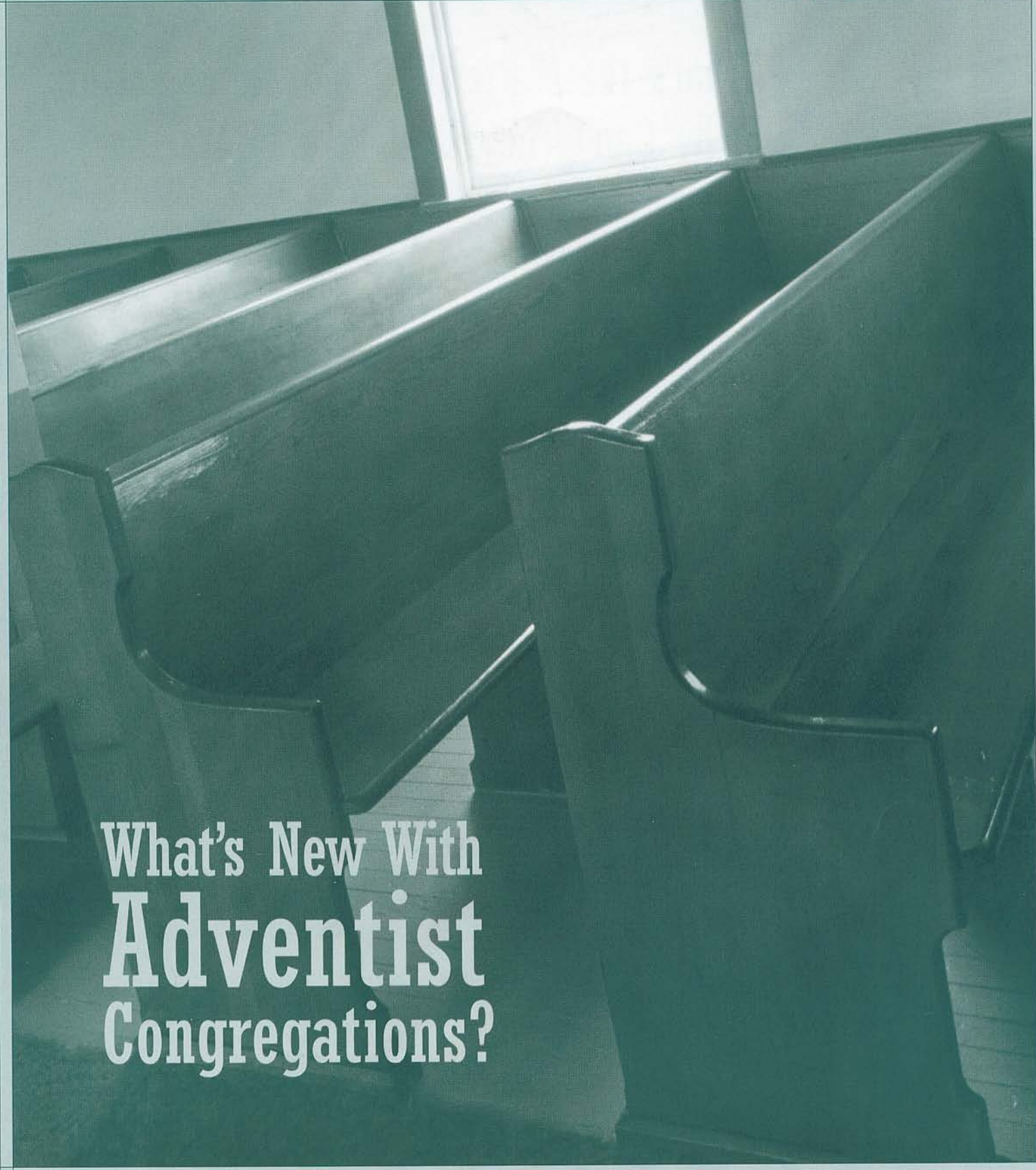


# adventist today

NEWS  
ANALYSIS  
OPINION

volume twelve | number five | september, october 2004



## What's New With Adventist Congregations?

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# What's the Matter With Adventist Pastors? (Why Can't They Be Like Rick Warren?)

JOHN MCLARTY

**T**he city planner had rejected our permit application for the church we planned to build in Edgewood, Wash. The reason: In my cover letter I had referred to our plans for expansion. Sitting together in a meeting, the planner turned to me and said, "OK, you tell me how large this church is going to be."

It was a cruel question. It brought into sharp conflict two different persons who live in my skin. One is a religious professional, someone who reads professional literature and tries to take account of statistical research on churches. The other is a dreamer, an evangelist who reads inspirational literature about pastors who have altered the shape of communities and individuals through imaginative, faithful service.

Some of the lay leaders in our church dream of our becoming a major "community church," drawing thousands for weekly worship services. It was a vision I helped to fuel five years ago shortly after I arrived as pastor. But looking at our history and congregational and pastoral profiles, the most likely future for our church is that in 10 years it will be the same size it is today—about 100 in attendance. The small building detailed in our plans would accommodate this congregation for the foreseeable future.

Nearly every pastor I know—Adventist or not—is working to grow his/her congregation, but it doesn't work. In my own conference, we have been keeping statistics on church attendance for over 10 years. In an urban area that has grown dramatically, aggregate attendance in the conference has increased by about 1 percent per year. Almost all of that growth is in immigrant churches.

Do churches grow? Yes, but very few of them. Probably about the same as the percentage of young men who play high school basketball and go on to earn paychecks from the NBA. Most congregations, at age 10, are as large as they ever will be. There may be occasional surges in attendance, but then after a year or two, attendance will regress toward the historical average for that congregation.

Over time, attendance in nonimmigrant congregations in North America remains fairly constant.

Adventism is an aggressively evangelistic denomination. Every church leader talks about evangelism, and by that they mean a process that adds active members to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. At pastors' meetings we are fed a steady diet of information and inspiration designed to make us more effective as agents of growth in our churches. There's just one problem: it isn't working.

It is easy to find targets for criticism. Pastors who don't preach well or visit or pray or delegate appropriately. Laity who are not fully committed and don't invite their friends. Antiquated evangelistic methods that advertise monsters and attract beastly people. Our denominational financial structure. Failure of congregations to assimilate the graduates of our evangelistic series. Etc., etc.

**Not all church plants succeed in growing.  
 Nearly one hundred percent of established  
 congregations succeed in not growing.**

I cannot give up my dream of seeing my congregation grow. I want to reach out to others with the Adventist understanding of God, the Bible and wholesome patterns of living. But nearly every day I wrestle with my awareness that after a dramatic growth spurt early in my tenure here, my congregation is not growing. And I feel responsible.

Some young men actually do earn millions of dollars playing basketball, but it would be irresponsible for Adventist parents or schools to allow their young men to flagellate themselves because they are unable to match Michael Jordan. Some tiny fraction of pastors lead their churches in a pattern of sustained growth over 20 years. But is it irresponsible for the Adventist church to allow its pastors to flagellate themselves because they are unable to match Rick Warren.

The only likely source of increased Adventist church attendance is new churches. Not all church plants succeed in growing. But nearly 100 percent of established congregations succeed in not growing. ■

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## Evenhanded Reporting

Herbert Douglass's letter in the July-August issue (AT July/Aug 2004) seemed puzzled by the reference to Galileo, where he stated that the "Bible never taught that the earth was either flat or the center of the universe/solar system—Catholic tradition rested on such novelties. Galileo was not contesting biblical thought but Catholic tradition."

Galileo's contribution to scientific study at that time is stated by him in his letter pleading his case: "I hold the sun to be situated motionless in the center of the revolution of the celestial orbs while the earth rotates on its axis and revolves about the sun." While it may have been traditional Catholic thought, he was actually contesting literal biblical interpretation. In Galileo's famous letter to the Grand Duchess Christina in 1616, mentioned above, he sets forth his case: "Now let us consider the extent to which it is true that the famous passage in Joshua (10:12-13) may be accepted without altering the literal meaning of its words, and under what conditions the day might be greatly lengthened by obedience of the sun to Joshua's

## Requiring Adventist intellectuals to maintain beliefs that they know to be scientifically unsupportable puts them in a catch-22.

command that it stand still.... It is obvious that if the sun should cease its own proper motion, the day would become shorter, and not longer. The way to lengthen the day would be to speed up the sun's proper motion; and to cause the sun to remain above the horizon for some time in one place without declining towards the west, it would be necessary to hasten this motion until it was equal to that of the *primum mobile*. This would amount to accelerating the customary speed of the sun about three hundred sixty times. Therefore, if Joshua had intended his words to be taken in their pure and proper sense, he would have ordered the sun to accelerate its own motion in such a way that the impulse from the *primum mobile* would not carry it westward. But since his words were to be heard by people who very likely knew nothing of any celestial motions beyond the great general movement from east to west, he stooped to their capacity and spoke according to the understanding...."

How should the famous passage in Joshua, ordering the sun to stand still, be interpreted? Should Isaiah's sign given to Hezekiah about the sun declining backward (2 Kings 20:9-11) also be interpreted literally? This was not simply Catholic tradition but biblical teaching. Is there now less literal and more metaphorical interpretation of similar texts?

To answer Douglass's question: Yes, Galileo was clearly questioning biblical text.

**Elaine Nelson | Fresno, Calif.**

## Recent Six-Day Creation?

Buried in the middle of a recent *Adventist Review* was

an otherwise inconspicuous report that may foretell the greatest division in the church's history. Based on the recommendations of the International Faith and Science Conference, the church has "reaffirmed" that creation occurred recently, in six literal 24-hour days, and that Genesis 1-11 contains reliable scientific description. Not surprisingly, the fact that this conclusion conflicts with virtually every scientific discovery made within the last 500 years is not reported. Indeed, the report, as worded, has little to do with affirming science and much to do with reaffirming a narrow view of scripture. The "science" portion of the conference was obviously subordinated to a larger institutional need to maintain historical faith in a literal creation week.

Requiring Adventist intellectuals to maintain beliefs that they know to be scientifically unsupportable puts them in a catch-22. They can be honest, reject the church's simplistic doctrine, and maintain a sense of self-respect. But they will soon be unemployed. Or they can continue what they've done for decades—mouth the official position in class, and then, behind closed doors, go on believing what reason requires them to believe. For years it has been a well-known secret on Adventist college campuses that the majority of science professors, and a good number of theologians, reject a recent six-day creation. Most are adopting what is increasingly becoming mainstream in Protestant churches—theistic evolution—which permits the blending of intellectual integrity with faith.

Another option is that after younger academics without doctrinal biases have taken over the helm at the colleges, the teaching will slowly change until the demands of rationality are met. If not, the church may divide even more than it is along conservative-liberal lines. Whether honest scientific reflection can continue on Adventist campuses is now a question that only time can answer.

**Karl W. Kime | Los Angeles, Calif.**

## Venerable Manuscripts

I recently resubscribed to *Adventist Today* and received my first copy a few days ago, the May-June issue. I am interested in reading articles expressing different viewpoints on controversial issues. However, when I read the article "Wrestling With Venerable Manuscripts," written by Fred Hoyt, I came close to deciding to cancel my subscription. In this article you have devoted four long pages presenting a highly educated man the opportunity to question Mrs. White's claim to being a messenger of God sent to assist a struggling young church to develop biblical doctrines. Mr. Hoyt states that many of her writings contain major modifications and distortions not present in her original handwritten manuscripts.

We are all aware of the fact that Mrs. White had only three years of formal education and that her handwritten manuscripts required editing and correction of spelling and grammatical errors in order to make them suitable for publication. Furthermore, on all occasions she would proofread the revised and corrected article to make cer

tain that the message she was sending to church leaders was not changed or distorted. To imply that whoever she chose to edit her original manuscript, be it her husband James or Maggie Hare or any other person, actually changed the content of the message she was bringing to the church leaders is very misleading and disingenuous. Mr. Hoyt's biased acceptance of Mr. Crisler's notes in preference to the notes of Maggie Hare fails to note that Maggie was concerned in preparing the manuscript for publication whereas Mr. Crisler was not. The question that Mr. Hoyt raises near the end of his article, "What modifications and distortions have been committed against other key documents of the Archives?" would in my opinion require the editorial staff of *Adventist Today* to invite a reputable historian and journalist to comment on Mr. Hoyt's accusations.

**Alexander Dederer, M.D. | Bend, Ore.**

*Editorial note: We would welcome responses from "reputable historians." Dr. Fred Hoyt is an emeritus professor of history at La Sierra University and has served as president of the Association of Adventist Historians. This article was presented recently to a meeting of that association. He has written many scholarly articles reflecting his careful research into Adventist church history.*

## Closed Door

A comment about your report on the Denver Faith and Science Conference (AT July/Aug 2004): Ellen (as you say) may have been "speaking as a prophet" in regard to the closed door, but she was not sharing the revealed will of God at that time. She was expressing an opinion that was later proven to be erroneous. In fact, she did not believe God would add to the church (and made no effort to do so) until after new people had been accepted in other places. Though I personally believe she was God's appointed voice for her time, I in no way ascribe infallibility to her. Nor to Daniel, Isaiah, Peter, James or John. God is infallible; His penmen are not!

**Robert Joe | Via the Internet**

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# VOTE PRO-LIFE?

WARREN ZORK

“Of course I’m voting for Bush! I know he’s a born-again Christian and not afraid to admit it. I like that. On real Christian issues, he’s against abortion and gay marriage, and for family values, for sex education taught at home, for prayer in all our schools. I can’t see how any serious Adventist could possibly be for the other side.”...“We support ‘born again’ Mr. Bush for President because he is ‘pro-life,’ while Kerry and the Democrats are either ‘pro-choice’ or wishy-washy at best on the essential issue of the sacredness of human life.”

For some of my friends, it was cut and dried. The only possible vote if you valued life was to vote for Mr. Bush. I am not convinced. I’m an independent—not a Republican or a traditional Democrat. I am a practicing Christian, but I do not support our “pro-life” president. Why? Because he has failed to demonstrate respect for all human life. He has “picked and chosen” capriciously.

Neither Republicans nor Democrats can make a simple claim to the high ground when it comes to the sacredness of human life. The Republican Party has, in the past decade, taken the “high road” of identifying its platform closely with the Christian right-to-life movement. Many conservative Christians vote Republican because Republicans are the party committed to protecting human life—that is, opposing abortion. However, the simple equation of Republicans with an anti-abortion stance is simply wrong. Jim Wallis, of *Sojourners* magazine, wrote in June 2004: “Ironically, the Republicans, who actively and successfully court the votes of Christians on abortion, are much more ecumenical in their own toleration of a variety of views within their own party. For example, fellow Republicans have not enforced anti-abortion orthodoxy on their rising new star, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, whose pro-choice views seem not to be a problem. Indeed, there is now a long list of pro-choice Republicans whose support the party seems to regard as crucial to its success. The Republican Party takes a very strong anti-abortion stance in its party platforms but then allows for a wide variety of opinions based on either conscience or pragmatic political calculations.”

It appears that the Republican anti-abortion platform is as much about winning votes as it is about protecting the dignity of human life. Even more crucial in making an informed political choice is the fact that politics is seldom a matter of clean, simple choices.

I believe in the sacredness of all human life. This includes the lives of all the fetuses in the whole world, not just the fetuses within American mothers. It also includes the sacredness of all the world’s children, including the children of Mexican citizens working in the United States; all the aged of the world, including Iraqis; all the security officers, police and firemen of the world; all the “foot soldiers” of the world, including young

women and men in American uniform. If I care about African and Middle Eastern fetuses as well as American fetuses, it complicates my politics because fetuses in those countries may be more strongly affected by American economic policy than by American abortion policy.

Mr. Bush’s choice of preemptive war showed an almost cavalier disregard for the sacredness of human life. Over the past two years the current administration has put at risk the lives of almost a quarter million of our bravest and best, resulting in thousands of Iraqi and American dead and maimed in a chancy war. That war continues to be played out in the wretched neighborhoods of Sadr City and the lonely byways of northwest Iraq where Iraqi IEDs (improvised explosive devices) are snuffing out—by ones and twos and threes—the lives of young women from rural southeast Georgia and young men from the majestic mountains of northern Idaho. Then there are the uncounted hundreds (thousands?) of Iraqi police and civilians who continue to die in the insurgency. Are their lives not also sacred? For most of the enemy conscripts we killed in the invasion, wasn’t their real crime that of being born in the wrong place?

Maybe war was the only pro-life option, but many of us remain to be convinced.

Alas, there are times when innocent life may have to be sacrificed to defend the public good. Violence, even at the risk of someone’s life, is sometimes inevitable in order that the greater good may prevail—but only when all other reasonable means to thwart it have been exhausted. This is the rule by which all security (police) forces work. When it comes to the vastly higher ethical stakes surrounding a decision to go to war, the burden of proof on those who would elect violence is far greater than the burden of proof required of a policeman before he pulls a trigger.

Regard for the sacredness of life certainly includes protecting vulnerable fetuses from abortion. It also includes safeguarding the quality of the air and water they will grow up to breathe. It includes advocating economic policies that will be most helpful for lifting poor, working families out of poverty. It includes working to provide access to adequate medical care. No party has a monopoly on these issues. Our choices are not simple. But it would be irresponsible to reduce our test of political legitimacy to only one or two of these concerns while ignoring the rest. The nation has voted. Mr. Bush has been reelected. But his claim to represent “the moral high ground” will be tested in his policies and appointments. Will he work to advance justice for all or privilege for the few? Will he advance policies that indicate his commitment to act as a wise steward of the garden God has entrusted to humanity, or will he cater to the demands of those who value profits above environmental health? Will he be guided by a narrow definition of American national interest or by a deep regard for the dignity of all humans? Will Mr. Bush prove to be genuinely pro-life, or will he prove that even the highest of moral causes can be hijacked in the interests of partisan politics? ■

*Warren Zork is a retired Adventist minister. His ministry included missionary service in Africa and 15 years on the staff of Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church.*

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Republicans  
nor Democrats  
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human life.

# Election, Enlightenment and Freedom

RON CORSON

**W**ithin a day of the election this November the culture warriors began their assault upon the people of America. The foreign press such as the *London Daily Mirror* presented the cover page with the question "How can 59,054,087 people be so dumb?" Obviously those 56,054,087 would disagree with the *Mirror* and its pseudo-intellectualism presented as fact. But the *Mirror* reveals a symptom of the disease that has infected the media and many people throughout the world.

Pulitzer Prize winner Gary Wills expresses his disgust more directly. To him it is not Americans who are dumb. It is their Christianity that is dumb. On Nov. 4, 2004, *The New York Times* published Wills' column "The Day the Enlightenment Went Out." He asks: "Can a people that believes more fervently in the Virgin Birth than in evolution still be called an Enlightened nation?"

Later he explains how the world is confused by the American electorate: "The secular states of modern Europe do not understand the fundamentalism of the American electorate. It is not what they had experienced from this country in the past. In fact, we now resemble those nations less than we do our putative enemies." America has not become any more religious since the 1940s, but modern Europe has become far less Christian. So now, to the secular in Europe, Christianity is the anti-intellectual boogeyman. The death of reason and enlightenment is now found in the Christian right.

But the anti-Christian bigots like Wills are not the only ones upset that the Christian right came out and voted for their preferred candidate. A number of Seventh-day Adventists find the vote of their fellow Christians disturbing. Because if the Christian right can have an influence on an American election, surely the Sunday laws cannot be far away. According to national exit polling, white evangelical Christians supported Bush 78 percent, Kerry 22 percent. Fifty-two percent of Catholics voted for Bush, 48 percent for Kerry. Black Protestants voted 83 percent for Kerry and 16 percent for Bush. In each of these categories, the more regular the church attendance the stronger the support for Bush.

Of course, the above groups have been important in every election in the last 40 years. Yet when credit is given to the evangelical Christians by the media for helping to decide a close election, there is a segment of the Adventist church that sees only storm clouds. These folks also see danger in a president who believes in God, who is comforted spiritually by the thought of people praying for him. Even when he espouses values that are similar to their own Adventist values, their first thought is how this will lead to their "time of trouble."

But our battle is not with the Christian right; in fact, we are very much a part of the Christian right. In our effort to prove our traditional endtime predictions right we should not deni-

grate our Christian brothers and sisters for wrongs that they have not done nor intend to do.

The Christian battle is with the secular world that defames God and his followers. As Gaylon Parker wrote in the *Mississippi Press* on Nov. 5, 2004: "In fact, the tripe I've had to choke down over the weeks and months preceding the election is going to be tough to wash out of my mouth. Bill Clinton's former labor secretary, Robert Reich, said Christians pose a greater threat to America than terrorists; Richard Dreyfuss spews anti-religious hate speech on Larry King's show; Bill Maher says prayer is moronic. You get the picture." Indeed, it is Christian morals and values that are under attack in America. The attack is not from our fellow Christians but from those who think that Christianity is the end of Enlightenment. These enemies of Christianity smugly declare Christians are foolish to believe in the Virgin Birth and the idea that God could become incarnate. Christians are foolish if they don't believe that some random amino acids formed into an amoeba that over time changed into a human being, as well as every other form of life.

The battle is on, and it is really all about God. At this time and in this country it is about the Christian God. Society and the major media increasingly disparage God and Christian believers. More and more the forces which claim diversity and tolerance as their credos openly ridicule and impugn Christianity, especially conservative, Protestant Christianity. Tolerance, it seems, is only for those who think like the secular Europeans or practice some version of Native American or Asian religion. If you are a Christian believer, you are just dumb, and your opinions are irrelevant.

The critics of Christianity seem to be willfully blind to the fact that the very freedoms that allow them to attack Christianity are the fruit of Christianity. Whatever the personal faith of the American founders, they developed their ideas in a world that was bathed in Christian ideology. The concepts of the dignity of humanity and inalienable rights were rooted in Christian notions of God and his work as creator. Christianity is not the problem; it is the solution. Christians owe it to society to defend their faith and the values that arise from it.

We understand that those without the Spirit of Christ will think us foolish (1 Cor 2:14). But we cannot ignore the fact that we are ambassadors to these very people who regard us with condescension and hostility. We owe to Christ as his ambassadors and to our community as citizens to defend vigorously the rationality and logic of Christianity. Failing to defend the dignity of our Christian faith poses the greatest threat to American freedom, religious and political. ■

Ron Corson writes from Olympia, Wash., where he works as a cytotechnologist. A native of the Pacific Northwest, he has interests in politics and religion. His e-mail address is corsonr@comcast.net.

Modern  
Europe has  
become far  
less Christian.  
So now, to  
the secular  
in Europe,  
Christianity  
is the anti-  
intellectual  
boogeyman.  
The death of  
reason and  
enlightenment  
is now  
found in the  
Christian  
right.

# The Next Adventism:

## 2004 Conference of the Association of Adventist Forums

ELWIN DUNN

**T**he Association of Adventist Forums convened a conference on “The Next Adventism” at the Hueston Woods Conference Center in southwestern Ohio over the weekend of Oct. 24, 2004.

Charles Scriven, president, Kettering Medical Center, and newly named chair of the Association of Adventist Forums, stated the intent of the conference organizers was to focus our imagination on “what the ‘Next Adventism’ is going to look like, and on what, ideally, may be best for our future.”

Charles Teel, professor of religion and society, La Sierra University, opened the conference with a series of liturgical readings “affirming an Adventist heritage.” It included quotes such as “There is danger of our being so overzealous to keep out of Babylon that we shall commit her most noted blunder—that of sticking a stake and refusing to pull it up and advance” (M. E. Cornell “Making Us a Name,” *Review and Herald*); “To be a contemporary Adventist is to acknowledge that precisely because we are Adventists—people who look to the future—we are

in 1903, was only 40 years old.

The keynote speaker was Phillip Jenkins, distinguished professor of history and religious studies at Pennsylvania State University and author of *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* and an article in the October 2002 *Atlantic Monthly*, “The New Christianity.”

Jenkins, an Episcopalian, states that by 2025, the majority of Christians will be African and Indian. Christianity is moving south and east from the northern hemisphere. Most nations in Europe are no longer labeled as “Christian.” The current Christian population in Europe is comprised largely of immigrants. The average age of Christians in Europe and America is 40. In the southern hemisphere the average age is only 19.

Ron Lawson, professor in the department of urban studies at Queens College, City University of New York, pointed out that by the year 2000, over 25 percent of Adventist members came from Africa. Almost 60 percent of the church’s present membership comes from the southern hemisphere. Only 8 percent of Adventists live in North America. The large and rapidly growing third world membership is fundamentally “conservative.” They have the votes to elect General Conference leaders and can be expected to elect individuals with views similar to their own.

John Webster, theologian from La Sierra University and a recent (1999) transplant from South Africa, shared perspectives from his former homeland. He stated numerous options were tried by those formerly in power in South Africa in the early 1990s, ranging from trying to remain a small minority with money but no authority or control to the only workable solution: remain engaged, keep talking and working.

The attendance at this conference illustrated one of the major challenges facing progressive Adventism: Most of the participants were over 50. One panelist was in her 20s, and several ministers in their 30s and 40s attended. But overall, young people were missing. That fact was perhaps one of the strongest statements about the future of the church. A movement without young people does not have the energy to take on the future. Progressive Adventism is rooted in deep convictions about the character of God and the value of intellect and reason in spiritual life. However, if we are to play a significant role in the future, we must find a way to pass on those convictions to new generations. ■

*Elwin Dunn is publisher of Adventist Today, a long-time member of the Association of Adventist Forums and a board member of the San Diego Chapter of AAF.*

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always on a journey, a journey that leads toward that truth which in its entirety is God’s alone” (Larry Geraty); “The concept of God as Creator is one of the most basic and fundamental tenets of Christian belief, ...which sums up the whole of theology—God is Creator. ...So preoccupied were the traditionalists with a battle to preserve a partially questionable concept of biblical interpretation that the larger war swept past them” (Jack Provonsha in *God Is With Us*).

Roy Branson, former editor of *Spectrum*, and now director of the Center for Law and Public Policy, as well as professor of ethics and public policy at Columbia Union College, reminded us that the Adventist founders were mere 20-year-olds. Ellen and James White and Uriah Smith were 23, John Harvey Kellogg was 24, and General Conference President A. G. Daniells, elected



# Adventists Working for Peace

AN INTERVIEW WITH DOUGLAS MORGAN, DIRECTOR OF THE ADVENTIST PEACE FELLOWSHIP.

**T**ell us what Adventist Peace Fellowship is and how it started.

The idea germinated in conversations between Ron Osborn and me in 2001. Both of us had interests in nonviolence and peacemaking. We believed that Adventism has something to say on those matters and that those things should be said and acted upon much more than they were.

Ron was on the staff of the Center for Law and Public Policy at Columbia Union College, which shares an office suite with the history and political studies department, where I teach. The two of us, along with Jonathan Scriven, then teaching at Takoma Academy, began having informal discussions on Wednesday evenings. We had a growing feeling that we ought to do something to reinvigorate a commitment to peace among Adventists and develop connections among those interested in working for peace.

The crisis atmosphere after the 9/11 attacks and the “war on terrorism” energized convictions we already held. But even before 9/11, Ron had drafted what became our statements of vision and covenant. Chuck Scriven, president of Kettering College of Medical Arts, gave us guidance on those statements and offered great encouragement.

We then asked several individuals—mainly teachers, administrators, and pastors in the United States—to join an advisory committee. The eager responses were a huge boost. The fact that a university president, Larry Geraty, and a former president of the Adventist church in North America, Charles Bradford, were willing to put their names on the line for a fledgling, unofficial, perhaps subversive-sounding effort was of critical significance. Not only did their support assure us that “other people” would give us a hearing, but it indicated that we weren’t unique in seeing this as an “Adventist” thing to do.

I remembered hearing about the Baptist Peace Fellowship that had been formed in the 1980s, and I was attracted to the thought of an “Adventist Peace Fellowship.” As things have turned out, APF has been a “fellowship” in a couple of rather loose senses: We have cosponsored reading groups in the Columbia Union College/Sligo church community on using books like *The Politics of Jesus*, by John Howard Yoder, *The Meaning of Jesus*, by Marcus Borg and N. T. Wright, and *Rich Christians in An Age of Hunger*, by Ron Sider. We have also developed something of a cyberspace fellowship with a Web site and an e-mail newsletter, the *Peace Messenger*.

**I**sn't a concern for peace or pacifism passé in Adventism? Haven't we moved beyond that in our accommodation to American culture?

To answer your second question first, Yes. But I think that's why we need an Adventist Peace Fellowship. Historically, Adventists were strongly opposed to participation in war. Peacemaking has unfortunately become passé for many Adventists, but not for all. We are finding encouraging support for the idea that it shouldn't be. We believe it is worth trying to get people to take a new look.

**I**sn't your “peace work” really just another name for liberal anti-Americanism?

No. Before venturing to elaborate, I would want a person asking this question to explain what these terms mean and why he or she thinks that such might be the case. Is pro-American synonymous with pro-war?

**W**hy should Adventists bother with working for justice and peace among the nations, since we know from Bible prophecy that everything is just going to get worse and worse until Jesus comes?

I think Adventist church leaders who sent a letter to President Harding advocating disarmament in 1921 said it well: “We strongly favor a limitation of armaments,” they wrote, basing their view on “the very logic of our belief in Him who is the Prince of Peace, and of our experience as subjects of His kingdom.” The letter goes on to state that though “the perfect ideal of abiding peace can never be realized in this present world,” still “the mitigation of the evils of war in any measure is well worth the effort, and should have the consistent support of every lover of peace.”

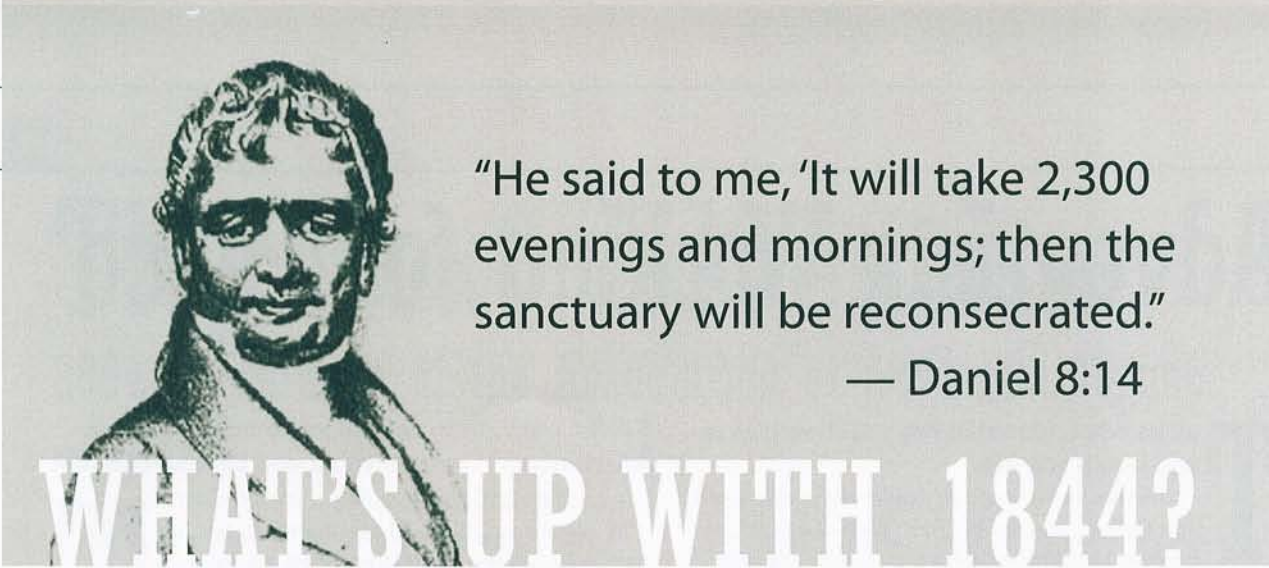
By the way, this document and several other historical and contemporary texts are available at the “Adventist Voices” page of our Web site—[www.adventistpeace.org](http://www.adventistpeace.org).

**W**hat special assets does your Adventist heritage offer in your work for peace and justice?

First, the intense determination of the movement's pioneers to follow the law of God and the teachings of Christ as revealed in Scripture. Back in the 1860s, following some very open and vigorous debate in the pages of the *Review*, the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist

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CONTINUED ON PAGE 22



“He said to me, ‘It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated.’”

— Daniel 8:14

# WHAT'S UP WITH 1844?

ALDEN THOMPSON

“Our fondest hopes...were blasted, and such a spirit of weeping came over us as I never experienced before... We wept, and wept, till the day dawn.”

That was Hiram Edson’s commentary on the early hours of Oct. 23, 1844. He spoke those words 160 years ago. Do they ring any bells at all for Adventists in 2004?

If you’re new in these parts you need to know that the roots of Adventism go back to that Great Disappointment of 1844, when thousands of devout Christians believed that Jesus was going to return on Oct. 22. Daniel 8:14 was the key verse: “Unto two thousand three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.” The “sanctuary” was the earth; the cleansing was Jesus’s second coming; and the 2,300 days were actually years, taking them to 1843–44. They set the date, waited until midnight, then wept until the sun rose again on the same old earth.

Let’s look at all that: the pain and embarrassment, picking up the pieces; and sharpening the focus.

**But pain doesn’t have to lead to embarrassment and scorn. It can point to growth and renewed enthusiasm. Besides, I believe there are really good solutions to all that is painful.**

## **Pain and Embarrassment**

If the survivors of the Great Disappointment itself had to weather the mockery of unbelievers, those who have followed them in Adventism have faced quite a different kind of pain: fear and shuddering in the presence of a holy God. But that too is the experience of an older generation. It’s foreign territory to most of their children. Can I tell you what it’s like? Probably not. But at least I should try.

Realizing that the earth itself was not the sanctuary to be cleansed, our Adventist pioneers focused on the only sanctuary left, the one in heaven. And the angel Gabriel himself had told Daniel that the vision of the cleansed sanctuary was for the “time of the end” (Daniel 8:17).

That would mean it’s for us. Now.

And what happens in God’s sanctuary at the end of time? “The hour of his judgment is come,” announced the first angel in Revelation 14. That’s sobering—or should be. If you’re young with roots in Adventism, I suggest you talk with your parents or grandparents. You will hear echoes of their pain—even terror—in words such as “investigative judgment,” standing “in the sight of a holy God without a mediator,” sins recorded with “terrible exactness.”

If you could sense the pain, you might understand the intense reaction at that Adventist Forum meeting in 1979 at Pacific Union College when Adventist theologian Desmond Ford announced to a crowd of some 1,000 Adventists that it was “impossible” to prove the investigative judgment from the Bible. Roughly half the crowd called Ford a saint; the other half believed something quite different. Adventism has not been the same since.

Unless older Adventists have shared their pain with you, you probably won’t get it. But from that pain flows a fair bit of embarrassment and mockery. Check the Web. You’ll find plenty of scorn directed at William Miller and his rules for Bible study; at Josiah Litch and his predictions about Turkey; at Hiram Edson for his cornfield glimpse of the heavenly sanctuary, and at Ellen White and her visions. You’ll hear snickers about “historicism” and “shut door.” It’s not pretty.

But pain doesn’t have to lead to embarrassment and scorn. It can point to growth and renewed enthusiasm. Besides, I believe there are really good solutions to all that is painful. I won’t go into detail here. But those solutions help explain how someone like me—who knows at least something of the pain—can be really excited about the Adventist vision. And it’s an excitement that I am eager to share with you.

## **Picking Up the Pieces**

First, let’s admit that even if our Adventist heritage leaves us neither ashamed nor embarrassed, parts of early Adventism really are puzzling for us. In particular, how could they not hear Jesus’ words that no one knows the “day nor the hour”?

Given our puzzlements, how do we put the pieces together so that Adventism can be a dynamic community of believers, one that touches hearts and minds in our day, 160 years after the Great Disappointment? Here are some points to ponder:

### 1. Changing logic, changing methods of Bible study

It's tough getting inside the mind of an earlier era. That's why we should be modest about our ways of thinking. Methods of Bible study are often heavily conditioned by time and culture. Those who come after us may be as puzzled by our logic as we are by the logic of our pioneers.

One of the best examples of changing logic and methods involves the historicist approach to Bible prophecy. "Historicism?" you ask, "What's that?"

Martin Luther could tell you. So could Sir Isaac Newton. Newton wasn't just a mathematician and physicist, you see, and he was that—"the most eminent physicist of his day," says the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*—he also wrote a book on Daniel and Revelation. That's partly why he found his way into the ODCC!

For devout believers like Luther and Newton, "historicism" was the way to read Daniel. And it makes some sense, too: You simply plot biblical events along a line of "history" until you come to the end. For the image of Daniel 2, Babylon comes first, then Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, the divisions of Rome, and finally, the kingdom of God, symbolized by the great stone. In Daniel 7, one beast follows another until the saints "receive the kingdom." Simple. Perfectly reasonable. All Protestants thought so.

But check the dates: Luther died in 1546, Newton in 1727. Historicism's days were numbered. But no one knew that yet. Adventists are now virtually alone in defending historicism, but that's now, not then. In the early 19th century it was still in vogue. As historian Whitney Cross puts it: "All Protestants expected some grand event about 1843, and no critic from the orthodox side took any serious issue on basic principles with Miller's calculations."<sup>1</sup> In other words, 1844 made good sense then.

But what most ordinary people don't realize and many scholars often forget, is what one scholar put in words to justify the reprinting of a 1928 book in 1955: "Books of biblical exposition tend to date very rapidly, and eventually to become almost unreadable; so close is the connection between such writing and the contemporary climate of thought."<sup>2</sup>

So let's be gentle with the 1844 people. They were gripped by their culture, we by ours.

### 2. Biblical parallels

For unique Adventist wrinkles such as the "shut door" theory and our understanding of the heavenly sanctuary, seeing biblical parallels can often be helpful. Micaiah's vision of the heavenly court (1 Kings 22), for example, is at least as curious as anything Ellen White ever saw.

And the dusty road to Emmaus was at least as offbeat as Hiram Edson's cornfield. But handsome buildings and fine cars make it harder for us to remember that Jesus was despised and rejected by his own people and had no place to lay his head.

### 3. Disappointment and growth

I marvel at how many people admit to me sheepishly and after dark that the really important things they have learned in life have come through the tough times. Jesus's disciples faced their dark night, and so did our Adventist pioneers. Why should we escape?

**For devout believers like Luther and Newton, "historicism" was the way to read Daniel. And it makes some sense, too: You simply plot biblical events along a line of "history" until you come to the end.**

### Sharpening the Focus

For most Adventists now, 1844 is in the dim and distant past and makes little difference in the way we live our faith today. Perhaps we could draw a parallel with our own births. Our mothers will know whether it was c-section or natural childbirth. But we don't remember and probably don't care. Life goes on regardless of the circumstances of our birth. Births are usually painful, but only the mother remembers.

For us, what counts is how we live today. And in that connection our Adventist pioneers pointed us in the right direction with a simple covenant that they used when they first began organizing local churches in 1861: "We, the undersigned, hereby associate ourselves together, as a church, taking the name Seventh-day Adventists, covenanting to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus Christ." That was it: brief, simple, straightforward. I'd love to see that covenant at the head of our current statement of beliefs. That would preserve our focus. And everything else could then be seen as commentary on those things that really count. I think even Jesus would like that. ■

*Alden Thompson teaches at Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.*

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Whitney R. Ross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 321. Cited by Rolf Poehler, *Continuity and Change in Adventist Teaching* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000), 23.

<sup>2</sup> Norman W. Porteous, "Foreword" to *Adam Welch's Jeremiah: His Time and Work* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955), vi.



# CITYLIGHTS: Learning to Love

ROBERT DARKEN

“A community learning to love well”—that’s the stated vision of CityLights Faith Community, a new church in New York City that my wife, Lynette, and I started with 20 others in June 2003. When we left our jobs in Connecticut and moved to the city two years ago, this vision hadn’t yet been written down. But the concept of “loving well” was exactly what motivated me. Didn’t Jesus teach his students to love well? And wouldn’t secular New Yorkers be fired up by this same vision? We thought it was worth finding out.

**But a church can’t love well if it only focuses inward, so CityLights runs, or participates in, a number of other events that create opportunities for making friends beyond the church community. For instance, CityLights people helped to begin Salon, a weekly discussion group that gathers in Greenwich Village to talk about philosophy, movies, politics or sociology.**

At CityLights, “loving well” is expressed in three dimensions: inward, toward one another within the church; outward, toward anyone within our capacity to help; and upward, toward God through acts of worship. We designed CityLights so that all of our activities—everything we do—helps to fulfill our vision of being a loving community for the good of New York City.

One of the primary ways we learn to love well within the church is in our small groups. On a weekday night, five or six people gather after work in the living room of an apartment on Manhattan’s Upper West Side. One night they share some snacks, sing, pray and discuss a few chapters from *The Story We Find Ourselves In*, a book of postmodern fiction and theology by Brian McLaren. On another night they might take the Lord’s

Supper together, or empathize with a group member who’s having a conflict with a coworker. All these activities are part of the process of discipleship, in which students of Jesus help one another to be more like the teacher.

Small groups are an essential part of CityLights’ vision. Meeting on a weekday night reinforces our understanding of the church as a community that does life together all week long, rather than a collection of individuals who convene once a week to do church. Belonging to a small group is a way for us to be intentional about our commitment to each other. If we are serious about learning to love well, we can’t just say, “We love the whole world.” In small groups we make our love specific by coming to know and care for specific people.

But a church can’t love well if it only focuses inward, so CityLights runs, or participates in, a number of other events that create opportunities for making friends beyond the church community. For instance, CityLights people helped to begin Salon, a weekly discussion group that gathers in a café in Greenwich Village to talk about philosophy, movies, politics, sociology or anything else of interest. Some members joined a book club that meets every couple of months. On occasion CityLights will sponsor a dinner party or a hike outside the city and bring our friends and coworkers along. In this way the CityLights community is broadened to include and serve a diverse body of people.

CityLights also places a strong emphasis on Christian activism as a way of loving our city and its people. God is not a Republican or a Democrat, but Jesus did not shy away from politics; his platform was to care for “the least of these.” Following Jesus, some CityLights people have committed to weekly service preparing meals for the homeless and the terminally ill. CityLights has organized several blood drives, helped to run a Christmas party for homeless kids, and made holiday cards for shut-ins. These kinds of service-oriented activities remind us that Jesus directed us to be doers, not merely hearers of the word.



# ve Well in New York City

We regard all these tangible acts of love for others as worship. But it is also important for CityLights people to spend time in worship that transcends the merely human and connects us directly to God. On Sabbaths we gather in the library of a Quaker school downtown. The library has a comfortable, familiar feel. It's ringed with books, and large windows flood the room with natural light, so people seem comfortable inviting their friends into a neutral space without churchy overtones. Worship times are simple. There is singing and prayer, a talk and discussion. New Yorkers have serious doubts about Christianity, and I try to provide a useful framework for coping with these doubts, rather than resolving them with easy answers or pretending a greater level of certainty than I have. Most of us live with some level of uncertainty. It seems to me that one key to following Jesus is not to focus obsessively on intellectual certainty about his teachings, but to actually do what we are certain is good: like the command to love one another as Jesus loved his friends.

The best feature of our library meeting space is the view through the large windows overlooking Stuyvesant Park. As we worship we look out at trees and birds, pedestrians and taxis. I always love stained-glass windows in church buildings, but a real drawback is that they insulate worshippers from the world outside. Here, there is no barrier between us and the world. We are here in the heart of the city, and the city goes on all around us. This reminds me that the followers of Jesus are not called to be separated from the city, nor to be assimilated to it. We are a countercultural community within the city, joining in whatever work we perceive God doing here. We are part of the legacy of Abraham: blessed, but not for ourselves alone. We are blessed to be a blessing to all people. ■

*Robert Darken is the community director for CityLights Faith Community. He is a former high school English teacher who attended a church in New York City for three years before moving to the city to start CityLights. You can find out more about CityLights by visiting [www.citylights.info](http://www.citylights.info).*

## One-Minute Adventism

You step from the lobby into the elevator with a colleague. Just as you push the button for the top floor she says, "You're a Seventh-day Adventist, aren't you? What do Seventh-day Adventists believe?"

It will take the elevator a little over one minute to make the trip. What would you say in those 60 seconds? If you talk really fast, you could squeeze in 200 words. You will sound more relaxed and gracious if you limit yourself to about 160.

Write down what you would say and send it to us.

We will publish two pages of entries and will pay for the best one according to how many entries come in—the more entries, the higher the reward for the top submission. Entries from those under 25 years of age will receive special consideration. Send your version of One-Minute Adventism to [editor@atoday.com](mailto:editor@atoday.com).

(Please, no entries by postal mail.)

# The Holy Family

JOHN MCLARTY

“So you are no longer foreigners and aliens but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household.” Ephesians 2:19

I was 22 years old, headed from Memphis, Tenn., to Pacific Union College in California as a transfer student for my senior year. I had never been to the school and didn’t know a soul. I got off the plane in Oakland and waded into the sea of unknown faces in the terminal, looking for Uncle Ellsworth. I had met him only once before, when I was 6 years old, so I didn’t have the slightest idea what he looked like. But a tall man with a mane of white hair and a kindly face approached and greeted me tentatively. “John?”

Within seconds, I went from being a stranger lost in a crowded airport to long-lost son coming home. Uncle Ellsworth and Aunt Bernice embraced me with warm affection. Their hospitality, humor and counsel enriched my year. My cousin Jeanine was a wonderful friend, offering sage “sister’s advice” regarding girls and dating. Aunt Bernice’s spaghetti on Friday night was the highlight of

**In the beginning, humanity’s identity was the gift of creation—we are created in the image of God. The story of the Jews celebrates the status they enjoyed as descendants of Abraham. The Bible highlights privileges that were theirs as members of the nation God had chosen, quite apart from the character or characteristics of the individual.**

my week. Here in this new place among new people, I discovered that I was family.

Americans celebrate the individual. Our national stories honor individuals who have risen above their family of origin and through hard work and initiative have achieved individual greatness. Most of us know nothing of Ben Franklin’s family, or George Washington’s, for that matter. We are suspicious of political dynasties like the Kennedys or Bushes. We wonder if the younger members of the families have gotten into office by riding their daddies’ coattails. And there is no compliment intended in the question. We protest affirmative action because it seems to undercut individual achievement.

But in reality, personal identity is not created *ex nihilo* by individuals. It is given by family (either literal or figurative). Individuals make real choices. We shape ourselves through choices that become habits and character. But all

of this activity of the will is at most a remodeling, a modification, of the identities given us by our families. Identity is a gift, not an achievement. This perspective is pervasive all through the Bible.

In the beginning, humanity’s identity was the gift of creation—we are created in the image of God. The story of the Jews celebrates the status they enjoyed as descendants of Abraham. The Bible highlights privileges that were theirs as members of the nation God had chosen, quite apart from the character or characteristics of the individual (or even of the community at any one point in time, Deut 7:7). In the New Testament, believers are not viewed as “saved individuals,” but as beloved members of the Holy Family, the household of God.

When the Old Testament affirms God’s regard for non-Jewish people, it does so by picturing them as honorary members of the Jewish community. Consider the stories of Rahab, Ruth and Naaman (Matt 1; 2 Kings 5) and the inclusive language of Psalm 87:

“The Lord loves the gates of Zion.... And he has made her his home. He says, ‘I will make her my home. I will count Egypt and Babylon among my friends; Philistine, Tyrian and Nubian shall be there; and Zion shall be called a mother in whom men of every race are born.’ The Lord shall write against each in the roll of the nations: ‘This one was born in her’” (Psalm 87).

This text commands attention because it promises a hopeful future for the traditional enemies of the Jews. For our purposes, however, the most striking feature is that the Babylonians and Philistines who receive the favor of the Lord are not favored as the noblest individual citizens of their respective lands. Instead, they are received as honorary citizens of Jerusalem. Their boon comes from being reckoned as members of the earthly community that receives God’s favor.

This same concept is evident in Isaiah 56:

“The foreigner who has given his allegiance to the Lord must not say, ‘The Lord will keep me separate from his people for ever;’ and the eunuch must not say, ‘I am nothing but a barren tree.’

“For these are the words of the Lord: The eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, ...shall receive from me something better than sons and daughters, a memorial and a name in my own house and within my walls; I will give them an everlasting name.... So too with the foreigners.... Their offerings and sacrifices shall be acceptable on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.’

“This is the very word of the Lord God, who brings home the outcasts of Israel: I will yet bring home all that remain to be brought in.”

The greatest honor God bestows on individuals is to pronounce them full citizens of the community of the redeemed.

The gospel of Luke tells of an encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus, a tax collector in the city of Jericho. In that society, tax collectors had approximately the same social standing as drug dealers in our society—envied for their wealth, despised for their wickedness. Because they worked in cooperation with the Roman military that occupied the country, they were seen as traitorous collaborators and regarded as hopelessly corrupt.

Jesus invites himself to Zacchaeus's house. At dinner, Zacchaeus announces he is giving away half his money and that to anyone he has cheated he will repay four times what he stole. Jesus responds to this evidence of transformation by announcing, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:9-10).

Notice that Jesus describes Zacchaeus's new status not in terms of his individual, personal connection with God, but in terms of his restoration to citizenship in the community of Abraham (a figure of speech for the people of God, the Jews).

Individuals matter. Jesus clearly affirms individual responsibility, privilege and rewards. But just as emphatically he teaches the significance of community identity. He aims to create a new Holy Family that will spiritually replace the racially and geographically defined Holy Family of the Jewish nation (Matt 21:41). This concept is reinforced by passages such as:

"You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now are you the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Peter 2:9-10).

"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household" (Eph 2:19).

In this Holy Family, proof of discipleship is not personal sinlessness but loving connections between people within the community.

"A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. Everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another" (John 13:34-35).

"Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph 5:1-2).

The Bible says very little about "me and God." It's emphasis is "we and God." Salvation is not something that I achieve through the pursuit of personal holiness, it is the gift of inclusion in the holy community. The blessings enjoyed by a follower of Jesus are gifts to the holy nation. They are not intended to develop holy individuals, but to build a holy (whole, just and merciful) community.

The book of Revelation brings this emphasis on

community to a climax. In chapter 3 Jesus is pictured knocking at the door seeking to enjoy dinner with individuals ("I will go in and eat with him and he with me"). But more frequently the focus is on the people of God, gathered from "every tribe, nation, kindred and people" whom Jesus has anointed as priests (Rev 1). They form a heavenly chorus and "follow the Lamb wherever he goes." They sit on thrones with their compatriots, judg-

**Unfortunately, we betray this commitment to law in our reduction of the "Spirit of Prophecy" to the individual ministry of Ellen G. White. We should rather expect the prophetic work of the Spirit to operate broadly across the church, rather than being limited to a single individual.**

ing and reigning forever (Rev 5, 7, 20, 22). Salvation is enjoyed by the host of God's people in corporate worship and reigning, not by individuals in private, one-on-one interaction with God.

The theme song of heaven is not "I Come to the Garden Alone," but "Shall We Gather at the River?"

Adventists believe that God gave birth to our community specifically for the purpose of restoring Sabbath-keeping within the larger Christian community. Beyond our role in affirming the continuing validity of the specifics of the 10 commandments, Adventists picture God as seamlessly congruent with the principles of law. God is not capricious or arbitrary. In contrast to the Roman Catholic (and Episcopalian and Orthodox) churches, rather than finding our institutional identity in the personal authority of a succession of individuals (apostolic succession), Adventists find our institutional identity in a corporate pledge of allegiance to the principles of heaven. We have no illusions that individual Adventists are more "law-keeping" than other Christians. But one of the central ideas (or ideals) that forms our community is a corporate affirmation of the supremacy of law over the authority of persons.

Unfortunately, we betray this commitment to law in our reduction of the "Spirit of Prophecy" to the individual ministry of Ellen G. White. We should rather expect the prophetic work of the Spirit to operate broadly across the church, rather than being limited to a single individual.

The picture of authentic Christian life as being a life in community is highlighted in the central practices of the Christian church: baptism, the Lord's Supper, worship. A very strong communitarianism lies at the heart of most classic explications of the meaning of the crucifixion of Jesus. Most theories of the atonement assume that people are really, truly connected with each other, that what happens to one, happens to many.

To those who are vividly aware of their inadequacies or failings, God offers the gift of membership in his household. You do not have to earn your place or prove your merit or fight your way in. To people who see

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# 24/Seven Ministry Center

24/Seven is a new church in the Washington Conference. After seven to eight months of planning, praying, networking and preparation, it held its first service on Oct. 18, 2004, with an attendance of 260. Since then, its attendance has averaged between 120 and 150. The church is led by two full-time pastors, Steve Leddy and Matthew Gamble.

## How did you arrive at the name, 24/Seven Ministry Center?

The basic premise behind the name is simply that instead of being seventh-day Christians, we should be Christians 24/7. In talking with many church-goers, we found that all too often people would go to church on Saturday or Sunday and believe that in so doing they were Christian. 24/Seven Ministry Center is all about being a Christian in church and out of church.

## Describe the basic philosophy of your ministry: How is it the same as other church-planting projects? How is it different?

The most important similarity between 24/Seven and other church plants is that we want to do something for God's kingdom. By and large a lot of the church plants that we know about have been started to address a need in a community or even in an already existing congregation. They want to have a culturally relevant church that articulates our beliefs as Seventh-day Adventist in a way that is life-changing and practical. That is our goal, too.

What makes us different? To begin with, instead of starting another small church that would probably be roughly the same size 50 years from now, we designed our foundation for growth. In preparation for launching 24/Seven we met with over 200 people individually or in small groups to discuss the vision of 24/Seven. From those 200, we pastors hand-picked a core team of over 80 people. We knew this core team would establish the DNA of the church and thus determine its future. And we knew we needed a sizable core team in order to implement our dream of launching our public services with a large attendance.

Another thing that distinguishes us is our plan to develop a multicampus congregation. We did not want to create another geographically defined congregation like the Bellevue Seventh-day Adventist Church or Memphis First Church or Loma Linda University Church. We are

seeking to create a regional church with many campuses. Our vision is to establish seven campuses over the next 10 years serving people all over western Washington. Presently we have attendees from Everett in the north to Port Townsend to the southwest, a distance of over 100 miles.

Also, we launched opening day with two services. Why? Because we are all about growth, growth, growth. We want all of the seats that are there to be filled quickly. We are encouraging our attendees to recognize the fact that we are not going to grow unless they step out and invite their friends and neighbors. Our goal is to be missional in all that we do. We have radically shaped our leadership structure to allow for ministry to flourish. When someone has an idea, the answer is yes!

## How much time do you think you need to give your ideas and dreams a good trial? In other words, at what point do you think it would be appropriate for an outsider to come and look at what you are doing and make a creditable analysis of whether it is working or not?

I would say that someone could come now and look at what we have accomplished over the last 10 months and see that the ideas and goals for launching a church that will make a significant difference for eternity can happen! We launched a month ago with over 260 in attendance. It was amazing. So that would be one major milestone for us. Now we are onto the next major milestone, which includes growing the first campus to over 400 and then starting another campus. At that point, it would be great for someone to come and check us out to see how we are doing. But quite frankly all along the way I would highly recommend for anyone to come and make a creditable analysis. Presently we have over 80 names on our young adult list. This being a population that is often missed in the local Adventist church, we are thrilled at what is happening with that age group.



# Mosaic: Experimenting in Oregon

DARRELL LITVIN

Mosaic is a Seventh-day Adventist Church committed to creating congregations that serve today's young people. It is presently developing campuses in Oregon City and in Portland.

## A long time ago in Palestine

Jonathan said to his young armor-bearer, "Come, let's go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised fellows. Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few" (1 Sam 14:6).

Saul was camped under a pomegranate tree with two swords and 600 men. They were waiting for the Philistines to sharpen their farm implements (plowshares, mattocks, and sickles) so that they would have something to fight with. Saul counted his two swords and waited. Jonathan didn't do the math.

I don't mean to oversimplify the situation, but read 1 Samuel 14. Saul did the smart thing and waited. Jonathan acted.

## Right now

The denomination tends to do the smart thing and wait until success is probable before committing resources. At Mosaic, we have decided to take a venture for God. We are seeking to align our resources with available social and spiritual energy and seek to make a significant impact for the kingdom of God.

Most Adventists over 40 are cultivating an ever-smaller circle of friends, the vast majority of whom have already settled into their religious biases. No one is looking to change. No one is expecting change. But the denomination is devoting most of its resources to

servicing the over-40 population. No wonder our growth is minimal.

On the other hand, people in their teens and early 20s are making religious choices. Young believers are far more likely than their elders to have friends who are nonbelievers and to have discretionary time to pursue ministry. That's the sweet spot of outreach: people with "outside friends," time and passion. And since people in leadership are most often successful when their demographic profile approximates that of those they hope to lead, the church should provide major resources to support young leaders in outreach to young people.

## Mosaic

In the Portland metro area, a Seventh-day Adventist church called Mosaic is presently building two spiritual communities (congregations) led by young people. They live and work in neighborhoods where the congregations are planted, so their natural network of friends becomes part of their ministry. Their goal is to create spiritual communities with a radically defined cause and a high level of support. That support includes life-skills classes, guidance and mentoring. Their basic conviction is that life is not fulfilled by career, but by radical involvement in God's cause. It has been my privilege to take part in their work.

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were unchurched or non-Adventist.

One amazing story is of a woman who attended the grand opening. Steve talked to her as she was leaving and Matthew followed up with a phone call that following week. Come to find out, she was born and raised in the Church of England. She said it was so strict that as she got older she wanted nothing to do with it. When she got our flyer in the mail, it made 24/Seven look fun and exciting. The day she walked into 24/Seven was the first time that she had been back to church in over 26 years! Matthew asked her if she had any questions for us. She was curious about what type of Bible to buy as she did not have one. Matthew told her that not only would he recommend a translation, he would bring it to her the following Sabbath. What a pleasure it was to provide this woman a positive experience with God at Church and in his word! ■

Our most basic objective right now is to offer resources and connections for Christians, particularly Adventists, who are interested in peace-making as part of their allegiance to Jesus as Lord.

## What do you see as your greatest challenge?

Administration. If we had more administrative gifts it would be great. We are so blessed to be in the most amazing conference in the planet. The conference has provided us with two full-time salaries from day one, but we wish we could hire an administrative pastor as well. We are making it, but long nights would be reduced with an administrator.

## Tell us about the first few weeks. How many people came? What kind of people came? Any interesting conversations with people who came?

24/Seven: The first week we had over 260. In the weeks since then we have averaged 120 to 150. Of the first week's attendance we estimate that roughly 100

# Teamwork & Perseverance

GARY S. WALTER

It has been nearly two decades since I was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I didn't want to become an Adventist. I fought it with every ounce of intellectual and spiritual strength I could muster. But the logic is too good—the theology is too pure.

Technically, I'm a fourth-generation Adventist, but in reality, I'm first generation. After my grandparents (on both sides) joined the church, it wasn't long before their parents also discovered "the truth" and joined. But my parents had long abandoned the church and its teachings by the time they married one another. Therefore, I wasn't raised going to church or with any real Christian teachings.

That all changed in 1974 when we were all baptized after a six-week Revelation Seminar. At 15 years old, I was ready to become the best Seventh-day Adventist I could be. Within a few weeks I convinced my family to become vegetarians, and soon I transferred to Portland Adventist Academy for the last year and a half of high school.

**It is not an easy task to make adjustments to an international organization with 13 million members. Unity and cooperation are principles that should dominate every discussion for change.**

It was while attending Walla Walla College that I became disillusioned and turned my back on the church and renounced my Christianity. The legalism and associated guilt were too much to bear. I found I couldn't live up to the standards imposed on me.

Ten years later, after much searching, I found a real relationship with Christ that began a journey eventually leading me back to Adventism. The only problem was that I didn't want to be an Adventist. I assailed the church in dialogue with anyone who would listen. In my opinion, there were great problems that needed immediate attention. Theologically, I had no problem with the church—it was the bureaucratic, cultural and social issues that concerned me.

Two things helped me to see past the problems and allowed me to become a solid Seventh-day Adventist. First, in my professional career I learned the value of teamwork. Although I played organized sports all my life, it wasn't until I began to sit on committees and chair them that I saw the true value of unity, cooperation and teamwork. Although compromise may be required, cooperative groups accomplish so much more

than independently minded individuals.

The second thing that helped me see past the church's problems was a statement made to me by my brother. After a long discussion where he patiently listened to my complaints against the church, he waited for the right moment, then spoke words that changed my life. He said, "It's easier to change the church from the inside than from the outside." It wasn't long before I was rebaptized.

As my involvement in the church has increased, these two principles have served me well. Anyone with significant attachment to the denomination is going to see problems, but it is their approach to these issues that determines not only the future of the church, but their own peace of mind. I have determined that I want to be part of the solution and not add to the problems. Here are the steps I take to accomplish this:

First, I honestly try to evaluate what is within my span of control and what isn't. As pastor of a local church, I can assume that "the buck stops here." But in reality, about the only thing I have direct control over is my personal computer. Nearly everything else must be negotiated with my ministry teams, the conference, and everyone else who has direct stock in our local church.

Second, I try to assess the problems in the church openly and acknowledge their existence. Face it, we live in an imperfect world and things are only going to get worse as Satan exerts more and more control. By admitting that we have problems, we can begin to address them. Denial serves no one.

Third, I strive to think globally, and act locally. It is good to see the "big picture," but it is important for those who live in glass houses not to throw stones. Jesus recommended that we remove the log from our own eye before we try to remove the sliver from another's eye. Most people who are intensely focused on other people's issues have been unable to resolve their own problems. Because their own lives are out of control, they seek to control others.

Fourth, I prioritize the issues and begin to tackle them systematically. A shotgun works well for hunting geese, but if you truly want to take down the big game, you'll use a carefully aimed, high-powered weapon. Choose your battles and count the costs. Make sure you know what you're getting yourself into.

Fifth, I try to evaluate my motives humbly and prayerfully, making sure that each issue is one that God is calling me to take on. It is better to be led by vision and not driven by fear, rage, hurt or arrogance. Know without a doubt that you are operating on God's timing. It is always good to check yourself with trusted friends and

colleagues—not just the ones who agree with you, either!

Finally, but not least, I seek to draw ever closer to the Lord. We can't afford to let our quiet time diminish—in fact, we should increase the time we spend with God. Carefully examine your life and make sure you are free of any moral failures, pride, envy, or need for power and control.

To fix some issues it can take years—even generations. We need to be patient, trust in the Lord, and persevere. Impatience only leads to frustration, and unreasonable expectations are just premeditated resentments.

In my previous career I saw a huge problem shortly after I was hired. I was quick to offer a solution and vehemently advocated a change. Unfortunately, I found few who would listen to the passionate complaints of a 20-something rookie. Thirteen years later, as a mid-level manager, I was able to propose a solution to the problem I'd seen when I was first hired. Not only was the solution accepted, but I was made responsible for implementing it and assuring success for the new program. By patiently waiting for the right opportunity and working within the system, I helped to improve an already great organization.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a great organization. We have the strongest pastoral remuneration system

of any large denomination. Arguably, we have one of the strongest missions and outreach organizations of any worldwide church. Our theology is sound and undeniably strong. Our educational systems are tremendous. Our members are committed.

Sure, we have problems. Adjustments need to be made. Few people can honestly debate this. However, it is not an easy task to make adjustments to an international organization with 13 million members. Unity and cooperation are principles that should dominate every discussion for change. It is more important to understand the multicultural complexities and various viewpoints before we seek to be understood.

While I respect and admire passion and vision, I know that these must be tempered with love, respect and unity. Jesus's John 17 prayer should dominate our discussions. Paul's counsel in Romans 14 must prevail.

I didn't want to join this church in 1987, but after considerable soul-searching I jumped on board. I'm not going to leave now. I know we face a number of issues, but I'm a team player. I will fight to make this a better organization. I want to be part of the solution. ■

*Gary Walters and his wife Jen are church planters in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Their website is: [www.springsproject.com](http://www.springsproject.com).*

## Mosaic: Experimenting in Oregon

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We talk about “communities” because we believe authentic spiritual life is developed through the accountability and support of genuine friendships among a group of disciples. We think the critical mass for this kind of authentic community is five to seven people. This grouping will be most effective when the individuals live within walking distance of each other and the ministry center (church). In this kind of neighborhood-centric ministry, the church grows through natural relationships of church members with nonchurched people rather than by religious immigration. Those relationships are developed as they live, work, shop and play in a compact environment where members are intentional about cultivating friendships.

The community part of the equation is formulaic, but the programming is not. We do not look for people to “do” specific tasks, but for people who passionately desire to develop creative ways of making a difference for God. The overriding purpose is to create a community focused on helping others come to “wholeness.” Wholeness means emotional and spiritual maturity. It means financial and physical balance. It means “it's not about me.”

The basic ethos of Mosaic is sensed more as a “cause” than as a doctrinal formulation. Traditionally, we have

focused our evangelism on the doctrines that make us unique among Christians. However, comparison-shopping among brands of Christianity is less relevant for today's spiritual wanderers who aren't necessarily looking to Christianity. Besides a distinctive doctrine-set, Adventism includes a whole-life picture of God and of healthy human response to him. At Mosaic, we aim to make our impact less through proclaiming a “best set of doctrines” and “premium brand Christianity” than through the demonstration of a coherent lifestyle. Traditionally, we've shown our mettle by having all the right answers for the journey's end. At Mosaic we are committed to being better companions along the way.

Finally, failure? Jonathan ventured out with the word “perhaps” and succeeded beyond his wildest dreams. Will we also succeed? We are committed to doing something “new and different.” That doesn't sound like “tried and true.” So, it is likely that some of what we do will fail. Fine. That's a natural part of life. But for those willing to learn, it is also the foundation for future success. ■

*Darrell Litvin owns both a lawn mower and a garage door opener—which makes him too much of a resident of suburbia for his ideals. He lives 12 minutes (and years) “over the hill” from an evolving Mosaic church plant in Portland's Pearl District where he plays the dual roles of cheerleader and financial architect.*

# Jack W. Provonsha's Contribution to Adventist Thought

JIM WALTERS

Part 1

This is the first installment in a two-part review of the work of Dr. Provonsha. The second installment will appear in the next issue of *Adventist Today*.

Jack Provonsha is one of the most significant theologians in the Adventist church in the last century. He filled various roles—religion professor to perhaps 9,000 students at Loma Linda University over a period of 28 years, consultant to various church administrators for a quarter century, author of scores of essays and five books, and teacher of a popular Sabbath School class whose tapes

epistemology. Not coincidentally, the questions of how we love and how we know were also vital to mainline ethicists and theologians that Provonsha read and studied in graduate school. And those were moderate to liberal thinkers.

## How We Love

Christian love remains the central, unchanging constant for Provonsha. In his unpublished *Christian Ethics in a Situation of Change*, 1967 (hereafter, *Christian Ethics*), he concludes that every decision must be made on the basis of “whether it is ultimately for or against love.” Near the conclusion of *Remnant*, 26 years later, Provonsha claims that the “finishing of the work” will come when “all can see the difference between self-service and sacrificial love” (147).

In using agape as the fundamental principle in his work, Provonsha was in keeping with a key theme of long standing, and he drew on several leading Christian thinkers: Anders Nygren, Paul Ramsey, Paul Lehman, Gene Outka and Joseph Fletcher.

Provonsha defines agape as “spontaneous and undervived” love of the other, and wholly of divine origin. However, the crucial human role is in providing the occasion or situation for agape’s reign. Only “the right action, the loving action, will be the one rendering agape possible.” Whether a person opts for this loving action is totally up to the person; more specifically it involves a person’s freedom to choose.

Provonsha is emphatic and extensive in his treatment of human freedom. He declares that agape “presupposes” human freedom, and here he doesn’t mean some carefully nuanced philosophical category, but the “old-fashioned” kind. Provonsha sees freedom as a natural part of the human being, as “something inherent in man *qua man*” (*Christian Ethics*, 28). The importance of freedom to Provonsha can hardly be overemphasized. The essential notion is that human beings, created in God’s image, are innately endowed with a freedom to choose good or evil, right or wrong. The very idea of selfless love

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were distributed worldwide. But Provonsha’s impact on his church transcends individual roles. Provonsha’s enduring spiritual ethos is an intellectual integrity that allows the next generation of Adventist theologians to stand on his shoulders. And Provonsha saw himself, as he put it, standing on the “giant shoulders” of the Adventist pioneer—and he might have added, contemporary theologians.

An analysis of Provonsha’s major books portrays him as increasingly espousing his Adventist roots. Provonsha used his considerable talents to elaborate—for the modern person—a more intellectually palatable version of Adventism. Interestingly, Provonsha’s only book written and published after his retirement in 1985, *Remnant in Crisis* (hereafter, *Remnant*), focused exclusively on Adventist uniqueness. However, Provonsha cannot be fully appreciated without understanding two central concerns that undergird and inform all his later work—love and

for God and others is dependent on a person's being able to consciously and freely choose such love. If freedom is an illusion, the idea of a loving action is meaningless.

For Bertrand Russell, one's decisions are mere preferences. But for Provonsha one's capacity for moral choice is nothing less than our creation in the divine image. Here Provonsha follows Reinhold Niebuhr who emphasizes the human capacity for self-transcendence. Humans, like lower animals, are often driven by instincts and natural proclivities. But only human beings can deliberate and responsibly decide. Provonsha cites Paul Tillich who writes that humans have such freedom that "man is free even from his freedom; that is, he can surrender his humanity" (*Christian Ethics*, 43). Provonsha saw significant coherence between contemporary theology and Ellen White on the relevance of freedom.

### How We Know

Provonsha is particularly indebted to contemporary philosophy for a key element of his epistemology, the study of how we know. Here Provonsha unapologetically invokes metaphor and symbol as the only means we have for talking of God and also for understanding the significance of Christ's salvific death.

Again, following Tillich, Provonsha distinguished sign from symbol. Whereas a sign is arbitrarily chosen to designate its subject, a symbol partakes in the reality toward which it points. Provonsha frequently cites the Sabbath

as possessing some important symbolic qualities. But in regard to God, "all" that we say is only symbolic. Provonsha's modesty about God-claims goes beyond this. Our very idea of God contains our own "need and wish fulfillment." This notion is expressed elsewhere by Provonsha's view that our "creative memories" are often at work in our re-creation of the past. We humans adapt things as they once were to "the deeper needs of the present. We do not see things as they are or even as they were. We see them as we are." Provonsha confesses that some of the old ideas are more "emotionally and intellectually satisfying" (*God Is With Us*, 7,68).

Another word for symbol is "event-window." Provonsha sees various Hebrew rituals as such windows—the ancient Day of Atonement, the heavenly sanctuary, and particularly the Sabbath (*You Can Go Home Again*, 103; hereafter, *Home Again*).

Significantly, at times Provonsha embraces socio-historical criticism to expose the human nature of religious doctrine. Regarding various atonement theories, he explains how a thinker came to a particular emphasis by indicating the prevailing form of government. For instance, Provonsha explains Anselm's theory of "satisfaction" (that is, divine justice must be satisfied) as a result of his socio-political milieu in which sin was analogous to a serf dishonoring his feudal lord and either accepting punishment or providing an alternate satisfaction.

Provonsha contends that we can learn about God, at

least provisionally, "by beholding man." We learn such things as God's unity, his personhood, and his goodness.

Provonsha sees the New Testament writers using a variety of metaphors to describe the significance of Christ's death and resurrection. None of them are adequate to the event; they are all symbols or event-windows that illuminate but do not fully disclose. The problem is that theologians have taken them literally and drawn too much from the mere symbols. They didn't realize that the New Testament writers were using, as we all use, "ant language."

In the next installment we will examine the increasingly Adventist accent and focus of Provonsha's work as he matured. ■

*Jim Walters teaches at Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, Calif. in the department of religion. He is a founding member of Adventist Today.*

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## Adventists Working for Peace

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Church took an explicitly pacifist stand during the Civil War, based on their reading of the divine commandments, both in the Old and New Testaments. Some of the documents posted at our Web site substantiate this. I would also mention an article I wrote, "Between Pacifism and Patriotism," which first appeared in the summer 2003 issue of the *Journal of Adventist Education*, and may still be available at *Adventist Review Online*.

A second Adventist resource is our connection with the radical Reformation beliefs about the "believers' church." This is strongly affirmed in *The Great Controversy* and other writings by Ellen White and puts Adventism in a historic line with such radical folk as the Waldensians, Lollards, Anabaptists, and the left wing of the 18th- and 19th-century evangelical awakenings. Pacifism, peace-

**Our most basic objective right now is to offer resources and connections for Christians, particularly Adventists, who are interested in peacemaking as part of their allegiance to Jesus as Lord. I don't know exactly where that commitment will lead, but I'm eager to find out. A great deal will depend on the ways and extent to which people respond to or interact with our witness.**

making and humanitarian activism—taking the way of Jesus seriously—all run through this historical line and are often at odds with the established powers of both state and church, which tend to try to impose their will through war and persecution.

Third, dedicated Adventist theologians and ethicists of recent decades have done a marvelous job of showing that taking action for justice and peace in the present is actually mandated by the Adventist belief in an ideal future. Roy Branson, at the forefront of these scholars, wrote several years ago about social reform as a "sacrament of the Second Advent." Our belief in the coming kingdom and what it stands for guides and motivates our efforts to give the nations a taste of it now.

**C**an you give us some idea of the demographics of those who are involved in APF?

No one has sorted out much information along those lines. The number of people who have signed on to our statement of vision and covenant is rather small. However, it is a truly international group. Though North Americans predominate, we have heard from supporters in Australia, Kenya, South Africa, Italy, Great Britain and Germany.

**W**hat kind of response have you had from Adventist church leaders?

We have experienced nothing but support and encouragement from the ones we have been in contact with thus far, and I have no reason to expect that wouldn't continue. We have a booth reserved for the 2005 General Conference session in St. Louis, and we hope to make further connections there.

**H**ow can people get more information or get involved?

[Visit] our Web site—[www.adventistpeace.org](http://www.adventistpeace.org). We'd be eager to add anyone who asks to the e-mail list for the *Peace Messenger*.

Our most basic objective right now is to offer resources and connections for Christians, particularly Adventists, who are interested in peacemaking as part of their allegiance to Jesus as Lord. I don't know exactly where that commitment will lead, but I'm eager to find out. A great deal will depend on the ways and extent to which people respond to or interact with our witness.

I would stress the value of signing on with APF as a significant, concrete action in itself, even if one does not know in advance the particular actions to which that action will lead. Signing on to a general statement of convictions is in itself a very powerful and practical action, because it helps build a base for future actions growing out of those convictions. For example, when we need to call on church or public leaders to take a particular action or when we join our voice with those of like-minded organizations in addressing an issue, the larger our membership base, the more effective we will be.

**W**hat are the central concerns of APF right now?

I think the aggressive militarism of the current American government—the policies of unilateralism, "preventive" war, the pervasive and multifaceted abandonment of constitutional and international norms of human rights—have been a wake-up call for many people, galvanizing them into action, based on long-held but sometimes inert commitments.

Also, the widespread endorsement of the current war policies in the name of evangelical Christianity magnifies the challenge. In this context, it seems important to raise questions about the accommodation to American culture you referred to earlier. To a considerable extent, Adventists seem to have made an easy peace with the American military ethos and voluntary participation in armed combat. I think the founders of the Adventist movement would find that very strange.

The central concern of APF in all of this is to encourage Adventists to consider anew what it means to follow Jesus in matters of war and peace, social and economic justice, and human rights.

**T**here is increasing talk of the American Empire. If you were to be asked to give spiritually based counsel to its leaders, what would you say?

Well, that creates a fun fantasy and I guess it never hurts to be prepared.

Somehow I would want to encourage them to act in harmony with the nation's own highest values—the principles of the Constitution and Declaration of Independence—as well as international norms on human rights, ecology, and economic development for impoverished societies.

It seems likely that greater consistency in living up to these values would make for a more successful campaign against terrorism. I would want them to consider that military action is at best one prong or tool in that effort. The imperial rulers are likely to have the greatest long-term success by placing a high premium on listening to, respecting and consulting with various peoples of the world, and taking firm, consistent action against genuine threats to peace based on broad consensus.

It would be great to get them to read Walter Wink or some other good author on the biblical teaching about the principalities and powers, which should encourage them to act their part in bringing order to a seething world without becoming arrogant and overreaching.

**W**hat appeal would you extend to the ordinary citizens of the Empire who are also Seventh-day Adventists?

Please read and/or listen to the works of N.T. Wright, a prominent bishop in the established church of America's imperial predecessor—Britain. Let me give you a quote in which Wright describes the ministry of the apostle Paul as constituting “a major challenge to precisely that imperial cult and ideology which was part of the air Paul and his converts breathed. His missionary work must be conceived not simply in terms of a traveling evangelist offering people a new religious experience, but of an ambassador of a king-in-waiting, establishing cells of people loyal to this new king, and ordering their lives according to his story, his symbols, and his praxis, and their minds according to his truth. This could not but be construed as deeply counterimperial, as subversive to the whole edifice of the Roman Empire; and there is in fact plenty of evidence that Paul intended it to be so construed, and that when he ended up in prison as a result he took it as a sign that he had been doing his job properly.” This is from the book *Paul and Politics*, edited by Richard A. Horsely (Trinity Press International, 2000), pages 161-62. ■

For more information about Adventist Peace Fellowship, visit [www.adventistpeace.org](http://www.adventistpeace.org).

## The Holy Family

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themselves as foreigners and strangers, God gives the assurance that he has set a place for them at the family table.

To those who secretly (or not so secretly) strut their mastery in orthodoxy or holiness, intelligence, personal discipline, academic achievement, financial savvy, common sense, weight control, fashion and makeup (or lack of it), or evangelistic technique, God offers a place at his table in company with the ugly, the spiritually bankrupt, the poor in spirit, recovering addicts, repentant pedophiles, the retarded and schizophrenics, those struggling with depression and bipolar disorder. The biblical picture of the holy family rebukes pride and corrects self-loathing. We are all part of one body, where our gifts and our deficits and disabilities belong to all.

We readily recognize certain kinds of human ability as gifts—things like musical ability or high IQ. We have a harder time recognizing personal drive, motivation, or moral and spiritual sensitivity as gifts. But God, in calling us to his table, reminds us that none of us arrived here by spontaneous generation. We were birthed. And all of our abilities were gifts before they became achievements. And

all of our failings were first weaknesses and wounds that came to us apart from our will.

Certainly, individuals are responsible for their choices. And the smarter and stronger we are the greater our responsibility. The regular way individuals formally join the Holy Family is through a personal choice to be baptized. But when we compare the benefits of being members of the Holy Family with the contribution we make to the family, our personal, individual role is dwarfed.

**The biblical picture of the holy family rebukes pride and corrects self-loathing. We are all part of one body, where our gifts and our deficits and disabilities belong to all.**

Our most precious identity is the one that is given to us irrespective of our accomplishment or demerit. The greatest benefits we enjoy come to us because of the resources of the family, not because of our own personal achievements. When we step off the plane, we are greeted by Uncle Ellsworth and taken home because we are family. And we will be welcomed into heaven because we are members of the household of God. ■

*John McLarty pastors the North Hill Adventist Church in Federal Way, Wash.*

# Nine Floors Above

DEE MYERS

When the curtain went up,  
He was there. A single dancer.  
Center stage.  
Pirouettes?  
Broken turns.  
Glissades?  
Staggering steps.  
Sinking to his knees  
In mute appeal.  
His shadow  
A haunting partner  
in pas de deux.  
The dancer exits stage left.  
Across the parking lot.  
Into a dumpster.  
Homeless  
Going home.

*Story maker and poet, Dee Myers,  
lives on the ninth floor above 8th Avenue in Seattle.*