

**The Troubled Career of an "Ex-Gay" Healer:
Colin Cook, Seventh-day Adventists, and the Christian Right.**

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ABSTRACT

The Troubled Career of an "Ex-Gay" Healer: Colin Cook, Seventh-day Adventists, and the Christian Right.

This paper examines the goals, dynamics, and effectiveness of "ex-gay ministries" and their supporters through exploring the two phases of the career of Colin Cook, who became perhaps the most prominent of the "ex-gay healers." In the 1980s, while funded by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Cook operated both the Quest Learning Center in Reading, PA, and an allied network of Homosexuals Anonymous chapters, which spread across the U.S. and then to some other countries. He became the dominating intellectual force within the "ex-gay" movement: he was a prominent speaker at the annual conferences of Exodus International, and he did much to reshape the latter's theoretical and practical approaches to ministry. Cook faded into obscurity for a period after having been found to be sexually abusing young counselees, but reappeared in Denver in 1993 as the founder of FaithQuest Colorado, where he was backed by organizations of the Christian Right, notably Colorado for Family Values and James Dobson's Focus on the Family. These proved reluctant to disown him when sexual abuse of clients was again uncovered. Since the pattern of abuse was discovered by the author while pursuing academic research, the paper also confronts the question of the ethical obligations of a researcher to report and attempt to stop such behavior.

PAPER

The Troubled Career of an "Ex-Gay" Healer: Colin Cook, Seventh-day Adventists, and the Christian Right.

The anti-homosexual political organizing and rhetoric of the Christian Right, and most recently, a series of full-page newspaper advertisements during the Summer of 1998, have helped bring attention to "ex-gay ministries" and "reparative therapy," which have been put forward as "the solution" to "the homosexual problem--as a means of reversing homosexual orientations. The ensuing debate has featured raucous claims and counter-claims, but little data, raising many questions which have yet to be answered. What exactly are "ex-gay ministries"? What religious assumptions do they make? In what sense are they therapeutic, and what are the nature of their therapies? Who enter such programs? What is the impact of their experience there on their lives? How frequently are sexual orientations changed, and in what ways? To what extent are these programs psychologically, even sexually, abusive?

The troubled career of the prominent "ex-gay" healer Colin Cook and the fallout from his therapeutic ministries, which I have followed closely for 18 years, provide insight into such programs. To what extent is this an extreme case, an anomaly? Cook's abuse of vulnerable young counselees was covered up first by the Seventh-day Adventist Church and later by two prominent organizations within the Religious Right because he proclaimed what the leaders of these organizations longed to hear--because he fitted their agenda so well. In spite of two major scandals over the years, Cook's career continues today.

Cook, a defrocked Seventh-day Adventist minister, formed the "Quest Learning Center" [Quest], in Reading, Pennsylvania, in 1979, with the avowed purpose of helping people gain "freedom from homosexuality." The Seventh-day Adventist church funded it, publicized it, and provided its board members. By 1986 it had spawned an affiliated network of 60 "Homosexuals Anonymous" [HA] chapters, and had become the largest and most publicized "ex-gay" ministry in North America. Cook also became a prominent leader within Exodus International, a coalition of "ex-gay" ministries. He used his marriage and the subsequent birth of two sons as evidence of his own healing and the effectiveness of his approach.

However, in 1986, as part of a major study of international Seventh-day Adventism, I discovered, through interviews with those concerned, that Cook was sexually molesting his young, vulnerable counselees. This discovery placed me in an ethical dilemma: while I felt I could not remain silent and thus allow the sexual abuse to continue, I feared that blowing the whistle could undermine my study by causing church leaders to "blame the messenger." My decision to report the abuse transformed me into an actor in the situation I was researching. My report, with documentation, to church leadership, resulted in the withdrawal of funding and the closing of Quest. (HA continued under new management.) Cook, however, declaring

the successful culmination of his healing process, soon resumed his career in Reading as an "ex-gay" healer and recruited new counselees.

In 1993 Cook moved to Denver, where he founded a new ministry, "FaithQuest Colorado, Inc." [FaithQuest]. This grew and became prominent thanks to close alliances with organizations of the Religious Right, notably James Dobson's "Focus on the Family," which referred potential counselees to him, and "Colorado for Family Values," which gave him publicity by advertising him as a speaker in its anti-gay "Time to Stand Seminars," which were sponsored across the state. Cook also re-appeared on national television and received renewed publicity from Seventh-day Adventist sources.

My interest in Cook and his ministries was rekindled when recent counselees brought their painful stories to my attention, and I set out to research his activities in Denver. Since one of the counselees was willing to share with me tapes he had made of many of his counseling sessions and a detailed diary of several days of intense counseling spent living in Cook's house in Denver, the data were full and compelling. They indicated that there were again severe ethical problems with the ministry, with sexual and psychological abuse of the counseling relationship. In an endeavor to prevent further abuse, I leaked the basic details to the religion reporter at the *Denver Post*, who then carried out a full investigation of her own. Her report, which was published as a front-page story on October 27, 1995, was the beginning of a wave of publicity and debate that threw both the Christian Right organizations and the Seventh-day Adventist Church into a quandary: should they publicly admit their error in supporting Cook?

This paper explores Cook's career as an ex-gay healer, and his relationship with both the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Christian Right. The analysis also highlights an unusual situation in which a searcher, for ethical reasons, becomes an overt participant in action that is the object of a segment of his research.

Cook's Background¹

The son of a fisherman whose job kept him away from home much of the time, Cook reports becoming aware of homosexual feelings about the age of 10. He was converted to Adventism at the age of 15, by which time the homosexual issue loomed so large in his masturbatory fantasies that he took the unusual step of requesting that his pastor anoint him in the hope that this would change his sexual desires. While the feelings in fact continued, he was able to repress them for several years by becoming an extremely rigid and legalistic Adventist.

Cook studied religion at college, earning both B.A. and M.A. degrees, and served seven years as a pastor--four in Britain, three in New York City. It was while pastoring in England that he first became sexually active, when he took advantage of relationships he formed with underage teenagers in his congregations: "I could have been in prison today--a molester" (Eddy 1994-95). In New York he pastored a church in Midtown Manhattan and attracted unusually large crowds

¹ The outline of Cook's early history has been compiled from interviews with him and from a long recorded autobiographical soliloquy given in answer to a question from a counselee.

to his lunch-hour preaching in Battery Park while, concurrently, participating in a great deal of anonymous sex, "from bathrooms to bath houses to parks, toilets, to massage parlors and everything--three or four times a week with three or four different men" (Eddy 1994-95). The guilt and the threat to his career caused by his homosexual feelings and actions prevented him from forming any ongoing relationships with homosexuals. His behavior was eventually discovered by church administrators when he was observed having sex with a pickup he had brought home to the church center where he lived, and he was forced out of the ministry in 1974 at the age of 34.²

The loss of his pastorate was a huge blow to Cook, leading him to make several attempts, through psychiatric and counseling programs, private study, and the exercise of faith, to change his sexual orientation. In December, 1976 he published a three-part article, "God's Grace to the Homosexual," in *Insight*, a magazine for Adventist youth (1976a,b,c), where he proclaimed, without yet revealing anything of his own experience, that "There is a way out of the homosexual life.... You can find new emotions and enjoy the rich possibilities inherent in love for someone of the opposite sex" (1976b:7). Since this was the first article in an Adventist publication to address the possibility of homosexual healing, it drew 150 letters from readers, many of whom were struggling with their homosexuality. As a result, Cook began to hold weekend counseling sessions in Reading, Pennsylvania, where he was working in a health center. He had begun to regain a ministry.

Cook married in 1978. He published another article in *Insight*, "Homosexuality: The Lie," the same year, in which he took issue with researchers and therapists who contend that "the experts cannot come up with one single case of homosexual cure, and thus, by inference, that change from homosexuality to heterosexuality is impossible," and introduced contrary opinions (1978a:12). He also released a ten-cassette tape album, "Homosexuality and the Power to Change," which has since had wide circulation (1978b).

Cook incorporated the Quest Learning Center, a program which combined personal counseling with "Homosexuals Anonymous" mutual support meetings, in 1980. The number of applications from would-be counselees rose dramatically after the publication of a 10-page interview with Cook entitled "Homosexual Healing" in the September 1981 issue of *Ministry* (Spangler and Cook 1981:4-13). This magazine had a circulation of 300,000, for it was sent free by its Adventist publishers to clergy of all denominations. According to J. Robert Spangler,

Ministry's editor and Cook's interviewer, this article drew more responses than any other ever published--almost 1,000 (Spangler and Cook 1987:4). Many letters of praise came from clergy who believed homosexuality to be sinful but had previously lacked any solution to recommend. The article was re-published separately as *The H Solution* shortly afterwards, and circulated even more widely.

² In his writing, Cook has usually implied that he resigned voluntarily from the ministry because of his homosexual problem ("I decided to quit; I just couldn't control the habit;" "I just wasn't in control, so I decided to leave" (Spangler and Cook 1981:6,8)). I remembered the circumstances differently, and confirmed them in an interview with Cook.

By 1986 the total number who had been counseled at Quest had reached about 250.³ Meanwhile, Cook had expanded the Homosexuals Anonymous [H.A.] mutual support concept by planting a network of chapters in many cities throughout the U.S. and Canada. By 1986 it was estimated that between 700 and 800 people seeking "freedom from homosexuality" were attending weekly meetings in 60 chapters. International expansion had begun, to Europe, Australia and New Zealand, and a goal of establishing 1,000 chapters over ten years was announced.

Colin Cook had, within a short time, become the most prominent figure, and the dominating intellectual force, within the "ex-gay" movement. He was featured as the speaker at H.A. seminars held all over the U.S. as well as in Canada and France and on two further sets of tapes elucidating H.A. theory and practice. He was a prominent speaker at the annual conferences of Exodus International, and he did much to reshape its theoretical and practical approaches to ministry--indeed, many of its member groups formed H.A. chapters to work beside their counseling programs. He appeared many times on radio and TV (The Phil Donahue Show, for example), and was featured frequently in press and magazine articles. His booklet, *Homosexuality: An Open Door?*, published in April 1985, was reported to have sold 45,000 copies by December 1986, a remarkably high number for an Adventist publishing house. In the words of Dan Roberts, his counselee, colleague and successor, he became a "star" whom "many Exodus ministry leaders and HA members [and, I might add, Adventist leaders and editors] saw...as 'exhibit A--the healed homosexual'" (Roberts 1986b).

Research Methods

I have followed the Colin Cook saga closely over the years--beginning well before I planned to write a book about Adventists. I met Cook twice when he was a pastor in New York in the early 1970s: he taught the Sabbath School class I attended my first week in New York, in 1971, when I was impressed by his mind and his ability to express himself; later he preached to my student congregation at Columbia University, where he pulled a notice advertising a gay dance off a notice-board. This incident provoked a long intellectual argument between the two of us, in which neither of us disclosed our homosexuality. I interacted with him at an SDA Kinship (gay Adventist) convention in 1980, and during a visit to Reading with SDA Kinship in 1983, when we heard testimonies from counselees and observed an H.A. meeting.

My actual research on Cook's ministries falls into two concentrated periods: 1985-86 and 1995. Because of the participatory role that I felt forced to play, I shall spell out the methods followed in detail.

³ Quest's estimates of total counselees range from 250 to 500. Cook declared that they did not keep statistics, that he had not been through the files to take a count. Since 20-30 counselees were admitted per year, this suggests that long-term counselees must have totaled 120-180. The remainder would have been short-term visitors and phone counselees. Thus the figure of a total of 250 is probably as near to accurate as I can tell.

The outline for my research on international Seventh-day Adventism included several social issues, one of which was homosexuality. Because the Adventist Church funded and publicized Quest and put it forward as *the* answer to "the problem of homosexuality," my research plan included a study of Cook's ministry. Since I was familiar with his approach, having followed his activities over the years, and had built on this through participation in one of his three-day seminars in 1985, the major issue remaining for me in 1986 was the impact of the program on counselees. I had been greatly perplexed by the triumphant testimonies of growth and reorientation given by counselees during Kinship's visit to Quest in 1983, which in no way resonated with the experience of Kinship members; however, when the lead testimony-giver confided in me the next day that he had just spent a sexually active weekend with a man he had met at a gay meeting place in Philadelphia, I sensed something was awry. This sense was deepened in 1985, when a Canadian interviewee confided that, as a 16-year old academy student, he had been sent to Quest for weekly counseling and had been sexually abused by Cook. However, because he traveled to Reading for each counseling session, he did not know that his experience there was part of a pattern.

In order to assess the impact of the program, I wished to interview a sample of its graduates. However, when I sought Cook's help in drawing a random sample of past participants, he refused to cooperate. I decided, therefore, to pursue a "quota sample." Since I was attempting to assess the impact of the program, this meant interviewing quotas of program participant representing both those who were regarded at Quest as having been successful and those who had failed. I restricted my sample to men because the program was very male-oriented. Once I contacted the first counselee, who turned out to be a "failure", it proved extremely easy to find others like him--men who were angry with Cook and Quest because they had been sexually abused there and whose sexual orientations had not changed. Almost everyone I interviewed gave me additional names of people who had endured similar experiences; however, they claimed to know no "successes" at all. Frustrated in my endeavor to fill the other half of the sample, I asked Cook to put me in contact with those he regarded as his greatest successes, but again he would not cooperate. Finally, however, I met a woman at a social occasion who was completing her fifth year at Quest and had a positive attitude towards it because of a close counseling relationship with Sharon Cook. She suggested five men who were regarded around Quest as successful. I went to each of these interviews expecting them to be positive about their experience, but was surprised to find that their accounts paralleled those of the "failures" very closely. Every interview was traumatic, for counselees had to relive their experiences at Quest in their minds in order to tell me about them.

I interviewed a total of 14 Quest counselees, most of whom still lived in Reading. Their ages ranged from 18 to 52, with most in their 20s. Their average period at Quest or in counseling (one by phone twice weekly) was 22 months. One began counseling in 1979 and two were still participating in it at the time of their interviews in the Fall of 1986. Thus the involvement of the sample members in Quest spanned its entire history. Seven of the 14 interviewees were Adventists--a percentage that exactly matched Cook's estimate of the Adventist: non-Adventist ratio among the counselees (Hallock and Cook).

To broaden the context I also interviewed two long-term members of a Homosexuals Anonymous chapter in suburban Chicago who heard about my research on the grapevine and then contacted me. Finally, I completed interviews with the program principals: Cook, another counselor, and a former counselor.⁴ Meanwhile, I had also listened to Cook's tapes and read his publications and the Quest and H.A. newsletters.

In the years that followed, as word of the fall of Quest spread among former counsees who had left Reading and as others who had been severely hurt by their experience there gained courage, I received many more letters and phone calls from men wanting to detail for me what they had endured from Cook. The exploitation they had shared had often created strong networks, and they now took comfort from the unmasking of their abuser. My ties to these networks were to prove important later in uncovering a second wave of sexual abuse.

I avoided publishing papers on Adventism while I was gathering data for fear of muddying the research waters; however, I did present them at professional meetings. Towards the end of 1993, when I was involved in data analysis in preparation for writing the book, I decided that the time had come for me to try to publish some of the papers I had presented; one of these was entitled "Trouble in an 'Ex-Gay' Ministry" (Lawson 1987). However, about this time I learned that Cook had moved to Denver, founded FaithQuest, and was claiming to have lived "free from homosexuality" since September 1986, the very month I had interviewed him; he had also re-appeared on The Phil Donahue Show as an expert on the healing of homosexuals and had spoken to students at an Adventist college in California, advertising his new ministry. I therefore felt it necessary to update the paper before publishing it. I decided to try to interview Cook's former pastor in order to find out about Cook's final years in Reading, and then to contact Cook to seek an interview. Since he was new to Denver, I was perplexed concerning how to explore the recent counseling experience from the point of view of counsees.

At this point I was informed by a former Quest counselee who had become a Kinship regional director that he had been contacted by "David," a recent Cook phone counselee in his early 30s, who reported a very distressing experience. Although he was so vulnerable that he refused to talk about the experience with anyone else, this news alerted me to the fact that perhaps not all was well in the new program. Meanwhile, I had been talking with another Adventist acquaintance, "Eddy," a 20 year-old college student who was genuinely confused about his sexuality, having had extended relationships with both a male and a female. When he expressed interest in Cook, whom he had heard of within church circles, I shared my Quest paper with him. Soon after that I received a mailing from HA and, finding there an article by Cook, I passed it on to Eddy. When some of its content, such as a discussion of genetics versus choice, spoke to his own ambivalence, he contacted HA to procure Cook's number in Denver and then called him to ask questions raised by the article. When Cook suggested that he enter counseling by phone, his response was ambivalent: while his initial contact with Cook had led him to hope that counseling might be helpful in his dilemma, what he knew of Cook's history from me made him somewhat apprehensive. However, an adventurous spirit and his wish to

⁴ I also sought out Elder Duncan Eva, the chair of the Quest board, but he refused, having been warned by Cook that I was asking "antagonistic" questions. By that time Cook had good reason, given my discoveries, to try to keep me away from the chair of his board.

clarify his own situation carried him into counseling, and over the next 15 months he had 34 sessions with Cook, totaling about 50 hours in all. Since he was paying for the sessions and wished to be able to re-hear them in order to gain the most benefit from them, he chose to tape many of the sessions (Eddy 1996).

In January 1995, having submitted several other papers to journals, I turned to my paper on Quest, and completed updating interviews with both Cook and his former pastor in Reading. I revised the paper, wrote a cover letter, addressed the envelope--and then received a call from Eddy. He was eager to talk over his counseling experience with me, for after a semester's break because of an awkward schedule he had listened to all the tapes in preparation for resuming counseling and had realized that "all we talk about is sex," with the conversations often getting "very hot." Moreover, he was now leaning towards accepting an invitation from Cook to visit Denver for several days of intense counseling at the end of the school year. I concluded that I should delay mailing the paper, and await what I hoped would be further information from Eddy.

During the summer of 1995 Eddy sent me tapes of many of his counseling sessions, and a detailed diary covering his experience in Denver accompanied by a description of his feelings concerning these events. I followed up with many additional questions, which he answered via e-mail. Meanwhile, I found, through our mutual contact, that David was now willing to be interviewed concerning his counseling sessions in 1993. His experiences proved to be very similar to those of Eddy, and thus confirmed them. When I discovered that David had concurrently been in counseling with a social worker in his city, who had encouraged him to end the sessions with Cook when she learned of their content, I arranged to interview her also. Since I was not a therapist, I also sought evaluations of the ethics of Cook's counseling techniques, based on transcripts of Eddy's sessions, from two other therapists, both clinical psychologists. Finally, I returned to Cook for a further interview and also interviewed his wife and his assistant.

Since I had already made an ethical decision to become an actor in the situation in 1986, it was much easier to make a similar decision when faced by a parallel case in 1995. Since Cook's main supporters were now organizations of the Christian Right, whose leaders had already discounted evidence of Cook's earlier problems in Reading, I chose to attempt to place pressure on them by leaking the basic facts to the religion reporter of the *Denver Post* late in the summer of 1995 and putting her in contact with the counselees I had interviewed.

During the Fall of 1995, when the reporter was researching Cook and FaithQuest, she interviewed me at length. Reporters from other Colorado papers contacted me after publication of her story. When the two organizations of the Christian Right that had supported Cook stalled in their response to the *Post's* revelations, seemingly confused by the lack of compelling detail there, I decided that I must become an open protagonist in order to try to curtail further abuse. I then faxed them a summary of my data, which included ample quotations from Eddy's tapes and diary. Finally, when the Colorado Grievance Board began an investigation of Cook's counseling, the chief investigator also contacted me seeking data. I followed the reactions and interactions of all parties closely during this period.

In the segments that follow I focus first on Reading and then Colorado.

READING, PENNSYLVANIA

Cook's Approach to Counseling

Quest/H.A. brochures described Colin Cook as "a layman who is recognized as a peer among many psychiatrists, psychologists and therapists in the field of homosexuality" (HAFS 1986a). When I asked him about his credentials, he listed them as:

"A man who has met the Lord in relation to the great issue of his sin and of God's righteousness.... Secondly, a mind that has a natural bent to the integration of theology, psychology and philosophy.... Thirdly, the experience of having gone through the struggle with homosexuality and still learning to abide in Jesus.... Those are the greatest qualifications."

He was proud of his lack of formal training: "I think I'm at an advantage not having formal qualifications because I've not been pulled into the narrow trap of the medical model and the secular psychology model" (interview 1986).

Cook's theory was a mix of his theological views and what he described as the "interpersonal relational model" of psychology, which was based on research done between the 1930s and 1955. While he was far less harsh in his attitude towards homosexuality in the 1980s than were spokespersons, for example, for the "Moral Majority," he held that it was sinful. If this were so, homosexuality must, by definition, involve choice, and therefore the possibility of change. He rejected the vast majority of research on homosexuality, which concludes that there is a fixed homosexual orientation:

"If I am to be a Christian, I must allow the Bible and Christian faith to be the final arbiter upon scientific data.... I'm not in a position as a committed Christian to say that scientific data may one day come up with a justification for homosexuality. That is an impossible position for a Christian to take, because science can never come up with a position that would alter the law of God" (Hallock and Cook).

Consequently, he also rejected recent evidence suggesting that homosexuality may have genetic or hormonal causes.

Instead, following Moberly (1985) and earlier psychologists, he argued that the etiology of homosexuality lies in an unmet love need from the parent of the same sex (his own fisherman father, for example, was away too much), which produces "defensive detachment" and disidentification with the parent, and ultimately "distortion of reality" to the extent that the person attempts to fill the unmet need through the "false solution" of "homosexual intimacy," which he described in terms of furtive promiscuity. Such behavior becomes "addictive."

Cook well knew the frustration and futility of the "neurotic prayer" that persistently seeks release from homosexual "temptations." The answer, he argued, was to claim Christ's [presumed] heterosexuality by faith, to meet the love need through relationships with Christ (which can include such things as, in fantasy, meeting Christ in a grove while naked) and non-erotic friendships with members of the same sex, and to practice Cook's 14 steps (which were derived from the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous). However, unlike AA, whose meetings always begin with members reminding themselves that they *are* alcoholics no matter how long they have been dry, Cook's steps rejected the research findings that suggest that sexual orientation is a permanent part of the personality structure, instead asserting that homosexuals are in fact heterosexual:

"5. We came to perceive that we had accepted a lie about ourselves, an illusion that had trapped us in a false identity.

"6. We learned to claim our true reality that, as mankind, we are part of God's heterosexual creation and that God calls us to rediscover that identity in Him through Jesus Christ, as our faith perceives Him.

"7. We resolve to entrust our lives to our loving God and to live by faith, praising Him for our new unseen identity, confident that it would become visible to us in God's good time" (HAFS n.d.).

That is, even though a person may be feeling homosexual attractions, he/she is in fact, through faith, really heterosexual:

"The grace of God that allows us to live calling ourselves heterosexual in Christ though homosexual in ourselves, sufficiently so that we can live beyond our homosexual feelings, was the theology I came out with... The issue is, can I live comfortably beyond the feelings..., to heterosexuality, and not gritting my teeth and in a celibate horror for the rest of my life?"(interview 1986)

Cook's view of homosexuality was grounded in, and limited by, his own experience of it. By portraying compulsive promiscuity as the only homosexual experience--as was true in his case--he presented a stereotyped, one-sided picture of gay relationships. His own trauma with homosexual fantasies during masturbation made this a prime concern.⁵ The extent to which the theory of an unmet love need from the same-sex parent seemed to resonate with his personal experience distracted him from its failure to do the same for many other homosexuals.

Claims and Promises

Quest/H.A. brochures headlined such phrases as "Freedom from Homosexuality" (HAFS 1986b) and "The Healing of Homosexuality" (HAFS 1985). Such headlines were designed to raise hope and excitement among persons in conflict over their homosexual impulses. There is no doubt

⁵ He was especially weak in his depiction of lesbians because he assumed that mother/daughter dynamics paralleled those of father/son, and then used male examples throughout.

that they were interpreted as strong promises. For example, Spangler, the editor of *Ministry*, in the headlined introduction to his 1981 interview with Cook, exclaimed: "Can homosexuals find genuine deliverance? Many say No; Colin Cook says Yes" (Spangler and Cook 1981:4). American Cassette Ministries, in its brochure advertising *Homosexuality and the Power to Change* (a title with a strong claim in itself), asserted that Cook's tapes reveal "how the GOSPEL...sets a person FREE from his homosexual tendencies and actually creates the new emotions of heterosexuality. Colin Cook has produced these tapes with the conviction that if a homosexual will use them, work with them and apply them...he will find his way out of homosexuality" (n.d., emphasis in original). Such interpretations of the Quest/H.A. claims and promises seem to mesh with the statements of Cook. In his "Introduction" to his booklet, he wrote: "I have written this book for the person in conflict with his homosexuality--the person who wants to be free.... I have...experienced the meaning of such freedom myself. Since then, I have married and become the father of two children" (1985a:7).

However, the small print sometimes inserted qualifications that fell short of the claims implied in the headlines:

"Homosexual inclinations...gradually yield in varying degrees, opening the way for satisfying heterosexual expression either *socially* as celibate singles or through heterosexual Christian marriage" (Cook 1985b:7, emphasis supplied).

"Deliverance...does not necessarily mean the absence of all temptation... I [Cook] still experience temptation from time to time"(Spangler and Cook, 1981:10,13).

Cook could be even more direct in an interview:

"I don't know of any men whose orientation has totally changed--whose inclinations have totally changed. But they don't have the massive urges that they used to have before.... What I'm very much opposed to is the sociological mind that will simply try to come at this statistically....Let's suppose that somebody left Quest after a year and had one homosexual failure per month. Somebody would say, 'Well, there you are--that guy is not a success.' But that's absurd, for that person first of all must know what level of psychic development that person was at before he ever came.... I would prefer to look not for success or failure, but measurements of growth" (Hallock and Cook).

However, the counseles who moved to Reading in order to seek help at Quest had focused on the claims and promises suggested by the headlines rather than the qualifications and special definitions of such words as "freedom," "healing," "deliverance," "recovery" and "growth" inserted in the small print.

The Seventh-day Adventist Connection

The content of Cook's 1976 article in *Insight*, and his reports to them of the influx of mail that it generated, made Adventist leaders aware for the first time that church membership included a

substantial number of homosexuals. While some who were more conservative reacted negatively preferring to regard any homosexual as, by definition, a non-Adventist, and therefore beyond the responsibility of church leaders, others liked Cook's approach. Its emphasis on deliverance from homosexuality through faith allowed them to do something to respond to the needs of homosexual members while confirming Adventist theology by continuing to insist on the sinfulness of homosexual feelings and actions. Such an approach became even more relevant when Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International organized in 1977 and asserted the ideal of committed relationships among gay Christians—a concept that church leaders found repugnant. Consequently, when Kinship requested that five leading theologians and pastors be allowed to minister to them at their first national camp meeting in 1980, General Conference President Neal Wilson insisted that Cook be added to the list before he approved the request. Enthusiasm for Quest increased further in 1981, when the publication of the Cook interview in *Ministry* drew a favorable response from conservative clergy in other denominations—it was now seen as good public relations.

Thus it was that Duncan Eva, a recently retired General Vice President of the church who was then serving as Special Assistant to the President, was appointed as liaison between the General Conference and Quest and Chair of the Quest board of directors. The other members of the original board, appointed in 1982, included representatives of other levels of the Adventist hierarchical structure,⁶ a local pastor, and three of Quest's staff members. All were Adventists. Cook and his wife were presented, hand in hand, to the church's Annual Council as budget appropriations were about to be voted: the General Conference and the Columbia Union provided \$47,500 annually towards Quest's budget. In 1985 this amounted to 39% of Quest's total income. The Adventist church thus became the first denomination, as such, to commit itself to give financial support to an "ex-gay" ministry (Exodus 1986).

In making these arrangements, Adventist leaders were careful to ensure that the Quest bylaws omitted any reference to the church. They insisted that the two be legally separate to ensure that they would be free of any liability in the event of a lawsuit against the program. Nevertheless, the Seventh-day Adventist Church had clearly become a major presence in the operation of Quest.

Quest received a great deal of favorable publicity as a result of its relationship with the Adventist Church—in church periodicals, on "It is Written," its international TV program, and by counselors in Adventist schools and colleges throughout North America and beyond. In some schools a student discovered to be homosexual was given a choice between entering the Quest program and being expelled. Pastors and other church employees found to be homosexual might, instead of immediately losing their jobs, be given the option of attending Quest. The Adventist Church portrayed Quest as THE answer to homosexuality.

The pride of church leaders in Quest/H.A. increased further as it grew in size and reputation, as 1,500 calls were received on an "800" line provided by the church after Cook appeared on the

⁶ Union and conference.

Donahue show, as letters of praise from conservative clergy of other denominations accumulated:

"Quest Learning Center and Homosexuals Anonymous Fellowship Services are truly Christ-centered. And this fact and the effectiveness of their approach has been recognized by many earnest Christians of other faiths... There is increasing [sic] widespread recognition by Christian agencies, Protestant and Catholic alike working to help homosexuals, that we have one of the most successful ministries, soundly based on scripture, truly Christian and effective psychologically" (Eva 1986a).

A sign of Quest/H.A.'s growing comfort with similarly minded clergy from other denominations was its decision to appoint two of them, a Baptist and a Presbyterian, to its board.

Adventist leaders never asked for any studies of the program's impact on counselees, or even for a written report before funding was renewed. They were misled by vague and carefully worded assurances, by sincere but self-deluded testimonies affirming heterosexuality by faith--as a hope for the future rather than a genuine success already realized--and by endorsements from clergy of other denominations whose praises were based on the program's promises, not its results. They ignored the questions raised by concerned and informed Kinship leaders in letters to them. Large sums of money were poured into a program that was not questioned because its director said what church leaders wanted to hear.

The Impact of the Program on the Counselees

I asked counselees about their earlier sexual feelings and experiences, what led them to come to Quest, and what they expected to gain by it. Those who moved to Reading to participate in the Quest program tended to be fragile personalities--they were so crippled by guilt about their homosexuality that they lacked sufficient careers and close personal bonds to inhibit their leaving home. It was because of their fragility that the counselees never blew the whistle on what was occurring at Quest. Their experience had taught them to be cautious--making waves might have negative repercussions. Nevertheless, the fact that they moved to Reading to engage in the program indicates a high degree of motivation to change their sexual orientations.

I also asked them to assess the positive and negative aspects of their experience at Quest, and where they now stood in regard to their homosexuality. Their assessments were overwhelmingly negative. They found it traumatic to recall these things, and often spoke of them with vehemence and/or tears:

1) Counselees experienced a great deal of anger and confusion over a sense that they were sexually abused by Cook and manipulated for his own gratification:

(a) Eleven of the 14 reported considerable discomfort from the long, erotic hugs with which Cook typically began every counseling session. During these hugs they often became

acutely aware that he had an erection. The three who did not report this behavior included the two not counseled personally by Cook (one was counseled over the phone, another by Roberts) and one aged 52, much older than the others.

(b) Nine of the 14 complained that in counseling sessions Cook repeatedly insisted on going over the details of their sexual fantasies and experiences. This made them increasingly uncomfortable as their suspicions grew that he was titillating himself at their expense. The experience of a West Coast 21-year-old, with whom Cook counseled twice a week by phone and exchanged tapes once every two weeks for a year, illustrates this problem:

I was uncomfortable when we would talk over the phone. He would get very explicit about some things, and I was not really comfortable listening to the details--in fact in a lot of ways it was more arousing than it was necessary to talk about it. One time it sounded as if he was out of breath. I didn't understand what was going on... He was...masturbating over the phone to the sound of my voice. After a while I asked him what was wrong, and he asked me if it would be OK if I continued to talk and he would jerk off over the phone. I didn't know what to say, so I just went ahead with it, and after he was satisfied he apologized for putting me through that. It was a very humiliating experience.

(c) Twelve of the 14 counselees reported that Cook had urged them to undergo nude massages with him (the only exceptions were the phone counselee and the older man). Such invitations were typically given at the beginning of their Quest experience--as early as the first or second counseling session. Two resisted pressure they described as strong and sustained overtime; the other 10 complied, despite great nervousness and discomfort--feelings they said were aggravated when they discovered that Cook also usually took off his clothes and became aroused.

When I asked him about this behavior, Cook replied, "Where I have nakedly massaged a counselee, where I have done that to him, I have sinned, done wrong." He explained that the purposes of the practice were to help counselees feel better about their bodies and to desensitize them so that they could become used to being naked with other men without this leading to sex. But "it sometimes led to temptation, in which a fall took place--mutual masturbation."

(d) Counselees also reported that Cook had taken other opportunities to handle their genitals and "come on" to them.

2) The counselees came to Reading because Cook has been put forward in the publicity of both Quest and the Adventist church as proof that they too could be cured. They had seen him and his wife on television and heard about their children. They had read success stories about him in church periodicals. Counselors at Adventist schools had told students about his "deliverance from homosexuality." Their pastors (including several non-Adventist ministers) had given them copies of the 1981 *Ministry* interview. Cook had become such a symbol of hope for them that they had moved to Reading for his counsel. Great, then, was their disillusionment and

discouragement as they reluctantly concluded that he was not the example they had thought him to be, that he was not cured. This caused them to begin to doubt their own chances of achieving the goal they sought. They mentioned a number of items that had led them to conclude that Cook was still homosexually oriented:

(a) Most important was the sexual pressure he applied to them, as discussed above. In all, 13 of the 14 counselees interviewed reported this pressure. The only exception was the older man, who had also become disturbed over the stories he heard from the younger ones.

(b) Cook had told them, both in counseling sessions and at HA meetings, that he had to fantasize about men in order to have sex with his wife. Cook explained these statements to me as his attempts to become their peer, to show them that deliverance from homosexuality was a long process. But they saw these statements as admissions of failure, as holding up an illegitimate way to "make it" with a woman.

(c) It was rumored that Cook had admitted having difficulty working with some counselees because he found them so attractive; he also seemed often to focus on one in particular, to invite him to work together with him in the office, to develop an emotional dependency on him. When I asked Cook about this he replied, "I won't deny the fact of being attracted to a handsome man.... Yes, I'm in a risky area for me. I don't deny that."

3) Cook's lack of training in basic professional standards of practice created problems complained of by 10 of the 14 counselees interviewed. They mentioned unlocked files containing detailed notes of their counseling sessions, which other counselees with keys to the office would read when there after hours. They told how Cook frequently read examples from the files of others during counseling sessions—and that they would often recognize whose file it was. They mentioned that even after two or three years of counseling and rehashing the details of their lives with him, he would still get their stories confused with those of others. The oldest counselee complained of Cook's repeated requests to borrow substantial sums of money from him--requests which, given his vulnerability within the counseling relationship, he felt unable to refuse.

4) Although all counselees had entered the program in search of a cure for their homosexuality, none of them had changed his sexual orientation nor were any of them confident that they knew anyone who had changed:⁷

"[I came to Quest] looking for healing, to change my orientation—to look at a girl and get a hard-on, the whole straight thing.... I had taken a year out of my life; I had given up my family, and given up my ministry, had given up school--it meant an awful, awful lot to me--to come to this stupid program to be cured. But nothing was happening."

⁷ Only one person was mentioned--tentatively and by only two of the fourteen interviewees--as possibly having changed. This was one of the Quest counselors.

"Nobody changed their lifestyle.... A lot of people went away with bitter feelings.... [It was] heartbreaking for those people to end up feeling that they'd gotten nowhere. It was a lot of false hope."

Further confusion was caused by the incongruity between their goal in coming to Quest--to change their sexual desires and behavior--and the enormous amount of homosexual contact they had while there. This was due primarily to the psychological stress caused by putting themselves through the program. It was facilitated by the ready availability of sexual partners there:

"I was inexperienced when I had gone there, but I became extremely promiscuous during my time there.... There were all these men wanting to change, and yet they were very tempted by one another.... It was hard to have any relationship with anyone in the group without involving sex. To be invited over to someone's apartment usually ended up with sex. [Quest] became a meeting place."

5) While three of the 14 counselees interviewed reported that their spiritual lives improved as a result of the counseling, seven others said that their confusion, anger and disillusionment had been so great that their spirituality had regressed considerably.

The counselees also mentioned two positive results of the Quest experience:

- 1) Just over half of the interviewees (8/14) felt that broadly focused counseling and its considerable emphasis on developing strong same-sex relationships had helped their self-esteem and social relationships. Cook placed considerable stress on these goals, so that their accomplishment was an intended consequence of the program. However, the evidence denies his claim that these goals are on the same trajectory as becoming "free from homosexuality," as the second "positive result" illustrates.
- 2) Eleven of the 14 counselees said the Quest program led them to accept and feel good about their homosexuality. Before they came to Reading they had experienced no meaningful gay friendships--their guilt was typically so great that any sexual activity was anonymous (that is, usually with different partners each time). But at Quest they discussed their homosexual impulses openly, mixed regularly with others like themselves, felt less guilt and shame, formed friendships, were active sexually with these friends, and sometimes, for the first time, fell in love. These new experiences significantly fostered the unintended and unexpected outcome of affirmation and self-acceptance:

"[I used to see homosexuality as] probably the worst thing in the world a person could experience.... There was a lot of self-hate in me, a lot of pain.... During my time at Quest...I learned to accept myself.... I became more at ease with my gayness. I could talk about it. I couldn't before...even say I was a homosexual.... I had not known a homosexual...as such. Going to Quest I got to meet people who were homosexuals, and for the first time hear stories of others.... That was so liberating!... I was so bottled up

with the gay thing,...always afraid to deal with it, never wanted to admit that was my problem. I released all that."

"Sexual orientation" to these counselees meant the same as it does to most people, including psychiatrists M.T. Saghir and E. Robins: "Romantic emotional attachments, fantasies, dreams, daydreams and sexual arousal are the primary psychological responses for evaluating the direction and intensity of the sexual propensity of an individual" (1973). Using this definition of sexual orientation, even the three counselees I interviewed who had not accepted themselves as homosexual were still, nevertheless, homosexual, for they admitted they were not attracted to women, but were in fact attracted to men.

A surprising number of the counselees had remained in Reading, even though, embittered by their experience at Quest, they had cut all ties to the program. Others continued in counseling after four or five years. How could they return to their families and churches, which had sponsored them in their quest to find "freedom from homosexuality," when they had not achieved their goal? Most of them continued in dead-end jobs and showed considerable signs of psychological trauma.

Later, when word of my findings spread through the Quest/H.A. networks, some people who phoned or wrote to me gave me insight into the impact of participation in the program in H.A. chapters in other parts of the country. As in Reading, attractions, sex, and fragile relationships occurred frequently among participants. Three people told me of incidents where Cook, while visiting chapters, had invited participants to his room and then engaged them in erotic hugging, naked prayer, nude massage, and more. However, although they too had been shaken and confused by these events, they had not initially reported him.

Ethical Dilemma

I approached the Quest staff members for appointments after my interviews with the counselees had been completed. When I confronted Cook about his sexual manipulation of the counselees, he admitted it, describing it as "human failure" and "inappropriate," but "episodic" and "concentrated in one period." (However, the cases I was aware of spanned the entire period of 1979-1986.) He did not seem to grasp the seriousness of his behavior: he avoided addressing the widespread pattern revealed clearly in the data, interpreting it instead as occasional sins which, once confessed to God, should be forgotten; he sidestepped the possibility that such behavior could result in prosecution or suit, especially as two of the molested counselees had been 16 years old, and therefore minors, at the time; and he played down what he had done by emphasizing that it was merely "mutual masturbation, not lovemaking."

It is unlikely that this latter distinction would stand among the courts, psychiatrists, or gays, especially given the emphasis in recent years on practicing "safe sex."⁸ Indeed, even the leaders

⁸ Because of the danger of infection with the AIDS virus, non-monogamous homosexuals are now widely restricting their sexual contact to safe practices such as mutual masturbation. Cook was practicing "safe sex."

of Exodus had taken the matter most seriously when, in the Spring of 1985, they had discovered that Cook had engaged in nude massage and prayer with two HA members when visiting an HA chapter and attending an Exodus conference. To show their concern, two leaders had come immediately to Reading, and insisted that Cook tell his wife, the chair of his board, and the HAFS director. Cook had limited his confession to the two incidents that had been uncovered. Eva had informed Adventist General Conference President Wilson and Cook had agreed to receive private phone counseling from his original therapist in Chicago, but otherwise the incident was hushed up.

Having heard Cook admit to the facts I had discovered but refuse to take responsibility for his actions, I was left with the dilemma of what to do with the information. Since I was in the midst of a study of Adventism and feared that church leaders would react negatively towards the discoverer of such damaging material, especially since I was an officer of Kinship, the whole situation was very awkward for me. I sought the advice of Kinship leaders and others I trusted within the church, making it clear that under the circumstances I wished to avoid going to the press with the story. All agreed that I could not let the exploitation of the counselees continue. One possibility was to take the matter to the Quest board; it, however, had clearly failed at the time of the initial revelations 18 months earlier. Consequently, I chose to write directly to the General Conference President, and sent copies to 29 other significant church figures to ensure that he did not ignore the information.

Aftermath

The 13-page letter, dated October 23, 1986, which gave a full account of the impact of the program on the counselees together with extensive quotations from my interviews with them, brought quick results. On October 27 Eva, chair of the Quest board, suspended Cook from his responsibilities and suggested that he tender his resignation (Eva 1986b). On November 3 Cook wrote to Wilson, acknowledging that the accusations were correct, and shortly after this the board accepted his resignation and voted to close the Quest counseling program.⁹ Meanwhile, as early as November 14, the board of Exodus International, seeking to limit the damage of guilt by association, broke the news to its affiliates, urging them to close or sever ties with their affiliated H.A. chapters.

If Cook had been a licensed therapist or counselor, the licensing body would undoubtedly have withdrawn his right to practice. However, since he has no counseling qualifications, he was under no such constraint. Rather than being demoralized by the scandal, Cook soon pushed ahead aggressively in an attempt to rebuild his ministry to homosexuals. He was helped in this by the fact that the Adventist media, which had earlier given him so much positive publicity, failed to inform Adventists of the collapse of his ministry—it would have embarrassed church leaders to have it known that the program they had funded as *the* answer to the "homosexual problem" within Adventism had proved to be a fiasco. Consequently, Cook's image as the homosexual healer was left intact.

⁹ The Adventist Church continued initially to fund Homosexuals Anonymous, with leadership there passing to one of Cook's associates. It no longer has any Adventist connection, but still uses Cook's "14 steps."

Indeed, when it did finally mention the matter, *Ministry*, the Adventist journal that had initially played a major role in publicizing Cook's program among Adventist pastors and ministers of other denominations, focused on rehabilitating him. Its September 1987 issue featured, as its lead article, a second interview with Cook (Spangler and Cook 1987:4-9). Entitled "Homosexual Recovery--Six Years Later," this article prominently posed the question, "Does the closing of the Quest Learning Center under a shadow prove that attempts to help homosexuals change their behavior are misguided?" (4) Since Spangler chose to interview only Cook, the account was inevitably one-sided and self-serving. While it did admit that Cook had passed through a "crisis" in his life, it underplayed the extent and pattern of sexual contact between Cook and his counselees. Its main thrust was to reaffirm that the Cook approach to the healing of homosexuality was valid and retained the blessing of the Adventist church. It announced that Cook would "soon resume leading seminars for recovering homosexuals." Although Cook admitted that "in some of my propensities and delusions I still feel homosexual," he had now been "totally free from [his] addiction for about eight months" and his convictions were "stronger relative to the possibility of homosexual recovery" (4,7,4,5). The interview seized upon the endorsement by Adventist prophet Ellen White of using converted alcoholics to work for those with alcohol problems (6). However, the parallel with Cook working for homosexuals was poor--especially given the fact that he had admitted and demonstrated that young homosexuals represent a temptation to him. A better analogy, then, would be putting a reformed drunk in charge of a bar.

Cook wrote regular unsolicited progress reports to Adventist President Wilson for two years, distributing copies widely. In one of these, 15 months after my letter exposing him and shortly after the appearance of the second *Ministry* article, he stated that "the borderline homosexual behaviors that I allowed myself to be deluded by ended on September, [sic] 15th, 1986 and have not returned. I am enjoying a peaceful growth in heterosexuality, Sharon and I experiencing [sic] a fully open and growing relationship." He then went on to announce that he had formed "Quest II" and had begun counseling two men, and that he was being supported by private donors to write a "major book on homosexual healing." Writing books and articles would be "the top priority of Quest II. ...in time we expect to see a full range of seminars and workshops for churches and the general public, therapists, ministers and other professionals, married couples working through the homosexuality of a spouse, and people working through the healing of their own homosexuality" (1987).

However, Cook's plans to regain prominence in the world of ex-gay ministries were slowed when the story of his fall suddenly appeared in the press 15 months after the event. During the Fall of 1987, a reporter with the *Los Angeles Times*, while investigating a report that another ex-gay ministry was harassing AIDS patients in Los Angeles hospitals, was told about the Quest scandal. Amazed that the story had not appeared in the press, she phoned me to ask for a copy of the paper detailing the Quest saga that I had read at the 1987 meeting of the American Sociological Association. Her editor subsequently sent her to Pennsylvania, where she interviewed Cook and a number of his former counselees, and followed this up with a photographic team. On December 6 the *Times* published a detailed account of the scandal in a long article entitled "It's Called Change Counseling: Troubled Pioneer Maintains Faith in

Program" (Japenga, 1987). This publicity led to coverage of the story in other papers and on TV and radio talk shows. One of the papers which gave broadest coverage to the Quest story at this time was the *Reading Eagle*, which followed up four extensively researched articles (Rohland, 1988a-d) with an editorial whose headline pronounced "Cook's 'Cure' much Worse than 'Disease'" (*Reading Eagle* 1988:4). This came as a huge shock and embarrassment to most of the members of Cook's congregation, the Hampden Heights Seventh-day Adventist Church in Reading, who had not been informed of the crisis at Quest. The church placed him under discipline, which meant that he could not hold office or teach classes. Cook kept a fairly low profile for several years after this wave of publicity, which made it impossible for him to rebuild his ministry in Reading: although he continued doing some counseling, most of his income came from jobs such as delivering pizzas.

When some of the former counselees interviewed by the press complained that the whole focus had been on Cook as victim and that the Adventist Church had not contacted them to make amends or even to apologize, Eva wrote a letter of apology and, in order to continue to protect the confidentiality of the counselees, left Cook with the responsibility for mailing it. However, when the first few drew responses from counselees that were verbally violent towards him, Cook chose not to mail the rest (Cook 1995a).

Once again conservative Christianity proved willing to return Cook to prominence--this time the Evangelicals. In 1989 *Christianity Today* featured an article by him entitled "'I Found Freedom': One Christian's Struggle with Homosexuality and how he found Healing through God's Grace," in a cluster of articles which evaluated "ex-gay" ministries positively (1989:22-24).

Early in 1990 the board of the Hampden Heights Adventist Church, where a new pastor formed a close relationship with Cook and was convinced of his claim to have been "free from homosexuality" since September 1986, voted to give him "unconditional forgiveness." Shortly after this, he was interviewed for three hours by a panel of 12, which included clergy and psychologists, concerning his sexual record over the previous three years and how he was now handling counselees. These gave him a positive evaluation, together with a letter recommending him as a lecturer and counselor on gaining "freedom" from homosexuality (Santee 1995). In the Fall of that year, the church distributed a brochure announcing a three day seminar, "Christ and the Wounded Christian," conducted by Cook, which described him as a "wounded healer." His rehabilitation within his congregation was complete.

DENVER, COLORADO

Growth--with Help from the Religious Right

Cook, his wife, and his two sons, then aged ten and eight, moved to Denver in June 1993, where he established a new ministry, FaithQuest Colorado Inc. This move was made with the encouragement of another ex-gay ministry, Where Grace Abounds, which provided Cook with free office space for some months. It was also a move to a much more receptive environment, where the Christian Right was gathering strength and his earlier problems had not been publicized.

Since FaithQuest's income would initially come primarily from counseling, Cook tried to expand its potential by advertising that it ministered not only to "men and women struggling to recover from homosexuality" but also to heterosexuals with "sexual addictions" (Cook, n.d.(a)). By January 1995 he was working with 20 counselees, half by phone, the others in person. FaithQuest also marketed Cook's tapes. Cook quickly set about arranging for the incorporation of the new ministry in order that it might receive tax-deductible donations. This required that he establish a board for it; he accomplished this by drawing all four members from among his counselees.

Cook received considerable publicity during his first six months in Denver, during which time he had 30 speaking engagements. Some of these were within the Adventist community, which he continued to regard as his natural constituency. He conducted seminars at Adventist churches and arranged to make a presentation to a general assembly of students at Pacific Union College, an Adventist institution in California. Cook also made another appearance with his wife on The Phil Donahue Show as an expert on homosexual healing, did radio interviews, presented seminars at churches of various other denominations, and conducted sessions with the counseling unit of James Dobson's Focus on the Family. The latter resulted in a regular flow of potential counselees, since the counseling unit began to refer callers with homosexual concerns to him. Cook also began to build a close relationship with Colorado for Family Values [CFV], the organization which had sponsored Amendment 2, an attempt, via referendum, to change the state constitution to make laws protecting the civil rights of homosexuals illegal, which had been successful at the polls.¹⁰ This relationship led to Cook's participation in CFV's virulently anti-homosexual "Time to Stand" seminars, held in churches across the state. These appearances frequently spawned inquiries from potential counselees (Carrasco 1995a). Cook had entrenched himself with the Christian Right, which was opening new doors for him.

When I asked Cook about his level of comfort working with the Christian Right, given the fact that the Adventist Church is wary of it as a potential threat to religious liberty, he replied that he now saw my "attack" on him in 1986 as an attempt to advance gay ideology, and this had made him "keenly aware of the need to speak out against gay activity," which was "massively misleading and deluded." CFV and he were "against gay activists because they were for those finding freedom from homosexuality" (1995b).

A participant in a FaithQuest seminar held in a church during 1994 made a donation of \$8,000, to be used as seed money in launching a series of much larger seminars. This resulted in the announcement of two three-day seminars in Denver and Colorado Springs for September and October 1995 which, Cook hoped, would be merely the first in a series of seminars that would be presented monthly across the nation and become FaithQuest's main source of income. He hoped that the first two seminars would place it on a firm financial footing, attracting a total of 220 participants each paying \$195--for a gross of \$42,900. The brochure advertising these "Lifting the Fog" seminars proclaimed that participants would learn "a genuinely effective, Christian, therapeutic approach to homosexual recovery," and that FaithQuest's mission was

¹⁰ This would ultimately be declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court.

"to challenge those conclusions of the theological, scientific, psychological, and political communities that entrench society in an attitude of fatalism toward homosexual orientation" (FaithQuest 1995).

Cook hired one of his counselees, Tom Carrasco, in November 1994 to handle the details of arranging and advertising the seminars, and sent out a letter to raise funds for his salary (Cook, n.d.(a)). As the plans for a national series of seminars emerged, Carrasco was given the title of "national coordinator." Twenty thousand brochures were printed, half of which were mailed to a purchased mailing list, while others were distributed through churches and mailed to a broad list of Adventist leaders. The seminars were also advertised at the International Conference on the Family in Denver during the summer of 1995, in the *Journal for Christian Counselors*, on radio, and on the Internet (Cook 1995b).

Threats and Problems

Although Cook's new ministry was attracting considerable attention, he was also facing several difficulties. When Cook became involved with CFV's "Time to Stand" seminars, Richard Cendo, a gay activist from Boulder, who was familiar with my 1986 letter to the president of the Adventist Church detailing what I had found in Reading,¹¹ confronted Kevin Tebedo, the executive director of CFV, with the information about Cook (Cendo 1995a). However, Tebedo discounted it:

"Colin [Cook] will continue to be part of CFV's seminars for the following reasons. First, Colin is living proof, and does not hesitate to say it, that homosexuality poses a significantly higher danger to children than heterosexuality in proportion to the number of homosexuals in society. ...Colin is not afraid to say the hard things about the homosexual lifestyle and the causal factors that give rise to it. ...

"Secondly, it would be completely hypocritical if we were to reject Colin and refuse to recognize the changes wrought in his life... For eight years he has been totally free of homosexual activity and has dedicated his life to seeing men and women freed from the same 'beast' that held him...Colin is not a homosexual or a child molester, nor is he a 'recovering' homosexual or child molester. He has been set free; Colin is a changed man...CFV has chosen to stand with Colin... I want the entire state to hear him.... CFV will continue to give Colin a platform because he is being used to draw needy people out of the trap" (1995).

When Cendo distributed excerpts from my letter at a "Time to Stand" seminar, Tebedo responded by calling the police and having him arrested (Cendo 1995b).

Meanwhile, Cook was troubled by mixed signals from the Adventist Church. Adventist journals first published advertisements for his tapes but then later rejected them; he was promised that

¹¹ This had been published in a book by the Rev. Sylvia Pennington, who, alerted by stories in the gay press after the *Los Angeles Times* revelations, had, without my knowledge, procured it from a Kinship leader (1989:42-70).

the *Columbia Union Visitor* would publish an interview with him, but when a church leader cautioned that Adventists could get their fingers burnt again, it fell through. The format of his presentation to students at Pacific Union College was altered when some professors protested, and the latter were allowed to follow up with hostile questioning and his opportunity to publish in the student paper was canceled. The pastor of his church in Denver recommended that he be added to the board of elders there, only to have him vetoed by the elders, and his endeavors to obtain funding from the Rocky Mountains church headquarters in Denver were rebuffed. These reversals angered Cook considerably and increased his dependence on the Religious Right.

A far greater blow, however, was his wife's decision, late in 1994, to separate from him. This was the culmination of eight years of growing detachment, dating back to the 1986 crisis in Reading. Sharon, a survivor of childhood sexual molestation from her father, had been severely hurt by the revelations of Cook's infidelity, and as a trained counselor¹² she saw his actions as a severe betrayal of the counseling relationship. Consequently, she had pulled away from him as early as 1988-89 to the point where "she did not want to be touched, be sexual with [him], sleep with [him]" (Cook, 1995a). Finally, after extended turmoil, she had chosen to move out. This was a severe setback to Cook's image as a recovered homosexual, for he had regularly used his marriage and children as evidence to support his claims. Indeed, in a brochure advertising his Colorado seminars, published six months after their separation, Cook referred to his personal history as "a triumph of recovery to heterosexuality through faith-training in Christ," and documented this once again by stating that he "is married to Sharon and is the father of two sons." Although this was technically correct, it created a dishonest impression.

Meanwhile, FaithQuest was facing a financial crisis. In part this was because counselees come and go--in spite of the flow of inquiries generated by referrals from Focus on the Family and by the "Time to Stand" seminars, the number of counselees dropped from 20 to 15 between January and July 1995; and in part it flowed from Cook's disorganization, which meant that payment for counseling sessions was not always pursued (Carrasco 1995a). Consequently, when FaithQuest ran out of envelopes during the mailing of the seminar brochures, the specter of other unpaid bills caused a sense of crisis (Eddy 1995a). The financial success of the planned seminars appeared crucial to FaithQuest.

Early in July 1995, two months before the first of the scheduled seminars, Carrasco suddenly resigned from FaithQuest, leaving a gaping hole at a critical time. The official reason given for this by both him and Cook was that the uncertainty of receiving his salary was too much for him to bear. However, Tom confessed in an interview that this was not the real reason, for in fact "God always provided." He cited instead two other reasons. First, he still "sinned homosexually"--a fact that he had just admitted to in FaithQuest's newsletter (Carrasco 1995b)--and was afraid of bringing the ministry into disrepute. Second, and more important, was the tension caused him by his relationship with Cook. He felt great conflict between the roles of counselee, colleague, and friend. In particular, while his role of counselee implied dependence on Cook, he had found since they had been working together that Cook had become emotionally dependent on his friendship (1995a). In his diary covering his visit to

¹² She completed an M.A. in guidance and counseling in 1978.

Denver for intensive counseling, Eddy had observed that Cook and Carrasco spent a great deal of time together, during which they behaved "like kids," with a lot of excited camaraderie, laughter, teasing, and the playing of elaborate practical jokes on one another. Cook had told Eddy before he met Tom that the latter, who was 29 years old, was "very cute"; he had touched Tom a great deal in front of Eddy--on his back, neck, cheeks and hair--but this had not been reciprocated. Tom called them "kindred spirits", but found "the blurring of the relational boundaries" increasingly unbearable. He eventually felt obliged to abandon the counseling, and resented this--"I could no longer share my struggles with him because of how he might take it." Tom sensed that Cook grieved more over his decision to resign from FaithQuest and cut the ties with him than he had over Sharon's leaving him (interview).

Carrasco also resigned from FaithQuest's board, and another of the members also resigned about the same time. This left only two of the nine positions on the board filled, potentially threatening FaithQuest's tax-exempt status. Since the members had all been counselees, they had felt the tensions of role conflict. Carrasco blamed Cook's inability to form peer relationships with men of his own generation for his failure to find anyone other than counselees to fill board positions (1995a). It seems certain that a board composed of counselees would find it very difficult to hold Cook responsible, even though they would be more likely to be aware of the peril of a counseling relationship with him.

The Experience of Recent Counselees.

I asked Cook what he told potential counselees about the goals of his counseling and of its content, in order to compare this with the experiences of Eddy and David. He said he was very specific with them about his goals: to enable them to recover from homosexuality--from the thought patterns, fantasies, and behavior; to deal with deep-seated anger in the parent-child relationship; and to function as heterosexual males. As for the content of the counseling, he typically took their family, sexual, and religious histories, with special interest in father-son relations; he taught them that God had created them heterosexual, and to praise God for this, and that if they had a homosexual fall they should not feel condemned by God; and he told them how to achieve "positive orgasms," praising God for them.

Cook initially told Eddy that as a result of counseling with him he "would discover his heterosexuality;" they would discuss his family, religious and sexual histories. They did discuss Eddy's relationship with his father at some length in one session, and Cook seemed surprised to learn that Eddy's father had not been absent when he was a child and that when his parents had divorced when Eddy was in his later teens, he, unlike his sister, had chosen to make his home with his father. However, Cook forgot these facts, which did not parallel his own experience nor support his theory, and referred to Eddy's problems with an absent father so frequently that at length Eddy gave up trying to set him right.

The counseling became so mired in Eddy's sexual history that, in 34 sessions, they never reached his religious history. Cook was especially interested in Eddy's masturbation: he inquired regularly how many times he had masturbated since the previous session, and sought

considerable detail concerning how he held his hand and what motions he made and their speed; he asked what Eddy's penis looked like during masturbation, how the orgasms had been, how long they had lasted, how much "cum" he had produced; and he showed unflagging interest in Eddy's fantasies during masturbation. He also took opportunity during these discussions to ask the size and shape of Eddy's penis.

Since Cook had himself endured great guilt concerning his homosexual fantasies during masturbation, he was eager to teach Eddy how to "masturbate positively"--without fantasy--and spent the first full counseling session on this topic. The technique involved here was to think of Jesus being "in the room with you giving you his love as he gives you an erection." He gave detailed instructions, over and over again, on "how to get in touch with your sexual energy while Jesus is there with you...":

"Take off all your clothes ...stroke gently...thank God for your body, your legs, your chest, your arms, your thighs, your stomach, your penis, your balls.... Praise him for your erection...for these lovely feelings...let the orgasm take over... The major thing is that you don't fantasize."

Accompanying this were exceedingly detailed instructions concerning how to masturbate gently--how to hold his hand, where to apply pressure, etc. Eddy was also urged "to tell Jesus exactly what you sexually desire. Get by your bedside, naked, maybe with a hard-on. And say, Jesus I would like to suck a penis right now..." During succeeding sessions he asked for full, excruciatingly detailed reports--lasting whole sessions--on how the previous week's attempts at "positive masturbation" had turned out (Eddy 1994-95). Sessions focused again and again on masturbation, and frequently turned suddenly to that topic.

When Cook explored Eddy's homosexual experiences, which were limited to two men, he asked explicit, full details concerning encounters, focusing especially on what happened between when they first dropped their pants and their ultimate orgasms. For example, during part of one session Cook's questions concerning Eddy's relationship with someone whom he had never seen naked included

"Have you ever actually handled each other's penises? ... Tell me about the heavy times. What did you do when you did heavy stuff? ... Did you take each other's clothes off, or unzip the pants and take the penis out?... What other parts of the body did you [kiss] directly on the flesh?..."

He would also ask about the size of the partner's penis, whether it was veiny, was its head large? Often Cook would go off on a reverie, remembering his own attractions and experiences: for example, having led Eddy to admit that he loved the smell of a man, he commented it "just could give you a hard-on just like that, couldn't it?", and then reminisced about sniffing the underwear of a heterosexual roommate he had "had the hots for" in college when the latter was not present. He also described his own body, his penis, his masturbatory habits. He often repeated his stories, and their point was not always clear except that they were sex-related. For example, he told Eddy several times about getting an erection while bathing with one of his

sons, who touched it and was impressed with its size, and of his positive feelings when he would "feel their little erections" pressing into him when he carried his sons on his hip when they were young. While these seem to have been innocent occurrences, the frequency with which they were retold suggests that they played important parts in Cook's own fantasies.

During one session Cook raised the possibility, yet again, that "maybe one day you'll even be able to make love to a woman." Frustrated at this remark, Eddy reminded him that he had already had a lengthy heterosexual relationship. Startled, Cook paused long enough to ascertain that he had indeed penetrated her successfully, but then resumed the ongoing discussion of masturbation--and never ever returned to explore Eddy's heterosexual history.

All the sex-related talk, to which there seemed to be no end, was inevitably arousing to the counselee, and Cook frequently checked on this: "Are you aroused?"; "Do you feel alright being aroused while you're talking with me?" He was at pains to tell Eddy that such a reaction was "a normal process. ...I want to help you...get relaxed about talking of sexual things." Moreover, Cook wanted to know when Eddy was aroused: "...if you feel aroused...feel free to break into the sentence and say it." He also asked frequently if Eddy was handling his penis while Cook talked, something he admitted to with embarrassment several times, and was eager to know if Eddy had any sexual feelings for him or fantasies about him--and when this was admitted, he demanded to know the details of the fantasies.

David's counseling experience, though much shorter, was very similar to that of Eddy's. He was in deep distress when he first contacted him: he was filled with self-hatred because of his homosexuality, was isolated, felt he could never be happy, was suffering rejection from family members, while his Adventist pastor in visits to him assured him that change of orientation was possible. Feeling extremely vulnerable, he reached out to the healer whose material had been circulated at his church some years before, and emotionally told him he needed help: "He told me he loved me, and could validate my experiences. I felt he really understood and could help me gain victory over homosexuality." After this, Cook launched immediately into a counseling session which focused on David's sexual history. He too was asked questions about "how often I masturbated, what fantasies I had then, what kind of guy I was attracted to. ... I told him what I did and did not do sexually. The more I told him the more he wanted..." David explained that he felt dehumanized in the gay community in his small city because he was known as "the guy with the big cock"--he was related to not as a person, but as an object. However, rather than responding to the pain he had expressed, Cook immediately wanted to know the size of his penis. Although David, taken aback, initially put him off, saying that the information was not relevant, Cook returned to his question again later in the session, and "was quite impressed" when told the answer: "he told me to thank God for it, and then prayed, thanking God for my penis. It was weird, but the conversation became eroticized--it felt like we were having 'phone sex.' ... Later he asked me if I had an erection, and prayed thanking God for it." Later in the session Cook asked David what he liked doing most sexually, and then "if I was fantasizing about doing that with him--and I was! There was something very appealing about his voice—he knew what to say: it was very stimulating. He guessed I was stroking my cock--and asked for details, such as 'Is it pulsating?' I'm sure he was also masturbating to what he was getting me to say." Eventually Cook asked if he was close to orgasm, prayed for the orgasm, and then

suggested that he hang up, finish himself off, and then call back and tell Cook about his orgasm. Even though he found this experience confusing and humiliating, by the next week he was feeling so turned on at the prospect of further phone sex that he called again for another "counseling session," when he masturbated once again--and this time got Cook to admit that he had a "semi-erection." However, each session left him more confused, so that after the third he told the social worker with whom he had already been counseling about the sessions with Cook and his resulting confusion. She affirmed his desire to quit, which he did at the time of his next appointment. He never told his pastor what had happened and, rather than face him again, ceased attending church (David 1995).

Very shortly after they entered counseling, Cook invited both Eddy and David to visit Denver for several days of intensive counseling sessions; these invitations included accommodation in Cook's home. After such invitations were repeated several times to Eddy, he accepted and spent four days in Denver in June 1995.

The most striking new ingredient of the face-to-face counseling and living experience for Eddy was the full body hug. These were offered whenever he and Cook were alone, as many as six per day. They were so unexpectedly long that after the first Eddy timed them. They were typically between five and six minutes each, the longest being 12 minutes:

"Once we got into the room, Colin closed the door and said it was time for a real hug. He then tightly wrapped his arms around me, told me that I had to squeeze harder than I was, and pressed his entire body against mine--his cheek to my neck (because he is so much shorter than me), his chest to my chest, and his crotch to my crotch... He held me for about five minutes, occasionally stroking my back and the nape of my neck, and other times squeezing me so hard it felt as if he wanted our bodies to become as one... [A]fter we sat down Colin asked me what I thought about the hug. I said I had never in my life received a hug that was so full and long. Colin asked me if I liked it. I said yes, and Colin stood up and said, 'Let's do it again.' This hug was the same as the first one--body-to-body, stroking, and lasting five minutes. ...

"Colin said it was time for another hug. This time the embrace lasted seven minutes and it involved the same body contact. But I formed an erection, mostly because Colin was rubbing against me so firmly. I could feel Colin's penis, too... I sensed Colin could feel my erection, so I tried to pull away, but Colin hugged me more tightly. This happened twice. ...

"Then Colin said it was time for a closing session hug. After three or four minutes I pulled away because I couldn't stand the throbbing erection Colin was pressing into my crotch. Colin asked why I pulled away; was I becoming aroused?" (Eddy 1995a)

Twice Cook found excuses to walk in on Eddy in the bathroom as he emerged from a shower. Each time he knocked he was told by Eddy that he was not dressed, but he then walked in.

When the two were together alone, whether in counseling sessions or socializing, "the only thing [Cook] wanted to talk about was sex. ...all his conversation was either direct sex talk or full of underlying sexual innuendo. ... During counseling sessions he sat with his legs apart, and I could observe his erection—he would draw attention to it by manipulating his pants. When I would cross my legs he would say 'there is no need for you to hide your erection from me.' This happened several times."

Cook had asked Eddy to bring his favorite pornographic magazine to Denver, and they spent one counseling session going through it page by page. Cook commented approvingly, "this man has a nice pubic area," "this one has an enormous penis and balls," "nice penis," etc. He repeatedly asked Eddy about his state of arousal. When Eddy pointed out his favorite photo, Cook asked him graphically what he would like to do to the model. Then, having ascertained that Eddy was fully aroused, he admitted that he too was partially aroused, and demanded that Eddy pray, thanking God for the model's handsome appearance:

"I said I could not feel comfortable doing so, so Colin said he would pray for both of us. In his prayer, Colin thanked God for the man's strong penis, his handsome thighs, his broad chest, his attractive pubic hair, his fleshy balls, and (again) his firm erection... For me, this was rather sacrilegious and made me uncomfortable. Then he hugged me, and let me feel his erection...Colin rubbed my neck and whispered pleasant words to me about how I could overcome this porn."

During the counseling sessions there was plenty of the usual talk and questioning about masturbation, now accompanied by graphic demonstrations near Cook's crotch and the use of Eddy's thumb to show what Cook's "gentle" method felt like, and many questions designed to ascertain whether Eddy was still attracted to Cook now that they had met in the flesh:

"Colin then asked me if I had experienced any more sexual fantasies about him. ... I felt rather shy, but after some prodding I said I had briefly entertained sexual images of him, but I quickly repressed them because I knew I shouldn't be thinking such things, and especially with him of all people.

"After some insistence on Colin's part to meditate on some fantasies about him, I reluctantly said that I had thought about 'rubbing him all over.' ...

"Colin then asked if I had any other fantasies, such as 'turning him over' after I rubbed his penis. I said no, but I had thought about 'you know.' Colin asked me, 'What?' and I said, 'Doing "you know."' I expressed such embarrassment about describing this sex act to his face (vs. over the phone) that Colin finally demanded that I hold his hands, look in his eyes and tell him what I fantasized. I kept looking away, Colin kept repeating, 'Look me in my eyes,' and I finally mumbled, 'Fellatio.' That didn't please Colin, and he said, 'Oh, that sounds so clinical. Tell me in normal words.' After some more hemming and hawing I finally said, 'Sucking your cock'—a phrase that Colin made me repeat twice and then used himself several times to discuss what I fantasized about."

Eddy's fantasy was rooted in Cook's enthusiastic talk, during phone counseling, about nude massages--he had commented that he would like to resume them with other men "in a sensuous, non-erotic, way." Whilst Eddy was in Denver, Cook told him about his regular visits to a masseur, where he had recently asked if he could remove the towel that had previously covered his genitals: "He commented that a masseur would be used to seeing clients get erections." Eddy interpreted this conversation as "testing my reaction to the thought of such an experience" with him: he felt that they could have had such a massage together if he had been there longer and Cook had not had responsibility for his sons at night and over the weekend he was there (Eddy1995b).

In contrast with the experience of these two counselees, that of Tom Carrasco, the counselee who became FaithQuest's National Coordinator, suggests that if a counselee took a firm stand he could establish boundaries which Cook then respected. When Cook placed his hand on Tom's knee during an early counseling session, Tom told him this made him uncomfortable, and he pulled back. Although they hugged frequently, Tom did not find this erotic, and if Cook got an erection he refrained from pressing it against him. Tom had no sexual fantasies about Cook. Although the counseling contained very explicit sexual descriptions, Tom did not find this arousing. Even though Cook told Tom that that the discussions aroused him, he never received positive feedback, so that his behavior remained relatively sedate, even though later events, once Tom was added to FaithQuest's staff, indicated that Cook had developed strong emotional bonds to him.

However, the data from the larger sample of counselees in 1986, when only a small minority were able to resist Cook's advances, as well as the two cases examined in detail here, show that counselees coming to Cook for "healing from homosexuality" are generally far too vulnerable and trusting to be able to set boundaries and hold to them consistently. He has usually been able to manipulate them for his own purposes.

In retrospect, Eddy felt disappointed because he had been led to expect that they would cover new material together in counseling--"I expected to learn more about recovery from homosexuality. I feel that all I learned was that Colin only had time to listen to my sexual fantasies and practices. ...I feel used because Colin seemed to be only interested in my sex life. He barely scratched the surface of my life's other dimensions. ...I feel sexually used. ... I had no warning from Colin that (the counseling sessions)would focus on sex." Moreover,

"When Colin and I first spoke...Colin said, besides helping me understand his article, these sessions would help me harness my sexuality. ... After spending more than a year with Colin, I have no new understanding of his article--in fact, we never discussed it... As for being aroused at women, I have found that in the last year and a half I have actually become less aroused by women. I measure this decline by my decreased interest in using women in my masturbation experiences; when I began counseling, I used female pornography about once a week; during the last four months I can recall only one instance when I tried to fantasize with women, and I had to abort the effort after losing my erection. I have not had a sexual dream involving women since I began counseling, while I have had sexual dreams about Colin"(1995b).

He concluded that "when I went to him I was questioning my homosexuality," but "now I am questioning my heterosexuality."

David's experience, in retrospect, was more distressing. He called upon Cook in a time of great need, but found nothing to help him out of homosexuality--only sexual exploitation and humiliation: "After this I hated myself even more for my homosexuality. Finally, counseling with a social worker helped me to accept myself, and I found peace."

Professionals Assess Cook's Ex-gay Ministry

Since I am not a therapist, I shared the transcripts of Eddy's counseling sessions with two clinical psychologists, seeking their assessment of Cook's approach to counseling and of the professional ethics revealed therein.

The first of these was Ghislaine Boulanger, Ph.D., who, in addition to being a clinical psychologist in private practice in Manhattan, also teaches courses in clinical psychology at both Columbia University and New York University. She said:

"Obviously he is very disturbed and really courting trouble. ... What he is doing is a tremendous abuse of therapeutic practices--he is taking advantage of the intimacy that counseling produces. The problem is that since he is unlicensed he answers to no one. ... Hugging is absolutely out. I know of no treatment which encourages this physical contact with a therapist—and he is clearly being aroused by the technique. He would lose his license if he had one. ... It is very out of date to believe that psychotherapy can change a homosexual orientation...

"Most immediately troubling are his accounts--amazingly made to a patient--of what is happening between him and his sons. He has reported that he allowed his sons to handle his erect penis. This is grounds for official inquiries into possible child abuse. If this had happened in New York State, I, as a licensed psychologist, would be obliged to report him, and the state might well then take his children away from him" (Boulanger 1995).

The second therapist was Suzanne Weld, Ph.D., C.Psych., a registered psychologist in the province of Ontario, Canada, and Professor at the University of Ottawa. She is familiar with the impact of Cook's counseling on counselees as a result of having had a former long-term participant in the Reading Quest program as a student, whose continuing plight as a result of that experience was revealed to her in papers written for her classes. She wrote:

"My general overall reaction to Colin Cook and his style of providing therapy is that he should not be practicing psychotherapy, should be barred from admission to any professional association, and should be subject to a class action [suit] from his ex-counselees. ...his

methods are clearly inappropriate. Mr Cook's physical behaviour is unacceptable, unprofessional, and highly damaging to a client who trusts that Mr Cook knows what he is doing and goes along with the 'treatment'. *There is no professionally accepted treatment today which would advocate that a therapist press his erect genitals up against a client under any circumstances. That Mr Cook did this is and of itself is probably sufficient grounds for charges...*

"Mr Cook appears to have his own obsession about pursuing certain details and not others in the client's experience. Specifically, details about anatomy and masturbation are very eagerly sought by Mr Cook but the same level of seeking details about other aspects of the client's emotional and social functioning are neglected. ...

"Mr Cook reveals far too much about his own personal life, beliefs, experiences to a point where at times the lines between counselor and counselee are blurred. ...

"Lastly, it is worrisome, after being 'found out' years ago as someone who is practicing unethically and unprofessionally and being fully aware of his own continued physical touching of clients, that it has not dawned on Mr Cook that he should have removed himself completely from any further work as a psychotherapist. Clearly, he has not learned from his past mistakes. ...Regardless of professional issues, anyone else would quit out of personal shame if not out of the threat of being liable" (Weld 1995).

Disclosure

Feeling that it was my ethical obligation to do what I could to prevent further abuse of counsees, I leaked word of the situation to Virginia Culver, religion reporter of the *Denver Post*, in August 1995. Realizing that the story would be controversial, Culver spent weeks doing extensive corroborating research. She listened to Eddy's tapes, interviewed not only Eddy and David but also many counsees from Cook's Reading period, including some I had not met, Tebedo, and Cook himself. She also spent two days at Cook's "Lifting the Fog" seminar at a Sheraton hotel in Denver.

Cook failed dismally in his attempt to charge \$195 for entry to his seminars: in order to get an audience he was forced to waive admission charges, merely requesting an offering to help with expenses. Since his hope that the seminars would help put FaithQuest on a sound financial footing was dashed, he was obliged to close his office shortly afterwards and move all counseling to his home. The attendance at the Denver seminar was only 40, most of whom were older women and men, including some with gay children and three Adventist pastors. No more than five were young men who were perhaps "struggling with their homosexuality" (Cendo 1995c).

Cook spent a great deal of time during the seminar talking about his wife and children, of what "we" do together--creating a false impression in order to shine his image as a healed homosexual. In the midst of the seminar, whilst illustrating from his experience the importance of a father roughhousing with his sons, Culver was amazed to hear him suddenly blurt out a

comment about his joy when he had "felt [his sons] little penises pressing into his leg." For her, this was the ultimate confirmation of Eddy's story.

Culver's *Denver Post* article was published as a front page story on October 27 (1995). She was disappointed because the editors, unwilling to tarnish the *Post's* reputation as a "family paper," sanitized what she had written, omitting crucial graphic portions. Entitled "Sessions with Gays Criticized," it described Cook as a former Adventist minister who had been fired twice for inappropriate sexual activity. Now counseling in Denver, there were renewed charges of inappropriate sexual conversation and behavior with counselees. The article tied Cook's program closely to Adventism: not only was Cook an Adventist and his earlier program Adventist-funded, but all the counselees quoted were also Adventists. However, the editorial rewrite omitted all mention of Eddy's visit to Denver and the damning events recounted in his diary, and caused confusion by mixing together the stories of Denver and Reading counselees, so that it was not clear how many of the allegations were new.

The article appeared during Cook's seminar in Colorado Springs. Local papers reported that he had declared angrily that "gays are attempting to silence me" and had "flatly denied" allegations of "long, grinding hugs." Nevertheless, parts of the seminar, "sprinkled with references to Cook's own arousal, masturbation and erections, had the flavor of a confessional" (Fallon 1995:B2; Terwilliger 1995). Ironically, a camera crew from Pat Robertson's "700 Club," presumably unaware of the publication that day of Culver's allegations, arrived during the seminar to shoot a segment of Cook's presentation for a show on reparative therapy.

While a spokesperson for Focus on the Family quoted by Culver denied that it had any relationship with Cook, the article's lack of specificity let CFV off the hook, allowing Tebedo to challenge its thrust and to voice continued support for Cook. When interviewed by Culver, he "stoutly defended Cook," praising his work with CFV in their "Time to Stand" seminars, even though he had just been informed of the evidence against him (Culver 1995:8A). The tone of his defense became more strident in succeeding days: "We have every confidence in him... I just know the homosexual lobby is trying to rip open Colin" (Dolan 1995:1B). However, the founder and president of CFV, Will Perkins, was apparently disturbed by this brash defense of Cook, with the result that Tebedo was suddenly ousted as CFV's executive director on November 6. While Perkins was unwilling to dissociate CFV from Cook, he was more reticent in his statements, saying first that "The ball is in Dr[sic] Cook's corner... It is up to him to clarify the situation" (Dolan,1995:1B), and then that he considered the accusations to be serious, and had asked Cook to respond to the charges before scheduling more seminars with him(Booth 1995a: 1B).

Culver was aware that the *Denver Post* had the data to remove any room for uncertainty on CFV's part concerning Cook's recent abuse of the counseling relationship, and was eager to write a more explicit follow-up article. When it became clear that her editor would not grant her wish, I chose, on November 14, to fax a 10-page summary of the data, with detailed quotations from Eddy's diary and counseling tapes and David's interview to Perkins. I also sent copies, with separate cover letters, to James Dobson (disputing Focus on the Family's denial of its relationship with Cook (Culver 1995:8A)), Pat Robertson (alerting him to the curious timing

of the visit of his camera crew), Alfred C. McClure, president of the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, and to the Colorado press.

That night a phone call from Denver informed me that an ebullient Cook had announced a press conference for November 16, when he would answer the allegations, and that the *Denver Post*, in order to forestall the possibility of a lawsuit, had offered to let him write an op-ed column where he could do the same.¹³ I understood then that the timing of my faxed letters was perfect. The next night, in the "wee small hours," I was wakened by a plaintive call from Cook: "How could you do this to me?" He had been given a copy of the fax, and was thus aware that it had been sent to the press. This had put him on the defensive, for he knew now that it would be much more difficult to dazzle and mislead the reporters during his press conference the next day.

At the press conference Cook avoided questions addressing the explicit material covered in my fax by attacking the homosexuals who were out to get him. However, he went into some detail about his counseling technique when defending its soundness, arguing that vivid discussions of male bodies and sexual acts were necessary to "desensitize" clients and that long hugs were legitimate "father-soning." Cook stated that his work was partly supervised by his Adventist pastor, who stood by his side, looking increasingly uncomfortable as Cook described such counseling techniques as his use of pornography. When Cook cut off the questioning as it became more difficult, his place in the spotlight was taken by Tebedo, whose presence as "a friend" of Cook's was a surprise. Tebedo charged the *Denver Post* with manufacturing the tapes: "I always consider the source... When homosexuals bring the accusation...it has zero credibility" (Booth 1995b:1B; Novosad 1995; Terwilliger 1996).

This charge prompted the *Post*, in its reporting of the press conference, to be much stronger concerning the veracity the tapes and the explicitness of their content than it had earlier permitted Culver to be. Other newspapers drew heavily on my fax in their reporting of Cook's conference, giving details and quotations that the *Post* had proved unwilling to print (Harkavy 1995:21-24; Terwilliger 1996).

Although Perkins now had access to much more compelling information, Colorado for Family Values remained silent concerning Cook, and Perkins never acknowledged my faxed letter to him. Gay activists, led by Cendo, were moved by his apparent intransigence to picket his Colorado Springs car dealership, challenging him to judge the truth of the accusations for himself by listening to Eddy's tapes. He rejected this challenge: "It would be like wading in the cesspool" (*Independent* 1995). However, CFV has done nothing in partnership with FaithQuest since that time, and when it issued a list of recommended "ex-gay ministries" in August 1996, FaithQuest was omitted (*CFV Report* 1996:5). CFV had distanced itself from Cook without publicly admitting that it had partnered a sexual abuser.

In contrast, Focus on the Family did respond to my fax, in a letter from James W. Ogden, its Vice President for Counseling and Education. Contradicting their statement included in Culver's

¹³ In my judgment he would not have risked a suit, for this would have meant a great deal of negative publicity for him when the various documents were opened in court.

article (1995:8A), he now admitted that Cook had spoken to their counseling staff and at events sponsored or hosted by the ministry a total of four times, and that their counselors had referred individuals struggling with homosexuality to him. However, in the light of the revelations in the *Denver Post* and my letter to Dobson, they had decided to distance themselves from Cook, so that "Mr Cook and FaithQuest have been removed from our list of possible references and resources" (Ogden 1995). That is, Focus on the Family sought to avoid being besmirched by the Cook scandal by cutting its ties to him without publicly admitting that they had existed.

My purpose in faxing letters to Perkins and Dobson had been to give them information that I hoped would convince them that Cook was abusing counselees, and thus encourage them to cease supporting FaithQuest. However, my reason for sending the letter, with its own cover page, to the President of North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists was different. Even though his spokesperson had assured Culver that "the church has no connection with Cook,"¹⁴ both Eddy and David had turned to Cook for counseling because they were Adventists: Cook's ties to Adventism had rightfully been a theme of the *Post's* story (Culver 1995:A9). My letter pointed out that many Adventists continued to think of Cook as the "answer" to homosexuality in spite of the 1986 debacle because the Adventist media had failed to report his firing, thus leaving the memory of his image as a healer of homosexuals, which they had helped create, intact. This was proven by the continuing flow of Adventist counselees to him, his invitations to give seminars in churches, and the presence of Adventist pastors among those attending his public seminars; I could have added that the Adventist "800" numbers continued to advise men calling for help with homosexual problems to contact Cook(interviews). I demanded to know whether Adventist leaders were now "finally willing to inform their membership about the Cook fiasco, so that the flow of SDA victims to Cook [would] be stanchd?" (Lawson 1995).

A contact within church headquarters informed me that my letter had triggered a flurry of meetings there, even though homosexuality was still an uncomfortable topic for church leaders; however, "We do not want to put ourselves in a position to get sued for making accusations about him"(interview). Finally, on December 14, the official church paper noted that "a major Colorado newspaper" had carried an article alleging that Colin Cook, "whom it identifies as a Seventh-day Adventist," had engaged in inappropriate conduct towards counselees participating in his organization, FaithQuest, although Cook had, in the article, denied the allegations. It then proclaimed that "Mr Cook's seminars and counseling activities are neither connected to nor endorsed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church" (*Adventist Review* 1995:6).This statement did nothing to direct counselees away from the predator--it did not even indicate that the counseling was related to homosexuality, nor did it advise pastors to refrain from directing church youth to Cook or warn the youth against trusting themselves to him. Church leaders were unwilling to admit to the membership that the program they had funded to heal homosexuals had proved to be a fiasco and that the only advice they now had for gay Adventists was an insistence they somehow remain celibate. The prime concern of the

¹⁴ This was an overstatement, since what was really meant was that the official church no longer employed him or funded his ministry.

statement was not to tell the membership the truth nor to safeguard gay Adventists from abuse, but to protect the institutional church.

Shortly after his press conference, Cook mailed a nine-page letter to those on his mailing list. It did not surprise me that its content was heavily self-centered--his personal response to the "attack" on him, his anger with the Adventist Church hierarchy for distancing itself from him, his importance as a target to homosexual activists who had persuaded counselees to make charges against him, his "fight" or planned response. Nor was I surprised that, in denying the charges, he ignored the tapes and other evidence against him. The most curious item was a comment complaining about counselees who quit "after just a few sessions, as both the counselees did who reported to the *Denver Post*" (n.d.(b):5). While Culver had stated that David had pulled out after "three or four" sessions, she had reported listening to "hours" of Eddy's taped counseling sessions--and I knew he had had a total of 34 sessions spread over more than a year. About this time I had reason to call Sharon Cook who, in passing, mentioned the name of the counselee, a student at an Adventist college, whom Colin was blaming for taping his sessions. I had never heard of him--Cook had misidentified my source. I was left wondering once again how many other recent counselees had endured sessions as "hot" as Eddy's.

A State Investigation

Alerted by the articles in the press concerning Cook's counseling, the Colorado State Grievance Board initiated an investigation in January 1996. Under the Colorado Mental Health Statute the Board has authority to discipline both licensed psychotherapists and unlicensed counselors practicing in Colorado. On the basis of the press reports, the Board prioritized Cook's case as 1 (most serious) on a scale of 1-5 (Frazzini 1996).

The next month I received a letter from the appointed investigator, asking me to put her in contact with anyone I was aware of who had counseled with Cook in Colorado. She commented that from the press articles "it would appear that Mr Cook is violating the Mental Health Statute," and that the Board could well decide to file an injunction "prohibiting Mr Cook from doing any type of counseling in the state." This would likely require a court hearing (Maxwell 1996a).

The only counselee I was aware of who had actually counseled with Cook in Colorado was Eddy. I put him in contact with the investigator, but he ultimately decided, in order to protect himself, not to participate in the investigation. Although this left the investigator with no direct complaint from a counselee, thus limiting the restriction that could be applied to Cook, she pursued her investigation, which included a lengthy interview with Cook.

In his response, Cook claimed a "pastoral exclusion" from the requirements of the Act on the grounds that his counseling "takes place only in the context of my religious ministry." However, under the Act such an exclusion is available only to employed church pastors. The two relevant Adventist entities, the North American Division and the Rocky Mountain Conference, provided

statements that Cook was not so employed and that "his counseling program has no official standing with the Seventh-day Adventist organization" (OCI 1996:1,2).

The Grievance Board determined that Cook was practicing psychotherapy, and notified him that he must comply with the State law requiring all unlicensed psychotherapists to be listed in a database kept by the board (Maxwell 1996b). This would force him to file a disclosure statement of his qualifications and methods with the Board and to provide a copy of it to each client no later than the second counseling session. Failure to provide this to any client would mean that the latter could demand a full return of all fees without having to show wrongdoing. Cook was given until October 31, 1996 to register. On November 11, the Administrator of the State Grievance Board told me, in an interview, that Cook had failed to respond to the order to register. The case would now be passed on to the State Attorney General, who could find him not in compliance and prohibit his practice of psychotherapy in the state; if he then continued to counsel, he could end up in prison (Martinez 1996).

Cook had told the investigator that he would interpret any action against him by the Board as "interference by the state in his religious practice" (OCI 1996:6). On November 2, in a presentation to the Denver First Seventh-day Adventist Church, Cook referred to his "ministry to homosexuals" and then mentioned that he was "fighting the state of Colorado" over their investigation of him (Shelton 1996).

Recent Events and Non-events

The outcome most feared by Cook has occurred: Sharon Cook's divorce from him is now final. Cook recently asked a mutual acquaintance for advice on how to find another woman who would be willing to marry him, since being married is so important to his image as a "healed homosexual" (interview).

FaithQuest and Cook largely disappeared from view in Colorado while the furor subsided. However, in 1997 he launched a daily radio program on a religious station in Denver--FaithQuest had to pay for the radio time. He had found new financial backers. He used these broadcasts as opportunities to advertise his tapes telling how to gain "freedom from homosexuality." Within months new backers allowed him to extend his broadcasts to a station in Geneva, Switzerland, and to another in San Francisco. He announced two more public seminars in Denver and Colorado Springs during the Summer of 1998. He told the investigator from the Grievance Board that he was still counseling, that almost all his clients "are Christians who think of homosexuality as a sin," and that he believes that his work is "pioneering and ground-breaking"(OCI 1996:3,6).

The FaithQuest web page also advertises Cook's tapes. It proclaims "recovery from homosexuality to heterosexuality, so that the option of opposite sex intimacy in marriage and in the image of God, is open to us." He puts forward his own experience as proof: "I know the experience of shift from homosexuality to heterosexuality. I have known the genuine love of a woman, my wife, and the fathering of our children."

Early in 1996 I was contacted by a former colleague of Cook's whom I had interviewed in Reading. He told me that he had believed Cook's claims to have been "free from homosexuality" since 1986, but was now shaken to learn of what had been published in Colorado, and begged to hear the tapes of Eddy's counseling sessions in order to judge the situation for himself. When I arranged for a former counselee to play him tapes over the phone, he was convinced of their "seductive tone," that this was highly improper "counseling." When I was completing this paper, I contacted him again to ask if he had any further news of Cook. He replied that after well over a year of silence between the two, he had recently received a call from him:

"Well, to make a LONG story short, he went on and on about all the things he was doing... a radio program that will be expanded to national coverage... infomercials about homosexual recovery... Christian marketing/radio consultants that are helping him to succeed... lectures he's going to give... on and on... for almost 20 minutes before he finally drew a breath. I couldn't believe it. It was like nothing has happened. After conversing a little more (he did most of the talking, I just listened) I asked him about the 'tapes.' 'Oh,' he said in reply, 'those things! That's just a bunch of made up stuff.' Then I told him that I had heard them (I didn't say who or how) and told him what I thought of it. He said, 'Well, that's your opinion... and your perspective.' And then he dropped it totally, and soon ended the conversation" (e-mail interview).

That is, Cook is pushing ahead, is ignoring the most recent fiasco, and is, as always, full of hopes and nascent plans. Since his support from powerful organizations of the Christian Right has apparently dried up for the time being, he is once again trying to cultivate support from among Adventists: he has moved his membership to a different, large Denver congregation and is regularly teaching an adult Sabbath School class there, where he is building a following and taking opportunities to refer to his experience with homosexuality and his approach to "homosexual healing" (Shelton 1996).

Conclusion: The Healed Homosexual?

The brochure advertising FaithQuest's seminars described Cook's personal history as "a triumph of recovery to heterosexuality through faith-training in Christ." He has stated repeatedly that he has not had sex with a man since September 15, 1986, that he has gained freedom from homosexual identity, fantasy, and romanticism.

The evidence points to self-delusion, for the general patterns that were uncovered in 1986 continue. When I asked Cook about his continued intense focus on sexual details, he explained it in these terms: "My message is too unorthodox for therapeutic and pastoral professionals. But you have to be unorthodox to get healing--you must break through the traditional decorum of therapy." He claimed that his results are better than those of professionals because he gets counselees "to describe every sexual thought and act," but he then added that "sometimes this results in sexual arousal in me--I can't talk in this depth without this stirring." When I asked if he

still engaged in erotic hugs, which counselees had complained of and he had admitted to in 1986, he replied that their purpose is to say "I care about you"; however, "I sometimes get a semi-erection--it does not phase me."

It may be true that Cook has not engaged in sexual intercourse, fellatio, or mutual masturbation with a man in recent years, and that he has "made progress" in reducing homosexual fantasies during masturbation. Nevertheless, the evidence presented reveals a man who is continuing to use his young, vulnerable counselees to meet his sexual needs. He drools over every detail of their sexual experiences that he can pry from them, whether alone or with partners, he pores over pornography with them, he initiates frequent embraces of them that become marathon "grinding" sessions, he delights when they become aroused, he draws their attention to his own erections, he contrives opportunities to see them naked, he takes every opening to engage in "sex talk" with them, he shows them, in gruesome detail, how to gain more pleasure from masturbation and, while purporting to teach them to masturbate without homosexual fantasy, he revels in their sexual fantasies about him. This is done often in the name of Christ, and accompanied by prayer and religious fantasy.

Cook has no legitimate claim to be a practising heterosexual. He admitted before his recent divorce that he had not had sex with his wife in years. Tom Carrasco, in whom both Colin and Sharon Cook had confided, described their relationship during the last eight years as one of "ever widening detachment": "he wants closeness to men more than with her" (1995a). Eddy concluded that

"Colin is not sexually attracted to women. When we drive down the road, walk in the park, or talk on the phone, Colin only makes sexual references to the male body. He describes only the male genitalia. Since Colin is so focused on the male, but he chooses not to have sex with men and he cannot have sex with his wife..., the only sexual outlet left is masturbation. Since masturbation is an individual act, I think Colin considers it non-gay sex, and with that safety label, he can engage in it and talk about it without being homosexual" (1995b).

Cook could not abide himself as a person with homosexual fantasies and behavior, as a gay man. In a desperate endeavor to change his orientation and to be able to present himself as heterosexual, he married and had two children. As a result he damaged more lives, for he continues to be obsessed with homosexuality.

Colin Cook used, and in return allowed himself to be used, by the Christian Right until the latter got their fingers burned by their association with him. Groups such as CFV and Focus on the Family were eager to cite his healing, feature him as a speaker, and direct young persons desperate about their homosexual inclinations to him for counseling. Like the Seventh-day Adventist Church earlier, they embraced him because he said what they wanted to hear and they could present his example as *the* answer to the "problem" of homosexuality. The cycle repeats itself, and his troubled career as an "ex-gay" healer continues.

A check of the web in October 2007 found that he again had a web-site, which advertised a daily radio program in Denver, tapes, articles that are “first draft chapters” of his long-awaited book, and quarterly seminars. Cook describes himself on the site in this way:

“Basically I teach how faith intersects sexuality and moves it out of the addictive mode into a place of innocence. This has marvelous results for people whose homosexual feelings or heterosexuality are out of control through addictive drives. I've seen addiction disappear or greatly lessen in people's lives and my own. I have seen the development of heterosexuality in some who came out of homosexuality and wanted to go for marriage. And I have seen gay men and women discover that God's grace is for them too, and that He will receive them right where they are in Christ and lead them in continual growth in Him.”

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