

Homosexuality or Christianity?

Netherlands Union again places itself

In opposition to the Seventh-day Adventist Church

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Introduction

The Netherlands Union, a part of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church, acting unilaterally, recently voted a statement concerning homosexuality (<http://www.adventist.nl/2014/04/24/homoseksualiteit-en-de-kerk/>, accessed 2014-04-27). Their declaration, made public April 24, 2014, says that they want their churches to be safe places for LGBTQ persons (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, queer). The statement elaborates little about what it intends by "safe." One of the few specifics that is presented in their document is their call that Dutch Adventist congregations not remove LGBTQ persons from membership. The main point of concern appears to be homosexuals who are already church members.

We are unaware of any physical safety issues for homosexual people in Adventist churches in the Netherlands. Because churches are full of people, they are full of persons who have sinned. But church members will have turned toward Jesus--- the same Jesus who told another person caught in sexual sin to "go and sin no more" (John 8:11). Is the Netherlands issue safety or is it actually the membership of practicing homosexuals?

"Adventists in the Netherlands are accepting of LGBTI people in the church as members in regular standing if they are married in committed monogamous relationships or celibate." Such remarks are being written online with reference to Netherlands Union. Have some forgotten that the *Adventist Review* reported on the 2010 General Conference session *Church Manual* floor debate over the addition of the phrase marriage is "between one man and one woman"?

"It was clear that an overwhelming majority of delegates favored the added wording, but some delegates voiced concerns that it would alienate homosexuals from the Adventist Church and might not protect children from forced marriages.

"Jeroen Tuinstra, a representative from the church's Trans-European region, made the first amendment, calling for the following wording: 'Marriage is a monogamous, loving relationship between two mutually consenting adults.' He explained that the current text could be interpreted to allow forced marriages.

"Furthermore, I believe that our church is an open, not closed church . . . a gracious, not a condemning church,' Tuinstra added, saying that the wording would further estrange gays and lesbians from the church" ("*Church Manual* Further Defines Marriage," Elizabeth Lechleitner, ANN, <http://archives.adventistreview.org/issue.php?issue=2010-1525&page=2>, accessed 2014-04-26).

At the time Tuinstra sought to amend the motion he was Youth Director for the Netherlands Union.

Indeed, The Netherlands Union is on record as calling upon its members to neither exclude homosexuals nor judge their "relationships" (Response of the Dutch SDA Union to Ugandan anti-homosexual bill, <http://www.buildingsafeplaces.org/index.php/resources/church-responses/response-of-the-dutch-sda-union-to-ugandan-anti-homosexual-bill.html>, accessed 2014-04-27).

The Seventh-day Adventist position

Indeed, the current Netherlands Union statement presents itself as a response to the Guideline voted by the church Spring Council two weeks ago, which had stated,

"It is inconsistent with the Church's understanding of scriptural teaching to admit into or maintain in membership persons practicing sexual behaviors incompatible with biblical teachings. Neither is it acceptable for Adventist pastors or churches to provide wedding services or facilities for same-sex couples" (<http://www.adventist.org/information/official-statements/guidelines/article/go/0/guidelines-for-the-seventh-day-adventist-church-in-responding-to-changing-cultural-attitudes-regardi>, accessed 2014-04-25).

Again, this Netherlands Union is the same which unilaterally voted to place itself in opposition to its world church on the question of woman's ordination (see <http://ordinationtruth.com/2013/07/07/netherlands-union-renews-rebellion-against-general-conference/> and <http://ordinationtruth.com/2013/09/26/netherlands-union-secc-womens-ordination-unilateral-action/>). Some have been urgent to maintain woman's ordination and same-sex sexual intimacy as separate issues. But the correlation is undeniable. Netherlands Union has simply demonstrated this again.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has never condoned homosexual practice. Sexual intercourse---outside of a monogamous biblically-covenanted marriage between a male and a female---is sin. One reason I (and many others) are Seventh-day Adventists, is because the church teaches people to practice healthy, biblically appropriate relationships. In the case of marriage, that means a lifelong, monogamous union between one biblically eligible male and one biblically eligible female. We look to the Bible itself for this teaching. Practices outside the Bible standard are sin. The Adventist Church is non-negotiably committed to Scripture.

We are an unusual body, a church truly global in extent. There are tens of millions of members distributed across nearly all nations. The precious, Spirit-led, global unity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is placed at risk when organizational units in the west (Australia, North America, Western Europe) overwrite agreed global practices with values current in those locales. Culture in these areas has in the past century moved away from communitarian and family-centric ideals. The family unit has been mostly reduced to an affiliation of convenience. An extreme individuality has been made the supreme value. Sexual norms have been revised. Creation-designed role distinctions have been eliminated, even reversed.

In face of these trends the church has struggled to sustain its commitment to biblical values. In some places our churches are at risk of falling into captivity to the culture. Leadership has a difficult task, but lead it must, and that in harmony with the Bible. Those who lead the church must set an example of faithfulness to Jesus.

Here is a portion of the official position voted by the world church in 1999:

"Seventh-day Adventists believe that sexual intimacy belongs only within the marital relationship of a man and a woman. This was the design established by God at creation. The Scriptures declare: 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh' (Gen 2:24, NIV). Throughout Scripture this heterosexual pattern is affirmed. The Bible makes no accommodation for homosexual activity or relationships. Sexual acts outside the circle of a heterosexual marriage are forbidden (Lev 18:5-23, 26; Lev 20:7-21; Rom 1:24-27; 1 Cor 6:9-11). Jesus Christ reaffirmed the divine creation intent: "'Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female," and said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?" So they are no longer two, but one'" (Matt 19:4-6, NIV). For these reasons Seventh-day Adventists are opposed to homosexual practices and relationships" (<http://www.adventist.org/information/official-statements/statements/article/go/0/homosexuality/>).

Netherlands opposition to Adventist position

The Netherlands Union, insofar as its statements are seen by its churches as directing them not to remove from membership persons involved in homosexual practice, is in opposition to the teaching of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Members of the church intentionally practicing any kind of sin, including sexual, should not feel "safe"; they should feel convicted.

God loves all people and has gone to enormous lengths that all might be redeemed. But all have a choice. They may choose their own preferences, which will destroy them, or God's revealed will, which will change them. Churches should not be "safe places" for sinners in the sense that they would find their sins downgraded to matters of mere preference. Jesus was very clear. The Christian response to sin is to repent, receive forgiveness, and be changed.

Seventh-day Adventist Churches, because they are Christian, can never become places where sexual sin is condoned.

Same-sex attracted, or acting-out?

But there is a distinction that should be clear. Not everyone who is same-sex attracted is acting-out as a homosexual. By definition, "gay" means you desire to have sex with the same gender. Sam Allberry makes the point:

"In western culture today the obvious term for someone with homosexual feelings is 'gay.' But in my experience this often refers to far more than someone's sexual orientation. It has come to describe an identity and a lifestyle.

"When someone says they are gay, or for that matter, lesbian or bisexual, they normally mean that, as well as being attracted to someone of the same gender, their sexual preference is one of the fundamental ways in which they see themselves. And it's for this reason that I tend to avoid using that term. It sounds clunky to describe myself as 'someone who experiences same-sex attraction.' But describing myself like this is a way for me to recognize that the

kind of sexual attractions I experience are not fundamental to my identity. They are part of *what I feel* but are not *who I am* in a fundamental sense. I am far more than my sexuality....

"Denying yourself does not mean tweaking your behavior here and there. It is saying 'NO' to your deepest sense of who you are, for the sake of Christ. To take up a cross is to declare your life (as you have known it) forfeit. It is laying down your life for the very reason that your life, it turns out, is not yours at all. It belongs to Jesus. He made it. And through His death He has bought it" (Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-gay?*, pp. 8, 9, emphasis in original).

Allberry experiences same-sex attraction (SSA) but denies himself. He is a Christian; he sees that as being the larger reality. The need for faithful Christian witness to a lost world is a higher value to Allberry than his need for personal sexual fulfillment.

In the power of God, persons experiencing SSA can resist that attraction. We want them to come into our churches. We want them to experience the help of the God's love and be changed. But no Seventh-day Adventist Church can permit members to practice sexual sin. This prohibition includes homosexual sin. And no, thankfully, not everyone identifying oneself as "gay" is acting-out homosexual sin. But Allberry helps us understand an important reality: for many, that identification does stand for wholesale adoption of homosexual activity. No favors are done for anyone by blurring the points where lines do and do not intersect for male and female sexual relations and church membership. We are not called to please men but God (Galatians 1:10).

The western church is at risk of being overwashed by the culture. It is at risk of failing to give the trumpet a certain sound. We feel rich and self-satisfied. Easily we fall into a blinded conformity with the very culture to which we are sent in counter-cultural witness.

Local Unions insubordinate

Netherlands Union, Columbia Union, and Pacific Union are placing pastors and church members in an untenable situation. The local concerns of relatively small numbers of persons with opinions on homosexual practice and/or the ordination of women which are out of harmony with that of our world church body, are acting again and again in unilateral manner. They are compromising the biblical witness of the world church.

When we became members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, we joined a worldwide body of believers. We did not sign up to participate in a loose confederation of regional churches, one teaching this and one practicing that in a swirl of contradiction.

Local union conferences have no right to overrule the practice of the world church. My allegiance as a pastor is to the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a world body more than to my local union. If we are to hold together in unity globally this must be the commitment of every pastor worldwide. There is a basis for the authority upon which my local union issues me a credential as an ordained minister. That basis is the fact that the North Pacific Union Conference is granted the authority to issue such credentials in trust by the North American Division, which is part of the General Conference. If the North Pacific Union votes itself into opposition to the General Conference, in so doing it denies the basis of its own authority.

The church is in crisis at this time because in some cases local union leadership and even constituencies, are unilaterally voting policies they have convinced themselves they must have, yet which stand in contradiction to the world church. When they do this, they forfeit their trust. They fragment God's church. They become free radicals damaging the body.

Conclusion

The divinely-appointed leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist world church are justified in requiring Netherlands Union to uphold agreed biblical practice. Members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church may not practice sexual sin. Same-sex intimacy is sexual sin. If the Netherlands Union approach to membership and sexual sin cannot be corrected, it may be necessary for the church to start fresh in the Netherlands with a new organization. The church cannot permit its witness to Jesus' biblical message to be compromised.

We are a world body. Compromise in Netherlands greatly damages our witness in every other place. We are not concerned that the church in Netherlands be comfortable with its culture; rather, the church worldwide must remain faithful to Jesus. When world church leadership votes one thing and a union immediately counteracts that, a line has been crossed and crossed hard. In this case, it has become a choice between homosexuality and Christianity.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: Pastor Larry Kirkpatrick has served churches in Nevada, Utah, California, and presently ministers in the forest fastness of Northern Idaho. Larry and wife Pamela live with their children Seamus (age 8) and Mikayla (age 7) in the shadow of Roman Nose mountain.