successful in this. Nevertheless, the new statement, which replaced much vaguer language, for the first time labeled this 'practice' as unacceptable and a basis for discipline." See Ronald Lawson, "The Caring Church?: The Seventh-day Adventist Church and Its Homosexual Members," a paper prepared for the meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (Washington, DC, November 1992), 7; the same paper was presented at the meeting of the Andrews Society for Religious Study at San Francisco, November 1992. Some perceptive Adventists have argued that the attempt made at the 1995 GC session to modify the relevant sections on homosexuality was yet another attempt by advocates of pro-gay theology to chip away the church's non-acceptance position.

³⁷In the Seventh-day Adventist Church the two influential books endorsing women's ordination are: Patricia A. Habada and Rebecca Frost Brillhart, eds., *The Welcome Table: Setting A Place for Ordained Women* (Langley Park, MD: TEAMPress, 1995); and Nancy Vyhmeister, ed., *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998). While the former often employs the arguments of "liberal" feminism, the latter adopts the "egalitarian" arguments of Evangelical feminism. Whereas my response to the former volume is found in *Receiving the Word*, 119-129, my detailed critique of the latter appears as several chapters in *Prove All Things: a Response to Women in Ministry*, ed. Mercedes H. Dyer (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventists Affirm, 2000), 17-44, 179-218, 287-312.

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rid of *gender* or *sex roles* in marriage and the church, gay theology also seeks to bring about “equality” between homosexuals and heterosexuals by obliterating *sexual identity*. Thus, when radical proponents impose their gender-inclusive reconstructions upon the Bible and suggest that Adam was “an androgynous being” (i.e. bisexual),³⁸ it is only a few steps from seeing homosexuality as a creation ordinance.

Similarly, when conservative proponents of women’s ordination claim that at creation Adam and Eve were “fully equal,” enjoying “total egalitarianism in marriage,” and argue that prior to the fall there was no role differentiation between male and female, whether they are aware of it or not, they also are building a theological nest for advocates of homosexual theology to lay and hatch their gay eggs.³⁹

At the recent General Conference session in Toronto, Canada, the obliteration of role distinctions before the Fall was one of the sore points in the questionable proposal on divorce and remarriage. Regretfully, some failed to see a theological connection between role-relationships and homosexuality.⁴⁰

³⁸Jeane Haerich, “Genesis Revisited,” in *The Welcome Table*, 101, 100. The obliteration of gender differentiation in Genesis 2 is only a few steps away from positing homosexuality or bisexuality in the first created pair. And since human beings were created in God’s image, if Adam was “an androgynous being” does it not mean that God also is androgynous? One wonders what is really behind the gender-inclusive reconstructions of the Bible: “*Son of God*” becomes “*Child of God*”; “*Son of Man*” becomes “*Human one*”; “our heavenly *Father*” becomes “our heavenly *Parent*.” Is this also the reason why an Adventist author promotes the Holy Spirit as the female member of the Godhead and repeatedly refers to the Creator as “He/She”? See Steve Daily, *Adventism for a New Generation* (Portland/Clackamas, Ore.: Better Living Publishers, 1993), 88, 105, 113.

³⁹This basic argument underlies *Women in Ministry*, the pro-ordination book by some faculty of Andrews University. The clearest articulation of this view in the book is my good friend Richard M. Davidson’s article “Headship, Submission, and Equality in Scripture,” 259-295. Denying that God made man the head of the home at creation, the article argues that God’s original plan for the home was “total equality in marriage” (267), or “total egalitarianism in the marriage relationship” (p. 269), or “headship among equals” (270), expressions understood to mean the absence of role differentiation before the Fall (264, 267, 269). For him the biblical teaching of male headship and female submission implies “functional superiority/inferiority” (260). Though he believes that “headship” was instituted *after the Fall*, it is his view that God’s original plan of “total egalitarianism in the marriage relationship” is still the same in the post-fall situation “as it was for Adam and Eve in the beginning” (269). In other words, today, as at the beginning, there should be no “ontological or functional” role distinctions. Rather, Christians should aspire for the “ideal” of “full equality” in their homes (284). Cf. Peter M. Van Bemmelen, “Equality, Headship, and Submission in the Writings of Ellen G. White,” in *Women in Ministry*, 297-311. The most devastating critique of the post-Fall headship theology has been provided by Samuele Bacchiocchi in *Prove All Things*.

⁴⁰See, for example, Roy Adams, “Fireworks in the Dome,” *Adventist Review*, 5 July 2000, 2-3. Adams expressed “surprise” at my comment that the obliteration of role distinctions before the fall ultimately leads to endorsing homosexuality. He apparently believes the comment by one delegate at Toronto that those of us questioning the theological fuzziness of the proposal were appealing to those with “a scare mentality” (3).

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To speak of “full equality” without seriously coming to terms with the nature and extent of this equality and without stating unambiguously that to act as “equal and joint partners” does not mean to act identically, allows advocates of gay theology to build upon the shaky foundation constructed by liberal and conservative advocates of women’s ordination. At a time of increasing homosexual demands for marital rights, the failure by proponents of women’s ordination to say unambiguously that men are not equal with women personally or even physically *as candidates to be spouses of men* has opened a welcome door for those who seek to nullify the biblical case for divinely instituted role differences and a monogamous heterosexual relationship. This fact has not been lost on proponents of gay theology within Adventism.⁴¹

Summary. The above ten reasons—(i) campaign by pro-homosexual groups, (ii) departure from biblical revelation to empirical research, (iii) the impact of the behavioristic philosophy on recent research findings, (iv) new sexual paradigms, (v) the climate of ‘enlightened’ ethical sensitivity, (vi) the AIDS crisis, (vii) the impact of Kinship’s pro-gay theology, (viii) the 1980 declaration by some scholars, (ix) troubling views in church publications, and (x) the obliteration of gender role distinctions—may help explain why attitudes are changing within the Adventist church on the issue of homosexuality. Before evaluating the arguments being used to domesticate homosexuality in the Adventist church, it may first be useful to summarize the three major positions pleading for audience in the Christian church.

II. Three Options for the Church

The Christian church is, today, being called upon to decide upon what homosexuals should do when they become Christians. Should homosexuals change their orientation, control their orientation, or celebrate their orientation?

The answer to this question has given birth to three contending positions in Christian churches: (a) the *non-acceptance* view, which maintains that homosexuality (whether or not practiced) is not compatible with biblical Christianity (b) the *qualified acceptance* view, which argues that homosexuality can be compatible with Christianity if not practiced, and (c) the *full acceptance* view, which asserts that even when practiced homosexuality is fully compatible with the Christian faith.

⁴¹For example, speaking at the annual meeting of Seventh-day Adventist college and university Bible teachers in San Francisco, California, in 1992, Ron Lawson, the “liason” from the pro-homosexual group Kinship, correctly remarked that the push for women’s ordination, when successful, will eventually open the door for the church to embrace homosexuality, since both causes are waging a similar battle of “discrimination” and share the same basic hermeneutic. The experience of other Christian denominations which have jettisoned the Bible’s teaching on sexual role differentiation for an “egalitarian” model confirms Lawson’s observation that openness toward homosexuality inescapably follows once that step is taken. For a response to the “full equality” argument, see my unpublished article “Ideology or Theology: An Analysis and Evaluation of *Women in Ministry*” (1999).

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Seventh-day Adventists historically have adopted the *non-acceptance* view. But as pro-homosexual groups (like “SDA Kinship”) continue their campaign for the *full-acceptance* view, and as the “born gay” argument draws more support (especially anecdotal support), some segments within contemporary Adventism are moving toward the *qualified-acceptance* view. Since all three views are represented in contemporary Seventh-day Adventism, and since each is based on a set of theological and ethical assumptions, I will briefly summarize the respective views. I will then raise some critical questions for those seeking to move the church toward “qualified-acceptance” or “full-acceptance” of homosexuality.

1. Non-Acceptance View. Historically embraced by the Christian church, this position maintains that homosexuality, regardless of its cause, is incompatible with biblical Christianity.⁴² The following are some of its basic tenets:

(a) Nature of Homosexuality: As a post-fall distortion of human sexuality, homosexuality (constitutional or situational) is no different from other depraved sexual deviations (such as bisexuality, bestiality, adultery, fornication etc.). The popular quip, “If God had intended homosexuality to be a legitimate expression of human sexuality, He would have created Adam and Steve, not Adam and Eve,” aptly summarizes the non-acceptance position.

(b) Morality of Homosexuality: Homosexuality is both evil (like sickness and death) and sinful (like pride, adultery, and murder). Like all other morally corrupt tendencies, homosexual orientation or disposition does not excuse the sin of homosexuality. All people are tempted to act upon their besetting sexual desires, cravings or tendencies (homosexual and heterosexual). The temptation is not sin, but yielding to it is morally wrong.

(c) Way Out of Homosexuality: Believing that there is no sin that is outside the scope of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, the non-acceptance position maintains that the Creator of human sexuality can fix every sexual problem. Homosexuality and homosexual lifestyle can, therefore, be overcome by God’s transforming power (in the conversion/new birth experience) and by God’s enabling or sustaining grace (in the gradual work of sanctification). God is able to deliver a homosexual from his/her sin and keep such a person from falling.

(d) Response to Homosexuality: The church should accord all homosexuals their full rights as human beings created in the image of God, show compassion,

⁴²Representatives include, Westmont College New Testament scholar Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexual Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), Louisville Seminary New Testament professor Marion Soards, *Scripture and Homosexuality: Biblical Authority and the Church* (Westminster, PA: John Knox, 1995), Gordon-Conwell Seminary church historian Richard Lovelace, *The Church and Homosexuality* (Old Tappan, NJ: Flemming H. Revell, 1978), and Don Williams (Biblical scholar at Claremont Men’s College), *The Bond That Breaks: Will Homosexuality Split the Church* (Los Angeles, CA: BIM Publications, 1978). In their theological discussion, Schmidt, Soards, Lovelace and Williams pay greater attention to church history and Biblical theology than to contemporary scientific findings on homosexuality.

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kindness, and Christian love to all those struggling with sexual sins, and point them to Jesus Christ as the Answer to all their needs. Homosexuals should be urged to repent and accept God's forgiveness.

Homosexuals who acknowledge the sinfulness of homosexuality, who accept Christ's offer of forgiveness, and who, by faith, seek to commit themselves to a life of sexual purity should be accepted into church fellowship. But those who do not acknowledge homosexuality as sin and/or those who are engaged in homosexual practices should not be accepted into the church.⁴³

The *non-acceptance* view, therefore, *rejects* the view that "once a homosexual, always a homosexual."

2. Qualified Acceptance View. Currently gaining currency in the Adventist church and implied in the current *Church Manual*, this accommodating view argues that unpracticed homosexuality *can be* compatible with Christianity.⁴⁴ The following are some of its essential teachings:

(a) Nature of Homosexuality: As a post-fall *aberration*, homosexual condition/orientation ("constitutional homosexuality" or inversion) is a non-ideal condition of human sexuality (just like poor eye-sight, asthma, or allergies). "God didn't create homosexuality, as He didn't create loneliness or disabilities."⁴⁵ Homosexuality is not God's ideal plan for people, and therefore must be removed *wherever possible*.

(b) Morality of Homosexuality: The homosexual condition or orientation is an evidence of the brokenness and fallenness of our present world. The condition may be classified with disease (such as alcoholism, or allergies), with handicap (such as congenital blindness), or eccentricity (such as left-handedness). It may even be evil (like sickness or death), but when not practiced it is not necessarily sinful (like pride, blasphemy, or murder). Because some homosexuals do not choose to be gay, but are born that way, "we shouldn't hold a person responsible for her or his sexual *orientation* any more than we hold a person responsible for skin color (nature)."⁴⁶ Being a homosex-

⁴³ Ronald M. Springett concludes his study on homosexuality: "The church must accept the individual of homosexual orientation who needs help and support and struggles against same-sex tendencies. But those who insist on and promote the active homosexual lifestyle as normal, natural, or even superior to heterosexual relations by that very act disregard and undermine the sole authority upon which the church's very existence and mission is based, namely, the Scriptures" (Springett, *Homosexuality in History and the Scriptures*, 164).

⁴⁴ Helmut Thielicke, *The Ethics of Sex*, trans. John Doberstein (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), and Lewis Smede, *Sex for Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976) adopt this view. While the latter is a more popular version than the former, they both seek to deal pastorally with the tragedy of "an ethically upright, mature homosexual who is struggling with his condition" (Thielicke, 271). They seem to accept, as equal partners, both the Bible and the testimonies of homosexuals and research by social scientists in their theological discussion of the issue.

⁴⁵ Blake, "Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation," 11.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

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ual is not sin,⁴⁷ but (lustful and inappropriate) homosexual activity is sin and therefore, must be avoided.⁴⁸

(c) Way Out of Homosexuality: In very rare situations, God may deliver some homosexuals from their condition/orientation. Generally, however, since genuine homosexuals did not choose their orientation, and since in most cases there is no possibility of change in orientation, homosexuals must aim at controlling (i.e. putting in subjection) their homosexual drives. One Adventist scholar writes:

“We must teach them to live with their condition. In a sense it is like being born left-handed. . . . However, it does not give license to practice homosexual acts, which violate Christian moral standards. In this situation we must consider the homosexual on the same basis as the heterosexual. . . . The homosexual may not be able to do anything about his attraction for his own sex, but by God’s grace he can control his impulses. He may not have had any real choice regarding his condition, but he has choice about his actions.”⁴⁹

Cure or deliverance may not always be possible for those with homosexual orientations. But through prayer, counseling, “therapy,” and other methods of behavior modification (skills of self-discipline or self-control), homosexuals can cope with their sexual predicament.

(e) Response to Homosexuality: While accepting their condition as a “thorn in the flesh,” and while controlling their desires, homosexuals should accept God’s unconditional love and acceptance. On the other hand, the church should treat people with homosexual orientation as it would treat heterosexuals—i.e., as real human beings, of equal value in God’s sight and having the same rights as all others. Show understanding, compassion, and love to them “neither condemning them for an orientation over which they have no control, nor encour-

⁴⁷“I don’t deny the *evil* of the thing, for evil it certainly is, but I do deny the *sinfulness* of it. The homosexual condition is to be classified with disease, weakness, death, as an evil; not with gluttony, blasphemy, murder, as a sin. Both sin and evil are the work of Satan, were brought into the world at the Fall, and will one day be destroyed by Christ, but they are not identical. Sin, which we must avoid and need never commit, is represented in our situation by homosexual lust and the activity to which it leads. Evil is different. We pray to be delivered from it, but may nevertheless find ourselves left in it, and then have to aim at using and transforming it. In our situation that means a homosexual nature. I’m sure that in this sense it is morally neutral. . . .” (Alex Davidson, *The Returns of Love: Letters of a Christian Homosexual* [London: Intervarsity, 1970], 80).

⁴⁸Chris Blake, “Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation,” 11, equates homosexual *orientation* with temptation, and states: “We cannot condone homosexual activity. Homosexual sexual activity is sinful—it is apart from God’s will. Yet a difference exists between the person who fights against homosexual tendencies and the one who experiments with or revels in them. It’s a sin to cave in to temptation. It’s not a sin to be tempted.”

⁴⁹Sakae Kubo, *Theology and Ethics of Sex* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1980), 83.

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aging them to accept something less than God's best for their lives,"⁵⁰ as homosexuals are led to accept Jesus as their Savior.

Homosexuals who renounce homosexual practices and make a commitment to remain celibate must be accepted as church members in good and regular standing. They can hold church offices and can be ordained as ministers. "If an alcoholic who never drinks alcohol can hold any church office, a homosexual who never practices homosexuality can hold any church office."⁵¹

The *qualified acceptance* view, therefore, assumes that "once a homosexual (almost) always a homosexual."

3. Full Acceptance View. Historically rejected by the church, this revisionist view of morality asserts that homosexuality is *fully compatible* with Christianity.⁵² The following are some of its primary precepts:

(a) Nature of Homosexuality: As part of the *pre-fall natural order*, genuine (constitutional) homosexuality is not a distortion, nor an aberration of human sexuality. It is an immutable sexual orientation given or created by God as a gift to some people—just as is heterosexuality. It is an eccentricity (a characteristic of a minority) or a mark of one's individual identity (just like possessing a particular color of skin, eyes, or hair).

(b) Morality of Homosexuality: Homosexuality is morally neutral; it is neither evil nor sinful. An article in the *Newsletter* of SDA Kinship states this position well:

"Homosexuality and heterosexuality are two aspects of sexuality, neither being the counterfeit of the other, both being right or wrong depending upon the context of their expression. . . . Both the homosexual and the heterosexual are capable of lusting or loving, worshipping the creature or the Creator, and of seeking salvation by works or accepting it as a gift of God."⁵³

Homosexuality may be eccentric, but (like congenital blindness or the sickness of alcoholism) it definitely is not evil or sinful (like murder or pride).⁵⁴ The

⁵⁰Kate McLaughlin, "Are Homosexuals God's Children?" 29.

⁵¹Blake, "Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation," 16. Blake, who wrote this long before reading my response to argument two, below, insists that the difference between our positions is primarily semantic and that his use of terms is in line with the *Church Manual*. I would say that an alcoholic who never drinks alcohol is no longer an alcoholic, and a non-practicing homosexual who has been born again may face temptation, but has *not* been *reborn* as a homosexual.

⁵²Representing this position are Norman Pittenger, *Time for Consent: A Christian's Approach to Homosexuality* (London: SCM Press, 1970); Letha Scanzoni and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?—Another Christian View* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), a work that draws heavily on findings of social scientists. The same position is advocated by SDA Kinship International, Inc.—"a support group for gay and lesbian Seventh-day Adventists"—and a group which maintains that "God can bless a committed homosexual relationship."

⁵³See J. Stuart, "Counterfeits," *SDA Kinship Newsletter* (May 1980):4 (cited by Pearson, *Millennial Dreams and Moral Dilemmas*, 257).

⁵⁴In 1973, *Trends*, a publication of the United Presbyterian Church, devoted a full issue to the topic: "Homosexuality: Neither Sin or Sickness" (see *Trends* 5 [July-August 1973]).

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abuse of homosexuality (e. g., promiscuity, rape, or prostitution) is wrong, but not its legitimate expression (as in loving, consensual, monogamous, homosexual relationships).

(c) *Way Out of Homosexuality*: To insist that homosexuals should change their orientation is equivalent to asking an “Ethiopian” to change his skin, or asking a person five feet tall to become six feet. Homosexuals do not have to be transformed into heterosexuals, nor should they “just control themselves” until they become “heterosexualized.” Because of the long years during which they have been victimized as “sexual minorities,” homosexuals must claim the assurance of God’s acceptance and leading in their homosexual lifestyle.

(d) *Response to Homosexuality*: Homosexuals should not be condemned, despised, or singled out as the embodiment of sexual perversion. They, like all others, deserve love, dignity, and respect. Effort must be expended to present the living Christ to the homosexual who is not yet a Christian (i.e., the person who was “born a gay” but has not yet been “born again”). But whether converted or unconverted, all homosexuals should celebrate God’s “gift” (homosexual orientation), and *practice* homosexuality within a permanent relationship of love and fidelity or within the biblical guidelines for sexual morality.

Homosexuals who accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior must be considered as full and regular members of the church, and if they choose, they must be encouraged to date other homosexuals—as long as the relationship is kept pure. In other words, homosexuals should be affirmed in their same sex relationships, be allowed to “marry” or to form “closed-couple homosexual unions,”⁵⁵ and whenever necessary, be permitted to adopt children. The rules of marriage should apply in homosexual marriages just as in heterosexual marriage. Converted homosexuals who have a calling or the requisite spiritual gifts should be ordained as pastors.

The full-acceptance view, therefore, maintains that “once a homosexual, always a homosexual.”

Summary. All three views—non-acceptance, qualified acceptance, and full-acceptance positions—are competing for converts within the Seventh-day Adventist church. The “hot potato” issue is whether to regard homosexuality as: (a) a morally-sinful practice to be renounced, (b) a morally-neutral condition to be controlled, or (c) a morally-acceptable gift to be celebrated.

Each of the three views raises crucial theological, ethical, and hermeneutical issues. Whereas the non-acceptance view and the full-acceptance view are con-

⁵⁵For example, Scanzoni and Mollenkot, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?*, 111, 71, 72, argue for “the possibility of a permanent, committed relationship of love between homosexuals analogous to heterosexual marriage.” Adventist ethicist David R. Larson, “Sexuality and Christian Ethics,” *Spectrum* 15 (May 1984):16, also writes: “Christians therefore have every reason to encourage homosexuals who are honestly convinced that they should neither attempt to function heterosexually nor remain celibate to form Closed-Coupled homosexual unions.”

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sistent, the qualified acceptance view is inconsistent. Yet, it appears that the qualified-acceptance view is that which is being widely promoted by some thought leaders in the church.⁵⁶

Before the Adventist church renounces its traditional non-acceptance position in favor of the qualified acceptance position, the church should demand biblically consistent answers from advocates of this version of pro-gay theology.

While concerning myself with these questions in the final section of this presentation, I will evaluate some of the common arguments often put forth in favor of homosexuality. However, on this “hot potato” item, just as on any other controversial subject, “it is better to debate a question without settling it than to settle a question without debating it.”⁵⁷

III. Evaluating Some Pro-Gay Arguments

In order to silence or challenge the Bible’s negative valuation of homosexuality, advocates of pro-gay theology often put forward several arguments. In this section, I will state the key arguments and offer brief responses. The discussion is organized under non-biblical and biblical arguments for homosexuality.

A. Non-Biblical Arguments for Homosexuality

These sets of arguments tend to be scientific, philosophical, or logical. Their basic thrust is to show that: people are born homosexual—i.e., conclusive evidence exists to prove that homosexuality is genetic or inborn; and since homosexuals are “born gay,” their sexual orientation is a natural or normal trait of their identity (like the color of the skin or hair), and the orientation is allowed or given by God; a person’s homosexual orientation is morally neutral and unchangeable. We shall look at ten such non-biblical arguments.

1. “To learn the truth about homosexuality, talk to real homosexuals.”

For many, it is not sufficient to trust the Bible writers as the exclusive vehicle of a dependable knowledge of all truth. In order to “learn the truth about homosexuality,” we must update our knowledge *about* them (gained through whatever means) by actually listening to homosexuals themselves. This seems to be the point in some recent Adventist publications.

⁵⁶ This qualified-acceptance position has been reflected in articles in *Adventist Review*, *Ministry*, *Insight*, and *Adventist View*—see footnote 34. See also B. B. Beach and John Graz, *101 Questions Adventists Ask* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2000), 55. The same theological view was promoted in booth #1109 at the Toronto GC session. The booth was listed in the GC Exhibition book as “Someone to Talk To.” Its organizers placed a two page advertisement in the book in which they claim that the NAD Family Ministries Department has recognized their organization.

⁵⁷ The above statement is attributed to Joseph Joubert (1754-1824); see David L. Bender, “Why Consider Opposing Viewpoints?” in Bruno Leone, ed., *Racism: Opposing Viewpoints*, rev. ed. (St. Paul, MN: Greenhaven Press, 1986), 9.

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For example, one Adventist author writes that after “years of reading, observing, and eventually talking to people,” her homosexual son finally confirmed to her that indeed, “homosexuality is a condition, not a behavior. Whatever may cause a homosexual orientation, it is not something a person chooses.” Her son “told us that from his earliest memories he knew he was ‘different.’” She also learned that God may change a persons’s sexual orientation only “on rare occasions,” and that one can be a homosexual and be “deeply spiritual.”⁵⁸

One non-Adventist scholar has explained why we need to go to homosexuals themselves to learn the truth about homosexuality. In his article entitled, “A Newly Revealed Christian Experience,” Chris Glaser, a self-avowed gay Christian on the Presbyterian task force studying homosexuality, explains that gay Christians are “the best source” for the Church to understand homosexuality.⁵⁹ United Church of Christ minister William Johnson states this new approach to knowing (epistemology):

“Rather than looking to the psychologists and the psychiatrists and the sociologists, and even to the theologians, to find out about gay people, there is a need to listen to gay people within our churches and within the society, to begin to understand what we perceive to be the problems, and then together to work on those problems.”⁶⁰

A Princeton Theological Seminary professor of Old Testament Language and Literature, an ordained elder in the Presbyterian Church (USA), echoes this view:

“I used to believe that homosexual acts are always wrong. Listening to gay and lesbian students and friends, however, I have had to re-think my position and reread the scriptures. . . . I have no choice but to take the testimonies of gays and lesbians seriously. I do so with some comfort, however, for the scriptures themselves give me the warrant to trust that human beings can know truths apart from divine revelation.”⁶¹

Response to Argument #1. Bible-believing Adventists need to ask whether the testimonies and claims of homosexuals are an adequate basis to learn the truth about homosexuality. Are homosexuals, by virtue of their experience, more qualified to speak on the issue of homosexuality than the inspired writers of the

⁵⁸Kate McLaughlin, “Are Homosexuals God’s Children?” 26-29. Cf. Suzanne Ryan, “When Love Wasn’t Enough,” 2-3; Blake, “Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation,” 4-5, 6.

⁵⁹Chris Glaser, “A Newly Revealed Christian Experience,” *Church and Society* 67 (May-June 1977):5.

⁶⁰William Muehl and William Johnson, “Issues Raised by Homosexuality,” *Raising the Issues* (materials distributed as Packet 1, Task Force to Study Homosexuality, United Presbyterian Church), 4, cited in Robert K. Johnston, *Evangelicals at an Impasse* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1984), 116-117.

⁶¹Choon-Leong Seouw, “A Heterotexual Perspective,” in *Homosexuality and Christian Community*, ed. Choon-Leong Seouw (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1996), 25.

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Bible who served as spokespersons of the Creator for human sexuality? In other words, is the attempt to justify homosexuality on the grounds of personal experience and/or empirical studies, rather than biblical revelation, a legitimate starting point for any investigation regarding sexual morality? Are the testimonies and claims of homosexuals necessarily true?

Specifically, does one have to be a homosexual in order to understand the truth about homosexuality? If we restrict knowledge or understanding of the homosexual condition to only homosexuals, does it mean that one has to experience a particular kind of sinful tendency in order to understand what exactly that sinful reality is? Assuming, for the purposes of argument, that homosexual orientation is a part of the constitutional make up of a person (just as a person's color or gender is), does it mean that true knowledge about that identity can only be had by persons with that kind of sexual identity? Does it mean, for example, that only black African women can fully understand the pains of people in that category? By analogy, could Jesus, a single Jewish male, have understood the experience of, say, Maria, a single-parent Hispanic woman?

Could it be that in a desire to appear more "informed" and perhaps more "compassionate," some Christians are giving the impression that they are ethically and religiously more knowledgeable and "sensitive" than the inspired Bible writers who condemned the practice of homosexuality? How can pro-homosexual advocates be wiser than the One who has given His written Word and His moral laws as the basis of true human joy and self-fulfillment? How can they be more compassionate than the One who has given His life for all humanity? Is it, perhaps, that they do not view the Bible and its God as did the Bible writers—the pioneers of biblical Christianity?

2. "There's A Difference Between Being A Homosexual And Practicing Homosexuality." Discussions on homosexuality often define it in two ways: (a) homosexual *orientation* or *inclination* or *tendency*—an inborn sexual attraction, predisposition, or desire toward a member of one's own sex, and (b) homosexual *behavior* or *practice*—an erotic activity with a member of one's own sex, an activity that may or may not be morally right.⁶²

On the basis of this distinction some Adventist writers argue that homosexual *orientation/condition* (also referred to as "ontological" or "constitutional" homosexuality or "inversion") is a permanent and unchangeable part of the indi-

⁶²Writes Anglican theologian D. S. Bailey: "It is important to understand that the genuine homosexual condition, or *inversion*, as it is often termed, is something for which the subject can in no way be held responsible; in itself, it is morally neutral. Like the normal condition of heterosexuality, however, it may find expression in specific sexual acts; and such acts are subject to moral judgement no less than those which may take place between man and woman. It must be made quite clear that the genuine invert is not necessarily given to homosexual practices, and may exercise as careful a control over his or her physical impulses as the heterosexual." D. S. Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* [London/New York: Longmans, Green, 1955], xi).

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vidual's constitutional make up. It is like the color of a person's skin—a non-behavioral trait that is to be viewed as morally neutral and a condition from which no one can change. On the other hand, homosexual *practice/activity* must be judged according to morally acceptable norms. "Being a homosexual is not sin," it is argued, but "homosexual sexual activity is sinful—it is apart from God's will."⁶³

Response to Argument #2: This argument is meaningless, if not misleading. Is homosexuality something you are, like being black or elderly or handicapped or female, or is it something you do, like adultery or incest or lying? This question goes to the heart of the pro-homosexual statement that "there is a difference between *being* a homosexual and *practicing* homosexuality." In order for the pro-gay argument to be valid, one must assume that homosexuality is not a sin. On the other hand, if homosexuality is a sin, as the Bible seems to suggest, then the distinction between being and practicing homosexuality is artificial and invalid.

Let's think a little more carefully: Can a person really be a homosexual without practicing homosexuality? If this is so, can a person be an adulterer without practicing adultery? Can an individual be a liar without practicing lying? Also, if a person repents of his besetting sin, and through the enabling grace of God gains victory over, say, stealing, lying, immorality, etc., would it be theologically appropriate to continue viewing the person as though he were still in bondage to that particular sin, even though he may still be tempted?

Rather than distinguishing between "being a homosexual" and "practicing homosexuality," perhaps it is more theologically sound to distinguish between the temptation to act upon one's sinful homosexual tendency (which is not wrong) and actually choosing to cherish and act upon that temptation (a wrongful choice).

If allowed to stand unchallenged, the distinction made between "being homosexual" and "practicing homosexuality" would raise a number of biblical and theological questions. First, does the Bible make such a distinction between homosexual *orientation/condition* and homosexual *practice/behavior*?—between *inversion* (constitutional homosexuality) and *perversion* (the abuse of homosexuality)? Adventist scholars disagree on this issue.

For example, one New Testament scholar admits that, "Such a distinction [between *inverts* and *perverts*] does not appear in Scripture, nor does the Bible reflect the understanding of homosexuality that we have today." But he seems

⁶³Blake, "Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation," 11. To be fair, I should make it very clear that though Blake argues that "being a homosexual is not sin," he does believe that homosexual *practice* is sin. He is not preaching that "It's okay to be gay." Instead he is calling for an end to persecution of those who face homosexual temptation so they can be brought to Christ rather than driven from Him. He is right to argue that name-calling, ostracism, and violence against homosexuals are not Christian.

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to negate this categorical statement when, in the very next sentence, he writes: “Nevertheless, Paul must have had reference to the perverted sexual practices common in the degenerate pagan society of his time. Obviously he is referring to perverts, not inverts who do not participate in homosexual practices.”⁶⁴

If the Bible makes no such distinction, how is it “obvious” for Paul to be referring to a non-existent distinction? In other words, if Scripture does not make the contemporary distinction between homosexual orientation (inversion) and homosexual practice (perversion), how is it possible that “the New Testament statements directed themselves primarily if not exclusively to perverts, not inverts”?⁶⁵ In order not to be accused of forcing the Bible into the mold of today’s sociological dichotomy between perversion and inversion, Adventist exegetes would need to establish whether the Bible makes such a distinction or not. The Bible condemns sin in thought and deed. It teaches that we all have sinful natures, but offers victory through rebirth.

Second, the distinction between orientation and practice—the former being morally neutral and the latter morally wrong—also raises theological and ethical questions. Does the universal sinfulness of all humanity and the fact that they are born with weakness and tendencies to evil (Ps 51:5; 143:2; cf. 14:3; 1 Kings 8:46; Pro 20:9; Rom 3:23; 7:14-24; 1 John 1:8) allow one to suggest that this sinful tendency or propensity is morally neutral, and therefore, not a sin to be repented of or overcome by the power of Christ (Rom 7:25; 8:1; Eph 2:1-10; John 1:13; 3:5; 2 Cor 5:17)?

Third, if Adventists adopt the social scientists’ distinction between homosexual *orientation* and homosexual *practice*, would not such a dichotomy be a biblically questionable rendering of actions and attitudes? In other words, how can the *practice* of homosexuality be wrong, and yet, the inclination toward or the longing for that action be neutral (cf. Matt. 5:27, 28; 1 John 3:15)?

Is it Scriptural to argue that a homosexual *orientation* is morally neutral (and hence, not a sin) but the *action* itself is that which is sinful? If there exists an *orientation* toward a wrong act, does not a person need as much help to overcome that inclination as the individual who has succumbed to that wrong desire—whether it be lying, stealing, adultery or killing, etc.?

Instead of referring to homosexuality as a morally neutral orientation, is it not more biblical to say that a homosexual orientation is nothing more than an

⁶⁴Sakae Kubo, *Theology and Ethics of Sex*, 75. It appears that in the Torah, the assumption is that everyone will marry, if possible. Not only is there no allowance for an inverted homosexual, but there is no suggestion that some might choose not to marry but to remain single. Not until the NT do we find Jesus calling disciples to be willing to forsake their families and follow Him and Paul urging disciples to forego marriage if possible and devote themselves to God’s work.

⁶⁵Writes Kubo: “Thus in treating the New Testament evidence we must keep two things in mind. Scripture does not reflect the understanding of homosexuality that we have today. The contemporary practices indicate that the New Testament statements directed themselves primarily if not exclusively to perverts, not inverts” (Sakae Kubo, *Theology and Ethics of Sex*, 76).

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almost helpless sinful tendency or propensity (such as kleptomania, nymphomania, inveterate adultery), a condition that makes temptation to sin almost irresistible? And if homosexual orientation, like kleptomania and nymphomania, is a sinful human condition, does not this diagnosis suggest that the cure for this problem has to be Divine?

Could it be that the failure to recognize homosexuality as sin is one reason why it cannot be overcome? If homosexual orientation excuses the sin of homosexual desires, does it not imply that other sinful orientations (such as compulsive lying, compulsive adultery, compulsive racism, compulsive stealing, compulsive disobedience to authority, etc.) should all be excused as irreversible sinful conditions? Wherein then, lies the power of God's transforming grace?

3. "People Are Born Homosexual." When advocates of pro-gay theology assert that people are born gay, they actually go beyond the generally accepted view that genetics and environmental factors *influence* a person's behavior. Instead, they suggest that homosexuality is largely *caused by* a person's genes.⁶⁶ This belief, which is itself based on the deterministic philosophy of behaviorism, is designed to suggest that what is inborn is (a) natural or normal, (b) unchangeable, (c) allowed or created by God—as with a congenital defect or one's eye color, and that it is (d) morally legitimate.

The logic and implications of this view are as follows: If a person is homosexual because of inbred homosexual condition, there is no hope or possibility for change. And because the homosexual cannot change, all aspects of society must change, including education, religion, and law. Not only must homosexuality be accepted as socially legal for homosexuals, it must also be promoted as a "normal lifestyle option" and, if necessary, the church must be pressured to abandon its "immoral discrimination" against homosexuals seeking church membership.

Response to Argument #3. Even if one could prove that homosexuality is of genetic, hormonal or environmental origin, would this make homosexuality morally legitimate? Does being "born" alcoholic, pedophile, or gay make alcoholism, pedophilia, or homosexuality normal? Even if it does, does the fact that something is "normal" make it morally right?

Is behaviorism or biological determinism compatible with biblical anthropology, which teaches that human beings are created in the image of God and endowed with freedom of choice? Can we correlate this naturalistic philosophy with the biblical doctrine that we are accountable to God for our conduct (doc-

⁶⁶This argument has to do with the causes of homosexuality and the possibility of change. If the root cause of the homosexual orientation is strictly genetic, then the chances of change are very slim. If, on the other hand, homosexual orientation has to do with one's environment or choice, then changing one's environment or exercising the power of choice can effect a change in a homosexual's condition.

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trine of judgment)? Does not this “I did not choose, I cannot change” philosophy raise serious questions about Christ’s power to help us “overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to sin”?⁶⁷

Does not this behavioristic philosophy lead to a “once a sinner, always a sinner” doctrine? In other words, *would it be biblically correct to maintain that even after conversion, an alcoholic/drug addict or a habitual/compulsive liar or sexual pervert will always remain an alcoholic/drug addict or habitual/compulsive liar or a sexual pervert? Is not this “born a gay” philosophy in conflict with the “born again” promise of the living Christ?*

To clarify the issue further, we will look at seven other aspects of this “born a gay” theory: (i) Do studies show that homosexuality is inborn? (ii) Is homosexual orientation natural or normal? (iii) Is homosexual orientation God-given? (iv) Is homosexual orientation morally neutral? (v) Is homosexual orientation unchangeable? (vi) Does God want homosexuals to give up “who they are”? (vii) Is it true that “once a homosexual, (almost) always a homosexual”?

4. “Studies Show that Homosexuality is Inborn.” Like every other sinful practice, one’s genes, environment, and many other factors may greatly influence a person’s predisposition to a particular sin. But pro-gay advocates go further, claiming that scientific studies offer conclusive proof that people are born gay.

Response to Argument #4. Although some future studies may one day bear this out, the research findings often cited as evidence of the “born a gay” condition are, at best, inconclusive; they are questionable at worst.⁶⁸ Two of these deserve mention because of the prominence often given them in Adventist publications.

(a) *Neurobiologist Simon LeVay’s 1991 Study on the Brains of 41 Cadavers.* The cadavers consisted of nineteen allegedly homosexual men, sixteen allegedly heterosexual men, and six allegedly heterosexual women. He reported that a cluster of neurons in a distinct section of the brain (called the interstitial nuclei of the anterior hypothalamus, or the INAH3) were generally smaller in the homosexual men as compared to the heterosexual men. As a result, he hypothesized that the size of these neurons may cause a person to be either heterosexual or homosexual.⁶⁹ This study is often cited as “proof” that people are born gay.

⁶⁷Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 671; cf. *The Ministry of Healing*, 175-176.

⁶⁸For a more detailed discussion, with supporting references, see Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow: Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 137-142; Joe Dallas, *A Strong Delusion: Confronting the “Gay Christian” Movement*, 107-131. What follows is a brief summary from these works.

⁶⁹Simon LeVay’s findings were published as “A Difference in Hypothalamic Structure Between Heterosexual and Homosexual Men,” *Science*, August 30, 1991, 1034-1037.

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As others have shown, LeVay's study is exaggerated, misleading, and fraught with major weaknesses. (1) In order for his theory to be valid, studies would have to show that the difference in size of that section of the brain occurred 100% of the time. But LeVay's own study showed 17% of his total study group contradicted his theory. Three of the nineteen allegedly homosexual men actually had larger neurons than their heterosexual counterparts, and three of the heterosexual men had smaller neurons than did the homosexual men! (2) There is no proof that the section of the brain he measured actually has anything to do with sexual preference. (3) The study did not show whether the size of the neurons caused the sexual preference or whether the sexual preference caused the size. (4) The scientific community has not by any means unanimously accepted LeVay's finding. (5) LeVay's own objectivity in the research is in question, since he admitted in a September 9, 1991, *Newsweek* magazine that after the death of his homosexual lover, he was determined to find a genetic cause for homosexuality or he would abandon science altogether.

(b) *J. Michael Bailey and Richard Pillard's 1991 Study of Twins.* Bailey and Pillard investigated how widespread homosexuality is among identical twins (whose genetic makeup are the same) and fraternal twins (whose genetic ties are less close). Among other things, they discovered that 52% of the identical twins studied were both homosexual. Bailey and Pillard hypothesized that the higher incidence of homosexuality among the identical twins implies that homosexuality is genetic in origin.

Bailey and Pillard's theory is also misleading and exaggerated. For their theory to be a fact, the following should hold: (1) There should never be a case when one identical twin is heterosexual and the other homosexual, since both identical twins share 100% of the same genes. If sexual orientation is genetic, then both identical twins will in 100% of cases always be either homosexual or heterosexual. Bailey and Pillard's findings of only 52% challenges their own hypothesis. On the contrary, their research confirms that non-genetic factors play a significant role in shaping sexual preference. (2) The twins should be raised in different homes to eliminate the possible effect of environmental factors in their sexual preferences. But all twins studied by Bailey and Pillard were raised in the same homes. (3) A later study on twins by other scholars yielded different results. (4) Bailey and Pillard, like LeVay, may not have approached their study objectively, given their personal feelings about homosexuality. Because Bailey is a gay rights advocate and Pillard is openly homosexual, their objectivity in the research may be questioned. (5) There are also questions about whether the sample was representative, since Bailey and Pillard requested subjects by solicitation through homosexual organizations and publications.

Other studies have been done. However, to date, we know of no study that supports the claim by pro-gay advocates that conclusive evidence exists that people are born gay or that homosexuality is inborn or of genetic origin. We are

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not suggesting that genetics does not influence one's homosexual predisposition. Our contention is simply that the studies usually cited for the claim that "people are born gay" are not as conclusive as proponents would have us believe. It seems that the studies are put forth to intimate that homosexuality is not a sin to be repented of, but a mark of one's identity to be celebrated.

5. "Homosexual Orientation Is Natural or Normal." Based on the assumption that homosexuality is inborn, i.e. of genetic origin, advocates argue that homosexuality should be accepted as a natural or normal human condition.

Response to Argument #5. This argument is also flawed. Leaving aside the important issues of the manner in which the scientific "research" is conducted and the kind of interpretation given to the research "findings,"⁷⁰ even proving that homosexual orientation is inborn (i.e., of genetic origin) will not make homosexuality normal or desirable. Many defects or handicaps today are inborn, but hardly anyone would call them normal for that reason alone. Why should homosexuality be considered natural or normal, just because it may be inborn?

When we say that something is natural, we refer to what happens repeatedly in the world of nature—in which case we do not assign moral judgment to it. For example, spiders kill and eat other spiders, including their mates. "But as a moral category natural refers to something that is in accord with God's intention. Actions are good or bad: for example, people sometimes kill and eat other people. But the fact that cannibalism happens in the world—perhaps in satisfaction of deeply held religious beliefs or peculiar culinary tastes—does not make it *natural* in the sense that it conforms to God's will. In summary: that which is *natural* to human experience or human desire is not necessarily *natural* in God's moral design."⁷¹

6. "Homosexual Orientation Is God-given." The argument here is that because many homosexuals claim that since their childhood they have *always* had homosexual feelings, their "natural" homosexual tendencies are from God.

Response to Argument #6. Scripture nowhere suggests that if a thing seems natural it is inevitably God-given. On the contrary, the Bible teaches that many "natural" states and desires are not of God and are contrary to His will.

For example, "The natural man does not receive the things of God" (1 Cor 2:14). Before conversion, we "were by nature the children of wrath" (Eph 2:3). "The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be" (Rom 8:7). Scripture teaches that we are a fallen race, born in sin: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity" (Ps 51:5; cf. Jer 17:9; Rom 5:12). Sin has marred our physical and spiritual nature (1 Cor 15:1-54; John

⁷⁰ For more on this, see Joe Dallas, "Born Gay?" *Christianity Today*, June 22, 1992, 20-23.

⁷¹ Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow?* 133.

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3:5-6). We cannot therefore assume that because something is natural or inborn, it must be God-ordained.

7. “Homosexual Orientation Is Morally Neutral.” From the assumption that people are born gay, proponents argue that homosexuality should be viewed as a neutral expression of human sexuality. Like heterosexuality, homosexuality can be rightly used or abused. The abuse is wrong. But its use within a loving, consensual, and monogamous relationship is morally right.

Response to Argument #7. As to the assumption that because homosexuality may be natural or inborn (an unproven assertion) it is morally neutral or legitimate, we may ask: If we would demonstrate conclusively that adultery, incest, pedophilia, violence, lying are inherited, would we be justified in considering them legitimate or neutral? Should the standard for morality be determined by what is inborn?

Contrary to this view, homosexuality is still immoral, whether inborn or acquired. “And immoral behavior cannot be legitimized by a quick baptism in the gene pool.”⁷²

Morality is not determined by what is inborn. Those wishing to discover God’s moral standards must look to the Bible. The Ten Commandments and God’s pre-fall order, rather than the latest discoveries of science regarding the post-fall sinful condition, provide the moral guidelines on whether homosexuality is moral and immoral. The leap from *what is* (alleged “facts” of the homosexual condition) to *what ought to be* (the morality of homosexuality) is too large to make.

8. “Changing Homosexual Orientation Is Difficult and Rare.” It is claimed that because homosexuality is an inbred condition, the homosexual has no (or very little) hope of ever changing.

Response to Argument #8. The oft-repeated claim that “changing one’s homosexual orientation is difficult and rare” almost suggests that it is impossible to change one’s sinful tendencies. It may be difficult, if the work of transformation is a human work. But if this operation is performed by God, as Scripture and Ellen G. White teach, then changing a person’s sinful orientation is not “difficult and rare.” In fact, the Bible itself says that sinners such as fornicators, adulterers, thieves, and *homosexuals* were actually able to overcome their sinful practice through the transforming power of Christ (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Similarly, Ellen G. White states unequivocally that “a genuine conversion changes hereditary and cultivated tendencies to wrong.”⁷³ The miraculous conversions and

⁷²Joe Dallas, *A Strong Delusion: Confronting the “Gay Christian Movement”* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), 117.

⁷³Ellen G. White, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, ed., Francis D. Nichol, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1980), 6:1101.

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transformed lives in our day also confirm that changing one's sinful orientation is not "rare."

But even when we suppose, for the sake of argument, that it is "difficult and rare" to change the homosexual condition—or even that no amount of prayer, counselling, and effort of any kind can make a homosexual change his orientation—do these facts make homosexuality less sinful? Definitely not. One former homosexual's statement is worth quoting:

"There is no contingency factor in any scriptural reference to any kind of sin, in either the Old or the New Testament. We never read anything like: 'Thou shalt not do thus and so!' ('Unless, of course, you tried hard to change, went for prayer and counseling, and found you just couldn't stop wanting to do thus and so. If that's the case, then thus and so is no longer sin. It's an inborn, immutable gift and you can darn well [feel free to] indulge in it!')"⁷⁴

9. "God Does Not Want Homosexuals to Give Up 'Who They Are'."

Based on the assumption that people are born gay, and on the basis of texts like Psalm 139:13 ("For you created my inmost parts") and Psalm 100:3 ("It is he that hath made us and not we ourselves"), pro-gay advocates maintain that people's homosexual *orientation/condition* is part of their identity, defining who they are as sexual human beings. Consequently, it is argued: "Since God made me the way I am, and since I have had my orientation from my earliest memories, why shouldn't I express my God-given sexuality? Why would God ask me to change something which He Himself has given me?"⁷⁵

Response to Argument #9. The fact is that God wants every one of us, including homosexuals, to give up something we have had all our lives—*ourselves*, our sinful selves. The Bible condemns all forms of self-love or self-indulgence as expressions of idolatry and presents *self-denial* as the hallmark of Christian discipleship (Luke 14:26-27; cf. Rev 12:11). The only way really to find one's self is by losing it (Mark 8:34-37). We cannot change ourselves; but Christ can change us if we truly want to be changed from our besetting sexual tendencies.

⁷⁴Dallas, *A Strong Delusion*, 121.

⁷⁵Thus, the Andrews University student newspaper carried an article by David Rodgers (pseudonym), a denominationally employed Andrews University campus outreach coordinator for the gay group, Kinship. Rodgers states that his homosexuality "certainly wasn't a choice. . . . God made me this way and it's not something I should change. Or can change" (Yoonah Kim, "The Love that Dares Not Speak Its Name," *Student Movement*, November 4, 1992, 9). The same article refers to "Ann," a 28-year old lesbian who seeks to transfer her church membership to the Pioneer Memorial Church at Andrews University. Ann speaks about her committed homosexual relationship in which God plays an important role: "I am a lesbian because God knows that that's the best thing for me. My homosexuality has actually brought me a lot closer to God than if I was a heterosexual" (ibid).

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10. “Once A Homosexual, (Almost) Always A Homosexual.” This is where the logic of biological predestination eventually leads: People are born gay; they cannot change their condition; they will always remain gay. If anyone has to change, it must be the institutions of society and the church, not the homosexual. The laws of society and the Bible must change to accommodate the homosexual who, once gay, will always be gay.

Response to Argument #10. Perhaps the most important question raised by the issue of homosexuality is whether Christ has power to help people overcome sin in their lives. This is of course an important question if homosexuality is sin. For if homosexuality is just a sickness or addictive/compulsive behavior, then homosexuals need therapy, not repentance; they need medical cure and not moral correction. And if homosexuality is simply a morally neutral part of a person’s identity, then “once a homosexual, (almost) always a homosexual.”

The latter claim has been made by the editor of a leading Adventist church paper:

“You attempt to make a point that neither the Bible nor human experience can support—that a person’s sexual orientation is itself sinful and must and can be overcome by the new birth. As Jesus and our common sense tell us, no amount of praying or piety can turn a person five feet tall into one six feet tall; and a person who is an alcoholic is an alcoholic for life. The only question is whether the alcoholic will *practice* on the basis of her [sic] or her orientation.”⁷⁶

The above quotation summarizes the issues raised in this paper. Not only does it raise questions about the normative source of one’s religious authority (Bible? human experience? Jesus? common sense?), but also it raises the question about whether or not (a) we can distinguish between *being* a homosexual and *practicing* homosexuality, whether or not the experience of conversion—“the new birth”—can help a person to overcome his/her sinful sexual orientation (whether homosexual, bisexual, or heterosexual) and whether (c) a person who is an alcoholic or homosexual can overcome all these sinful tendencies and cease to be an alcoholic and homosexual.

⁷⁶ Official letter, dated May 28, 1993, from New Testament scholar William G. Johnsson, editor, *Adventist Review*, to Samuel Koranteng-Pipim. In this letter, Johnsson was responding to a summary version of this paper I had submitted for publication. The above quotation presents the first of three reasons given why my article—titled then as “‘Born A Gay’ Or ‘Born Again?’”—in its present form is not acceptable” for publication in the *Adventist Review*. The editor suggested that the article should be re-worked “to bring it in line with the general thinking of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in this matter [of homosexuality]” if it should be considered for publication. The “general thinking” that the editor endorses seems to be the *qualified-acceptance position*. In addition to the above reason, the editor also suggested that the article should (1) deal with the pro-gay reconstructions of the Biblical texts that challenge homosexual lifestyle and (2) be “shaped within the framework of a greater compassion.” I am indebted to Dr. Johnsson for the suggestion. This present article is a partial response to his invitation.

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If the Bible's diagnosis of homosexuality as sin can be established scripturally, then the Bible's prescription is the same for homosexuals as it is for all other sinners: a call to conversion and an invitation to participate in the process of biblical sanctification. If this is true, then the Bible's approach cannot be disdained as naive, simplistic, or inadequate, nor belittled as "pat answers" that are incomplete for people struggling with sexual addiction. It forces us to answer the question of whether the transforming power of God is more effective than the impotent power of psychological therapy.⁷⁷ The testimony of Scripture exposes the lie that "once a homosexual, always a homosexual." Homosexuals can be, and have actually been, changed through the transforming power of Christ (1 Cor 6:9-11).

B. Scriptural Arguments for Homosexuality

On the basis of Scripture, Seventh-day Adventists historically have rejected homosexuality as morally unacceptable. Today, however, some are reinterpreting the Bible to allow for the practice. Proponents claim that scriptural references to homosexual acts are "culturally-conditioned," and thus do not suffice to determine God's will for homosexuals today.

Because of space limitations I can only summarize and respond to some of the major scriptural arguments justifying pro-gay theology. Those who seek more information may want to consult the in-depth analysis and evaluation provided in some other excellent works.⁷⁸

11. "Scriptural references to homosexual acts do not suffice to determine God's will for homosexuals today. They are 'culturally conditioned'."

⁷⁷See Andrews University psychology professor John Berezcz's, "How I Treat Gay and Lesbian Persons," *Student Movement*, November 11, 1992, 7, where he asserts that seeking help in the complex area of homosexuality from "untrained nonprofessionals," such as a local pastor, "is a bit like asking your mailman to remove your gall bladder. If you're seeking sexual re-orientation therapy, a competent professional trained in sex therapy is your best hope."

⁷⁸See, for example, Thomas E. Schmidt's *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexual Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), and Marion L. Soards' *Scripture and Homosexuality: Biblical Authority and the Church Today* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995). To date, the most detailed Adventist response to scriptural arguments of pro-gay advocates is the GC Biblical Research Institute's commissioned work by Ronald Springett, *Homosexuality in History and the Scriptures* (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1988); cf. Raoul Dederen, "Homosexuality: A Biblical Perspective," *Ministry*, September 1988, 14-16. I am indebted to the following works for their excellent readable review and evaluation of the scriptural arguments by pro-gay advocates: Carl Bridges, Jr. "The Bible Does Have Something to Say About Homosexuality," in *Gay Rights Or Wrongs: A Christian's Guide to Homosexual Issues and Ministry*, ed. Michael Mazzalongo (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1995), 147-169; Joe Dallas, *A Strong Delusion: Confronting the "Gay Christian" Movement*, 185-202; John R. W. Stott, *Homosexual Partnerships?: Why Same-Sex Relationships Are Not A Christian Option* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985).

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Probably the major reason Christian churches accept homosexuality is the sophisticated scriptural arguments being employed to justify the practice.

Proponents either maintain that the Bible is “silent” on the issue or that scriptural passages that condemn homosexuality (Gen. 19 [cf. Jude 7; 2 Pet. 2:6-10]; Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:24-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 1 Tim. 1:8-11), if “rightly” understood, are either ambiguous, irrelevant to contemporary homosexual practice, or refer to pederasty or cultic prostitution.⁷⁹ In short, advocates of gay theology argue that because biblical passages on homosexuality only deal with specific historical situations, they are “culturally conditioned” and no longer relevant for Christian sexual ethics in the present time.

Response to Argument #11. Undergirding these new reformulations of biblical teaching on homosexuality is liberalism’s unscriptural view of biblical inspiration, interpretation, and authority. One writer has correctly noted: “There are only two ways one can neutralize the biblical witness against homosexual behavior: by gross misinterpretation or by moving away from a high view of Scripture.”⁸⁰ Indeed, many of the biblical arguments by homosexuals are “strained, speculative and implausible, the product of wishful thinking and special pleading.”⁸¹

12. “Jesus said nothing about homosexuality in any of the Gospels.”

The argument is that, as followers of Christ, Christians should base their beliefs on the teachings of Christ. If Jesus Christ, the founder of biblical Christianity, was silent on the issue of homosexuality, why should we go beyond our Master by condemning the practice?

Response to Argument #12: The lack of record in the Gospels of Christ’s statement on homosexuality does not mean that He never addressed it during His earthly ministry. According to John, if the Gospel writers had attempted to record all the works of Christ, the world could not contain all the books (John 21:25).

Moreover, the recorded teachings of Christ in the Gospels are not the Christian’s only source of authority. “All Scripture”—from Genesis to Revelation—constitutes the normative authority. The fact that one section of the Bible says nothing on a subject does not mean the other sections are silent.

Furthermore, it is incorrect to say that Jesus is silent on homosexuality. His statement in Matthew 19:3-8 and Mark 10:2-9 reveals God’s created intent on

⁷⁹These pro-gay arguments are best articulated by former Yale University professor of history John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980), and Anglican theologian Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*. John R. W. Stott describes Bailey as “the first Christian theologian to re-evaluate the traditional understanding of the biblical prohibitions regarding homosexuality” (Stott, “Homosexual Marriage,” *Christianity Today*, November 22, 1985, 22).

⁸⁰Stanton L. Jones, “The Loving Opposition,” *Christianity Today*, July 19, 1993, 13.

⁸¹Richard Lovelace, *The Church and Homosexuality*, 113.

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human sexuality—namely, monogamous, heterosexual relationships are the only context for the expression of human sexuality.⁸²

13. “The Bible writers did not know about homosexuality as we know it today.” Some argue that the kind of homosexuality condemned by the Bible writers was that which was connected with rape, prostitution, or idolatry—not loving, committed, and faithful homosexual relationships. They claim that even if the Bible writers condemned homosexuality as we know it today, this is not the first time Bible writers have been wrong. They were wrong on many things, including the practice of slavery, polygamy, and the subjugation of women, practices later allegedly corrected by the “Spirit’s leading.” If they were wrong on these issues, why can’t they be wrong on homosexuality? And if under the Spirit’s leading the church came to embrace slave emancipation, monogamy, women’s equal rights, why should not the church, led by the same Spirit, accept homosexuality?

Response to Argument #13: First, if we believe that the Bible is God’s inspired Word, and not simply the personal opinions of ancient writers, and that the Bible is the all-sufficient guide in doctrine and practice for all people living at all times (2 Tim 3:16-17; cf. 2 Pet 1:20-21), then “it is unthinkable that God—who is no respecter of persons—would be so careless as to offer no guidance in His revealed Word to the thousands of homosexuals He knew would exist throughout time, if indeed their relationships were legitimate in His sight.”⁸³

Second, it is without foundation to argue that the Bible writers (Moses and Paul) were ignorant of today’s more “enlightened” scientific/theological view of homosexuality. These men were erudite in their intellectual training and discerning in their calling as God’s prophets. They never made the fine distinctions cited by today’s pro-homosexual advocates because there is no validity to recent distinctions between the homosexual act and the condition, the latter being something about which homosexuals have no choice. The Bible writers condemned homosexuality of itself. They also offered God’s miraculous transformation as the cure for this sin (1 Cor 6:9-11).

Third, the suggestion that the Bible writers were wrong on a number of issues is an assertion arising from unexamined assumptions of contemporary

⁸²While Jesus is not reported to have spoken on homosexuality or homosexual behavior, his one recorded statement [in Matt 19:3-8 and Mark 10:2-9] about human sexuality reveals that he understood males and females to be created by God for mutual relations that unite and fulfill both male and female in a (permanent) complementary union. There is no room here for an argument from silence concerning what Jesus ‘might have’ or ‘must have’ thought about homosexuality. But from Jesus’ own words we see that he understood human sexuality to be God’s own creation for the purpose of male and female uniting in a complementary relationship” (Marion L. Soards’ *Scripture and Homosexuality: Biblical Authority and the Church Today* [Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1995], 28).

⁸³Joe Dallas, *Desires in Conflict: Answering the Struggle for Sexual Identity* (Eugene OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1991), 276.

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higher criticism (the so-called higher critical method). In an earlier work I have challenged this discredited method of liberal interpretation as incompatible with the tenets of biblical Christianity.⁸⁴ Moreover, the claim that the Bible writers accommodated or tolerated (some say encouraged) slavery, polygamy, and the subjugation of women, practices later allegedly corrected by the “Spirit’s leading,” is a scholarly *myth* that has been challenged by responsible Bible scholars.⁸⁵ The Bible writers never once *commended* the practice of slavery, polygamy, and the subjugation of women. But they did repeatedly condemn the practice of homosexuality (see, for example, Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:26ff. 1 Cor 6; 1 Tim 1:8ff.).

14. “Sodom was destroyed because of pride, inhospitality, and/or gang rape, not because of homosexuality.” When the men of Sodom demanded of Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them” (Gen 19:5), it is argued that they were violating the ancient rules of hospitality. Some assert that the Hebrew word *yadah*, which is translated “have sex with” (or “know” in KJV), appears 943 times in the Old Testament, and carries sexual meaning only about ten times. Thus, it is argued that the men of Sodom had no sexual intentions toward Lot’s visitors; they only wanted to to “get acquainted” with them or interrogate them, fearing that they were foreign spies being harbored by Lot, himself a foreigner. Furthermore, even if they had sexual intentions, the condemnation of their action would be the condemnation of homosexual gang rape, not a consensual homosexuality as such.

Response to Argument #14: Indeed, Sodom was destroyed because of pride and inhospitality (cf. Eze 16:49-50; Jer 23:14; Luke 17:28-29). But it is a false distinction to separate inhospitality from sexual sin. What the men of Sodom sought to do was another form of inhospitality. Also, inhospitality and pride

⁸⁴See my *Receiving the Word*, 241-249, esp. 279-321. Cf. my unpublished article, “A Bug in Adventist Hermeneutic,” 1999, a summary version of which is to be published in a future issue of *Ministry* under the title, “Questions in the Quest for a Unifying Hermeneutic.”

⁸⁵Readers will benefit from the following works which challenge the above “accommodation” hypotheses: Ronald A. G. du Preez, *Polygamy in the Bible* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1993); Theodore D. Weld, *The Bible Against Slavery: Or, An Inquiry into the Genius of the Mosaic System, and the Teachings of the Old Testament on the Subject of Human Rights* (Pittsburgh: United Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1864); cf. Dale B. Martin, *Slavery As Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990). These works offer biblical evidence showing that God at no time tolerated polygamy and slavery as morally legitimate practices for His people. On the issue of the subjugation of women or “patriarchy,” George Knight, *Role Relationships of Men and Women: New Testament Teaching* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1985), and Guenther Haas, “Patriarchy as An Evil that God Tolerated: Analysis and Implications for the Authority of Scripture,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, September 1995, 321-326, have challenged the notion that male headship (in the home and church) is an evil practice that God tolerated.

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were not the only reasons for Sodom's destruction. The city was punished also because of its "abominations" (Eze 16:50), a veiled reference to its sexual deviations. The Bible describes various things as "abomination," a word of strong disapproval, meaning literally something detestable and hated by God. But since the word is used in the so-called "inhospitality passages" of Ezekiel 16 to describe sexual sin (v. 22, 58), and since the word refers to same-sex acts in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, the "abominations" of Sodom are not exclusive of sexual deviations.

Two New Testament passages make this point explicitly. The apostle Peter indicates that, among other things, Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of their "filthy conversation," "unlawful deeds," and their "walk after the *lust of the flesh*" (2 Pet 2:6-10), a reference that includes adultery, fornication, and other sexual perversions (cf. Gal 5:19-21). Jude specifically linked the destruction of these wicked cities to their sexual deviations: "Even as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to *fornication, and going after strange flesh* are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire" (Jude 7). The "*fornication and going after strange flesh*" are obvious references to sexual perversions (so NIV, RSV, NRSV, Phillips, TEV).

Pro-gay advocates incorrectly assert that the Hebrew word *yadah* as used in Genesis 19 means "to get acquainted with," not "to have sex with" as the context clearly indicates. Lot's reply to the men of Sodom shows that he understood their demand in sexual terms: "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing" (Gen 19:7). In fact, in the very next verse, the word *yadah* is translated "slept with." Lot, acting out of sheer desperation and hopelessness proposed: "Look, I have two daughters who have never *slept with (yadah)* a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them" (v. 8). Lot definitely had no reason to think that the men of Sodom merely wanted to question or get acquainted with his daughters! Derek Kidner puts it neatly: "It would be grotesquely inconsequent that Lot should reply to a demand for credentials by an offer of daughters."⁸⁶ The fact that Lot refers to his daughters' virgin status indicates he understood the *sexual* content of the request. Clearly, then, *yadah* refers to sexual intercourse.

This much can be said: The men of Sodom were were not interested in Lot's desperate offer of his virgin daughters. They were proposing a homosexual rape. But for such rape to have involved "all the men of the city, both young and old" (Gen 19:4), homosexual activity must have been commonly practiced—one reason why Jude records their "*fornication, and going after strange flesh* are set forth [in Scripture] for an example [and warning unto us]" (Jude 7). As we will

⁸⁶Derek Kidner, "Additional Note on the Sin of Sodom," in *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1967), 136-137.

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see, other Bible passages condemn all homosexual activity, not just homosexual rape.

15. “The Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 passages, condemning homosexual activity as sinful, do not condemn homosexuality as we know it today.” In these passages, God forbids a man to “lie with” another man “as with a woman.” They are an “abomination.” Advocates of gay theology, however, argue that the practices condemned as “abomination” (Heb. *to’evah*) in these passages of Leviticus have to do with the kind of homosexuality associated with pagan religious practices. Pro-gay writers therefore assert that God was not prohibiting the kind of homosexuality practiced today by Christians, but only the kind connected with idolatry. Even if the passages condemn homosexuality in general, they argue, these passages in Leviticus are part of the ceremonial holiness code that has no permanent binding obligation on Christians.

Response to Argument #15: First, if these passages condemn homosexuality only because of its association with idolatry, then it would logically follow that other practices mentioned in these passages—incest, adultery, bestiality, and child sacrifice—are also condemned as sinful only because of their association with idolatry. Conversely, if incest, adultery, polygamy, bestiality, etc. are morally objectionable regardless of their connection with pagan practices, then homosexuality is also morally wrong, regardless of the context in which it is practiced.

Second, in context, both Leviticus 18 and 20 deal primarily with morality, not idolatrous worship. When God wants specifically to mention the practices of cultic or idolatrous prostitutes, He does so, as in Deuteronomy 23:17: “No Israelite man or woman is to become a shrine prostitute.” Their lack of mention in Leviticus 18:22; 20:13 indicates that God is dealing with homosexuality per se, not with any alleged specific form of Canaanite religious practice.

As for the contention that Scripture always connects the word “abomination” (Heb. *to’evah*) with idolatry or pagan ceremonies, one biblical example will discredit the claim. In Proverbs 6:16-19 God is described as hating such “abominations” as a proud look, a lying tongue, murder, etc. Are we to believe that pride, lying, and murder are morally acceptable as long as they are not carried out in idolatrous pagan contexts? Certainly not.

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 condemn homosexuality, alongside incest, adultery, polygamy, and bestiality, in the strongest terms. These moral concerns are still relevant today. Also, since these sexual deviations are again denounced in the New Testament, we may conclude that the moral content of these Leviticus passages is permanently normative, not part of the ceremonial holiness code.⁸⁷

⁸⁷For an argument supporting the permanently binding nature of these passages, see Michael Ukleja, “Homosexuality and the Old Testament,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140/3 (July-September 1983):

16. “In Romans 1:26-27 Paul does not condemn individuals who are homosexuals by nature; rather, he refers to idolatrous heterosexuals who have ‘changed their nature’ by committing homosexual acts.” According to this argument, the real sin condemned by Paul is two-fold: (I) the changing of what is natural to a person into what is unnatural, and (ii) homosexuality committed by people who worship images, not God.

Response to Argument #16: Advocates of pro-gay theology often argue that if a person is homosexual, he or she can never become truly heterosexual. And yet they often quote the Romans 1 passage as an example of truly *heterosexual* people committing a sin by becoming truly *homosexual*. We may therefore ask: If a person who is a heterosexual can change and become a homosexual, why cannot a person who is a homosexual be changed by regeneration and become a heterosexual?

For a number of reasons, it seems inconceivable that Paul could be describing predominantly heterosexual people indulging in homosexual acts, even though such people would be included in his condemnation. First, he describes the men and women committing these homosexual acts as “burning in lust” for each other. Are we to understand this as heterosexuals who are simply experimenting with an alternate lifestyle?

Also, if verses 26 and 27 only condemn homosexual actions by people to whom they did not come naturally (i.e., heterosexuals who are practicing homosexual acts), but don’t apply to individuals to whom those same actions allegedly *do* come naturally (true homosexuals), then consistency and intellectual integrity demands that the sinful practices mentioned in verses 29 and 30—fornication, backbiting, deceit, etc.—are permissible as long as the people who commit them are people to whom they come naturally.

Is Paul’s use of “natural” purely subjective (what is “natural for me” in my orientation) or is it objective (what is “natural for everyone” regardless of orientation)? The context of Romans 1 suggests that Paul is describing homosexual behavior and other sinful practices as objectively unnatural. They are part of the practices that result when men “exchange the truth about God for a lie and worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator.” “He was talking about an objective condition of depravity experienced by people who rejected God’s will.”⁸⁸

In other words, it is the very nature of the sexual conduct itself that Paul considers unnatural. Homosexuality is unnatural to the man as a male (*arsen*) and to the woman as a female (*gune*), not because of what may or may not be

259-266, especially 264ff. on “The Relevance of the Law.” See also du Preez, *Polygamy in the Bible*.

⁸⁸Carl Bridges, Jr. “The Bible Does Have Something to Say About Homosexuality,” in *Gay Rights Or Wrongs: A Christian’s Guide to Homosexuals Issues and Ministry*, ed. Michael Mazalongo (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1995), 160.

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natural to their personality, but because of what is unnatural according to God's design when he created male and female. Homosexuality is unnatural, whether it is committed by idolaters or those who worship the true God.⁸⁹

17. "Paul's *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi* statements in 1 Cor 6:9-10 and 1 Tim 1:9-10, denouncing the 'effeminate and them that defile themselves with mankind' are actually a condemnation of an 'offensive kind of homosexuality,' not the 'offense of homosexuality'." In both passages, Paul lists those who engage in homosexual behavior among such lawless people as fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, drunkards, kidnapers, etc. According to pro-gay advocates, the Greek terms *arsenokoitai* (translated in 1 Cor 6 and 1 Tim 1 as "them that defile themselves with mankind") and *malakoi* (translated "effeminate" or "soft" in 1 Cor 6), which the apostle uses to denounce homosexual activity, refer to homosexual *abuse*, not its right use. Thus, these passages do not condemn today's "loving and committed" homosexual relationships, but rather offensive kinds of homosexuality activity, such as homosexual prostitution.

Response to Argument #17: For good reason the terms *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi* have been understood traditionally as a reference to the active and passive partners in a homosexual relationship. The first term (*arsenokoitai*) literally means "male bedders" (reference to a man who "beds" another), and the second term (*malakoi*) refers to "soft" or "effeminate" men, specifically males who play female sexual roles with the "male bedder." There is no hint in these words that Paul was condemning only a certain kind of homosexual abuse, as in prostitution, rape, or pagan ceremonies. He condemns homosexuality in itself as sin.

Further, note that *arsenokoitai* is derived from two words—*arsen* (referring to man as male) and *koite* (a term that appears only twice in the New Testament, and literally means "bed" or "couch." In Rom 13:13, it appears in "Let us walk honestly. . . not in chambering [*koite*]"); and in Hebrews 13:4, "Marriage is honorable . . . and the bed [*koite*] undefiled."). The combination of the two terms *arsen* (male) and *koite* (bed) does not even suggest prostitution, rape or idolatry—only sexual contact between two men. In other words, homosexuality is wrong, regardless of the reason why it is practiced.

Note also that when Paul used the term *arsenokoitai* to condemn the sinful practice of homosexuality, he derived it directly from the Greek translation of Lev 18:22, which in part reads *kai meta arsenos ou koimethese koiten gynaikos* ("and you shall not sleep in bed with a man as with a woman"), and of Lev 20:13, which also contains the words *kai hos an koimethe meta arsenos koiten gynaikos* ("and whoever may lie in bed with a man as with a woman"). There-

⁸⁹A detailed exegetical study of Romans 1:26-27 appears in Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow*, 64-85.

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fore, Paul's condemnation of homosexuality in 1 Cor 6:9-10 and 1 Tim 1:9-10 presupposes Leviticus's condemnation of homosexual acts. Is it any wonder that Paul lists homosexuality among "lawless" deeds that would bar a person from the kingdom of God?⁹⁰

In summary, the Bible is not morally neutral on homosexuality. Paul's statements in Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6, and 1 Timothy 1,⁹¹ along with the Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 passages, clearly show that homosexuality in all of its various forms is a sinful practice. Homosexual behavior, like heterosexual fornication, is sin, whether it results from one's orientation or from conscious choice. In other words, the Bible condemns all homosexual lust and behavior, including what takes place today. *It is not wrong to be tempted either homosexually or heterosexually, but it is wrong to yield to one's sexual temptation.*

Conclusion

The questions that have been raised in this article are some of the major issues confronting Bible-believing Seventh-day Adventists as they respond to the attempts by some within our ranks to reconcile the homosexual lifestyle with biblical Christianity. Unless biblically consistent answers are given to the questions, one cannot but conclude that the qualified-acceptance position on homosexuality, just like the full-acceptance position, cannot be a biblically-defensible option for Seventh-day Adventists. Until there is a clear articulation of a scripturally consistent position on homosexuality, the following criticism of "homosexual practices" will have to be applied equally to homosexuality and lesbianism:

The church cannot condone homosexual activity without betraying its biblical, historical, and spiritual heritage. Its conscious acceptance of the authority and inspiration of Scripture would need to undergo such a radical, liberalizing change that the fundamental teachings of the church would be left without foundation.

The consequences of such change with its ramifications for theological, ethical, and moral teaching might be labeled by some as progressive, calculated to enlighten the church and produce a more compassionate laity accommodated to the modern society in which it lives. But in reality such a move would be a giant step toward repaganization of the church. The resulting religion would not be a Bible

⁹⁰For more on this, see D. F. Wright, "Homosexuals or Prostitutes? The Meaning of *Arse-nokoitai* (1 Cor 6:9, 1 Tim 1:10)," *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 (1984):125-153, especially 126-129. Cf. Zaas, "1 Corinthians 6:9ff.: Was Homosexuality Condoned in the Corinthian Church?" *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 17 (1979): 205-212.

⁹¹For more on this, see Michael Ukleja, "Homosexuality in the New Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140/4 (October-December 1983):350-358; David E. Malick, "The Condemnation of Homosexuality in Romans 1:26-27," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150/3 (July-September 1993): 327-340, and "The Condemnation of Homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150/4 (October-December 1993): 479-492.

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religion or that of the prophets, the Lord, or the apostles, not Christianity except in name.⁹²

In today's climate of "enlightened" ethical sensitivity, the above words and the theological position adopted in this paper may seem "judgmental" or "uncompassionate" to some. If so, *we must make it absolutely clear that God's grace covers every kind of sin for any believer in Jesus who contritely turns toward God and makes a decisive commitment to turn away from sin.* "God can forgive homosexual sin as well as heterosexual sin, sin which is socially acceptable as sin and sin which is not. But the first step in receiving forgiveness is to recognize our wrongdoing as sin."⁹³

Seventh-day Adventists believe that the biblical world view presents a loving Father who is interested in all aspects of our being and our lifestyle (3 John 2). His written Word is the surest and most trustworthy guide for every human thought and conduct (2 Tim 3:16-19). It tells of a compassionate and powerful God who is abundantly able and willing to assist us in overcoming our human weaknesses (Heb 4:15-16; Jude 24; Eph 3:20). And the Bible introduces us to a faithful Savior and his dependable promises. Writes Ellen G. White:

Are you tempted? He will deliver. Are you weak? He will strengthen. Are you ignorant? He will enlighten. Are you wounded? He will heal. . . . 'Come unto Me,' is His invitation. Whatever your anxieties and trials, spread out your case before the Lord. Your spirit will be braced for endurance. The way will be opened for you to disentangle yourself from embarrassment and difficulty. The weaker and more helpless you know yourself to be, the stronger will you become in His strength. The heavier your burdens, the more blessed the rest in casting them upon the Burden Bearer.⁹⁴

We all can receive help if we are willing to believe that whatever God commands we may accomplish in His strength. The apostle Paul, a few verses after his condemnation of sinful practices such as homosexuality, declared that though he was "the chief of sinners," Christ's enabling grace was able to turn his life around (1 Tim. 1:9-16). If Jesus can change "the chief of sinners," certainly, He can change you and me (1 John 1:9). But this is possible if, and only if: (i)

⁹²Ronald Springett, *Homosexuality in History and the Scriptures*, 163-164.

⁹³Bridges, Jr., "The Bible Does Have Something to Say About Homosexuality," 169. Noel Weeks states it well: "It may seem kind to say that a person is not responsible for his sin. But it has the harsh and cruel consequence that sin is therefore outside the scope of the sanctifying work of the Spirit. The homosexual is doomed to live with the misery of sin. Make no mistake. Sin and misery go together. When we deny the homosexual the gospel we tell him to expect a continuance of his misery. The point is often made that the church should show compassion to the homosexual. So it should. The first item of that compassion is telling him how escape is possible. Why should he seek the church that tells him that nothing can be done for him? He may like such a church to ease the burden of his guilty conscience, but such a church has nothing to offer him" (Noel Weeks, *The Sufficiency of Scripture* [Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth Trust, 1988], 172).

⁹⁴Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 329

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we accept that the homosexual lifestyle is morally wrong and resolve to change; (ii) we are willing to accept Christ's abiding offer of pardon and cleansing (Matt 11:28-30; 1 John 1:9; Isa 1:18). The choice is ours.

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