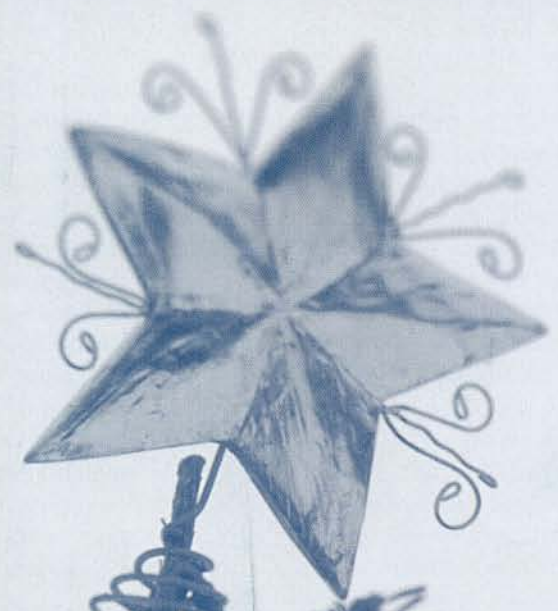


adventist today

NEWS
ANALYSIS
OPINION

volume ten | number six | november . december 2002



Grown-up Adventism

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Grown-up Adventism

JOHN MCLARTY

Through my college and grad school years, almost anywhere I went across the country, I could count on an invitation to stay the night and enjoy a good meal from relatives or friends of my parents. My presence created a fairly small footprint. I was single and healthy. I had a modicum of good manners. I wouldn't stay long. I accepted their hospitality with routine gratitude. I was young, houseless, rootless. They were older, home owners, settled. They were filling their role; I was filling mine.

My role has changed. When my daughter came home from college for Thanksgiving in a van with six other students, we fed them. We put one on the plane the next morning. Another spent the holiday with us. When my nephews fly into town, I meet them at the airport. When a young pastor passes through town and asks to see me, I pay for lunch. These young people are filling their role; I'm filling mine. I've grown up.

Adventism, too, is growing up. The denomination of my youth saw itself as a small, threatened remnant. We had no responsibility for society at large. Our Sabbath-keeping did not alter the flow of the economy. Our eating habits made no difference to the local grocery stores. Our views on church-state relations had no significant political implications; office seekers had no need to court "the Adventist vote."

We did not worry about what would happen if all our members embraced the most restrictive Sabbath rules. We could still ride the bus to church and there would be electricity for the public address and air conditioning systems during services. If nearly all our children enrolled in the local church school, public school would continue providing a solid education for our neighbors and for our children with learning disabilities. We could limit our health care to fomentations and nutrition; regular hospitals would handle the brain surgery. If we ignored politics, someone else would tend to government.

We were small and healthy. We had a modicum of good manners. We wouldn't be here long. We accepted the hospitality of the world with a certain sense of entitlement. The institutions of Christendom and secular society were filling their role; we were filling ours.

But our role has changed. Even in North America, our behavior impacts larger society—whether it is the research of Adventists who are national leaders in geological dating methods. (I'm thinking of Ed Hare and Erv Taylor, not Robert Gentry.) Or the artistry of musicians who conduct and perform with major music organizations. Or the work of computer specialists who maintain national networks that must function 24/7. Or the service of Adventist politicians. If these individuals ordered their lives only with reference to the values and needs of the church, they would bring dishonor on the Adventist church and even on Jesus himself. They must think and act with reference to the whole of their society. They must act like adults. And so must the clergy who shape the life of their church.

Outside of North America, there are countries where Adventists are a major percentage of the population. By their sheer numbers, Adventists shape society, whether they intend to or not. Adventist union presidents are peers of national presidents.

Adventists have a unique identity born of our pioneers, our denominational history, the Bible, the work of the Holy Spirit. But we are growing up. We are learning from other communions. We are recovering old ways of cultivating spiritual life and seeing new light in the gospel. The leaders of our church are learning to think and talk like the international statesmen they must be. We are embracing our essential role in the secular world where God has placed us.

This maturation of the church annoys the ideologically driven purists among us—whether right-wing historicists or evangelicals or liberals. The church refuses to be simple (or pure). It will not remain "what it was." Nor will it entirely quit being "what it was." The grown-up church has renounced its "purity" in its mature commitment to serve all its children...and their friends...and the neighbors...and the folks across town.

If we try to return to the role of our simpler, younger days, we will not be more holy or effective. We'll just look silly, like grown-ups aping teenagers. The only way to relive our childhood is to step forward into the roles of maturity, offering hospitality and encouragement to our children and their friends in their own passages toward maturity. ■



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Haloviak on Morgan

In reviewing Doug Morgan's book, *Adventism and the American Republic* (AT Mar/Apr 2002), Bert Haloviak at least partly misses the mark. First, the claim is made that Adventist predictive eschatology has precluded a nuanced relationship to Roman Catholicism. However true this may have been in the past, it is no longer true today. Seventh-day Adventist institutional interests closely parallel those of the Catholic Church in America, since we both run hospitals and schools. Accordingly, on a host of legislative and judicial issues, Adventists and Catholics work closely together to defend the principles of religious freedom and institutional autonomy. This is true both with respect to areas of doctrinal and practical divergence—like the Catholic practice with respect to family planning and contraception—as well as to common concerns such as the principled commitment to avoid dealing with labor unions. Here in the Pacific Union, there is a close working relationship between the California Catholic Conference and the Adventist Department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty. Attorneys for Adventist Health also work closely with their counterparts for Catholic Healthcare, which now employs at least one Adventist attorney.

This close association is not a rejection of predictive eschatology. Rather, it is based on the very premise that Haloviak insists is needed: a more "Christological perspective within the Adventist approach to eschatology." Our religious liberty ministry is premised on fundamental truths about the character of Christ and the primacy of the cross. Love must be free, as Ellen White wrote in *Desire of Ages*. Moreover, the plan of salvation itself demonstrates that freedom is more important to God than obedience. Indeed, if security and obedience were of primary importance, God could have placed a barbed wire fence around the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. An omnipotent God could easily solve the sin problem by adjusting human brain chemistry, but instead, he chose a plan that protects human freedom.

Application of this understanding to

eschatology does not require revision of the "eschatological scheme." Rather, it provides depth and theological significance to that scheme. The final crisis, then, is not over the issue of a day, but what the day reflects. The legislative enforcing of Sunday worship portrays God as a tyrant, willing to coerce outward conformity, which is nothing short of hypocrisy. In the words of Roger Williams, such forced worship "stinketh" in God's nostrils.

By contrast, Sabbath represents more than an arbitrary day God commanded for worship; and more even than the full range of theological meanings attributed to the day. Too many Adventists can proclaim the Sabbath message with the spirit of the beast: i.e., either you keep the right day or God will kill you. Sabbath embodies the freedom which is central to the plan of salvation, and it becomes the practical expression of the character of a loving God who coerces no one into being saved.

In sum, Haloviak's chief omission is his failure to recognize that the very correlation between a Christ-centered theology and Adventist eschatology he seeks already exists. To be sure, such a view is far from universal in Adventist ranks, but it is widely proclaimed by the church's organized religious liberty ministry, and it will no doubt have an increasingly salutary impact on the church as it becomes more widely disseminated.

Alan Reinart, Esq., President of the Seventh-day Adventist Church State Council, Westlake Village, California

Dealing With Issues

Alden Thompson's "Daniel 9: Putting the Focus on Jesus" (AT July/Aug 2002) was excellent. It can be instructive for how we should deal with perplexing or controversial issues. His was a straightforward, honest approach minus handwringing or not so thinly veiled criticisms of Adventist doctrines, thought or behavior.

I have long felt we should ask the question: so what? So what if technical Biblical issues are still being resolved? How many issues over which some in the church get rather heated, or become discouraged,

really have anything to do with our relationship with Jesus or our confident hope of salvation?

As Thompson inferred, I think, Rev. 14:12 concentrates the mind on what is most important for individuals and the core truth by which Adventists can be defined corporately. We should devote our time to thinking about and communicating how many, if not all, other Bible truths support Rev. 14:12. Maybe this approach would keep us from tending to "throw the baby out with the bath water" every time we face a new challenge theologically or otherwise.

Dean Riley | Banks, Alabama

Respecting Fundamentalists

As I read your editorial, "Nonfundamentalist Adventism" (AT July/Aug 2002), I did not sense a "pastoral concern" for our fundamentalist brothers and sisters. I am no fundamentalist (see "The Charlottesville Story," AT July/Aug 1998), but it seems to me that you succumbed to the liberal's tendency to lump all fundamentalists into one basket—controlling, not humble, unteachable, loud, squeezing others into their mold—just as many fundamentalists label all liberals as unspiritual, insincere, anti-E.G.W., etc.

Can't we confront and debug the fundamentalist's theology while respecting them just as we do members of our own family who may not be SDA or Christian? Did not most of us so-called liberals once live in a literal, concrete world of absolutes during our early teens and perhaps even later?

A liberal may now see his/her former views as "spiritually stunted"; yet, if s/he is now truly liberal-minded and liberal-hearted, s/he would not judge those who are still theologically and socially immature as unteachable or controlling, or scold them for being loud and proud. If we meet a person who is mentally retarded, we do not accuse him or her of being unteachable or controlling. We liberals should be as patient with fundamentalists as we would have wanted liberals to be with us when we were passing through a stage of blind obedience to authority and a rigid law orientation.

Alton D. Johnson | Banning, California

Davidson on Ford

I sat down this evening to relax and picked up the *Adventist Today* that recently arrived. Without having read the entire letter, I was struck by the comments of Richard Davidson on the bottom of page 11 where he was clearly trying to distance himself from Des Ford. Perhaps if I had read the whole thing I wouldn't have been so shocked. I don't know who Davidson is and only have a distant historical perspective of Ford, so nothing personal here.

Davidson states, "I would only support Des Ford's reinstatement into SDA Church membership if he once again embraces the 'present truth' that distinguishes this Church from other denominations. And for that change of heart on the part of my brother Des, I earnestly pray! I also pray for the SDA community in Australia and beyond, that we continue to reach out to Des, loving him, interceding for him, laying hold of the Arm of Omnipotence on his behalf, calling him back to the old landmarks that stand more solid than ever!"

As with many Adventists, I am sure he feels his attitude represents the love and care for others that Christ would portray, without a clue to the absolute arrogance and condescension his attitude actually exhibits. First, "if you don't think like I do you can't belong to the church." Every group has a right to determine what it takes to be a member. However, in Adventism the essence of that statement is isolation from "God's chosen people" and relegation to the realm of the lost. This is demonstrated by the capital C Davidson uses in church. When you feel compelled to "pray earnestly" for a fallen comrade, it signals that you don't feel they are acceptable to God but rather in desperate need of His intervention. When will Adventism realize that their Christian brothers are not the enemy, but colleagues on the side of good in the tug-of-war with evil?

Then comes the guilt and duty (great Adventist motivators) associated with his prayer that if only Australians and others showed enough love Des would return to the "truth." Could it be that God has led someone else down a different path than He has led you? Is it possible that you are

both following the path God has for you? I realize this must be incomprehensible for someone who is "so settled in the truth that they can't be moved."

Davidson's comments have got to be one of the clearest and most accurate representations of classical Adventism I have experienced as an ex-Adventist. It is the arrogance of Adventism that is most striking to one looking from the outside. This is especially true for someone who has "known the truth" and then been set free by God's grace.

Marvin Butler | Via the Internet

Ford, Davidson and Others

Isn't Davidson aware that not only Des Ford, but many Bible scholars view the sanctuary doctrine as Des does? Davidson and his opinions on this doctrine (AT July/Aug 2002) are shrinking in Adventism. That is not to say that the historic ideas are not well and still kicking, but just not so forcefully. And to call this "the core distinctive of Adventist doctrine" should be an embarrassment to the church. Our core distinction should be Jesus Christ, His life and death, the Cross and what it means to humanity. Davidson sounds like a politician, determined that his view is the one everyone should believe. He is behind in more ways than one. He states that he desires with all his heart to see Des back as a member in good and regular standing. Good news Davidson, Des is a member and in good standing, he just believes that the true gospel is Jesus! And continues to preach this in many SDA churches where he is invited to speak.

RE: The Fundamentalist Factor

One of the best articles I've read lately (AT July/Aug 2002). I'm so glad to hear another side. We can be united, but we don't have to be in uniformity. John McLarty's article said Amen with capital letters. There are nonfundamentalists out there, and we need to speak up!

RE: Too Hot to Touch

Good work, David Newman (AT July/Aug 2002)! You hit the subject right on the head. Our Victorian ideas, many times spring from tradition rather than from Biblical principles!

Barb Konrad | Loveland Colorado

Joretteg Answers Moon on the Year-Day Principle

Jerry Moon (July/Aug 2002) admits that historicists hold that in certain time prophesies a "prophetic day" represents a whole year, but not in others. Who is to say where the principle applies? And when it is, the time period spells out the punishment of the people; at the end of it the people are set free, not judged.

Toby Joretteg | Loma Linda, California

Loving New York

Congratulations. Excellent article (Sept/Oct 2001), I wish I could see this kind of writing more often, especially in the SDA magazines. I have worked for *Country Life* and I know exactly what you are talking about. Hope the Church changes and helps more the cities. I am studying sociology/psychology in UK, but I am from Brazil and as you may know Sao Paulo is the fourth biggest city in the world and I would love to see that city being evangelized from south to north. I must tell you if we don't do something the "stones" will do as they are already starting.

Ailson Moraes | Via the Internet

Judging the Little Horn

I enjoyed the July/August issue, and was fascinated by the writer's comments on Daniel 7, 8. I am not sure he has considered all the ramifications of the stated fact in the article that it is the little horn that is judged in these two chapters.... I can agree with the author's view that the passage is about the judgment of the little horn; however I believe it is the proclamation of the gospel that judges the little horn even now. But more so at Jesus' Coming it will meet judgment, if it doesn't give up the polluting doctrine.

Fred Speyer | Via the Internet

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The 'Being Adventist' Initiative and the Future

ARTHUR PATRICK

At the October 2001 business meeting of the Avondale College Church in Australia many church members expressed their convictions about relationship problems in the church. After much discussion the congregation set initiatives in motion that have resulted in the expenditure of a great deal of time and energy by members not only of the local church but others far beyond it. After twelve months this initiative seems worthy of careful evaluation. Essentially it has two aspects. First, it has become an attempt to define from substantive church publications a sustainable theological center for Seventh-day Adventists in an Australian context. Second, it recognizes and encourages the church's pervasive desire to invite all Adventists, including former and potential members, to focus on Scripture as a way to build commitment, fellowship, unity and mission.

The main factor precipitating this two-fold initiative was an administrative decision communicated throughout Australia during June 2001, regarding the relationship the church should hold with a popular Adventist minister, Dr. Desmond Ford, who had recently returned to his homeland from the United States. This well-intended decision was interpreted in a variety of ways, but for many Adventists it indicated that tensions which began in Australia during the 1950s and climaxed in the 1980s were still a continuing reality. One perceived result in the South Pacific Division during the 1980s was the loss to the church of more than a hundred ministers, perhaps a similar number of teachers and a far greater number of members. Those who heard "the full range of perspectives" within the College Church came to realize that there was both a need for the church to normalize continuing tensions and an opportunity

for it to do so. Both the administrative decision mentioned above and the attempt of the College Church to offer viable pastoral care to its members during the past year have elicited from afar critical as well as approving responses in letters and printed and electronic communications. As a result, people have seen a substantial clarification of the issues and now feel there is a realistic hope that the tensions of the past can be relegated to the past. An important question remains about what may yet be useful in terms of this initiative.

If the patterns of the September "Being Adventist" conference are accepted by people widely as sustainable in view of all the evidence, the situation should improve greatly. The tensions that were evident within Australia a couple of decades ago centered around four issues in particular: the perceived threat of schism, righteousness by faith, the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, and the understanding church members had of Ellen White's writings. Time has relieved the intensity of the issue of schism. Further research has developed unifying perspectives on righteousness by faith and Ellen White. Enormous progress has been made in our understanding of the biblical doctrine of the sanctuary and its focus on the saving acts of Jesus Christ, including his role in the judgment of both believers and unbelievers.

The progress of the past year leads me to hope that any remaining local tensions relating to Daniel 8 and Hebrews 6-10 may be resolved within a further two years of prayerful Bible study. The present seems an opportune time to foster realistic, sustainable ways for Adventists to experience stronger unity and a clearer focus on their identity and mission in terms of "the truth as it is in Jesus." ■

Year-End NAD Meeting Notes

ELWIN DUNN

Elder Harold Batiste, who has been secretary for the North American Division (NAD) for the past 12 years, has just accepted a position as a vice president of the General Conference (GC). He has been particularly effective, well liked, and able to work well with everyone. He will be missed. Incidentally, his wife recently retired as Kofi Annan's (head of the United Nations) personal secretary for some 30 years!

Elected in Batiste's place was Roscoe Howard, who has been secretary of the Mid-America Union.

Larry Evans, recently (as of six months ago) president of the Georgia-Cumberland Conference and presently assistant to NAD President Don Schneider, has accepted a call to serve as GC under-secretary. No replacement has been named.

Principal actions

- An increase in the "wage factor" by 1.1 percent, effective next July 1, and as it can be afforded by individual unions and conferences.
- Increase in the retirement fund assessment from 9 percent to 9.5 percent for 2003, with another .5 percent increase in 2004.
- A change in the manner in which all salaries will be calculated, stated to not actually reflect any change in pay, using "100" as the norm rather than the present "150" scale. It will have the effect of a slight increase for those "over" the 100 mark (examples are: president of the GC—115, NAD—112, Union—110, with ordained ministers at 100. (This scale was recommended by the study commission as being a more practical way to evaluate and deal with pay issues.)

In any case, regardless of future changes, none of those now receiving cost-of-living allowances—almost all pastors/administrators—would have their assistance lowered from that amount presently being received.

- Calculation of retirement pay (as well as payments into the retirement fund), will be based on both pay and cost-of-living allowances (COLA). COLA will be based on Educational Research Institute calculations and would be open for reevaluation yearly.
- Changes made to the health plan include increases in deductibles, essentially across the board. Coverage would otherwise remain the same. ■

New York Adventists Cooperate With Muslims to Promote Peace

ROBERT DARKEN

Samir Selmanovic, pastor of Church of the Advent Hope in New York City, was among those honored at a special recognition dinner held on Sept. 9 by the group Muslims Against Terrorism (MAT). MAT co-founder and director of Interfaith Outreach, Yasemin Saib, praised Selmanovic for his role in supporting the group's efforts to fight terrorism. "Pastor Selmanovic's kindness, his genuine love and care for all humankind has made him a role model for what a spiritual leader should be," said Saib. "He has been a true blessing to our organization."

MAT was founded after the September 11 terrorist attacks, by a group of young Muslim-American professionals who wanted to take action to prevent future terrorism. According to MAT's Web site (www.matusa.org), the group's mission is "to stand against those who preach violence and hatred in the name of Islam and to promote peace and understanding through interfaith and intercultural coalition building." MAT reasons that much of the violence between Muslims and non-Muslims is predicated on a fundamental misunderstanding of Islam. MAT works to defuse violence by educating both Muslims and non-Muslims about Islam's message.

The relationship between MAT and Church of the Advent Hope evolved in the turmoil of the post-9/11 environment in New York City. Like the young people who began Muslims Against Terrorism, the members of Advent Hope actively sought ways to repair an emotionally battered community. Pastor Selmanovic held grief counseling sessions every evening at the church. Church members organized a benefit concert, with all proceeds going to the families of nine firefighters from the local fire station who had been killed on September 11. Several of the community members who came for counseling even performed in the concert. But Advent Hope's most daring response to September 11 was the idea to host an interfaith discussion be-

tween Christians and Muslims at the peak of anxieties and hostilities between the groups in the city.

"The purpose was to learn and experience the best of the other," Selmanovic said. "Misunderstanding and violence are less likely to occur in an atmosphere that fosters respect. We needed to hear one another's point of view, try hard to understand the other side."

To that end, Selmanovic and volunteer church members organized a weekend of activities in November 2001 that focused on building an understanding of Islam. Dr. Jerald Whitehouse, founder and director of the Global Center for Adventist-Muslim Relations, based in California, spoke at Advent Hope's Friday evening vespers and Sabbath worship service. On Monday evening there was a panel discussion, open to the community, featuring Whitehouse, the imams of two local mosques, and Saib from MAT.

The decision to invite Islamic leaders to speak at Advent Hope was not without controversy. In the climate of fear bordering on hysteria that pervaded America after September 11, Arabs and Muslims were viewed with an attitude of distrust and suspicion. Several members of Advent Hope and the local community approached Selmanovic and strongly advised him not to hold the event. "That made me quite nervous," Selmanovic recalled. "But I also felt that if church needs to take a countercultural role, it will probably feel nervous about it. The fear was palpable. I knew that opening a respectful dialogue could calm anxieties and ultimately help the city. I also thought, 'How can we even start to cope with our own prejudices unless we listen to voices besides our own?'"

The interfaith discussion was conceived and organized by two people. Sylvia Hordosch had read about MAT in

the *New York Times*, and she contacted the group to invite a spokesperson to Advent Hope. Saib agreed to come and recommended they also invite Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf from a mosque near the site of the World Trade Center. The other imam invited was Omar Abu Namous, representing the 96th Street mosque near Advent Hope, the largest mosque in the state. Approximately 100 people attended the event; about 80 were not from Advent Hope.

Iowaka Barber served as moderator at the event, posing a series of questions for the three guests to discuss. Afterwards, audience members were invited to ask

Church members organized a benefit concert, with all proceeds going to the families of nine firefighters from the local fire station that had been killed on September 11.

questions of the panel. Dr. Whitehouse concluded the program with comments about how to bridge the gap between the Christian and Muslim faiths.

"People wanted to try to understand a faith they had been exposed to via the media," said Barber. "But they were skeptical of the media and looking for clarity. They came to the discussion hoping to hear moderate Muslim voices speaking out."

Hordosch encourages other Christians to build interfaith bridges as well. "The religious community has so much potential for doing good," she said. "But it also has the potential to hurt and incite people. That's how faith and religion get a bad name. We have a responsibility to learn about what others believe and why, because ours is not the only way of seeing." ■

Robert Darken is a reporter for The New York Times.

UNITY, DIVERSITY, LOYALTY AND OBEDIENCE: The Perspective of the General Conference President

ERVIN TAYLOR

A major policy address by the president of the General Conference (GC) is typically an occasion for observers to give much close inspection and dissection of its actual or assumed theological and/or political meaning and purpose. It should be of particular interest that the address occurred at a meeting of some 45 church leaders who had been convened to consider, over the period of a week (April 29 to May 8, 2002), "Theological Unity in a Growing World Church." The group was almost entirely composed of General Conference personnel, with

"several scholars" in attendance.

A significant address was given by the current GC president, Dr. Jan Paulsen, on the topic of "The Theological Landscape." This is because, unlike his predecessors, he has excellent scholarly and

academic credentials. His earned doctoral degree is from Tübingen, a prestigious German university. It is also noteworthy that the assembled leaders asked that his address be published, and it was, two times in the *Adventist Review*: as an insert in the June 13, 2002, world edition and as a separate article in the October 2002 North American Division edition. Clearly, church leadership thinks this document is important.

The major themes of his essay are not immediately clear in the opening para-

graphs, but later they are revealed to be what its author views as the tension between (1) unity and diversity in a world church, (2) the concept of "obedience where you are in time, culture, and experience," and (3) the importance of "loyalty to our heritage and our identity" as a church. These three major themes are interwoven in his statements relating his understanding of the current Seventh-day Adventist theological landscape.

In his view, "the church works the best when unity and diversity coexist in a nonhostile tension, learning to defer creatively to each other, but loving that which they share more than they love themselves." He recognizes that there is "some theological polarity" in the church of "the right or the left, reactionary or liberal" and asks how the church should deal with this reality. His pragmatic answer is "learn to live with it." However, he attaches a very explicit proviso to his short answer—the church at all times must be loyal to its heritage and identity.

Dr. Paulsen insists that "obedience to the Lord is always obedience where one is—in time, in culture, in experience, and in history. And salvation is contingent on that obedience." While he appears to be very comfortable with a significant amount of cultural diversity in the church, which allows for variety in worship formats and musical tastes, he states that he can abide neither theological "pluralism nor syncretism." In his view, there is "no place for these in our church." To him, what is "critical" to a united world church is "doctrinal integrity...[with] the same points of belief...[formulated] similarly," a single church manual, "a common organizational structure," the same "weekly Bible study focus," and the sharing of "the gift of God to our church in the writings of Ellen White."

Paulsen has spoken out previously and continues in this essay to forthrightly state the "need for the church as an organization to make an impact on society in matters of social care, welfare, health, education and yes, even government and politics." His focus on this has occasioned the question of whether he wishes to shift the vision of the church to some kind of "social gospel." His answer in this essay to that question is simple and straightforward: No. "Our understanding of the Word and of our doctrines, particularly as formulated in our 27 fundamental beliefs (all of them [his emphasis]) is clear."

However, he says that, in his view, the church has a "leadership problem." This perceived "problem" proceeds from his insistence that all church leaders, from the local church pastor up, in all parts of the world should support by word and deed, what Dr. Paulsen views as "God's plan that Seventh-day Adventists should be *one around the world*." Unhealthy local thinking will "lead eventually to some kind of Congregationalism." If "oneness falters, we will risk disintegrating as *one church*" [his emphasis].

Under the heading "The Second Coming—Do We Still Believe?" he suggests that "sadly

“Adventists, he insists, need to continue to “stand apart and be separate from the organized ecumenical movement” because this is the “only way we can be faithful to our mission and identity.”

there are in [our faith] community those who in truth no longer believe these things as we used to." Unless we "very deliberately attend to our teaching... we will drift and become



Ervin Taylor is professor of anthropology at the University of California, Riverside and executive editor of *Adventist Today*.

what we were not when we first took the name Adventist." He suggests that a belief in a second coming derives from an Adventist view of the world that they do not share with other Christians, namely that "the world as we know it is not reparable and is not survivable." On the other hand, he argues that in order to believe in the "reality of the last things"—which he says are to be "accepted by faith"—it is not a "prerequisite that all things be perfectly clearly understood."

By "last things" he specifically refers to the Adventist sanctuary doctrine, the second coming, and the final judgment.

Under "The Question of Identity," Paulsen asks whether we Adventists have "become or are we becoming more recognizable as 'Christians' than we are as Seventh-day Adventist Christians?" In speaking out in favor of the church's "readiness to protect our identity," he states that he wishes to remind his fellow church members that we "chose to be Seventh-day Adventists" and that we are "a community of Christians with a very specific and defined identity." People deliberately choose to become Seventh-day Adventist Christians for "some very good reasons," and these reasons should not be made "to look inconsequential or irrelevant." As an example, in his discussion of "Interchurch Relations" he asks, "Do we need to change our basic prophetic scenario?" His own answer is, "Emphatically...no." He suggests that from the earliest days of the Adventist movement, we have stated "that we foresee in Scripture two super, geopolitical powers gaining prominence in the latter days, and we have stated which two political and religious powers these would be." Adventists, he insists, need to continue to "stand apart and be separate from the organized ecumenical movement" because this is the "only way we can be faithful to our mission and identity."

To Paulsen, what apparently is an important part of that identity is the church's continuing view of itself as "the 'historical remnant' gathering the 'faithful remnant' from any and all comers to the purposes of God." Under the section entitled "The Idea of 'Remnant,'" he notes that we, as a church—although we sometimes hesitate and are not at ease when we do—use *remnant language* [his emphasis]. It is in this context that

Paulsen makes the following statement that, because of its forthright character, is quoted here in its entirety:

"[As a church] we shun the perception of being arrogant, and we don't want to come across as being overly exclusive, but at the same time we believe that being *Seventh-day Adventists* [his emphasis] has direct bearing on our salvation; that while a believer can be saved as a Catholic, I would risk my whole spiritual life and salvation were I to leave what I am now and join any other community. Also we hold that the Adventist community is an instrument for salvation in God's hand such as no other."

He immediately follows this statement with the comment that very little is written in the church on ecclesiology—the nature of the church. To him the problem is that the "linkage between a member's growth in knowledge and understanding and the uncompromising responsibility of discipleship is not pursued as it should be.... The fact is that one cannot as a disciple step out of what one is today and go back into a state of less knowing and less understanding." That knowing and understanding, he states, is "constantly moving forward, constantly building on what was there yesterday. Anything other than that would be disobedience." Such a view, he insists, should temper our view of other Christian faith communities or "other experiences and cultures within our own church. One has to consider where they are in their knowledge of the Lord and His truth, and in their experience with Him.... Those with whom I share my discoveries must also respond to Christ and dynamically move forward as the Spirit convicts... or their relationship with the Lord is compromised. It's a never-ending process, and it's why we must share our understanding with Christians of other identities...so we conduct evangelism among...other Christian communities [doing this] without sitting in judgment on what they were before.... So, in a sense,

the "remnant" church both *is* and *is in* a constant process of *becoming* [his emphasis]."

Commentary

This essay—at least to this reader—is not simple to analyze. If people read it too quickly, they might dismiss it as just another exhortation of an ordinary church leader to "stick to the landmarks." First of all, Paulsen is very far from being a typical or ordinary ecclesiastical administrator. Secondly, a lot of things are said, but many are left unsaid. For example, it may or may not be important to point out that nowhere in this document

“The fact is that one cannot as a disciple step out of what one is today and go back into a state of less knowing and less understanding.” That knowing and understanding, he states, is “constantly moving forward, constantly building on what was there yesterday. Anything other than that would be disobedience.”

does Paulsen refer to an "imminent" second coming. However, in view of his explicit concern about "drifting" away from the original Adventist belief in an imminent second coming, one probably should not read into this omission much, if any, significance. Thirdly, in places in the essay there are hints and references in the way he expresses himself that, despite his defense of traditional Adventist theological values, he appears to realize the limitations of orthodoxy in a post-modern world.

It might be the mark of a good essay on this topic if both progressives ("liberals") and traditionalists ("reactionaries") have serious objections to parts—but different parts—of the statement. I can't speak from the perspective of a reactionary or traditionalist, but I can imagine that some with certain theological orientations—for example, members of the Adventist Theological Society—might not be entirely happy with some of the positions taken.

Continued on page 10

The Perspective of the General Conference President

Continued from page 9

However, from the perspective of one who has respect for Paulsen as a scholar (see my comments on his dissertation, page 11), he nevertheless expresses some opinions which I view as very troubling and, assuming that I understand what he is saying, highly problematic because they come, in places, much too close to supporting a fundamentalist ethic for the church.

One of Paulsen's most troubling suggestions is that being a Seventh-day Adventist has a direct bearing on one's salvation. A member of the Roman Catholic Church can be saved as a Catholic, but Paulsen says that "I would risk my whole spiritual life and salvation were I to leave what I am now and join any other community." One might note that in the same sentence there is a change from a generalizing comment—being an Adventist has a direct bearing on salvation—to his own personal *confession*—his own salvation is bound up in his being one. This is a helpful distinction. But why does Paulsen think that his own obviously deeply felt private and personal commitment and confessional position must be generalized and made normative for all church members? Perhaps it is because of his view that "we," that is, Seventh-day Adventists, are "an instrument for salvation in God's hand such as no other." Few would disagree with the first seven words of that sentence—we are one of many instruments for salvation in God's hand. But why "as no other?" One might conceive that for some individuals with certain personalities in certain situations perhaps the Adventist message is the only means God might have to reach them where they are at a particular time and place. But to generalize raises the specter of a highly inappropriate exclusivity in our understanding of our role as an institutional church in God's plan for the world.

This specter is rendered more concrete because the comments he makes on this topic are embedded in his discussion of the church as "remnant." The traditional Adventist position that our denomination is "the Remnant Church" of Revelation 12 is a classic expression of a fundamentalist,

triumphalistic sect-type church—using *sect* here in its sociological sense. Paulsen recognizes that many Adventists are very hesitant and uneasy with the church's use of "remnant language." (One reason for the unease is that to many our historic interpretation of Revelation 12 to support this position clearly wrenches the text out of any reasonable context.) In considering this, one might get the impression that Paulsen might be attempting to nudge traditional Adventist "remnant language" toward a more nuanced stance by offering the view that "in a sense, the remnant church both *is* and *is in* a constant process of *becoming*." He would probably deny that he had any such intent. However, if, as he suggests, becoming a "remnant" is, like one's spiritual journey, a "never-ending process," it is possible that someone other than Paulsen might see this as providing a new ground on which to rethink as a faith community our classic, sectarian concept of "the remnant."

His suggestion that "the church works the best when unity and diversity coexist in a nonhostile tension" is one of the more hopeful, forward-looking statements in the entire essay. He recognizes the inevitability of this tension, and his recommendation as to how to respond is "live with it." This is the view of a pragmatic person. This position might yield an insight into the motif that animates the author of "The Theological Landscape" to express the view he does in the way he does.

Several individuals in a position to know have commented that Paulsen is a consummate, principled political churchman—here using "political" in the very best Aristotelian sense. He knows what will work and what will not in his church—both theologically and organizationally. His instincts and personality were not crafted within American Adventism but within European, and specifically northern European, Adventism. There the exercise of power is more muted and subtle than when exercised by someone acculturated and socialized within a middle-class American

culture. In watching Paulsen chair a session at a GC Annual Council, one sees that he does not have to demonstrate that he is in charge.

Dr. Paulsen exhibits here the sophistication of a theologically traditional, yet pragmatic, socially conscious, capable and well-educated Adventist church leader who knows well what his church—viewed from a worldwide perspective—will be able to live with at this time. Although he employs fundamentalist-like expressions on several occasions there is, in some cases, a decided pulling back from extreme positions. Many of his positions are far from what progressives would like to see the "Theological Landscape" of their church look like, but it is also probably far from how most reactionaries would like to see it as well. Perhaps coming from the perspective of a practical church man, this essay represents what Paulsen believes to be the best (only?) balance possible at this time given the realities of the dominant ideology and structure of the contemporary worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church. Who at this time has a greater understanding of these realities? ■

The reviewer wishes to acknowl-

“ One of Paulsen's most troubling suggestions is that being a Seventh-day Adventist has a direct bearing on one's salvation. ”

edge and express appreciation to Dr. Paulsen for his helpful comments on a first draft of this review and commentary.

The Coming of Methodism to West Nigeria With Particular Attention to Its Growth Among the Ijebu People

REVIEWED BY ERVIN TAYLOR

The University of Tübingen (now the Eberhard-Karls-Universität zu Tübingen) is one of the most renowned scholarly institutions of Germany and all of Europe. Founded in 1477, its Protestant theological faculty was established in 1534 and numbers the astronomer Johannes Kepler and the philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel among its illustrious graduates.

Dr. Paulsen is the first General Conference president to hold an earned doctorate, and it is from this distinguished European university. His two-volume, 453-page (310 pages of text and 143 pages of footnotes and references) dissertation is a case study in assessing Methodism's approach to "Mission" in Nigeria beginning in the middle of the 19th century. The purpose of his research was to examine "which areas of Methodism touched elements in the traditional beliefs of the people and with what results [and] to assess the methods they used and the results achieved."

Most of the text of the dissertation reports on his research into various aspects of the history of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS), the various tribulations of establishing and maintaining its work in West Africa, the nature of the Ijebu people in Western Nigeria, where Methodism was particularly successful, and the nature of Methodist Christianity introduced there following a British invasion of the region in 1892. There is also an examination of the development of WMMS social involvement in terms of its educational and, much later, medical efforts and in relationship to the issues surrounding polygamy.

In his concluding, more generalizing chapter, Dr. Paulsen addresses what he views as the function of the "Church Universal," suggesting an interesting contrast between "Mission"—the church's social responsibility to the marginalized and

oppressed peoples of the world to bring peace and justice—and "MISSION"—the traditional "proclamation of the Good News that God has in Christ reconciled man to himself." Evangelical missions, including Methodist missions—and he does not say it, but certainly Adventist missions would be included—have never doubted the primacy of MISSION.

He notes that Methodism (and Adventism?) would reject "anything that smacked of 'congregationalism.'" Church development must be in the context of the "Connexional" principal, that is, that the local church even in Asia, India and North Africa must always exist in the setting of a wider fellowship that would be uniquely Methodist. He addresses the meticulous process by which Wesleyan Methodism slowly moved their local units from a foreign, British-led, funded and controlled "mission" to an independent, locally led and financed "church" and specifically the emergence of what he calls a "responsible" church. By "responsible church" he means one that is "sensitive and responsive to the needs of the individuals it touches and of the community and the nation as a whole." The "responsible church" must also be "responsive to the changing needs of the people it claims to serve. Otherwise the Church will find itself catering to imagined needs and thereby its message becom[es] irrelevant."

In the concluding chapter, he also addresses those factors which are responsible for the creation of breakaway movements. In this context, he notes the dangers of syncretism, in this case the "blending of the African traditional worldview and biblical thought" that he views as a means by which, quoting an earlier author, "Africans are brought back to heathendom."

In a brief review one cannot do justice to the many details of the topic included

in the dissertation. Just a few additional points can be noted here taken from different parts of his study: (1) He notes the "Christian Presence" view that the Christian missionary comes not to bring Christ "with him" to share with non-Christians but, "together with the believers in traditional religions, to watch...as Christ appears from within the traditional religion in order in this way to change the traditional world-view." Dr. Paulsen appears to question the validity of "Christian Presence" arguments.

(2) With reference to the problem of accommodating the widespread African practice of polygamy to the traditional Christian view of marriage, he comments, "We believe that it is in the monogamous family that the idea of the Christian marriage can best be attained. Even so, when the Church demands this in a polygamous context, its position must be restudied in order for the Church to realistically meet and answer the problems which arise in such situations."

(3) He discusses the mission's relationship with the pre-Christian beliefs of one of the Nigerian ethnic groups, emphasizing the fact that they were a deeply religious people. The task of a Christian missionary in this context, he insists, is not to make "an indifferent people religious but to make a very religious people see the superiority of Christianity over traditional beliefs...[which] are inseparable... from the social and cultural sides of Ijebu life." He suggested that Christian missions in Africa have historically had great difficulty with the problem of how to make Christians out of their converts without destroying the relationship of the convert to the indigenous cultural and social fabric of traditional African societies, the elements of which—for example, the reality of spirits and spirit-powers—define their new converts' psychological identity and definition of social self. ■

William Johnsson has been the editor of the *Adventist Review* since 1982. We interviewed him in his office in Silver Spring, Maryland.

AT: What do you find most satisfying or most exciting about the Seventh-day Adventist Church today?

WJ: The people, the incredible variety of people. It's a feisty fellowship. We have people who are wonderful and people who

most of the world's Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists live]. It is very simple, a single sheet both sides, written in third-grade level English which will be sent electronically to offices in Asia, India, North Africa, and people there will translate and distribute it.

We're in Spanish, Korean, Telugu, French, Romanian, German. Our online English edition receives 1.8 million hits per month from 106 different countries. So we're trying by a variety of means to be

in a sense the paper is older than the denomination. Certainly their prosperity is interrelated.

The *Review* has articulated the church. At times it has sought to be a prophetic voice for the church. It has given news and information about the church. However, the *Review* has not been the voice of the church. Its contents are not approved by the GC officers or executive committee. True, it reports the official actions of the

IN HIS OWN WORDS: JOHN THOMAS MCLARTY Editor Of *Adventist Review* Speaks With *Adventist Today*

are strange. We have a wide spectrum of opinions within this church, which I think has been true from the beginning. Adventists tend to be individualists, perhaps not as much as they used to be in the 19th century, but I think there is still a high level of individuality in this church. And it is this incredible diversity among God's people that most engages my heart.

AT: Give us a brief overview of the *Adventist Review*.

WJ: The *Review* is the church paper, which means we serve the whole church. But the church is active in more than 200 countries, speaks many languages and lives in many different cultures, all of which makes ours an impossible job.

In North America (NA), we publish four principal editions per month. The first edition goes to about 300,000 Adventist homes across North America. The other three editions per month go to about 50,000 paid subscribers. The second edition focuses on world issues. The third edition targets young adults. And the fourth edition addresses Adventist heritage and doctrine. Every issue aims at inspiration and includes news and at least two pages of letters.

In an endeavor to fulfill our mission as the paper for the whole church, we have developed many other editions: Pacific Press now publishes a Spanish edition for NA. Beyond that we have another 14 print editions. One that is just now being developed is a specialized paper for people in the "10/40 Window" [the area from West Africa to East Asia, 10 degrees north to 40 degrees north of the equator, where

the church paper. I think it's apparent that while the subscriber base in NA is crucial for the health of the journal, it is only a part of the total *Review* story.

AT: What kind of control does your office exercise over all these various editions?

WJ: Back in 1996 when we created the "new *Review*," with four distinctive foci per month, the second edition each month was to be the "World Edition." The GC pushed the divisions to publish translations of this world edition. The *Review* office here was to have final control of all these editions. The world field did not buy into this, not surprisingly.

I had gone along with this earlier approach very reluctantly. But with the change of administration we scrapped the top-down approach. Now, we tell the international editors, we're here to serve. If you want an edition, we'll help you. The GC will pay for the translation and all other pre-press costs for anything you reprint from the *Review*.

The editions around the world now are localized, contextualized. The editors have a free hand to take anything they like from us. Some use nearly everything we send them, adding local news, their own letters and editorials. Others use much less.

AT: How do you see the relationship between Adventism as a whole and the *Review*?

WJ: From the beginning the relationship has been a very close one. It may well be unique among Christian bodies. The *Review* and the church have been side by side from the beginning. The church paper was the first thing we did, in 1849. In fact,

church. It carries the minutes of the GC sessions. But beyond that, the editor retains final say over the content of the paper.

Occasionally, at an annual council, someone will propose a motion that would mandate specific content for the *Review*. But no such action has ever passed. The first time it was attempted during my tenure, Neal Wilson, the GC president, immediately stated it was out of place, saying, "We cannot tie the hands of the editor." I've had mostly good relationships with the presidents of the church, especially with the current one.

AT: But your office is in the GC building. Aren't you affected by the place where you work?

WJ: We operate within a context. I am an invitee with voice and vote to the administrative committee, which is composed of about 20 to 25 members. There are obvious advantages to this: It keeps me aware of the plans and thinking of church leaders, and I can respond to questions about the operation of the *Review*. Of course, as an active participant of this crucial committee, I could be pulled into "the circle of power." I am not immune to that. But again, I must emphasize the formal responsibility for the content of the journal rests fully on my office. The GC committee does not edit the *Adventist Review*. They can fire the editor; they cannot dictate content. I would resign rather than be dictated to as editor.

AT: I understand you read every letter to the editor. Looking back over your years as

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I was asked the question, “Do you feel that the salary you receive as a Seventh-day Adventist pastor meets your needs and the needs of your family?” My answer is yes, and there are three reasons why I don’t want to compare my salary with the “going rate.”

First, I feel that if I am truly honest with myself and choose to be a worker for God, I will be chosen. Being chosen or called is not something that we do, nor that others do. It is something God does. The first question I ask myself before I take a position in or out of church work is, “Did God call me?” That is all that matters. If so, I will have peace and all my needs will be taken care of. It doesn’t mean that I will live like the family next door or even have all my wants supplied, but I know for sure that my needs will be met (Phil 4:19).

Next, I must consider if I have the skill to fulfill the call. That, too, I have to get from God. All things are possible with God. He is first looking for the person, and then he will “gift” them to fill the position. Is God going to call the wrong person? Doesn’t he know whether you have what it takes to do the job?

Thirdly, what about the blessing? How do we perceive what a blessing is? That is between us and God. In our relationship to him he shares with us beyond our greatest expectations!

Look at how God dealt with the building of the sanctuary in the desert. “The Lord spoke unto Moses saying, ‘I have called by name Bezaleel and have filled him with the spirit of God in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship. And...I have given him Aholiab. And in the hearts of all that are wise-hearted I have put wisdom, that they may make all that I have commanded thee’” (Exod 31:1-6). God called them by name to do a special work for him, and similarly he has a special work for each of us.

Next, after the call, he prepares us. God has been urging us all the time to take advantage of the blessings and opportunities for service that he has

provided right before us. Then, when the call comes, we can see how God has led in our preparation for bigger things. We may feel that we really had very little to do with the call, that we just chose to surrender to the caller.

CALLED, GIFTED & BLESSED

VALERIE SEARNS

There is no call for service that is too small, degrading or unimportant. There is no task too big, overwhelming or impossible if God calls us to it. If we surrender to him, he is there to supply the gift, skill, energy and wisdom. He did it for Bezaleel and Aholiab. They were called because they were ready. Why? Was it their skill, or their willingness to surrender to God’s will all along? The skills they had developed in mundane tasks were to be used in one of the most important jobs of their time. And they were blessed in every way.

There is another side to this picture. What happens if someone accepts a position although not chosen or called by God? Let’s say someone in authority calls the candidate without consulting God or asking his wisdom in the call, and the person accepts. Look at what happened in the building of Solomon’s temple. Ellen White says, “The descendants of these men [Moses’ workers] to a large degree inherited the skill that had been conferred upon their forefathers. In the tribes of Judah and Dan there were men who were regarded as especially ‘cunning’ in the finer arts. For a time these men remained humble and unselfish; but gradually, almost imperceptibly, they lost their hold upon God and his truth. They began to ask for higher wages because of their superior skill.” Soon they were seeing that they could get higher wages from the surrounding nations. They had lost

the spirit of self-sacrifice and ended up using their God-given skills to serve the heathen kings (making idols), in turn dishonoring their Maker. “It was from these apostates that Solomon looked for a master workman to superintend the

construction of the temple on Mt. Moriah. Minute specifications, in writing regarding every portion of the sacred structure, had been entrusted to the king, and he should have looked to God for consecrated helpers, to whom would have been granted special skill” (*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 1027).

The Phoenician king responded by sending Hiram, “a cunning man, the son of a woman of the daughters of Dan, and his father was a man of Tyre.” In the end Solomon put at the head of sacred work an unsanctified man, who later demanded large wages because of his skill. His life showed his selfish nature and his desire to grasp for the highest wages. Soon his workers were comparing their wages with his and lost sight of the holy work that they were doing. The baleful influences set in operation permeated all branches of the Lord’s service and extended throughout Solomon’s kingdom. Extravagance and corruption were to be seen on every hand. The rich oppressed the poor; the spirit of self-sacrifice in God’s service was well nigh lost.

Ellen White wrote, “The sharp contrast between the spirit and motives of the people building the wilderness tabernacle, and of those engaged in erecting Solomon’s temple, has a lesson of deep significance. The self-seeking that characterized the workers on the temple finds its counterpart today in the selfishness that rules in the world. The spirit of covetousness, of seeking for the highest position and the highest wage, is rife” (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 64).

Why don’t I choose to compare my salary with the going rate? I believe I have been called. I have been gifted in a special way to accomplish the task before me. I will continue to be blessed by having all my needs met. That is why I answer the first question, yes! ■

It was a warm summer evening when I knocked on the door of a new family who had started attending our church. They were wanting more information about becoming members, and the father had recently asked me to give baptismal studies to his oldest son. Even though the parents were new to the Adventist church, they had been dedicated Christians for most of their adult life. It was clear to many in our church that the father had definite pastoral leadership gifts. I even invited him to the local conference pastor's retreat, where he met with several other ministers and conference workers. I could tell that he was pondering the idea of becoming an Adventist pastor himself.

But first, he was hoping to sort out some serious questions about how Seventh-day Adventists understand the Bible.

When he opened the door, I was immediately directed to the dining room for our visit. Going through the kitchen, I noticed a witnessing book (which I had recently loaned him) laid open on the dining table. The pages were open to the appendix where the 27 fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were printed.

The Twenty-Seven

He had read through the statement of these 27 beliefs, and he started right in with several serious questions about authority in the church. For example: Were these fundamental beliefs authoritative for Adventists, or was there room for disagreement? If so, how much? How much freedom was there for someone to disagree with the doctrines as written, and still be a pastor in good standing? Could one revise or ignore any of these beliefs? Was it "OK" to openly disagree? In other words, he wasn't simply interested in what the church believed on paper, but how the church believed, and how much freedom there was to differ. The reason was obvious as he pointed to fundamental belief No. 17.

Number 17—Is Ellen an Option?

I remember when he pointed to fundamental belief No. 17, which described the gift of prophecy in Ellen White as a "continuing and authoritative source of truth."

This bothered him extremely, as it was a clear message to him and other Christians that Adventist belief was not really based on the Bible "alone." Even though the rest of the fundamental beliefs pointed to the Bible as the final appeal, this first part bothered him. He couldn't buy it. I explained how the fundamental beliefs were not inerrant, nor infallible. They were more descriptive of what many members believed, but there was room to wiggle. I explained that I didn't "buy" this doctrine either.

IS ELLEN AN OPTION?

RANDY A. CROFT

Of course, I explained how spiritual gifts will be in the church until the coming of Jesus, including the gift of prophecy (Eph 4:11-13). I also explained that many members do see her in a prophetic light. Yet there were also those who could not accept her as a voice of authority. It seemed to undermine the role of Scripture.

I couldn't really ignore this topic. I admit, frankly, that it bothered me how many of my fellow pastors used Ellen White's writings with pulpit power and persuasion. I've been in Sabbath schools and church meetings where Ellen White's writings were used as the final word for the discussion, an appeal of authority.

Both Sides of the Coin

Ellen White herself described the Bible as the only authoritative revelation of God's will (*Great Controversy*, p. vii). Early Adventists, especially her husband, James, were convinced that believing in Ellen White's prophetic gift was not to be a test among Adventists. It was to be a personal and private conviction among Advent believers.¹

But I also knew of other statements: "God speaks to men today through the Testimonies" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, 148). "The Holy Ghost is the author of the Scriptures and of the Spirit of Prophecy" (*Selected Messages*, vol. 3, 30). "The power of God would come upon me, and I was enabled clearly to define what is

truth and what is error" (*Gospel Workers*, 302). "In these letters which I write, in the testimonies I bear, I am presenting to you that which the Lord has presented to me. I do not write one article in the paper expressing merely my own ideas. They are what God has opened before me in vision—the precious rays of light shining from the throne" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 67).

Was Ellen White an option? That was the question. I confessed to my friend that, even as an Adventist pastor, I couldn't support this belief or the way many church members use her writings. "Let's just say," I reasoned, "that she was highly influential, and her writings remain so." But that's not what the statement says, and I knew it.

That wasn't enough to satisfy his question. He didn't want to simply theorize, but see how she was used in the local church. Would she be used with biblical-like authority in our services? He planned to visit another Adventist church nearby to find out.

A few weeks later, my friend visited a nearby Adventist church to see how they believed in scripture—not *what*, but *how*. Well, it wasn't a positive experience. The Sabbath school class appealed to Ellen White's writings "90 percent of the time" for confirmation in discussing the lesson. He could hardly stay through church, he admitted. In his own words, "I didn't sense the passion for the word of God." He wept as he shared this experience with me. This was very unsettling to my friend—and to me.

I knew my church. I'd visited scores of Adventist churches and knew that he would find a mixture on this issue. Some Adventist churches rarely use Ellen White in sermon and study. Others use her every week. Does it really matter? Is how we live fundamental belief No. 17 really that important?

The Option Matters

There are a couple of reasons why I believe and hope that Ellen White's writings and authority in the Seventh-day Adventist Church will become more publicly endorsed as "optional" in our preaching, teaching and literature. The way we often live our beliefs in this matter really does

complicate and confuse the role of scripture at times. Let's not be too offended or zealous to think otherwise.

There is a definite conception among sincere and interested non-Adventist Christians that we Seventh-day Adventists are not looking to the Bible alone for our faith and practice. This is largely because of our inability to clarify the relationship between the Bible and Ellen White's prophetic function. Clarification is needed, not silent avoidance or intentional indifference.

There are many sincere Seventh-day Adventists who have found the recent research regarding Ellen White's role and inspiration troubling, including myself (especially since 1980). There are thousands of pages of information on the Internet for those interested in learning about Ellen White. Some are positive and some are more skeptical. Instead of a natural defensive reaction to confirm, entrench and defend, we really need to consider the honest seeker for truth in this matter.

If we are truly *sola scriptura* (based on scripture alone), then even the most nega-

tive information won't be too bothersome. It won't matter. A lion doesn't need to be defended, and neither should Ellen White. Her authority shouldn't be an issue, if she is actively promoted as optional. Scripture is the final foundation for the Adventist faith.

While some will undoubtedly disagree with my assessment, let's at least be honest with what often takes place in scores of churches around the world. I've preached and worshipped with Adventists on four continents and have received the same concern over how Ellen White is often elevated above Scripture.

A final reason why Ellen White's writings should be optional has to do with reaching the lost. For the many members still waiting to invite their unsaved friends and family, we need to provide assurance that we really are a people who appeal to scripture alone in matters of faith and lifestyle.

This shift in thinking will be no problem for those firmly grounded in scripture. They will lose nothing, for they already have biblical support for teaching, preaching and

witnessing. Through time and additional research, our understanding of Ellen White will be revised, but the role of scripture will remain secure.

Whether we change fundamental belief No. 17 is not the most important challenge facing the church today. But others are watching, from within and without, to see how we will practice using God's Holy Word. This teaching alone, in what my friend read and experienced, was enough to keep him from wholeheartedly embracing the Adventist message.

And I'm sure that he's not the only one. ■

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¹Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, Oct 16, 1855; Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, June 13, 1871. Also Testimonies, vol. 1, 327-329, 382-384; Evangelism, p. 172, 258; Welfare Ministry, 172; Colporteur Ministry, 42; Counsels to Parents and Teachers, 453; Selected Messages, vol. 1, 259, 383-388.

Editor Of Adventist Review Speaks With Adventist Today

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editor, what changes have you noticed in the letters?

WJ: We receive fewer angry letters. The letters in the 1980s were so much involved with theology and heavy-handed administration. That was the most terrible time in my ministry. And we received many very angry letters. It came as an amazing insight that I would get an angry letter, and often it would be only after I had turned the page that I would discover which side they were coming from. Either the left or the right theologically. The spirit would be identical—anger with the church and its leadership.

There is less anger now but more pain. We have encouraged this by publishing articles that have laid bare areas like sexual abuse. So people feel free to express that. Recently, I received a letter from someone telling me how she was abused. She mentions people who are still employed by the church. I don't recall getting letters like that. The letters now are more gut wrenching.

AT: What are the greatest challenges fac-

ing our church structurally?

WJ: The growth of the church. We have grown beyond all expectations of our pioneers. The growth is mostly in developing countries where people are less affluent, less educated. Since we have a basically democratic system for electing leaders, increasingly the representatives to the world council and the nominating committee will not come from the West. We are seeing the church creaking and groaning under the stresses already. I predict that the stresses will become much more pronounced. I think a critical moment will come, and it may not be many years away, when the church elects a non-Caucasian, non-Western president. I think this will be a defining moment.

A huge need among us right now, and I think our president is trying to help us in this area, is to accept differences. You hear him emphasize "quality of life," which includes accepting that we don't have to all be the same. He talks about obedience in our own culture, obedience to the Lord where we are.

AT: Do you envision that a Third World

president will be an activist in attempting to "reform" or "purify" the NA church theologically?

WJ: That could happen; however, if there is division I think it would occur first in regard to money. We are facing financial stresses. The giving is not drying up, but the church is growing so much faster. In addition the GC is downsizing itself. Each year the NA treasury sends on a smaller percentage of its tithe. This was not so noticeable while the economy was booming, but now it is having a significant impact on the church. NA has more money available, but in areas where the church is growing and they need churches, schools and hospitals, the money just isn't there.

AT: Do you lie awake at night worrying about the theological or financial threats to the future of a united Adventist Church?

WJ: I don't. I have faith that the Lord is head of this church. I'm glad he is. There is no way any human being could handle this church. Do I see ready solutions to our problems? No. But then my New Testament background prepares me for surprises. God surprises us. ■

Think of yourself fleeing for your life, your only hope of escape to get through a traffic bottleneck at the one river crossing that is open. The military has set up a checkpoint. Your “passport” to avoid death is to prove your identity by speaking an elusive dialect, something like trilling your Rs to prove you are a true Scot. Can you say “Shibboleth”? Or have you always since babyhood pronounced it “Sibboleth”?

You can’t fake it. Your head will roll unless you can say it just right. Some 42,000 Ephraimites “fell” at the Jordan because they couldn’t say the word to satisfy the military guards (Judges 12:5, 6).

Is the nature of Christ our Adventist “Shibboleth”? Are we dividing ourselves over a theological trifle, anathematizing others who just can’t say it right? Says an issue of the *Newsletter for the Association of Adventist Forums*: “Theological and hermeneutical differences seem a part of Adventism. Congregations have parted; friends separated. Are such differences all that important?” (May, 1997).

We who write this appeal are not concerned with settling intricate semantic problems in a theoretical or academic way. And we don’t disfellowship anyone. We are not scholars, theologians, or historians—just simple missionaries who belong in Africa where in our youth we were sent to serve. As bottom-of-the-ladder missionaries, we saw that our task, assigned us by the General Conference, was to prepare the African church for the second coming of Christ. Serious business! It was in Africa that we learned to view this controversy on the nature of Christ from the perspectives of soul-winning, pastoral ministry, and we have been forced to see it as virtually a life-or-death issue.

We hadn’t been there long before we ran into a perplexing, even discouraging, problem: disciplining church members who were committing fornication and adultery, including too many mission teachers in our Christian schools. It was a plague beyond any reasonable management. Isn’t the Seventh-day Adventist Church supposed to be the remnant one in which the saints “keep the commandments of God”?

Some fellow missionaries advised us to

look the other way; this was a culture where people couldn’t help being what they are. (Well, without a savior, who among us can help being what we are?)

We began to realize that “preaching the law, the law, until we were as dry as the hills of Gilboa” (to borrow Ellen White’s phrase) wasn’t the solution. Fear of venereal disease or even fear of hell fire didn’t seem to deter

Why We See the NATURE OF CHRIST as a Life-or-Death Issue

ROBERT J. WIELAND

the immorality. The people already lived saturated by fear from birth to death. Sincere Christians who didn’t want to “fall” just couldn’t handle sexual temptations. There wasn’t much else to live for other than sex. But shouldn’t Paul’s letters to the Corinthians solve the same problems?

We could administer church discipline, but it became a dreary, repetitive task like running the ambulance service at the bottom of the cliff, picking up the broken people and trying to restore them; where was the fence at the top to keep people from falling over?

Missionaries today confess wrestling with the same frustrations. While I was visiting by e-mail with one recently, he confided that this same problem distresses him. Africa is the AIDS capital of the world. In Uganda there is hardly a home where there is not someone dead or dying of “slim disease” as they call it. It was heart-rending for us as missionaries to have to watch innocent youth grow to their teenage years and see them stumble into the sexual traps that leave ugly scars on their personality ever afterwards, even though their culture may accept such tragedies as normal. Look in those sad faces in the media photographs—see the pain of fear and guilt; the law of God speaks its condemnation to “every man.” Pagan or Christian, each has heard its voice. As human beings they cannot avoid feeling the conviction of sin even as they cannot understand how it comes upon them.

Before I was sent to Africa, I had chanced upon a copy of Waggoner’s *The Glad Tidings*, and my soul was thrilled with its heartwarming presentation of a savior from sin who can reach souls lowest down in the pit because he suffered being tempted as they are tempted, “yet without sin.” At the time I knew nothing of the 1888 history or message, but I knew that I had found the gospel of Christ’s righteousness stated in attention-grabbing language. How could I share this message of “glad tidings” with my African brothers and sisters?

I had read far enough in the book to grasp Waggoner’s point: Christ has set us free. He has delivered us from slavery under sin; he has “condemned” it “in the likeness of sinful flesh.” He has rendered sin passé, as out of date as an ox cart; there is no excuse for anyone in the world to go on living in sin if he or she understands and believes how good this Good News is. Satan has been vanquished, not merely attacked; it’s too late to go on saying “Satan made me do it!” as many were telling me. The gospel is not impotent, it is the power of God (“dynamite,” Greek) unto salvation. You can’t go on living for self if you appreciate the length, breadth, depth and height of the love (*agape*) of Christ revealed at the cross.

Someone’s preaching about the punishment these people must suffer for their sins didn’t faze them (longer than perhaps a week). They needed something else. Preaching about the punishment that Christ suffered for their sins was effective. Why he had to die was the only truth that seemed to get through to troubled hearts. Even the non-Adventist missionaries were casting about for some gospel that could save people from their moral degradation. The Bishop of Mombasa lamented publicly that nearly all the brides who marched down his cathedral aisles were pregnant. It was the same in Uganda. Yet here was Winston Churchill’s “Pearl of Africa,” where Uganda’s “Christian” culture went back to the 1880s. In Kampala the Catholic and Protestant missionaries had built cathedrals with pipe organs on Namirembe and Rubaga hills. Here was the most advanced nation in sub-Saharan Africa, but it seemed that very few could escape falling into the morass of sexual immorality; and that led to every

other kind of corruption as well.

Now we realize that this problem of sexual sin is the world's problem. Says Reo M. Christenson, writing in *Spectrum*:

Fornication causes more suffering in America than theft and perjury and random violence combined.... High rates of illegitimacy, single-parent families, school drop-outs following pregnancies, subsequent entries onto welfare rolls plus their children who get involved in crime, drugs, poor educational performance, and often lifelong poverty. Think of the parental distress all this brings, too. Add these up and the reader can see why I think fornication is an evil far greater than modern society likes to acknowledge. It is sad that even churches [Seventh-day Adventist?] are unwilling to give this sin the attention it so richly deserves (vol. 24, no. 2, 64).

Even when those with the "know-how" practice contraception or abortion, the scars upon the soul remain and poison the after-life. Jesus described this truly awful state of the world when he said, "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matt 24:12). Marriages are poisoned even if they survive, and children sense the loveless alienations. Fornication and adultery are a neutron bomb that spiritually kills souls while leaving our glittering homes and cities standing in their material grandeur apparently unscathed, with desolated souls "dead" in the midst of material wealth.

While I was struggling and praying about our problem in Uganda, a key element in *The Glad Tidings* became crystal clear: The biblical truth of the nature of Christ is a soul-winning message. The sinless Son of God came all the way down to where we are sunken in sin. He took our fallen, sinful spiritual nature and lived therein a sinless life, enduring even our spiritual alienation from God as he cried out on the cross, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" "As the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; ... In all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God to make reconciliation for the sins of the people" (Heb 2:14-17).

Romanism and Protestantism in general denied this truth, for Romanism taught a dogma of the immaculate conception (the

source of terrible sexual immorality) which says the opposite, and Protestants retained a similar idea of "exemption" for Christ even as they retained the Sunday Sabbath from the "mother church." Instead of being a Christ who was "nigh at hand" and not "far off" (as Ellen White articulated the good news in the 1888 message), their Christ belonged in stained-glass windows "far off" from the reality that took over the native vil-lages when dusk fell.

I began to wonder what our Seventh-day Adventist Christians thought about Jesus. I decided to ask the congregations some questions:

"Do you believe that Jesus in his incarnation was tempted as we are?"

"Oh, yes."

"Was he tempted to lie, steal, break the Sabbath, etc.?"

"Yes, of course."

"Was he tempted to break the seventh commandment?"

Then came the answer, firm and unmistakable: "Oh, no, impossible!"

I knew I had found the source of the problem. No savior!

Their Christ was the popular one of the prominent Roman Catholic evangelist Fulton Sheen and his Protestant friends who across the gulf clasp the hand of Rome. This Christ was "desolidarized" from the fallen human race, being "exempt" from the genetic inheritance of all fallen descendants of Adam. Sheen makes clear what his church teaches everywhere, including Africa:

Mary was desolidarized and separated from that sin-laden humanity.... Had there been no Immaculate Conception, then Christ would have been said to be less beautiful, for he would have taken his Body from one who was not humanly perfect! There ought to be an infinite separation between God and sin....

How could [Christ] be sinless if he was born of sin-laden humanity? If a brush dipped in black becomes black, and if cloth takes on the colour of the dye, would not he, in the eyes of the world, have also partaken of the guilt in which all humanity shared? If he came to this earth through the wheatfield of moral weakness, he certainly would have some chaff hanging on the garment of his human nature (*The World's First Love*, 15, 16, 48).

Sheen's apparently faultless logic has appealed to numerous Seventh-day Adventist writers in recent decades. If Christ took our fallen, sinful nature, how could he be sinless? And how then could he be our sinless substitute? Wouldn't he himself need a savior?

The Bible doctrine of Christ's righteousness eluded our Roman Catholic evangelist; he cannot see how Christ saves *from* sin, not *in* sin, because Christ "condemned" sin in fallen, sinful flesh, and thus outlawed it forever. There's a reason why "the blood...of all that were slain upon the earth" is "found" at last in the final judgment to be in Babylon (Rev 18:24).

But like Sheen, some Adventist writers fail to see the essential essence of New Testament righteousness by faith. Christ could not be our sinless substitute unless he had bridged that awful gap of being "desolidarized" from the human race and had fought and won our battle where we are. Somehow they think such complete identity with us in our temptations must compromise his sinlessness. A former editor of *Ministry* wrote to me, "You can never make me believe that Christ was ever tempted to break the seventh commandment." I responded, "Then according to the message of Hebrews, we have no Savior from that temptation! Our only hope is an ambulance at the bottom of the cliff."

To multitudes of sin-sick souls the Roman Catholic Christ brings no good news. He had not "suffered being tempted" as they are; he cannot be "touched with the feeling of [their] weaknesses" and therefore cannot "succour" them when they are tempted, for he was not "in all points tempted like as [they] are." All he can do is keep on pardoning their continued unavoidable sinning. I finally realized that my African friends desperately needed a glimpse of the true Christ.

Let's not kid ourselves into thinking that this is only Africa's problem; it's the world's as well.

About this time some friend had sent me a dog-eared copy of Jones' *The Consecrated Way to Christian Perfection*, where my heart was touched by the message of Hebrews 2 to 4. Only in that wherein Christ "himself hath suffered being tempted [is] he able to succour them that are tempted.... We have not an high priest who cannot be touched

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However much one may want to believe that someone or some group has all the answers about religion and God, we can be sure of one thing: They don't. Whether they are Traditional/Historic Seventh-day Adventists (SDAs), Progressive SDAs or Moderate SDAs, each group sees only part of the picture, "a poor reflection in a mirror." The question before church members now is how they

was demonstrated by their rejection of the 1957 book *Questions on Doctrine*. They felt that the book made too great a departure from the historic position of the church. More recently they have considered that the use of drama or contemporary Christian music in worship services was worldly entertainment. The Traditionalist/Historic person desires to hold on to several "pillars" of the Adventist church, holding as key doctrines the following:

ing that she was not always correct in her teaching and understanding, to denying her status as prophet.

4. The Seventh-day Sabbath is for our benefit; true Christians can and do worship on Sunday, and Sunday observance is not now, or later to become, the mark of the Beast, nor is keeping the Seventh-day Sabbath to be the seal of God.

The Progressive SDAs do not feel that the church should be limited by the teach-

Progressive and Traditional Adventists Examined

RON CORSON

can pursue the knowledge and truth of God while not stepping on one another's personal search and convictions. Unfortunately, none of us can be all right all the time. The history of the Christian era is filled with differences of opinion, and the Adventist church has not been much different in this respect. When our church became an official organization there were still considerable differences of opinion, even among the pioneers.

What is meant by these terms—Traditional/Historic, Progressive and Moderate? These labels are useful only for those who want to be described by them. If a label is used in a pejorative way it loses its value; it becomes another form of name-calling. But here the terms are used as categories for comparison and contrast of doctrinal positions. For this discussion the Moderate views will not be detailed, since those in this category may agree with the Traditional/Historic view in one area and with the Progressive view in another. They are somewhere in the middle. While many people may consider themselves Moderates, if they analyze their beliefs it is likely they will see that they fall more to one side or the other. In many people's minds the Moderate position is the right one. Hopefully this article will help readers clarify for themselves their own positions.

Traditional/Historic SDAs desire to hold to, and continue with, the beliefs that were instituted at the founding of the church, during the mid- to latter 1800's. They view with suspicion any move away from those traditions or teachings. This

1. The investigative judgment, the sanctuary doctrine (the process as begun in 1844 with a judgment of the "books").
2. The view that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the "remnant" (Rev. 12:17).
3. Ellen G. White as the prophet to the church, also known as the Spirit of Prophecy (presenter of the straight testimony, and present truth).
4. The Seventh-day Sabbath, with the implication that Sunday is a false day of worship (including concepts of Babylon, mark of the Beast and seal of God).

At the other end of the spectrum are the Progressive Seventh-day Adventists. These could be termed liberal, except that the term "liberal Christian" generally refers to those who don't believe that Christ was resurrected nor that he performed miracles, and who hold other tenets with which most Progressive SDAs would not agree. These "liberals" are often involved in the Jesus Seminars. While some Adventist church members sympathize with these views, they would not make up a sizable proportion of the Progressive SDAs. Of the key doctrines listed above as "pillars," the Progressive SDAs would hold to significant modifications:

1. A differing view of what the investigative judgment is or acknowledgment that the investigative judgment is not biblical. (And as such a differing view of Christ's activities from his ascension to his second coming.)
2. An inclusion of other Christians into the category termed the "remnant."
3. A less rigid understanding of the role of Ellen G. White, ranging from acknowledg-

ings of its founders. If errors are discovered in teachings previously held, the errors should be acknowledged and corrected. All knowledge is built upon those who have gone before us, not only those in the Adventist church, but also the many Christians outside and centuries earlier. Knowledge is progressive. What seemed right a hundred years ago may not be right for today or tomorrow.

Certainly the above lists do not cover all the areas of contention, including the differing views of the atonement, the nature of Christ, etc. They do, however, provide a good method of demarcation to establish the two sides in the discussion.

Neither Traditional/Historic SDAs or Progressive SDAs want a passive acceptance of their faith. But God has given us powers of reason. This is not merely human reason, for God asks us to reason with him. Christ did not just ask people to do what he said; he revealed to them in his teachings and stories the why of things. He knew some people would not understand, most likely because they refused to try; others might not understand because they had created a box for God and assumed they already knew enough. But there were always people who would search the teachings, reasoning the message out and drawing conclusions that in the end led them closer to God. In the time of the Apostle Paul the Bereans were considered noble because they searched things out and reasoned together in search of truth. In fact, one of our highest goals should be to find out the truth about God. This is our calling, our mission, to search for God and

as ambassadors for him to call others to pursue a relationship with him.

It is perhaps here, in this search, that the division really lies. Each of the two groups—Traditional/Historic Adventists and the Progressives—would certainly avow that they are searching for the truth about God. But the two differ vastly in what they are looking for and how they go about finding it.

Groups may be bound together by common history or common values. A Baptist and a Seventh-day Adventist have many beliefs and values in common, and to some extent a common history. There are enough differences, however, that each may regard the other as an apostate. Inside the Seventh-day Adventist denomination the same dynamics often occur, because of differences in the way people approach the Bible.

How to Arrive at Bible Truth

What is the best way to arrive at “truth”? Is it to base your understanding on the tradition of your forefathers, or to examine your beliefs objectively and be guided by reason? Because we as a church once believed in something does not make that

“ In fact, one of our highest goals should be to find out the truth about God. This is our calling, our mission, to search for God and as ambassadors for him to call others to pursue a relationship with him. ”

belief true—or false, either. Is there consistency among your beliefs, and can they stand up to objections or differing perspectives? If so, you can feel confident in claiming them as your own, as the best explanation of truth available.

The Christian church has for many centuries used the Bible as the standard for revealed truth about God. True, the Bible was not handed down in its present form by God; it was brought together by men who searched the writings of religious people of both the Jewish and Christian

perspectives. Through the application of reason, logic, consistency and spiritual value the church fathers made the selections. Among these recognized religious leaders making up what is called the canon of accepted scriptures, there was substantial agreement on all but a few books. Roman Catholics accept the Apocrypha, while most Protestants do not. In most cases these variations in accepted books do not affect doctrinal differences.

Among the beliefs which Traditional/Historic SDAs hold as pillars there is a striking similarity—none of them are really biblically supportable. For instance, there are no biblical verses that teach the investigative judgment as these people understand it, or its origin in 1844. There is no mention of the Seventh-day Adventist Church by name in the Bible or identification of it as the remnant; even the concept of the remnant is not held popularly in many churches. The Bible speaks nothing about Ellen G. White as the “Spirit of Prophecy” or a prophet. The term spirit of prophecy in the Bible refers to the Holy Spirit. The Bible says nothing of a Sunday law. It does not teach the Sabbath as the seal of God; again, it is the Holy Spirit that is the seal of God.

So the question arises, how did these doctrines become “pillars”? Because, so they say, these were incorporated into the early Adventist church belief system and therefore must be true and accepted. The Progressives, on the other hand, see the adoption of those doctrines as part of our history, but not as truth for today. If they do not stand the test they have no legitimate place in the church’s teachings.

The Traditional/Historic SDAs do not hold a less authoritative view of the Bible; they often speak of it as inerrant and even infallible. Some acknowledge that the existing Bible has errors not present in the original manuscripts. Of course, we do not have the originals, so what does that prove? In any case, such errors are mostly inconsequential to any important doctrinal position. The Traditional/Historic SDAs also have a second source of truth which has from the beginning of the church been

used to support its teachings.

The writings of Ellen G. White are often taken by the Traditional/Historic SDAs as having equal authority with the Bible. They may even use her works in place of the Bible, though many deny that such happens. Perhaps as troublesome is the way they use her as an “inspired commentator” on the Bible. As Morris Venden wrote in his book *The Pillars*: “The gift of prophecy is not an authority over the Bible, but it is an authority on the Bible. Some people have trouble with the phrase, evidently coined by F. D. Nichol, ‘inspired commentary.’ But if you accept the inspiration of the gift of prophecy and realize the fact that it is also a commentary on the Bible, and then put the two together, you have an inspired commentary” (104). To call her an “inspired commentator” is to place her above the book she is commenting on. Fortunately, as Venden noted, there are those in the Adventist church who have trouble with such a phrase.

Traditional/Historic SDAs sometimes declare that to reject the counsel of Ellen G. White is to reject God’s counsel, because they view her as a prophet. If she were not a prophet, then it would be acceptable to disregard her views where they seemed to vary from the Bible. And that is the stance of the Progressives.

Can the church survive with such a division? Must the Progressives accept the Traditional/Historic SDAs’ rigid stance, or must the Traditionalists become more flexible? Since both sides are in agreement about the Bible as the ultimate source of truth about God, there ought to be some common ground on which they can stand together. What is needed seems to be the willingness of each side of the debate to recognize the Christian spirit of the other. Perhaps there is a place for pluralism of this kind in the church, to help it maintain a balance between the potentially stultifying effect of a body unwilling to admit change, and the equally hazardous risk of running too fast with the winds of change. Both views have merit; can the proponents of each recognize the good in one another and not ostracize or disfellowship those with whom they disagree? In humility, each should recognize that they do not have a corner on truth; God alone knows what that really is. ■

I have long been fascinated by the vision of the Tree of Life in the Apocalypse of John. What a tree, a magical tree, that not only bends far over a crystal river, but grows on either side of the river, with 12 varieties of fruit, and leaves for the healing of the nations.

One of my fondest memories from childhood is that of moving to Hamilton, Montana. My father had left the farm to become a colporteur. I don't remember the trip to Hamilton, but I have vivid memories as a 4½-year-old child of the place to where we moved. It was high on the side of a mountain, just below the forest line. My father had purchased an old farm, on which he and his father set out to build our new home. In the front of the house was a granite boulder, taller than my head and larger than five Thanksgiving tables. Even more fascinating was the stream that ran down the mountain and through our future yard. Along the stream were apple and pear trees—old gnarled trees that were more wild than tame. The pears were not like store-bought pears that are yellow and juicy, but hard, green pears that made you sit up and take notice when you ate them. Each evening a grouse would beat its wings, playing a mating song.

In a word, the tree in John's Apocalypse always recalls in my mind this magical place of my childhood.

In the passing of time, some of the magic of the Tree of Life, like the memories of my Hamilton home, has dimmed. I know that multiple varieties of fruit can be grafted on the same stock. And I know that leaves provide oxygen and remove pollutants from the air. I also know that the leaves of certain trees like the eucalyptus and yew have medicinal properties. I still puzzle at times as I did as a child why we would ever need medicinal leaves in paradise, but perhaps that is just the point of the Apocalypse. In paradise there is an antidote for every ailment. Nothing accursed is in this perfect land.

This past quarter the magic of my childhood experience of the Tree of Life was renewed in art classes I am taking. In these classes I have come to realize that

leaves possess healing properties that go far beyond their filtration of our air or their pharmaceutical properties. Leaves, I have come to realize, are medicine for the soul.

I discovered the magical, medicinal properties of leaves from Martha Mason, who not only teaches her students at Walla Walla College how to design, draw and paint, but who ministers to them through her classroom prayers, her fresh-

Leave it to the Leaves

GLEN GREENWALT

baked Friday bread, her skipping and dancing for joy in classes, and most importantly through her devotion to leaves. I may be exaggerating, but it seems that at least a third of her projects have something to do with leaves. Leaves for Martha are little notes given by God to tell us how much he loves us—she tells us such things all the time in class.

This makes sense. If you stop and think about leaves for only a moment, your spirit will be lifted. Pictures come to mind of the first leaves of spring, of picnics at the park in the shade of old giant trees, of walking home from school in the fall kicking leaves, or of jumping into a pile of leaves. The list goes on, of traveling East to see whole mountains of turning leaves, of smelling the smoke of burning leaves, of collecting leaves for gifts, bulletin boards, or art projects for school. Leaves cheer our spirits.

Martha takes the magic of leaves a step farther by turning the study of them into a form of meditation. Surprisingly, although I have learned a great deal in my education as a theologian on how to read complex texts such as the Bible, I had never been taught how to decipher leaves before I took classes from Martha. After taking her classes, this seems odd to me, given that as

an Adventist I believe and support a holistic view of life. If nature really is God's second book, then we should be as skilled interpreting tablets of leaves, grasses, birds, animals of the field, mountains, streams, skies and the like, as in reading texts of scripture. Jesus certainly was. Learning to interpret leaves has provided me a critical tool for my reading of all other texts. By attending carefully to leaves, I have gained a healthy suspicion of anything that is not as eloquent and richly textured as a leaf.

Here are Martha's rules for meditating on leaves as I have deciphered them.

First, set aside at least an hour a week to carefully observe leaves. Leaves are easy to overlook, just because they are so abundant all around us. In this way they are like the people who surround us. In one of our classes Martha showed a video of an artist named Romare Beardon, who told the story of being propositioned by a very ugly prostitute. Her

asking price was only a couple of dollars. Each time the artist declined, she lowered her price, until in the end, in desperation for human contact and food, she begged Beardon to take her home. Beardon felt sorry for the woman and told her she lacked the qualities requisite for success as a prostitute, and suggested that perhaps his mother could find her a more successful occupation, which she did. But that was not the end of the story. One day when Beardon lost all his inspiration for art, this ugly woman came to him and told him that when he could see her beauty and paint it, then he would become a success as an artist—which in fact proved true. Finding the transcendent in the ordinary, the beautiful in the plain, is the first lesson of seeing that Martha teaches in drawing.

The second rule for discovering the healing magic of leaves is to view things without our preconceived ideas of them. In drawing, this means giving up our names for things. When we name things, we assume that we know what they are, so we fail to pay close attention to the things themselves. When we draw, we draw on our databank of stems, veins, and maple leaf shapes and so produce the most amateurish-looking leaves. On the other hand, to view a leaf without names is to visually

curves, shadows, lines, shapes and patterns, all colored in an unnamable variety of hues, tones and values.

Choose a leaf. Look at the leaf first with both eyes, and then with one eye. Look at the leaf close to your eye, then at an arm's length from you. View the leaf through squinted eyes. Feel the shape of the leaf with your eyes closed. Feel its ridges, its twists and turns, its texture. If you take time to explore a leaf with care you will lose yourself in an amazingly intricate world of eloquent design.

This lesson of putting aside our assigned names for things to truly see them holds as well in religion as in art. God is ultimately beyond all names. At best religious language serves as a gloss for that which is best referenced by awe and silence. We will never escape our need for words, but we do well to remember that our words are as easily fashioned into idols as any shape of wood or stone. Attempting to draw the simplest leaf reveals how splendid and beyond name and category are even God's lowliest works. Having studied leaves, I am modest in speaking of God.

The third rule Martha gives for seeing

leaves is perhaps the most difficult, but is certainly the most rewarding. Trace slowly with a pencil or pen every twist and turn, rise and fall, bump and curve of a leaf. Stick to drawing the leaf for at least fifteen minutes. Now I expect that many readers will say they cannot draw a stick figure, so how can they possibly draw the smallest detail of a leaf?

The task is not really as difficult as it seems. Imagine a plate of glass between you and the leaf. A child could trace the leaf onto the glass. Drawing onto a sheet of paper is not that much different. One simply traces the outline of the leaf onto a paper set a bit to the side of the leaf. Like a mechanical link between one's eye and hand, one's hand simply follows one's eye. The difficulty we face in drawing is that most of us take a quick look at an object, and then stare at our paper trying to remember what we saw. The problem with this strategy is that most objects are far too complex to remember. A single leaf has millions of bits of information. The secret of drawing is keeping our eyes on the object we are drawing.

To reinforce the need to keep one's eye

on the object one is drawing, Martha requires repeated "blind studies" where students are not allowed to look at all at the paper on which they are drawing. Inevitably such drawings bear little resemblance, at least at first, to what the student is drawing. It takes time to develop eye-hand coordination. But what blind drawings lack in realism they more than supply in amazingly intricate lines of fascinating complexity and beauty. After some time of blind drawings, Martha allows students to check their progress every once in a while on their paper to make corrections—but she repeats like a mantra that the only way to draw accurately is to keep one's eye on the object one is drawing. The religious lesson here is obvious. In religion as in art, success comes with paying attention to the object of study. We have been told this all our lives. Practicing drawing a leaf by Martha's rules will teach you why.

Take a challenge and spend time meditating on a leaf this week. It may not cure all of your ailments, but it will lift your spirit. Even earthly leaves can heal. And, oh yes, I would love to see your drawings. ■

Why We See the NATURE OF CHRIST as a Life-or-Death Issue

Continued from page 17

with the feeling of our infirmities [moral, not merely tiredness from physical labor!]; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (2:18; 4:15). I sensed that the common idea of justification by faith just didn't "fly" in Africa. Justification by faith is not merely a legal declaration of acquittal, as the African Christians thought, wonderful as that may be; Rome taught that all they had to do was to keep on confessing their moral falls, get "pardon," and then go right on giving in to the flesh again. Isn't Jesus sweet, kind, and merciful? Even the Muslims were saying that Allah is "compassionate." God knows it's impossible not to keep on sinning, not if you're "human."

About that time I also discovered the idea of agape. I began to fall in love with the glory of the cross of Christ. Then I saw in the heartwarming story of Mary Magdalene a "patron saint" for Africa and began to proclaim this message to my brothers and sisters there:

1. Christ knows your temptations, even that

of breaking the seventh commandment, and he "succours" you and lifts you out of that swamp if you understand and believe the gospel as good news.

2. Look at the grand dimensions of the agape that led the Son of God to go to hell to save you, to die your second death (not just suffer physical pain), to endure being "cursed of God" as he was "hanged on a tree," and your "lust of the flesh, and the lust of your eyes, and the pride of life" will cease to enslave you.

3. The story of Mary Magdalene defines for you what "faith" is all about—a heart-appreciation of Christ's love for you—it's not another works trip.

4. Justification by faith therefore is more than a legal pardon or acquittal that frees you to go on sinning again; it actually delivers you practically, genuinely, from bondage to sin.

5. The "curse of the law" is not obedience to the law but disobedience to it—and that's what you're saved from.

6. Justification by faith is an experience that actually makes you become obedient to all the commandments of God. It's the greatest joy that a human being can know! It transcends every other pleasure.

Did it work? I didn't accomplish anything, but the gospel did, for it is indeed the power of God unto salvation to those who believe. I found that my brethren are as capable of truly "believing" as anyone on earth and as capable of manifesting the fruit of such "faith which works by agape."

Seventh-day Adventists by nature are no better than anybody else on earth. But the Lord has given them "a most precious message" to proclaim to earth's billions. We'd be foolish not to recognize that it is a life-or-death message. ■

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“For the next five hours you are to enjoy EPC. Keep the time just for you and God. Find a place where you will be in solitude—your room, a rock along some trail, your car, wherever you choose; and observe silence—no professional chats with the other pastors. Don’t break the silence until at least 3 o’clock. You can fast if you want, or pick up a sack lunch. You may want to journal, read Scripture or some devotional book, enjoy nature, or simply meditate as ways to be in the presence of God. Go in peace and grace.”

I had joined the Task Force to Reach the Next Generation just the night before. The others in the group of about 24 pastors had begun the process five months previously, in November 1993. They had an advantage over me—a full introduction to EPC, the regularly used acronym for Extended Personal Communication with God. All I had was the summary paragraph. Now I was being sent off for five hours on my own.

What would I do with five whole hours in solitude with God? I soon learned that it was not a matter of “doing;” rather, it was “being” with God. I had to race down the mountain trail in order to meet the debriefing appointment!

The Task Force to Reach the Next Generation was set up by the administrators of the Southeastern California Conference in response to strong direction from the Conference Executive Committee to reach and retain youth and young adults. Very significant funding was provided in the conference budget beginning in 1993 and has continued each year since. Almost immediately the task force became known as the Boomer/Buster Project. As additional groups of pastors were formed, the “official” name became The Journey to Reach the Next Generations (note added plural), and most participants and leaders now refer to the process simply as “The Journey.”

Paul Jensen, director of The Leadership Institute, and an ordained Adventist minister, was commissioned to direct and facilitate the task force.

As the two-year span of the initial task

force neared its conclusion, the participants unanimously agreed that the process must continue for their own personal benefit and that it should be expanded to include others. As of this writing ten groups have been formed that have included both Adventist and other pastors. Nine of the first group of pastors are still part of “The Journey” and meet together with participants from other groups who wished to continue the process. Several from the first group and subsequent groups currently serve as mentors and caregivers to the other participants.

A Journey With God and Colleagues in Solitude, Support and Sharing

MERLE J. WHITNEY

Three times each year participants in The Journey meet for a three-day retreat at Pine Springs Ranch, the Southeastern California Conference camp and conference center in the San Jacinto mountains. Each group commits to six retreats during an 18-month span. Often between the regular retreats there are single-day, optional retreats closer home.

The paradigm for The Journey is that ministry must be the overflowing of one’s experience with God and his Word. We often use the word “spillage.” We cannot give what we do not have and experience. We talk of the lifestyle of the Upper Room as portrayed in John 15, with its three priorities of abiding in Jesus, belonging to the fellowship of Jesus’ followers, and reaching out to the community beyond. Only as grace overflows from our lives will there be any hope for reaching the next generations.

Soon after the process began, its “subversive” nature became apparent. Certainly the group spent time in studying the characteristics and needs of the next generations from sociological, psychological, theological, spiritual and how-do-you-do-it-at-church viewpoints. We read recommended papers and books. On one retreat we would

study and discuss, go back to our churches to practice what we had learned in specific projects, and on the next retreat report on progress made (or the lack of it) and evaluate with each other what was occurring and why. However, the foundation for The Journey was the spiritual formation of the pastors involved in the process. Soon this became an important aspect of recruiting subsequent groups.

A fantastic serendipity for each group of The Journey has been the support and trust that has developed. It has been amazing and most rewarding to experience the confidential sharing of deep, intimate personal and professional situations in a group of pastors. We listen to each other, pray with each other, and anoint each other. There have been healings of both body and spirit. Several have declared with great passion, “I would not be in the ministry today if it were not for The Journey.”

When we gather in a retreat, first we worship and devote time to Scripture in both silence and sharing, then spend an hour or two catching up on each other’s lives. The next morning we again worship and revel in a rich presentation from Scripture that sends us off for our day of solitude. We break the silence by late afternoon, and some groups have a time of debriefing and sharing how God has—or has not—spoken to them during the day. A season of worship and a presentation on some aspect of ministry using the grace-abiding-overflow paradigm conclude the first full day. The second morning and evening continue the pattern of worship.

I could never go back to ministry “as usual.” I need the confidential support of my peers. I need the time away and the directed and inspirational digging into Scripture. I relish the hours of solitude and long for more. The Journey is truly a life-saving journey to God, and as a pastor on this journey I have the privilege of inviting my parishioners to join me. They in turn invite others. I wish you, too, could come along. ■

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It is disconcerting to realize that if I had known at the outset what “The Journey” was, I am not sure I would have begun it. Not because I didn’t want or need it, but because I am not sure I knew what I needed at the time. And even if I had known, I might not have believed I would really have found it there. Now,

affected my life and ministry in ways that I cannot adequately express. First of all, the sessions were long enough for us to break free from the pace at which we lived, and to slow down enough to give God a chance to catch up. We were given significant amounts of time to spend alone with God and listen to the “still small voice.” In addition, we stud-

Many of us on The Journey felt like withered plants whose roots unexpectedly broke through into rich reservoirs of water.

The nine years that have followed have been the best in my ministry, perhaps the best in my life. Personally, my spiritual life has been enriched and supported in ways that I had never anticipated. As church staff members working through

HOW THE JOURNEY TURNED MY LIFE AND MINISTRY UPSIDE DOWN

KEN CURTIS

nine years later, I can no longer conceive of ministry without it, or at least what it represents.

Originally, it was known as the Boomer Buster Project. I understood this to be a series of retreats focusing on ways to reach these two unique generations and which would involve attendees in making significant personal spiritual growth as well. I was not deceived or mistaken, but I was genuinely surprised. Things have never been the same since.

Our first major discovery, the common thread that ran through the unique needs and perspectives of boomers, busters, and the pastors who had gathered to study them, was their deep hunger for genuine spirituality. All three groups had become weary of how kingdom life had been replaced by the kingdom of God industry; how marketing had replaced caring; how production had replaced significance; and how knowing Jesus had become one item to select on a divine smorgasbord of options, rather than the central core from which everything else flowed. We of course knew better. Given a test, we would have earned passing scores. But that was not the way it was typically being lived out in the actual practice of boomers, busters or pastors.

What we found at these retreats af-

ected grace together, not just as an abstract theological concept, but as the life-giving center of all aspects of our lives. “As we are saved by grace, so we live, serve and lead by grace” became the core of my ministry experience. We talked, prayed, planned, laughed, cried and worshiped together as we looked carefully and prayerfully at what ministry might become if we actually took seriously the practice of grace and the lifestyle of the upper room described in John 15. When we gathered again at subsequent retreats,

“As a church staff working through this process together, we discovered an incredible joy in ministry as we began to allow what we did in ministry, and how we did it, to be shaped by our journey.”

we continually refocused, worshiped, shared, learned and received encouragement to keep on going.

Over the course of these retreats, we discovered what it was to be “we.” I had become somewhat cynical about gatherings of pastors, which rarely seemed like places that were safe or where people were particularly real. In The Journey, I found fellow travelers who were incredibly real, both in their weariness and their passion, their hopes and their doubts, and who deeply desired to grow.

this process together, we discovered an incredible joy in ministry as we began to allow what we did in ministry, and how we did it, to be shaped by our journey. We developed and implemented new ministry structures that reflected the centrality of grace and the paradigm of abiding in Jesus as the core. To use a metaphor coined by a fellow participant in The Journey, in contrast to the wearing experience of trying to keep a kite in the air when the wind is not blowing, ministry became like flying a kite on a breezy day.

In short, God has used The Journey to ruin my old life. I can no longer find much joy or contentment in running the kingdom of God industry. I am no longer satisfied going it alone as an isolated pastor, unsure if there are other pastors out there in whom I can place my trust, and from whom I can draw support. Time alone with God is no longer a luxury; despite the ways I am too easily lured away from it by my own busyness and clutteredness, it is at the heart of ministry. It is now harder than ever to get excited about ministry where grace is not central, and where abiding in Jesus and genuinely caring for others is not the real point. This has created some problems and challenges, but I will take these over the ones I struggled with before undertaking The Journey, any day. ■

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It was a pleasant “ambush.” The pastors in our conference were invited to participate in a two-year project focused on reaching Baby Boomers and Generation X. I applied, since I served as an associate pastor to these groups, and my wife and I are ourselves Boomers or Busters.

I expected to hear the latest in research and techniques that I could take back to my church setting. I wasn’t disappointed. But the project offered something far more significant than the latest tools for professional ministry. It offered new paradigms for my time with God, spirituality-based leadership, and relationships with colleagues.

If God was planning this encounter for me, his timing was perfect. During the period of the project, I faced the undermining of my ministry in the local parish, the personal questioning of my fitness for ministry at all, and the quiet deterioration of my health. Stress and some hereditary factors contributed to my eventually suffering a heart attack.

During this time of prospective loss of life and career, my learning new ministry techniques gave way to a forced “clinging” to God. Peers from the project walked with me through these “dark nights of the soul.”

When all else failed, there was God. No matter how long I had lived, what things I had accomplished or left unachieved, or relationships I had cherished, the only thing of any permanence was God. All that mattered at times was God, something new for me when so much else of value seemed stripped away.

People counted for more than programs. How much in the past I had

workshopped for the latest methods to evangelize and nurture persons. While I had not really believed that numbers alone were the sole determinant of success, I had inwardly grinned when more persons showed up for something well planned and executed. With this new experience I discovered a new satisfaction in

source of our discussion, worship and challenge.

When I put my emphasis on abiding in Christ, I found a new security, no longer needing to identify only with my career. While my job might have been temporary, my calling to minister to others was not. God was more portable than what I did for work, even as a professional pastor. This change in bases gave me more freedom to be myself, dream more boldly, and be more assertive in ministry.

I discovered I needed changes in my life more than answers. I discovered the

value of journaling. Today I can review the record of my own questions, discouragements, and even prayers of desperation, seeing in them the experiences of a few moments, not of a lifetime.

It used to be that I felt as if waiting on God was more akin to fidgeting. While I sought relief and understanding from painful experiences, my prayers apparently went unanswered. Since then I have come to realize that through this very silence from heaven, God was creating in me a greater longing for him than I had ever known. Where the absence of God’s replies used to stir up my feelings of despair and rejection, now they serve as catalysts making me desire God more deeply, for his sake. To me that has been unspeakably priceless.

The years of this journey have helped me find some solutions to ministerial problems, but far more significantly, they have made me aware of my ultimate concerns for the Lord—my wife and my children—and shown me how my calling is built upon grace and person-centered ministry. ■

Ambushed

GREG AND BRENDA CLARK

ministering to individuals. I came to a real appreciation for the richness of Richard Halverson’s definition of ministry as “simply being with people.”

Grace was not merely a description of a quality of God necessary to help me escape damnation, but it became the model for my continuing life as a Christian. Of the more than 120 references to grace in the New Testament, the overwhelming majority focus upon the stuff of growth, such as motivation, endurance through suffering, service, and leadership. This serendipity regarding grace brought me face to face with my ever-present need for God’s provision for all of my life and work.

I came to realize that I could not assume to know Jesus intimately and deeply. Spending time with him, experiencing his abiding presence, was my first work. Whatever ministry I was called to was an outgrowth of this, as were also my prayers for myself and others. As my peers and I met together in retreats and through contacts in between, this ultimate focus provided the