



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Conversations about the Gay Issue

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Several readers have told us about conversations they have had about gay church members in response to material that Spectrum printed regarding Kinship Kampmeeting in 2005 and the Ontario Conference in 2006. With the permission of two participants, we share one conversation below.*

Dear Elder Brown,  
I have written this letter a hundred times in my head and discarded each one—yet it is a letter that burns in my mind. I will do my best to ask a question where maybe I should not.

From the first time I met you, I knew you were a man of God—I could see it in your face, which radiated love and caring. You also shared the book you had written that speaks of God's love, so I knew that the concept of love was the cornerstone of your ministry. I also know this by the way you live your life, which is an example to all about how to care for the temple of God and does not condemn those of us who do not do as well as you.

Your actions and comments showed me how much you care not only for humanity but also for the Church. You have a love for others that is patient, wise, and giving. Your love for others is shown in your actions—not only in your words. There are people all over the world

who love you and are in the Church today because of the message you have brought to them.

Therefore, for me to question a comment made by you is difficult. The comment came from the story in *Spectrum* concerning Adventist Kinship. I believe the comment was that you thought *Spectrum* should not have printed the article on the Kampmeeting experience of the individuals who attended.

I realize that you might have problems accepting the Kinship organization as Adventist; therefore, the comment could have been only in response to the acceptability of the organization. However, the story in the magazine was a heartfelt story of God's presence in the lives of those who attended.

As I read it, the story did not make a judgment call as to whether it was acceptable to be gay, it just told a story of God's love working in the lives of people who happened to be gay.

To me, the story is very much like many of the stories in the Bible about people's connection to and worship of God, regardless of their station in life. Remember the story of how Mary washed Jesus' feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair? She was very unacceptable to the established church and those present, as was her lifestyle, but Jesus welcomed her.

Remember the story of the lady

who let down the red cord to help God's people, or the story of the lady who was to be stoned? There are so many stories of how God connected to their lives. The story is in the love of God, not in their lifestyles.

The Bible is filled with these stories. These stories have touched my heart, and I could not help but be touched with the stories from the Kampmeeting of Adventist Kinship, no matter what my beliefs regarding the gay issue. These people are brothers and sisters to you and me. They love God in their own way—just as Mary did. We may not understand, but I could see Jesus listening to their stories and retelling them.

So how do I fit your response to the *Spectrum* article into the Pastor George Brown I know and love? Especially when I know how much you care—and how much you believe in the message of love. Should their stories not have been told? I know they are not popular stories, but Mary's was not either. Yet it was told.

I have this picture in my mind of you opening your arms to these people if you were there listening, just as you have with me even when we disagree. I see Jesus doing the same, listening to his children's stories—the good, the bad, and the messy life stories.

They may not be politically correct and they may cause consterna-

tion. They may not have a happy ending here on earth, but God will make us whole in heaven.

What do you think?

Take care and see you soon,  
*Ellen Brodersen*

Dear Ellen:

Greetings and best wishes for yourself and your lovely family. Thanks for your very moving e-mail. I could sense the concern that motivated your message.

First of all, let me sincerely thank you for your very gracious expressions of love and appreciation for me and my ministry. The fact is that I, too, have profound admiration, love, and respect for you as a fine and considerate Christian person. Knowing you and associating with you through the years has been, without question, a genuine pleasure. Moreover, nothing must be permitted to neutralize or diminish in any way our mutual appreciation for each other.

The primary reason for your e-mail, as I perceive it, is to determine why I made a certain comment regarding an article that appeared in *Spectrum*. Evidently, you feel that the comment I made was out of character with the kind of person you know me to be.

Since *Spectrum* purports to support and advocate the Adventist faith, message, value system, and lifestyle, I sincerely believe that it erred when it published the article that could be easily interpreted as an endorsement of the gay lifestyle.

It may well be that the impression given by the article was unintended. However, any journal identified with the Adventist Church must be careful not to misrepresent its

biblical teachings, moral values, and lifestyle. In today's secular culture, it is politically correct to applaud, defend, and even glorify lifestyles and practices that are unequivocally disapproved in Scripture.

Those who have experienced God's redemptive grace and transforming power should avoid anything that gives the impression of supporting the worldview of our secular society. The article in question rightly or wrongly led many to believe that Adventists, too, have gotten on the bandwagon in support of the gay lifestyle.

Let me now comment on the issue of love, acceptance, and caring, which you expounded upon so well in your letter. It cannot be disputed that the moral imperative of the Christian is that we love as Jesus has loved us (John 15:9-11). As imitators of Christ, we ought to love all God's children freely and unconditionally. It is our Christian duty to be compassionate, respectful, kind, and accepting of all peoples without exception.

However, the other side of the Christian coin is that wrongdoing should not be affirmed. To do so is to violate the true meaning of discipleship. The Christian does not love the sinner because he is a sinner, but because he is a precious soul for whom Christ died and is therefore a prospective candidate for eternal life.

We often assert that Christ loves us just as we are, but that is only a half-truth. The whole truth is that Jesus loves us just as we are so that by loving us just as we are we might become what he wants us to be. In other words, Christ's love is life changing as well as redemptive.

Hence, practices and lifestyles that are incompatible with the

transforming message of the gospel should not be countenanced. It is our spiritual responsibility to love, accept, welcome, and encourage every soul for whom Christ died in his or her spiritual pilgrimage. However, it is faulty discipleship to interpret such acceptance as an approval or endorsement of those practices and lifestyles that are clearly contrary to the teachings of Scripture.

You correctly stated in your letter that the Bible is replete with stories of the way Christ dealt with people whose lives were "bad and messy." To prove the point, you cited three superb examples of Christ's treatment of people with sordid immoral lifestyles: the woman caught in adultery, the prostitute of Jericho, and Mary Magdalene, to mention only a few.

The obvious message in each of these narratives is the power of redeeming love to transform sinners. These three characters are celebrated in Scripture, not for their former lifestyle, but for what they became when in repentance and faith they came to Christ and renounced their ugly pasts.

When confronted with the message of the God of Israel in faith, the prostitute of Jericho responded to God's will and was therefore affirmed for her transformed experience. Mary Magdalene, a woman of ill repute, responded to Christ's redeeming love and was forgiven. She was affirmed and celebrated when she publicly perfumed and anointed Christ for saving her from a life of prostitution and shame, a true example of transformation through



Christ's redeeming love and grace.

Perhaps the story of the woman taken in adultery is the most eloquent of the three examples. With deep compassion, Christ forgave the repentant prostitute with these life-changing words: "Neither do I condemn you," then came the key appeal, "go and sin no more."

For all who come to Christ in penitence and are sorry for their sinful lifestyle, the response is always the same: "Neither do I condemn you go and sin no more." Romans 8:1 speaks to this truth when it states: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit."

Please be assured, Ellen, that my comment is by no means an index of any personal dislike or lack of love for anyone. We are all a community of faith, fellow believers who are totally reliant on the saving grace of Christ. As a struggling pilgrim in pursuit of that perfection that only Christ can give, I must seek to love as he has loved us.

However, as disciples of Christ, we also have a solemn responsibility to glorify God by endeavoring to protect and safeguard the good name of his Church, which he regards with love and tenderness (Eph. 5:25-27). This is the privilege and duty of all who have embraced God's saving and transforming grace.

I apologize for such a lengthy response to your concern. I know that you wrote in all sincerity, love, and candor. Be assured that my response is in the same spirit. May you continue to feel the loving embrace of God's grace in your continuing spiritual pilgrimage.

Your fellow pilgrim,  
*George W. Brown*

Leif Lind's article in *Spectrum's* winter 2006 issue made quite an impact. The information was new to me. To be quite frank and honest, I struggle to understand this topic of homosexuality. Trouble is, there are no accepted scientific criteria, as far as I know, to decide on sexual orientation.

I think I sense a slight defensiveness toward members of the author's family who reacted negatively, as well as toward church leaders who found it necessary to terminate his service in the Church. Maybe they did not understand Lind's inner tension, and probably failed to treat him with Christlike tact and sympathy, which is so important, particularly for people in crises.

But they faced a hopeless dilemma. The conference and union leaders are the guardians of a movement that came into being as a result of earnest and straightforward Bible study. The Adventist pioneers of the nineteenth century sincerely believed that the answer to all issues could be found in the pages of the Bible. Sometimes they were stuck with simple and literal answers rather than sensing the underlying meaning of the texts.

This candid commitment to the Bible text is the holy legacy of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I'm sure no thinking Adventist wants to forfeit that legacy.

I do not have the answers to the dilemmas that gay and lesbian members of our Church raise. The only thing I feel sure of is that the way forward goes through empathy and mutual understanding.

*Sverre Skoglund*  
via e-mail

## Evangelical Persecution

In Gregory Schneider's review of books on American Evangelicals

(winter 2006), a key point was missing, perhaps because it is also missing from the books he reviewed. One important theme in popular Evangelical media is that Christians cannot persecute, they can only be persecuted. Although this is strongest in Evangelical eschatology, it appears elsewhere as well.

One effect of this idea, perhaps the one intended, is to make Evangelicals immune to ideas foreign to them. If Evangelical children are forced to learn un-Evangelical ideas in public school, they are being persecuted. If they are forced to tolerate gays, they are being persecuted.

But there is another effect, one that Adventists should pay attention to. This effect makes Evangelicals immune to the thought that some things they do with their political clout might persecute others.

If they manage to force local public schools to teach their ideas, children from families with dissenting ideas are somehow not being persecuted. If they manage to turn gays into second-class citizens, they cannot see how this could possibly be considered persecution.

Could this have any relevance to our Adventist eschatology?

*Jim Miller*  
*Madison, Wis.*

## Spectrum Needed

I have subscribed to *Spectrum* for about twenty-six years, since I was a college student at Andrews University. In the early years, I found the journal very exciting because it tackled controversial issues in a way that I considered fair. It presented all sides to the issues without revealing bias.

The Glacier View controversy was a case in point. *Spectrum* gave me an

opportunity to read the views of Desmond Ford and his opponents, and make up my own mind. The excellent coverage that *Spectrum* gave Glacier View was actually what prompted me to subscribe. I was hooked!

However, I am sorry to say that in recent years I have not been as happy with the journal. I still find value in it, and I continue to subscribe, but my enthusiasm isn't there anymore. I say this because, although it still bears the title *Spectrum*, it doesn't really seem to provide a spectrum of viewpoints anymore. The only viewpoint I hear coming through these days is that of the Adventist far left.

Now please don't misunderstand. I believe these people have a right to be heard, and I don't mind reading articles that promote theistic evolution and SDA Kinship. But there are many Adventist scientists who are still cre-

ationists, and there are many Adventist ethicists who still believe that Christians can genuinely love homosexuals without condoning the gay lifestyle. They also deserve to be heard. And, really, this is only fair if the journal truly intends to be a "spectrum."

So I am making a friendly plea that we, the readers, be given all the viewpoints again, so we can make up our own minds.

*Bob Helm  
via e-mail*

## Differentiating between ID and the Designer

Andrew Hoehn ("Good Religion, Bad Science," winter 2006) is right that teaching religion as science in the public schools violates

the separation of church and state. However, teaching intelligent design is not a violation.

Everything in nature—the fine tuning of the universe to make life possible, the interdependence of the animal and plant kingdoms with each other and the environment, the microinformation systems in living cells for transmitting and reproducing life, the beauty in nature corresponding to human esthetic sense—all of this and much more shouts design and purpose.

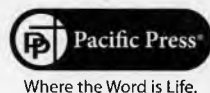
One would have to be blind not to see it. Even scientists applaud "the wisdom of Mother Nature"! What breeches the wall between church and state is teaching the Intelligent Designer.

*Beatrice Neall  
Collegedale, Tenn.*

*"I have always believed in God. What changed in my heart during the translation of Rainbow Over Hell was that I realized God believes in us. As He believed in Saburo Arakaki and saw a man of God and not a murderer, so He believes in us."*

—**Sharon Fujimoto-Johnson**,  
former assistant editor and designer of *Spectrum*.

*Rainbow Over Hell*, by award-winning Japanese author Tsuneyuki Mohri, is an unforgettable story of grace and forgiveness. A young Japanese student loyal to his deified emperor is trained as an assassin and then betrayed by the one who trained him. Sentenced to death by an American military court, his deliverance from death row is a one-of-a-kind conversion story.



ISBN 0-8163-2134-5  
ISBN 13: 978-0-8163-2134-6  
US\$14.99

Available at your local  
or order by calling  
or go online at

**Adventist Book Center**  
**1-800-765-6955**  
**AdventistBookCenter.com**

