

\$5.00

adventist today

january. february 2005

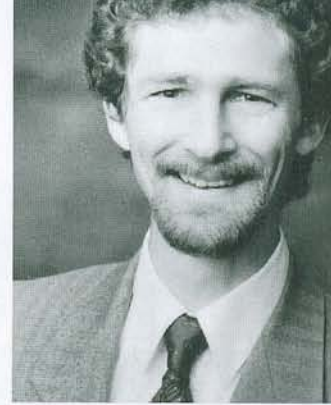
volume 13 issue 1



HOLY ecstasy

ON BEING CHRISTLIKE—FOR A WHILE : 11

INTERVIEW WITH CLIFFORD GOLDSTEIN : 16



Holy Ecstasy

PRACTICING HOLINESS GIVES US A GLIMPSE OF HEAVEN.

Foundation Board
 Elwin Dunn—Board Chair
 Ervin Taylor—Board Vice-Chair
 Eugene Platt—Treasurer
 John McLarty
 Greg Billock
 Keith Colburn
 Diana Fisher
 Edmund Jones
 Chuck Mitchell
 Madelyn Nelson
 Jim Nelson
 Randy Roberts
 Nate Schilt
 Eldon Stratton
 James Stirling
 John Vogt
 James Walters
 Kit Watts

**Raymond F. Cottrell
 Endowment Board**
 James Walters—Board Chair
 Douglass Ewing
 James Nelson
 Nate Schilt
 Ervin Taylor

Advisory Council
 Ken and Diana Bauer
 Robert and Kelli Black
 Gary and Jeanne Bogle
 Antonius and Lilia Brandon
 Todd and Ginny Burley
 John and Charlotte Cassell
 Ruth L. Christensen
 Keith and Judy Colburn
 Ronald and Patricia Cople
 James and Kathryn Dexter
 Merlyn and Rosemary Duerksen
 James Dunn
 H.O. Engen
 Douglass and Patricia Ewing
 Jack and Elsie Facundus
 Gary and Sharon Fraser
 Gary and Annette Frykman
 Brent and Karen Gardner
 Richard and Kathi Guth
 P. Edgar and Patricia Hare
 Lyndon and Linda Harder
 Jim and Jackie Henneberg
 Dennis and Jolene Hilliard
 Russell and Sally Hoenes
 Susan Jacobsen
 Wayne Jacobsen
 John and Judy Jacobson
 Donald and Virginia Jeffries
 Brian and Erika Johnson
 Elton and Marga Kerr
 Dean and Dolores Kinsey
 Frank and Helen Knittel
 Irvin and Doreen Kuhn
 Yung Lau
 Beryl and Ralph Longway
 Felix Lorenz
 Ken and Florence Lorenz
 Adele and James Nelson
 T. Clint and Elaine Nelson
 David T. Person, II
 Eugene Platt
 Thaine Price
 Gary and Ruthe-Marina Raines
 Judith Rausch
 Phil and Joyce Reisweig
 Gordon and Judy Rick
 James and Maryann Stirling
 Ervin and Marilyn Taylor
 John and Nancy Vogt
 James and Priscilla Walters
 James and Betty Webster
 Tim and Stephanie Welebir

I STILL REMEMBER THE FIRST Friday night service I attended as a freshman at Southern Adventist University about 35 years ago. Nearly 2,000 voices and a bold pipe organ created a breathtakingly rich experience of worship through music. The song service climaxed with “For All the Saints.” Before we opened our mouths to sing, the building already thrummed with the organ intro.

Then we sang. And I thought I had died and gone to heaven.

When I was still young enough to sing alto, my mother recruited me for the choir at Memphis First Seventh-day Adventist Church, where I sang the *Messiah* several times and learned to be at home with the works of Mendelssohn, Bach and Sibelius. My singing never progressed beyond barely carrying my part, but those years in choir helped prepare me for the sweet ecstasy of that glorious Friday night.

As we came to the end of the final alleluia of the last chorus, I was engulfed with a wave of sharp, almost painful longing. I wished we could sing it over and over again.

Revelation portrays heaven as a place of sustained ecstatic joy.

And the four living beings never cease to sing,
*“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty,
 Who was and who is and who is to come.”*

And the 24 elders fall down and worship, singing,
*“How worthy you are, our Lord and God,
 to receive glory and honor and power,
 for you created all things
 and by your will they were created
 and have their being” (Rev 4:8-11).*

The music of heaven is the natural, spontaneous response of celestial beings to the beauty, goodness, faithfulness, honesty, compassion, justice, mercy, creativity, benevolence, nobility, dignity, patience, self-restraint, generosity and gracious tenacity of God. The word they use to voice their awareness of this divine goodness is “holy.”

Holy means far more than the absence of evil or corruption. It is the presence of all the best attributes of life. (Note, a rock does not lie, cheat,

steal, fornicate, bully or gossip. Still, it is not holy.) God’s holiness is known through his actions, and more specifically, his actions toward humanity. The final verse of the song declares, “For you created all things... .” The parallel song in chapter 5 cites Jesus’ work in saving and elevating humanity.

One of the distinctive elements of biblical theology is the picture it paints of the essential similarity between the nature of God and his ideal for humans. As Israel journeyed toward the promised land, God told them repeatedly, “You must be holy, because I am holy” (Lev 11; 19; 20; 21). This theme is picked up in the New Testament: “It is God’s will that you should be holy” (1 Thess 4:3). “Just as he who called you is holy, so you be holy in all you do” (1 Pet 1:14).

One reason holiness is important is that it prepares us for the ecstasy of heaven.

Metaphorically speaking, we prepare for the music of heaven by singing in the church choir. We deepen our appreciation for God’s holiness by practicing our own clumsy versions of it. It’s like the enhanced appreciation we get of John Williams that comes from our trying to play Bach on the guitar. We are humbled by our failures. Our meager successes deepen our admiration for the master.

Holiness is not a negation of life and vitality, it is focusing our energy on what is best and admirable. It means forcefully asserting our will in faithfulness, compassion and truth-telling. Holiness means acting like God would even when avoiding such acts would be more convenient for us.

The practice of holiness enlarges our capacity for wonder, awe and worship. It prepares us to sing “holy, holy, holy” in a soul-lifting ecstasy that will never end.

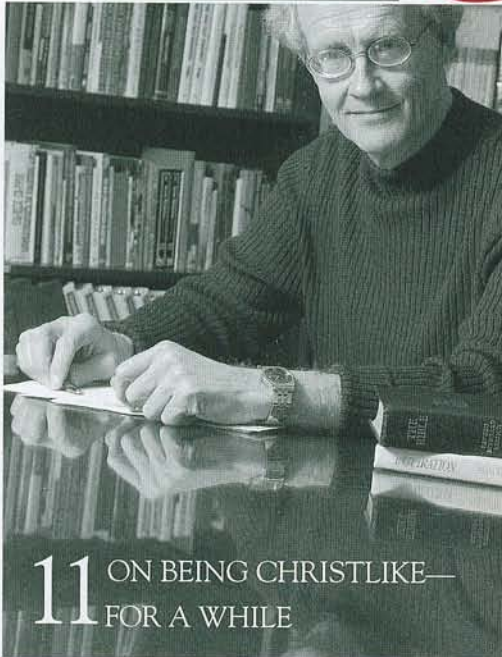
So be holy in all you do.

» Then we sang.
 And I thought
 I had died and
 gone to heaven.

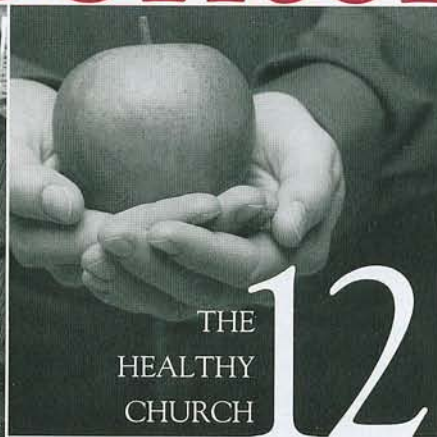


Contents

Vol. 13.
Issue 1



11 ON BEING CHRISTLIKE—
FOR A WHILE



THE
HEALTHY
CHURCH

12



20

- 4 | Letters _ Readers Respond
- 8 | Tithe Change Debated in Minnesota _ John McLarty
- 10 | Enrollment Gains Reported _ James Stirling
- 11 | On Being Christlike—for a While _ Alden Thompson
- 12 | The Healthy Church: Part 2 _ Gary Fraser
- 16 | Interview with Clifford Goldstein _ Ervin Taylor
- 18 | Kevin's Quandary _ Carrol Grady
- 20 | Counting Before the Lord _ Kevan Lim
- 22 | Reviews _ Edwin Schwisow and David A. Pendleton
- 24 | One-Minute Adventism _ Readers

adventist today reports on contemporary issues of importance to Adventist church members. Following basic principles of ethics and canons of journalism, this publication strives for fairness, candor and good taste. Unsolicited submissions are encouraged. Payment is competitive. Send an e-mail to editor@atoday.com for writer's guidelines. Annual subscriptions \$29.50 (\$50/2 years) for individuals, \$18 for students, \$40 for institutions. (Payment by check or credit card. Add \$10 for address outside North America.) Voice: (800) 236-3641 or (951) 785-1295 Fax: (951) 785-1595 E-mail: atoday@atoday.com Web site: www.atoday.com

adventist today (ISSN 1079-5499) is published bimonthly for \$29.50 per year (\$18 for students, \$40 for institutions) by Adventist Today Foundation, P.O. Box 8026 Riverside, CA 92515-8026. Periodical postage paid at Riverside, California, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *adventist today*, Box 8026, Riverside, CA 92515-8026. Copyright © 2005 by Adventist Today Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering open dialogue in the Adventist community.

letters

READERS RESPOND

PMINDLESS PHALOER

As you can no doubt guess, I have not been a regular reader of AT. However, a copy of your July/August 2004 issue came into my hands just recently. For the most part, I found it balanced and well-written, even if I did not agree with the author. Unfortunately, the essay by “Pmindless Phaloer” destroyed any illusion of integrity I may have had. Sarcastic ridicule of this nature, even if the premise is correct, is unworthy of any Christian publication.

Bryce Hickerson | Carmichael, Calif.

Editorial note: The article by “Pmindless Phaloer” parodied an article published in the Adventist Review that included a non-sarcastic (and very real) call for the removal from church employment of all teachers who disagreed with the author. The ridicule in Phaloer’s parody is less cutting than the conviction in the original.

SET FREE FROM RATIONALITY

After reading your castigation of Pmindless Phaloer (AT July/Aug 2004), I couldn’t help but wonder where faith fit in the equation. Certainly, new ideas and healthy debate are both necessary in the church if it is to continue to mature, but disparaging those who believe differently seems hardly productive. After all, Abraham did not offer up his son Isaac because the overwhelming evidence proved that it was a good idea. He offered up his son despite all logic, choosing instead to act in faith, which “is the...evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1 KJV). With regards to the July/August issue as a whole, there will always be people who choose to believe in the seven-day creation week, all evidence to the contrary, and that choice to act on faith does not necessarily indicate intellectual laziness.

Thomas Duerksen | Weaverville, N.C.

LINDA SHELTON

I read your report on Linda Shelton (AT May/June 2004). I have also been to Linda Shelton’s Web site. Even the most casual reader can see between the lines of your report and Linda’s own statement. It is very clear to see that you and Linda are not being upfront or honest. It is absolutely irrelevant what Linda did or didn’t do. Even though the divorce is (I guess) final there is only one thing Linda should do. Linda should go to Danny and do whatever it takes to work things out. Satan loves to see families broken up and God hates divorce. Your report on Linda was

well written but you do a superb job of incriminating her as she did to herself on her Web site. If your purpose is to serve Linda you have only succeeded in making her look exceedingly silly and guilty as sin. If you want to serve Linda, you will spend your efforts more wisely by convincing Linda that even though the divorce is final, she and Danny can work it out.

Gerald E. Payne | Via the Internet

ON THE SHUT DOOR

Amazing how often the “shut-door” issue comes up, especially in topics that are not fluent or related to the “shut-door” issue (Robert Joe’s comment, regarding other usages, AT Sept/Oct 2004). In summary (based on all the source material extant):

1) During 1844 and 1845, shut-door Millerites had a fairly uniform view that probation had closed for the world on Oct. 22, 1844. Ellen White began to use this term as a code word for what happened in heaven on Oct. 22, 1844, when Christ “shut the door” to the holy place and “opened” the door to the last phase of his atonement in the most holy place.

2) No source materials indicate that Ellen White or any of those who became Sabbatarian leaders engaged in the fanaticism associated with other shut-door advocates.

3) No records prove that Ellen White believed that the door of mercy was shut on anyone in 1844, except for those who shut their own door by rejecting Bible truth—and only God could know those personal decisions.

4) No records indicate that Ellen White repudiated any of her vision-messages.

5) Source materials do not indicate that Ellen White in the early 1850s changed her mind and moved from an extreme shut-door position in the early 1850s because of changing circumstances. Early Sabbatarian Adventists were moving more aggressively in reaching out to the general public in the early 1850s, chiefly because it had taken a few years to formulate their own message. What would they have said to anyone regarding their reason for existing as a religious group much before 1850? All this took time.

6) The principle of rejection emphasizes the biblical concept that (a) each person is responsible for his or her own salvation; (b) that no one is rejected by God until that person chooses to reject God; (c) that probation will not close for the world until all have settled into a habitual pattern of accepting light or rejecting it. This principle threads

“I CAN’T IMAGINE A GOD WHO KNEW DIFFERENTLY DICTATING THE WORDS AS THEY APPEAR NOW.”

its way through all of Ellen White’s vision-messages.

7) Each successive vision revealed additional building material in the development of an integrated, consistent theological system that eventually became the “present” and distinctive truths of Seventh-day Adventists. Keep your mag coming. It serves us well.

Herb Douglass | Lincoln Hills, Calif.

ADVENTIST PASTORS

In response to the editorial, “What’s the Matter with Adventist Pastors? (Why Can’t They Be Like Rick Warren?),” I wrote the following to my pastor:

“You may not be Rick Warren. But I do not know Rick Warren. I do know you. I know when I came to your church hurting from the spiritual abuse of my past, you saw me for God’s child. You listened to me. You affirmed me as a person. I also know that when I took my very messed-up family members to your church, you dealt with things that are unspeakable—child molesting, drugs, abused children, health issues, the depths of hell on earth. I know there are maybe even a dozen people out there who are not drinking and drugging any more and that your ministry was a large part of that. I know there are half a dozen children out there who are not living in the drug world or otherwise being abused, and your ministry was a large part of that. I know my elderly father can now relax and trust that his children and grandchildren have a chance of making it to heaven, and that your ministry was a large part of that. I know the darkness that has always haunted me in my extended family is dissipating, and that Jesus is becoming more real to me again. My heart can once more know peace and hope, and your ministry was a part of that. You may not be Rick Warren. You may sometimes despair because of the lack of numerical growth in our congregation. But Rick Warren never brought the healing my family needed. I am not sure that he could have. I am glad for your prayers and your words. You visited my family and accepted them in all of their weirdness and fallenness. Thank you.”

Name withheld

SCIENCE AND THE BIBLE

I was given a copy of your publication and really enjoyed it. I have been [a Seventh-day Adventist] for 69 years, but recently dropped out because of some of the very questions you brought out (AT May/

June 2004). It was almost a shock seeing them aired, things that never would have been published in the *Review*.

I appreciated the article on the six literal days of the creation week. I have thought how the story given in Genesis has been out of accord with any scientific evidence for 500 years. I have questioned this for the past several years, as I subscribe to *Astronomy* magazine. This is a real eye-opener on what God is doing out there in the cosmos. We don’t try to explain what has gone on in the earth, such as the age of dinosaurs. All we say is, well, they were destroyed in the flood. Adam, it is said, gave names to all the creatures (Gen 2:20). Can you see him giving a name to Tyrannosaurus Rex as it rambled through the garden looking for food?

The Genesis record also states when God came down to earth, “Darkness was upon the face of the deep.” Deep what? The water that made it without form and void, naturally, until he separated it from the land, raising up continents from the midst of the waters. Earth had been awash with a world tsunami, so to speak. Then God said, “Let there be light,” as if he now decided to create the sun to give light on the earth. The earth is in orbit around the sun, along with other planets in our solar system, all formed, I guess, after the earth. The story becomes more absurd in the light of even a cursory knowledge of astrophysics.

But one does not dare express such views in higher levels of Adventism or without risking being ostracized, I have discovered. When I read your publication, I realized some were not this way. I had begun to think we as a church had just closed our minds to science if it wasn’t like we wanted it to be. Since the Bible was written, people have made indescribable gains in knowledge. Had the writers in those ancient times known what we know today, it would have been written differently. I can’t imagine a God who knew differently dictating the words as they appear now.

Psalms 103:7-9 presents a far more awesome picture of the creation than Genesis does. He did not need a week to do what we see in the earth, as he can call those things which be not as though they were (Rom 4:17; Job 9: 9,10). That is the picture I have in my mind’s eye about the creator.

When my subscription to the *Review* runs out, I shall subscribe to your more scientific-approach publication. OK, I am 84 now, 85 in March, and I have learned a little bit about things over the years.

Joe Scrammage | Via the Internet

letters+

READERS RESPOND

PASTORS AND CHURCH GROWTH

The problem I had with your article “What’s the Matter With Adventist Pastors? (Why Can’t They Be Like Rick Warren?)” (AT Sept/Oct 2004) is the very title of the article. My first question is, ‘Who is Rick Warren’ and why would congregations want their pastors to be like him? (Does this mean I am not with current church news?)

Are we planning God’s churches and congregation sizes? The question asked, “Do churches grow?” was a question of perception. Maybe we should be asking if we are to be involved in the growth of churches or of congregations.

Individuals really are wanting love, fellowship, recognition, to fill a function, to be called by their first name, a member of a conversational Sabbath School class. We need to check to see how many members within a large body of believers know and are known by more than just their family and close friends.

If we feel responsible for the lack of congregational growth, could the lack be either we are not ready for the rush of new members or we do not want to give the responsibility to God? The great ideal in my mind of “growing churches” is 50 churches within the community—walking-distance churches, each with only 100 members or less, offering health classes, cooking classes, Bible classes, prayer meetings and church services all within the community and maybe even within walking distance.

It may be that the only real source of [Adventist] church growth is in the planting of new churches and not in congregation growth. I want a pastor who is able to say, “Hello, Steven,” when shaking my hand. I believe God’s shepherds are those pastors which keep planting small churches going into the community seeking the lost. I would like to see church growth in the form of more churches within the community with the feeling of each neighborhood they serve.

Steven C. Schroder | Assistant to the Evening Dean Heald College | Roseville Campus, Calif.

Editor’s Note: Rick Warren is senior pastor of 15,000-member Saddleback Community Church in Southern California. Warren launched his ministry with a handful of people in 1980.

WRESTLING WITH MANUSCRIPTS

From reading Dr. Alexander Dederer’s recent letter about my article, “Wrestling With Venerable Manuscripts” (AT May/June 2004), I sincerely regret that I failed to make my positions clearer. I had no intention of questioning “Mrs. White’s

claim to being a messenger of God sent to assist a struggling young church to develop biblical doctrines.”

I was surprised by Dederer’s assertion I had stated “that many of her writings contain major modifications and distortions not present in her original handwritten manuscripts.” I have never seen any of her “original handwritten manuscripts.” If they exist for any of her writings I have been denied access to them. Such absolutely essential primary documents for any scholarly study of her life and work would constitute an invaluable treasure. I don’t believe Dr. Fred Veltman and his very competent group ever found such a document in almost eight years of exhaustive work on *Desire of Ages*.

If evaluation of the transcript of a public speech is based on the meticulous accuracy and complete coverage of its contents (similar to a court reporter’s professional best), then it was simply “no contest” in my choosing Crisler (a true professional) over Maggie Hare. Simply put, Maggie’s frequent liberties with what Sister White actually said to that important group in Battle Creek in 1901 are unacceptable conduct—whether approved by Ellen White or not. Or to put it another way: Ellen White was a multitalented, charismatic down-east Maine Yankee with the character and personality traits of that justly famed ethnic group. Maggie’s gratuitous disingenuous changes went far towards destroying that uniqueness. To a historian this is a devastating betrayal of a trust to abide strictly by the truth in even the minutest detail. I am certain that any physician would be horrified if a medical transcriber made even the slightest change in his medical reports.

Dr. Dederer did not comment on Sister White’s startling statement that Christ had personally—not in a dream or vision—appeared to her more than a hundred times. (Arthur White in his massive definitive biography of his grandmother discusses three of those events in considerable detail.) This, in comparison with St. Paul’s few personal visits from Christ, plus her tremendous quantity of writing, makes Ellen Gould Harmon White the preeminent prophet of the Christian era.

My concern over Maggie’s unprofessional editing was of a speech, not a manuscript. My fear about the possibility of such having occurred to manuscripts was a logical extension from this very rare insight into the inner working of her editorial team.

Fred Hoyt | Emeritus professor of history
La Sierra University, Riverside, Calif.

“I WAS RAISED INSIDE THE ADVENTIST PAY SCALE AND ENCLAVE; AS AN ADULT I’VE WORKED OUTSIDE AND INSIDE. I REMAIN CONCERNED BY HOW MUCH GOES TO THE TOP....”

TITHE DISTRIBUTION IN MINNESOTA

Which congregation in Minnesota submitted the proposal to amend bylaws of the conference (AT e-mail special report, Feb. 4, 2005)?

I am chairman of [a Seventh-day Adventist] church school in Tampa that has four constituent churches, 100 students and a great staff. But we are struggling with finances due to major increases in assessments from our conference each year for teacher charges, at rates that far exceed any good economic index in the U.S.

At our last school board meeting we voted unanimously to ask our conference to reconsider cost increases and to do those things necessary to cut the tithe pie a little more in favor of the local schools and churches. That seemed radical until I read your news item. There must be others around the North American Division who worry with the changing needs of churches and the grassroots of the denomination. Incidentally, I don’t see the leadership in Minnesota enthusiastically allowing the proposal onto the agenda; in fact they’ll probably enthusiastically oppose any open discussion. Thanks for your leadership.

Art Berard | Tampa, Fla.

SPECIAL REPORT ON MINNESOTA

Mr. Foster’s comments regarding the journalism in the article posted to the Web and e-mail (Feb. 4, 2004) by *Adventist Today* are well taken. The journalism does seem suspect and Mr. McLarty’s reply does not put those questions to rest. I was very glad to see that these practices are being questioned. I was raised inside the Adventist pay scale and enclave; as an adult I’ve worked outside and inside. I remain concerned by how much goes to the top and the double standards that seem to be employed in the administration of our tithe. May God bless our church and the Minnesota conference as it grapples with these issues. Thanks to Minnesota for bringing a much-needed discussion out into the open.

Melva Hicks | Via the Internet

RESPONSE TO MINNESOTA REPORT

I am very interested in this ongoing debate. I wonder...because the Ohio Conference has a myriad of “bi-vocational” pastors now pastoring the smaller churches. This saves them money that they can siphon off of the tithe funds from those smaller churches to give to the larger churches and

themselves. Wouldn’t a bi-vocational pastor be something similar to a “congregational” type of church family? As I understand it, the church votes on whether or not they want to have that person as their “pastor.” Oftentimes, it is a person already a member of that particular congregation. I realize that they don’t set the pay for the person, but they can cause that individual to be released from his/her official duties as pastor if they want to...as can larger congregations if they make enough of a “stink” to the conference officials and withhold their tithes, etc. I think it is a major problem in Adventism.

Charles W. Godfrey | Via the Internet

A CONFERENCE PRESIDENT’S PERSPECTIVE

Editor’s note: This letter, reprinted here with permission, was originally written to the pastors in the Rocky Mountain Conference.

Just a quick note on the material flying around on e-mail regarding the proposal in Minnesota to redefine the storehouse, etc. I have talked with both Bill Miller, president of the Minnesota Conference, and my brother who is a pastor in the conference and on the executive committee. While they certainly don’t agree with the proposal, they are allowing the discussion to take place because of their commitment to a real atmosphere of openness that fosters participation and input. While allowing the discussion, the conference president and the constitution and by-laws committee will recommend to the constituency that the motion be rejected.

If a congregation really wants the denomination to change its tithe policy, the recommendation would have to be acted on by the General Conference in session, not the local conference constituency meeting. We are part of a much larger movement raised up by God. If you insist on the degree of change called for in this proposal, you ought to resign and start your own church.

There is always room for discussion on how we do business, but as large as the church is, it will take a “God thing” to change the structure of the church. That is not my mission. Sharing Jesus and helping local churches be more responsive and effective in their own communities are the real issues for our conference.

Jim Brauer | Denver, Colo. | President, Rocky Mountain Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

Letters policy

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

Adventist Today welcomes letters to the editor. Short, timely letters that relate to articles appearing in the journal have the best chance at being published. We reserve the right to edit for length and clarity. In publishing letters, *AT* does not necessarily endorse the views represented, but believes in giving voice to differing viewpoints. We prefer messages sent on the Internet, addressed to atoday@atoday.com. Please include your complete address and telephone number—even with e-mail messages. Send postal correspondence to Letters to the Editor, *Adventist Today*, P.O. Box 8026, Riverside, CA 92515-8026.

Revolutionary Change Debated in Minnesota

PROPOSED TITHE CHANGES SPURS LIVELY DISCUSSION

THURSDAY, FEB. 3, 2005. In preparation for the April 17, 2005, Minnesota Conference Constituency Meeting, the conference constitution and by laws committee has received from a congregation a proposal to change the way tithe funds are managed in the Minnesota Conference. The initial decision by the committee was to place the proposal on the agenda and to recommend against its acceptance by the session delegates. At the time of this writing, it is not certain whether the proposal will actually be included on the agenda for the constituency meeting.

The major changes in the proposal include:

1. Qualifying two blanket statements that everything in the Minnesota Conference will be done in agreement with General Conference (GC) policies by adding the proviso, "unless otherwise expressly stated in these by laws."
2. Recognizing that local churches (instead of, or in addition to, the conference office) are appropriately designated "storehouses" for tithe.
3. Requiring the conference to return 75 percent of tithe received from congregations to the congregations. This 75 percent would include the salary and benefits paid to clergy who directly serve the congregation.
4. Explicitly stating that any use of tithe permitted in the administrative divisions of the church—conferences, unions, divisions, GC—is also a permitted use in the ministry divisions of the church—that is, congregations. (For instance, since tithe funds are used to pay for secretarial and janitorial services in the administrative divisions of the church, local churches would be allowed to pay their secretaries and janitors with tithe.)

Congregations do not often offer substantive input for consideration by conference constituency sessions; however, it is customary for conference administrators to invite input from their congregations in preparation for constituency meetings. Given the revolutionary political and financial implications of these proposed constitutional changes and the history of other congregational initiatives in North America, it is questionable whether these proposals will actually be

openly discussed on the floor of the session.

The full text of the recommended changes is below.

Proposed amendments to the bylaws of the Minnesota Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and the addition of a new article

Motion #1—To amend ARTICLE II of the Bylaws of the Minnesota Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, as set forth below:

ARTICLE II RELATIONSHIPS

43 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

All purposes and procedures of this Conference

44 shall be in harmony with the working policies and principles of the General Conference of

45 Seventh-day Adventists, the North American Division, and Union Conference unless expressly stated in these Bylaws.

Motion #2—To amend ARTICLE XII of the Bylaws of the Minnesota Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, as set forth below:

ARTICLE XII FINANCE

345 Policies. The tithes and all other funds shall be used in harmony with the financial

346 policies of the North American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day

347 Adventists and the Union Conference except as permitted in these Bylaws and, in the case of

348 donations, its use shall be in harmony with the specifications of the donors and in accordance

349 with applicable state and federal laws governing the use of charitable contributions.

Motion #3—To add the following ARTICLE to the Bylaws of the Minnesota Conference of Seventh-day Adventist. The new ARTICLE shall be implemented and in full operation by September 1, 2005.

ARTICLE XX TITHE

In Malachi 3:8 God directs His people to bring "all the tithes into the storehouse." Notwithstanding any other article or provision in these Bylaws each local church or company is the collection point for tithe and each serves as an individual "storehouse."

Section 1. Handling of Tithe. One hundred percent of collected tithe shall be returned to the Conference Treasurer within 45 days of receipt. The Conference Treasurer shall account for these

EDITORS' NOTE:
This article was originally published via our e-mail newsletter. It provoked a lively letter exchange. We publish the article and corresponding letters to encourage church-wide discussion of Adventist tithe policy. Events in Minnesota have moved beyond what is reported here. For more current information visit our Web site, atoday.com.

funds using Generally Accepted Accounting Standards and identify each storehouse from which the funds are received.

Section 2. Use of Tithe. A permitted use of tithe at the administrative level is a permitted use of tithe at the storehouse. As codified in the Working Policies of the North American Division (NAD) tithe may be used to sustain personnel who are directly engaged in soul-winning work and/or by people who serve in a supporting role. In addition, according to NAD Policy tithe “may be used for operating expenses” used by these personnel. In practice tithe is used and may be used for: salaries (pastoral, teaching, secretarial, janitorial); expenses associated with soul-winning and disciple making; operating expenses related to these activities.

Section 3. Distribution of Tithe. As a trustee and fiduciary of remitted tithe, and other assets belonging to storehouses, this Conference shall annually return to each storehouse a minimum of 75 percent of all tithe collected at that storehouse. Salaries and employee benefits paid to personnel hired by this Conference directly for each storehouse is included in this 75 percent. This Conference may retain a maximum of 25 percent of each storehouse’s tithe to cover expenses they incur in administering human resource functions and benefits for the sisterhood of churches, accounting, other administrative costs. The portion of the tithe this Conference retains may also be used to provide additional staff and resources for new missions or to provide additional support to churches and companies.

Section 4. Timing of Distribution. The portion of each storehouse’s tithe not expended for salaries and benefits paid to personnel hired by this Conference directly for each storehouse shall be returned to the storehouse within 60 days of receipt and an annual accounting of received and dispersed funds shall be provided to each storehouse by March 31st each year.

Reaction to tithe debate

THURSDAY, FEB. 10, 2005

To the editor: I read with interest John McLarty’s Feb. 3, 2005, news bulletin, “Tithe Distribution: Revolutionary Change Debated in Minnesota,” though the article seemed somewhat one-sided. I was disappointed that there was no indication that information had been sought from any of the “leaders in all the relevant administration divisions.” (Typically a news story includes something like, “Repeated efforts to contact...were unsuccessful.”) I was also disappointed with the author’s prediction that administrators “will work to prevent these proposals from being openly discussed.” (Usually a reporter can find someone to express the desired opinion so that it can be reported with a pretext of objectivity through attribution to someone else.)

Unfortunately, the way this proposal has been framed by those offering the amendments is likely to make more difficult an open discussion on the underlying financial issue. One plausible interpretation of the proposal is that the local conference should secede if the denomination doesn’t give in to demands for a congregational structure. The idea that we will follow denominational policy “except when we don’t want to” (paraphrasing slightly) seems remarkably defiant and likely to open the door to all kinds of future mischief.

If the required 75 percent of the delegates do not wish to present this ultimatum to the denomination (“Accept that we are going to do what we want or throw us out—we dare you!”), then what is left of the proposal? What sort of open discussion would you expect at a constituency session? (Some of us will have driven over four hours to come to a one-day meeting where we are asked to elect officers and consider a number of other important issues.)

As to use of tithe, if we stay part of the denomination, we don’t have much control over the portion that is to be sent to the union, division, and General Conference. If we continue to follow denominational policy, we don’t have much control over the portion we pay for the retirement benefits. These sums alone make up more than the amount the proposal would allow to be used by the conference. For some, it is hard not to see the proposal as a demand to dismember the conference (and by extension, the denomination).

There are certainly some important issues related to resource allocation and use of tithe that merit appropriate discussion in an appropriate forum. Does the fact that someone has thrown down the gauntlet obligate me to pick it up? Is the burden now on me to craft an effective alternative, or else I’m branded as in league with those who “will work to prevent these proposals from being openly discussed”? Do you get the sense that I’m feeling manipulated?

—James Foster, J.D. (speaking only for myself)

Head elder, Moorhead Seventh-day Adventist Church

Member, Constitution and Bylaws Committee, Minnesota Conference

McLarty responds: I should clarify a couple of points. First, by circulating the article, *Adventist Today* is not advocating the adoption of the proposal in question. Personally, I agree with some parts of the proposal and disagree with other parts. Second, the reason we published the article (on the Web and via e-mail) was to encourage discussion across North America of the issues addressed. I believe the denomination will make better policy decisions if the debate that shapes those decisions includes substantial input from people who earn their living outside the cocoon of Adventist employment. (For the record, I live inside that cocoon.)

I do not make any pretense of knowing how to fix our current system. It is clear to me that the North American Adventist church is not growing in the non-immigrant population and may be in actual decline. I doubt that redoubling our efforts in doing what we’ve always done is going to change the picture appreciably. But I believe there must be ways to increase our im-

Enrollment Gains Reported

INCREASES IN ENROLLMENT FOR COLLEGES OFFERING HEALTH-RELATED DEGREES

EARLY IN FEBRUARY THE NORTH American Division Department of Education, headed by Gerald Kovalski, released the figures for the latest count of enrollments for the fall of 2004 at its 14 colleges and universities. The following table details these figures. Total head count (HC) was 23,091 students enrolled. This number includes part-time students; full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollments totaled 19,041. Both of these figures represented small gains of a percent or two over the previous year. For some of the schools, especially health-related professional ones, the gains were dramatic.

Schools that reported increased enrollment

- » *Loma Linda University* gained 362 (HC) or 247 (FTE), an increase of nearly 9 percent.
- » *Florida Hospital College*, in Orlando, Fla., gained 168 (FTE), or nearly 19 percent.
- » *Kettering College of Medical Arts*, in Dayton, Ohio, gained 39 (FTE), almost 8 percent. The Florida campus has almost tripled its enrollments in the past five years.
- » *Union College* showed a gain of 55 FTE enrollments, almost 7 percent over the previous year.
- » *Southern Adventist University*, in Collegedale, Tenn., showed a small gain as well.

For the rest of the Adventist colleges the enrollment news was not so cheering

» *Andrews University* registered a gain in head-count students but a loss in FTE students of 14. Andrews administrators are quick to point out, however, that they are represented at many Adventist colleges abroad with affiliated programs, so that students pursuing courses under the Andrews name at home and abroad actually number almost 5,000. And the Andrews leaders point with pride to their new music hall, the Howard Performing Arts Center, with some of the finest acoustics found on any Adventist campus.

» *Atlantic Union College* has been beset with problems in recent years, and shrinking enrollments have not helped. Over the past year the fall head count dropped 20 percent, and the FTE 16 percent. But the school has weathered the accreditation crisis (presently on probation, according to its Web site) and is promoting new academic offerings like an associate of arts degree program: gourmet vegan chef. Education-rating publications have included AUC in lists of good schools in the Northeast.

Other schools are glad to have held their enrollments with only small percentages of slipping. All the schools have taken on professional development and recruitment officers and sought to tap sources of funding for scholarships and grants. Some even speak of their “marketing” departments and invest in student recruiting trips.

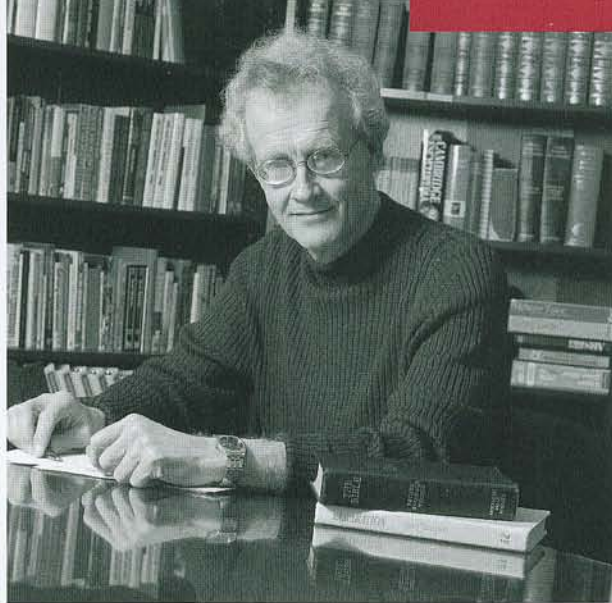
» James Stirling is ...

Article Calls

BOOK REVIEWS & E-MAIL BULLETINS

We are soliciting reviews of the book, *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World* (Doubleday, 2004) by Alister McGrath. If you are interested, please e-mail us at editor@atoday.com.

During the General Conference session *Adventist Today* will produce daily e-mail bulletins. We are looking for people who would be willing to produce a page of commentary or reporting for particular days during the session. If you are interested, please e-mail us at editor@atoday.com.



» Alden Thompson teaches at Walla Walla College, College Place, Wash.

On Being Christlike— for a While

“WE’RE IN GOOD COMPANY, EVEN AMONG BIBLE WRITERS.”

It seemed funny at the time. I laughed. Then I saw the tears. I don’t remember what she said; I don’t remember what I said. I didn’t write all that down. But I do remember the laughter; I do remember the tears. And what I did write down was a vow I hope to remember until the Lord comes: “I don’t ever want to laugh in such a way that it makes another person cry.”

Another vow from my little book of quotes triggers a similarly painful memory: “I don’t want to say anything in a person’s absence that I wouldn’t say in their presence.” That one burned its way into my soul in New Zealand several years ago while I was doing a circuit of workers’ meetings with the conference ministerial director. One day as we talked about the work of the church, I was explaining to my colleague in ministry why I felt the principle of “no backbiting” was so important. And then I remembered what I had said about a certain church leader just moments before. The juxtaposition was so jarring, and I was so chagrined, that I had no choice but to repent and apologize on the spot.

Typically, I don’t think I’m inclined to be deliberately malicious. Yet my natural impulsiveness has left more than a little wreckage along the way. And as I tell my students, it makes no difference whether I run over you by mistake or on purpose, you’re just as dead.

To be sure, any human court judges us more rigorously for destructive acts which are deliberate and premeditated. But the results are still deadly if an engineer makes an “innocent” mistake in computing the stress on a bridge or if a surgeon “forgets” to complete an important procedure.

In the moral realm, however, I am beginning

to think that God may be more concerned about those momentary lapses when I “forget” my vows and ideals than he is about my more obvious and public flaws. Do those moments of forgetfulness open to view the troublesome impulses which I have desperately tried to hide? Do they reveal my attempts to practice my piety before others in order to be seen by them (Matt 6:1)?

We’re in good company, though, even among Bible writers. The apostle Paul was perhaps the most candid in this respect, admitting that he all too easily failed to do the good he intended while living out the evil he wanted to avoid (Rom 7:19).

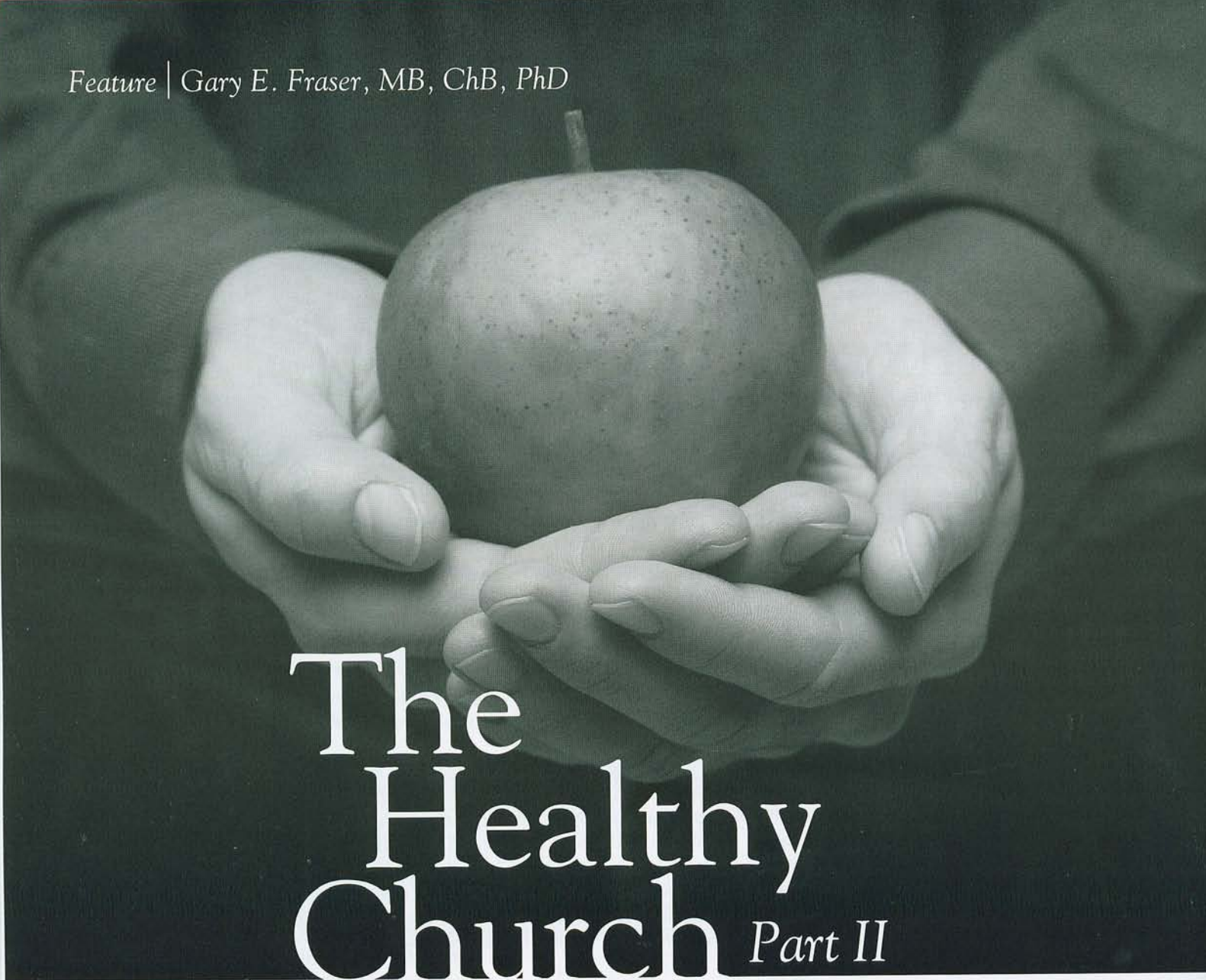
If we press just a bit deeper into the closet, we will discover that our outsized egos are quite capable of more subtle variants of the same disease. As



I remembered what I had said about a certain church leader just moments before. The juxtaposition was so jarring, and I was so chagrined, that I had no choice but to repent and apologize on the spot.

Augustine (d. 430) put it: “The same good qualities which please me when I possess them please me even more when they also please someone else” (*Confessions*, X.xxxvii, 61). Augustine was appalled by the discovery. So was C. S. Lewis when he found himself gazing inward shortly after his conversion. On Jan. 30, 1930, he wrote to his friend Arthur Greeves: “I have found out ludicrous and terrible things about my own character. Sitting by, watching the rising thoughts to break their necks as they pop up, one learns to know the sort of thoughts that do come. And, will you believe it, one out of

—Continued on page 15



The Healthy Church *Part II*

A BIBLICAL BASIS FOR HEALTH PROMOTION

Ellen White had a dominant role in proclaiming personal health as a part of our religion. So the question naturally arises, Is there a biblical basis for linking concern for personal and public health concerns with our religious identity?

An obvious starting point is Genesis 1:29-30, which recommends a vegetarian diet. Following the Noachian flood, God specifically allows the use of certain meats, perhaps reflecting a special situation (Gen 9:3). The next place in the Bible to report divine directions regarding “health habits” is the laws of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. These laws, with the exception of the 10 commandments, are usually classified as “ceremonial.” They are seen as wholly religious in nature. They point towards and are fulfilled and nullified by the crucifixion of Jesus. However, this neat dismissal of these laws as merely ancient ritual does not hold up under close examination. Leviticus 11-15, especially, point to a significance other than “mere ritual.”

Chapter 11 deals with dietary proscriptions. Chapter 12 gives rules for the “uncleanness” of a woman after childbirth. Chapter 13 deals with infectious skin diseases (probably leprosy and others), and the measures to be taken with anyone that “has a swelling or a rash or a bright spot on his skin that may become an infectious skin disease.” The “ritual” responses to these problems include quarantine, washing of

clothes, and regular inspection by the priests with detailed criteria for the pronouncement of cure. The motivation here is clearly the health of the community and limiting the spread of infectious diseases.

The latter part of chapter 13 and all of chapter 14 deal with green and red mildew infestations of clothes and walls of houses (stones, timber and plaster are mentioned), clearly treated as an infectious problem. Mildews are caused by fungus organisms living off organic materials such as those used in clothing, or in the construction of dwellings, or in foods. Certain fungi can cause such diverse disorders as ringworm, farmer's lung, bone abscesses and valley fever in humans.

Moulds of the genus *Aspergillus*¹ (*A. glaucus* and *A. flavus*) appear as green or yellow (and others red) patches. They thrive in moist or dry conditions; live on foods, clothing, leather or soft wood; and occasionally infect the human ear canal or skin. Similar modern, and unhealthy, infestations of homes were recently reported in the *Los Angeles Times*.² Other *Aspergilli* can cause severe allergic reactions in certain individuals, or produce toxic chemicals, some of which are now known to have useful antibiotic activity in small doses, or to be a potent cause of cancer, such as the aflatoxin produced by *A. flavus*. Although there is no conclusive evidence that these specific moulds are the topic of Leviticus 13-14, the advice to avoid clothes or building materials infested with such moulds would seem prudent.

Leviticus 15 deals with potentially infectious bodily discharges, such as semen or menstrual blood. Any high-protein-containing fluid is an excellent medium for bacterial growth. Our modern knowledge of medical microbiology makes all this quite sensible. The more modern demonstration by Semmelweis of the effects of lack of cleanliness at the time of childbirth is clear indication that care when dealing with body fluids is of great value! Whatever the primary motivation for the rules in these chapters—health, holiness, ritual cleanliness—the guidance was prescient and remains sound from the perspective of public health.

Commentators have suggested various motivations for these laws: concern for public health, ethnic identity, ecology, holiness, aesthetics or asceticism.³ All of these have some merit, except asceticism, which was not part of the Jewish tradition.

Given the Adventist understanding of inspiration, it is appropriate to distinguish the divine intent behind these laws from the Jewish understanding and practice. There is little evidence the ancient people saw foods as physically “healthy” or “unhealthy.” They did not have our concept of contagion. But the “health laws” of the Pentateuch are strongly supported by the findings of modern public health. Inspired guidance led the people to a level of health practice that was clearly more advanced than their understanding.

Holiness is explicitly stated as a reason for these requirements in Deuteronomy 14:1,21, Leviticus 11:43-45 and elsewhere. One mark of a “holy community” particularly acceptable to the creator appears to be healthfulness. This is implied in the Genesis accounts of the great age of the holy antediluvian patriarchs. When God linked these health laws to holiness, he used a universal concept—holiness—to accomplish a particular objective—healthiness.

The Bible explicitly states God's concern for health as well as holiness. “If you listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God..., if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, who heals you” (Exod 15:26). “Worship the Lord your God.... I will take away sickness from among you.... I will give you a full life span” (Exod 23:25). See also Deuteronomy 7:15.

Of course, there was a strong element of ritual in the Levitical laws. But if the goal was adherence, it has been shown that ritual can be a very effective promoter of adherence to community norms. In sum, it seems likely that the original motivation for Leviticus 11-15 was a concern for public health which was allied with but not identical with holiness.⁴

A New Testament reaction to Judaic dietary laws

The apostle Paul is often cited by those who believe Christianity should completely separate our concern for health from the work of the church.

Paul wrote, “One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables” (Rom 14:2), or “As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself” (Rom 14:14)! Paul probably uses the concept of “cleanness” here as a measure of spiritual status in the prevalent legal tradition of Judaism. Clearly he argues that what we eat is not a direct gauge of holiness. And the question arises, is Paul in fundamental disagreement with the important distinction made in Leviticus 11 between clean and unclean foods?

Paul's concern was ultimate salvation. He had no idea that diet might significantly affect the health of the “body temple.” If the concern of Leviticus was for physical health in the community and Paul's concern was spiritual health through eternity, then the apparent conflict between Romans 14 and Leviticus 11 disappears.

This makes sense of other New Testament passages that clearly express a concern for the health of believers, such as: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you...? ...Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Cor 6:19, 20; see also 1 Cor 3:16-17). Clearly, even in the New Testament, God wants healthy people.

—Continued on page 14

EDITORS' NOTE:

In the first installment of this series, Fraser explored the social and historical dynamics of Adventist concern for health. In this second and concluding installment, he examines the biblical basis for linking religion and health.

The Healthy Church

—Continued on page 13



» Gary E. Fraser is professor of epidemiology and professor of medicine, Loma Linda University. He is the director of Adventist Health Study.

One of Paul's major concerns was the use of Jewish lifestyle practices as a gauge of a person's holiness. In Romans 14:1-20, he writes, "Who are you to judge someone else's servant?" (verse 4); "You, then, why do you judge your brother?...For we will all stand before God's judgment seat" (verse 10); "Therefore let us stop passing judgement on one another" (verse 13). Paul goes on to plead that the believers "...not destroy the work of God for the sake of food" (verse 20), admonition that might have saved a good deal of pain in our own ranks. Diet, for Paul, was simply one example of the kinds of outward manifestations that should not form the basis for religious criticism. "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit..." (verse 17).

Even in Romans 14, however, Paul hints at a moral component of our health decisions. "So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves" (verse 22). Here Paul reminds us we have a responsibility to carefully decide what we approve, then to act according to our conscience.

Health habits and the Christian experience

What then is the place of health practices in religion? Practices such as prayer, Bible study, memorization, simplicity, etc., are widely honored as "spiritual disciplines." Although they do not lead directly to the "pearly gates," these practices do affect character and values, and thus help us become better Christians. Embracing the disciplines of health is another way to practice discipleship. By cultivating physical and mental vigor I make myself—my body and my mind—more available for the work of my master. Flouting the laws of health has an immoral component. Not because "evil" exists in a particular food or drink, but because reckless disregard for the body temple means "condemning myself by what I approve." I am not suggesting a hyperscrupulosity that makes a major case out of every piece of meat or bite of candy. But I am arguing that the Bible provides ample support for a morally aware concern for safe-guarding our health.

A growing body of data shows that religious persons of many denominations experience decreased mortality rates from many common diseases.⁵ The reasons are not clear and space does not permit

detailed discussion here. However, a number of questions arise. What is the effect of the "Sabbath rest" on health? Does being at peace with and communing with our creator provide an important degree of psychological support with its attendant health consequences? Is it just that religious folks live more conservatively and take fewer risks?

Conclusions

From a historical perspective Adventists are far from unique among religions by incorporating an emphasis on diet. The Adventist health emphasis of many decades has been a real force for good in local communities. At the national and international level, we have contributed to the body of scientific evidence guiding opinion, official recommendations,

What then is the place of health practices in religion? Practices such as prayer, Bible study, memorization, simplicity, etc., are widely honored as "spiritual disciplines."

and, to some extent, practice. This concern for health is solidly rooted in biblical teaching and precedent.

Footnotes

¹Thom, C. and Raper, K. B. *A Manual of the Aspergilli*, Williams and Wilkins, 1945; and Braude, Al. *Infectious Diseases and Medical Microbiology*, second edition, W.B. Saunders Co., 1986.

²"Ed McMahan sues over mold in house," *Los Angeles Times*, April 10, 2002, page C1; and "Officers sickened, police post shut in Long Beach," *Los Angeles Times*, April 12, 2002, page B7.

³Grivetti L. E., and Pangborn, R. M. "Origin of selected Old Testament dietary prohibitions," *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 65: 634-638, 1974.

⁴Note that the above brief discussion avoids any mention of the extensive Jewish dietary and other health regulations in the two Talmuds and the Mishnah, as they are extra-biblical.

⁵Jarvis, G. K., and Nortcott, H. C. "Religion and differences in morbidity and mortality," *Social Science and Medicine*, 1987;25:813-24; and Ferraro, K. F., and Jensen, C. M. A. "Does religion influence adult health?" *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion* 30: 193-202, 1994.

On Being Christlike— for a While

—Continued from page 11

every three is a thought of self-admiration: when everything else fails, having had its neck broken, up comes the thought ‘What an admirable fellow I am to have broken their necks!’...When you force yourself to stop it, you admire yourself for doing *that*. It’s like fighting the hydra....There seems to be no end to it. Depth under depth of self-love and self-admiration” (from Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*, 105-106).

So how do believers survive in the light of such unhappy discoveries, such embarrassing failures in godly living?

What often helps to keep up my spirits is the privilege of slipping in the back door, so to speak, with others who have the same malady. It’s the spiritual equivalent, I suppose, of “misery loves company.” If Paul admitted the disease and cringed in so doing, other biblical characters show that they have it too—but sometimes don’t even seem to know that they are sick.

Two prayers in the Old Testament are especially revealing in that respect. In Jeremiah 18:19-23, for example, the prophet pleads with the Lord to banish his enemies. His prayer is especially vivid in the Contemporary English Version: “Please, Lord, answer my prayer. Make my enemies stop accusing me of evil. I tried to help them, but they are paying me back by digging a pit to trap me. I even begged you not to punish them. But now I am asking you to let their children starve or be killed in war. Let women lose their husbands and sons to disease and violence. These people have dug pits and set traps for me, Lord. Make them scream in fear when you send enemy troops to attack their homes. You know they plan to kill me. So get angry and punish them! Don’t ever forgive their terrible crimes.”

What intrigues me about this prayer is the way Jeremiah claims to have started out on the high road. He tried to help these evil men and even begged the Lord not to punish them. But then something snapped and hell broke loose in his soul.

A similar prayer is found in Psalm 35. It’s not as violent, but still revealing. The psalmist opens with a call, not just for deliverance, but also for vengeance. He pleads with God to wield the “spear and javelin,” to “shame and dishonor” his enemies. “Let their way be dark and slippery, with the angel of the Lord pursuing them” (Ps 35:3, 4, 6, NRSV).

But a moment of reflection breaks into the middle of the psalm. After noting that the enemies have repaid him “evil for good,” the psalmist describes the high road which he had been able to travel—for a while: “But as for me, when they were sick, I wore sackcloth; I afflicted myself with fasting. I prayed with head bowed on my bosom, as though I grieved for a friend or a brother; I went about as one who laments for a mother, bowed down and in mourning” (verses 12-14).

What good did all that sympathy do? Not a lot: “At my stumbling they gathered in glee, they gathered together against me; ruffians whom I did not know tore at me without ceasing” (verse 16).

So back to vengeance. Let the enemies be put to “shame and confusion,” exclaims the psalmist. Clothe them with “shame and dishonor” (verse 26).

Those who follow Jesus will remember his commands to turn the other cheek, go the second mile, and love your enemies (Matt 5:39, 41, 44; Luke 6:27, 29). They will remember his prayer for his enemies as he hung on the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). And they will sense the great gulf that is fixed between him and them. And between him and us.

But by God’s grace we will be able to glimpse God’s purpose in publishing prayers that aren’t quite so “nice.” For we, too, like Jeremiah, like the Psalmist, may be able to sustain our good intentions and our laudable actions—for a while.

But what happens when we crack?

We can know that we aren’t alone. We can know that God will help us rescue our ideals from the shattered remnants of our good intentions. And while we are growing in grace, those of us who follow Jesus can revel in that powerful truth penned by the apostle Paul after he had laid out his anguish in Romans 7: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1, NRSV).

In short, sometimes I can be Christlike—only for a while. But when I fall, I am still his child. That knowledge keeps alive the flicker of hope that the day will come when I will never again laugh in such a way that it makes another person cry.

» What often helps to keep up my spirits is the privilege of slipping in the back door, so to speak, with others who have the same malady. It’s the spiritual equivalent, I suppose, of “misery loves company.” If Paul admitted the disease and cringed in so doing, other biblical characters show that they have it too—but sometimes don’t even seem to know that they are sick.

An Interview with Clifford Goldstein

VIEWS FROM AN ADVENTIST AUTHOR ON ELLEN WHITE, THE TRUTH AND CULTURAL ADVENTISTS



» Clifford Goldstein is editor of the *Adventist Sabbath School Quarterly*, author of *Graffiti in the Holy of Holies* and columnist for the *Adventist Review*.

Q On the back cover of your book, *Graffiti in the Holy of Holies*, you are identified as a “church apologist.” Is that how you view your primary role in the church?

A It’s certainly not a role that I consciously sought. As I study and learn, I have this desire to share with others what I have found helpful to me. If some people find things in my writings that help them, great; if others disagree, that’s fine too. I’m hardly the last word.

Q In *Graffiti in the Holy of Holies* you state that “I can accept that Ellen White, even as a prophet, was fallible, ... she made mistakes, grew in her understanding of doctrine and theology.” What criteria do you use when deciding when Ellen White made a mistake in her theology?

A The Bible, what else? Everything, even what she writes, needs to be tested by the Bible. After all, what other final criteria for spiritual truth do we have? We all need a bottom line somewhere, right? We can work through the logic of our beliefs, but sooner or later we need to come to a given. For me, that’s the Bible.

Q What criteria do you use to decide what is “truth” as opposed to “truth for you”?

A Truth for me is that beets and raw green peppers are the most sickening and disgusting-tasting things to grow on God’s green earth. “Truth,” however, is what’s true regardless of whether we know it, believe it, or even care about it. It was “truth” that the earth moved, even though the church—caught up in the prevailing zeitgeist (Aristotelian cosmology)—said it didn’t. “Truth” is what’s real even if everyone alive believes it’s fake; “truth” is what’s there even when everyone denies it.

It’s like when I go home and visit my family, none of whom are believers, I get the same line every time: “It’s your truth, Cliff,” that “truth” of course being about Jesus. But this makes no sense: either Jesus died for the sins of world, or he didn’t. If he didn’t, then it’s not my truth, or anyone’s truth; if he did, then it’s “truth” for everyone, regardless of who does or doesn’t believe it.

Q If you had the power to do so, would you exclude from Seventh-day Adventist church membership a current member who does not believe in one or more traditional doctrinal teachings of the Adventist church?

A No, that’s a local church matter.

Q From reading your previous writings, one would conclude that, if you had the power to do so, you would exclude from the theological faculty of an Adventist college or university anyone who does not believe in all of the traditional doctrinal teachings of the Adventist church as embodied in the current 27 fundamental beliefs. If this is not correct, please explain. If this observation is correct, please justify this view, in light of the fact that many of the early Adventist church founders and leaders held views that are in major disagreement with one or more of the current 27 fundamental beliefs.

A I guess that all depends upon which fundamental belief you are talking about. It would be nice for anyone teaching theology in our schools to believe, for instance, in fundamental belief number three, “God the Father”; or number nine, “The Life, Death and Resurrection of Christ,” wouldn’t it? Would not a school be justified in removing someone from the theology department of a Seventh-day Adventist college who didn’t believe in, say, number 19, “The Sabbath” or number 24, “The Second Coming of Christ”?

It’s just a question of integrity, really. Parents who spend money sending their kids to our schools ought to know beforehand what their kids are being taught. If a parent sends a kid to an Adventist school on the assumption that the kid is going to be taught, for instance, a literal six-day creation, then the parent should know beforehand if that’s not going to be the case. It would be nice if all those teachers who talk about the church being honest were honest about what they were teaching in the classroom. Surely you don’t want the veneer of “academic freedom” to be a cover for duping parents into thinking their kids are getting taught one thing when they’re really getting taught something else, do you?

Q You have stated that some theological beliefs that you once held with passionate certainty you later decided were not correct. Knowing this has happened in the past, how does this knowledge influence the certainty with which you hold your current views on, for example, the validity of traditional Adventist understandings as summarized in the current 27 (soon to be 28) fundamentals?

A Well, time does temper you, and though *Adventist Today* aficionados might find it hard to believe, I'm much more mellow than I used to be. But the answer to your question is yes; because I have changed on beliefs that I once held fervently, it has tempered my zeal on the beliefs that I now hold. At the same time, what do I do, stop believing anything, even passionately, because I changed my views in the past? I think the main difference is that I'm not so quick to judge the heart or motives of those who hold beliefs I fervently disagree with.

Give you an example. I have a good friend at the [General Conference] who holds a position on a topic that I fervently disagree with. And I don't think it's a minor topic, either. I once said to him, "You know, 15 years ago I don't think I could have been friends with you. I would have felt a responsibility to 'out' you." Now, doing something like that never enters my mind. I don't doubt his sincerity and his love of the Lord and the church. And we are brothers, despite this big theological difference. Fifteen years ago I don't think that I could have said that.

Q Do you currently believe that the institutional Adventist church is the "remnant" group referred to in the Book of Revelation?

A Of course.

Q Is/are there any practice(s) or belief(s) currently in place in the Adventist church that you would like to see changed? If so, what would it/they be?

A No, not really. I'd like to see the proper emphasis placed on things better than they have been, but essentially I am very comfortable with the church's theological positions. Despite pressure from all sides, the church as a whole seems to have done well in keeping a good balance.

That doesn't mean, however, that there are no problems. I think we've made a royal mess of the Ellen White thing, for instance. Ever since the Lord gave us this wonderful gift, the church has struggled in knowing how to understand and utilize it. Though I don't believe anyone meant ill, we've created a something that's proving difficult to tame. After her death, some of those seeking to defend this wonderful gift perhaps went too far, creating an edifice that was built on some shaky pillars, an edifice that was not needed to begin with, one that has now

created many more problems than it solved. Worse than not defending the gift, I think, is defending it with weak arguments. We'd have been better off keeping silent than speaking things that weren't correct.

Sometimes I think, maybe we should have just left her alone. That is, instead of building this entire apologetic structure in defense of [Ellen G. White], maybe we should have said little, instead letting the material speak for itself. Rather than cram it down people's throats, maybe we should have just printed the books, sold them cheaply, and sat back and let the Holy Spirit—which no doubt worked through the writer—work through the reader.

Q You are aware that some Adventists refer to themselves as "cultural Adventists," meaning that they belong to the Adventist community by virtue of being born into the church, but may take exception to many of the church's theological beliefs and religious practices. Since you are a convert to this faith community, do you have any problem with understanding the perspective and attitudes of "cultural Adventists?"

A Yeah, I have a real big problem with their perspectives and attitudes. It's a concept that makes no sense to me, a "cultural" Adventist. I have never thought of Adventism in that sense, that of a culture. To me, what makes us Adventists is one thing and one thing alone—our beliefs and the sense of mission and purpose that stems directly from those beliefs.

It's very hard for me to understand why anyone would want to be an Adventist who didn't share these beliefs. The doctrines are the only thing that keeps me here. It's not the culture; on the contrary, having been raised a secular Jew, I still struggle with the culture. There are things that, to this day, even after 25 years as an Adventist (almost half of my life) I don't feel comfortable with. But I have learned to transcend them, that's all.

Adventism not based on the beliefs we hold seems to me self-contradictory. If tomorrow I stopped believing in the truths of the [Seventh-day Adventist] church, I'd like to think I'd have the moral courage to pack up and leave, regardless of the personal cost to myself.

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



Because I have changed on beliefs that I once held fervently, it has tempered my zeal on the beliefs that I now hold. At the same time, what do I do, stop believing anything, even passionately, because I changed my views in the past?

Kevin's Quandary

A STRUGGLE TO BELONG

OF ALL THE HOT-BUTTON issues the church faces today, perhaps none is so inflammatory as homosexuality. The mere mention of the word sparks volatile emotions in almost everyone. But this incendiary atmosphere can blind us to the needs of real people around us who are living with this dilemma. Every day hundreds of thousands of Adventist young people¹ around the world struggle to understand their confusing feelings of being different. Instead of sharing the pleasant and exciting emotions their classmates experience around members of the opposite sex, they realize that, for them, these emotions are called forth by members of their own sex. They wear holes in the carpet, praying that God will change their desires.

As you read Kevin's story, try to put aside all your preconceived ideas and imagine yourself in his place.

Kevin grew up in a typical small Adventist church. At a very early age he gave evidence of his talent for music by picking out hymns on the old piano in the corner of the fellowship hall during potluck. Within a few years he was in constant demand to play and sing for church, prayer meetings, evangelistic meetings and Ingathering.

Slowly and subtly, Kevin began to hate himself for the feelings he had always had. But it remained his own private hell, since he couldn't talk about it to anyone. He buried his sadness in working hard to get top grades and participating in all the extracurricular activities, hoping to win the love and respect of people he thought would reject him if they knew who he really was.

When he went away to college, it was only natural for Kevin to enroll in the theology curriculum; church had always been the most important part of his life. But a little voice inside suggested it might be wise to take a music major, too, because he knew he couldn't be a minister if he was "like that." Sometimes he walked the dark streets of the college town late at night, crying and asking God through his tears, "Can't you change me?"

Graduation brought a job as assistant pastor and boys' dean in an academy. Kevin found his niche in working with young people, who respected and appreciated him. Later he became a music instructor at a large, well-known academy. For some years he was able to ignore his feelings as he poured himself into his work.

One day, as he was reading a Christian magazine he saw an ad that promised, "Hope for homosexuals." He had never seen that word in print before. Gathering his courage, he hesitantly contacted the "ex-gay" ministry and asked for their materials, which included a set of tapes. He listened to the tapes as he drove three hours each way every week to counsel with an Adventist therapist in a desperate



It didn't take them long to realize their marriage was a mistake. Sitting together in front of the fireplace, Kevin confessed his orientation and they wept together.

It was in boarding academy that Kevin particularly began to recognize that, as he put it, he must have been "born on the wrong planet." A disturbing sense of displacement haunted him as he yearned to be part of the exciting social scene around him.

He dreaded banquets. Wanting to be "normal" like the other guys, he would ask a girl to accompany him, then sit next to her while secretly dreaming of being with the cute guy across the table. The worst part was walking her back to her dorm and trying to tell her what a nice time he had had, while other boys were hiding behind the bushes trying to sneak a good-night kiss. Then he would escape into the darkness, feeling half relief and half devastation.

effort to overcome his “problem.”

Kevin spent a summer doing commercial fishing, leaving his car in the school secretary’s garage while he was gone. On his return in the fall he was greeted with a phone call from the church pastor. Feeling like a deer caught in the headlights, he listened in stunned silence as the pastor told him that a tape, “The Roots of Homosexuality,” had been found in his car. He was summoned before an intimidating array of pastors, principles and conference officials. After questioning him, they told him to wait in the janitor’s closet while they decided his fate. It was the loneliest 15 minutes of his life.

When he came out of the closet he was given a choice: resign or be fired. This was the ultimatum of the leaders of his church, and he obediently complied. But oh, how humiliated and alone he felt! What would his fellow teachers think? How could he face his students? How would he tell his parents he had lost his job?

The educational superintendent held out the hope that if he could prove he was “cured” he might be able to find another job in a different part of the country. So Kevin kept going to meetings and counseling sessions. He dated women, trying to show he was serious about changing. Finally he decided to ask another singer, a good friend with whom he frequently performed, to marry him.

It didn’t take them long to realize their marriage was a mistake. Sitting together in front of the fireplace, Kevin confessed his orientation and they wept together. They stuck it out for a few years, but eventually parted as friends. Kevin took stock of his life. Prayer hadn’t changed him. Counseling hadn’t changed him. The “ex-gay” ministry hadn’t changed him. Marriage hadn’t changed him. Indeed, God hadn’t changed him. Could it be that God loved him just the way he was?

Kevin’s loving, supportive parents helped him move to another part of the country where he could start a new life. He opened a piano studio and was soon fully booked. But he desperately missed his work with the church, and was thrilled when the pastor of a nearby church called him one day. This congregation was young, enthusiastic and wanted a strong music program. Would Kevin be their worship director? He was eager to accept, but having been burned once, he decided to tell the pastor frankly that he was gay.

“Are you willing to sign a statement that you are living by Bible standards?” asked the understanding pastor, himself the brother of a gay man.

Assured that the knowledge would be just between the two of them, Kevin gladly signed and was soon

busily involved with his beloved church music again. The members loved him and his exuberant personality. The church grew and prospered.

After several years a new pastor came. The outgoing pastor acquainted him with Kevin’s background and dependability. But the new pastor was uncomfortable with this arrangement. He simply could not let the matter rest. Time went by and eventually he called Kevin into his office for a talk.

“I want to help you,” he told Kevin. “I can exorcise your demon of homosexuality.” After his previous experiences trying to change, Kevin was understandably skeptical and declined the pastor’s offer. The pastor then felt compelled to bring the matter before the church board. The news quickly spread through the church. Initially shocked, most members felt Kevin had done nothing wrong and strongly supported him. A few, because they confused homosexuality with pederasty, were afraid to have Kevin around their children.

Kevin was dismayed and devastated. He appreciated the support of his many friends, but was saddened as he watched the congregation split. Eventually, the church was closed because of this and other problems. Kevin began playing for a gay church in the city, as he saw hope of ever having an active part in the Adventist church fade.

From his earliest memories Kevin loved his church and his God. He dedicated his many talents to God’s service. In spite of sincere and sustained efforts to change his homosexual orientation, Kevin finds his attractions unchanged. Does God love him anyway? How do you think God would have handled the situation in the academy where Kevin was teaching music? In the church where he was worship director? How does God feel about the multiplied thousands of other “Kevins” who have left the church in despair? What do you think God expects of homosexuals today? How do you think God wants us to respond to homosexuals in our congregations? To their heartbroken families? To those who have left the church?

¹A confidential survey conducted around the world except in North America reveals that approximately 10 percent of church members struggle with a homosexual orientation.

» Carrol Grady writes from Snohomish, Wash.

In spite of sincere and sustained efforts to change his homosexual orientation, Kevin finds his attractions unchanged. Does God love him anyway?



Fiction | Kevan Lim

Counting Before the Lord

Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken. John 21:11

The disciples stared at the figure. They were only a hundred yards offshore, close enough to hear someone from shore, yet not close enough to see anything but the silhouette of the someone.

John peered over the right side of the boat, at the

“Ah hah!” said James. “On behalf of John, Peter, and me, we’d like to grant the remaining four of you exclusive rights to sort this pile of fish.... We’ll be up-shore talking with Jesus.”

net. The someone had told the disciples to cast their net on the right side of the boat. The net was now so full all seven disciples could not haul it more than halfway out of the water.

John turned to Peter. “It is the Lord.”

Peter threw on his clothes and leapt over the right gunwale of the boat, over the net, and into the water. The boat rolled to the right. John, James, and Thomas dropped their grip on the net and hurled themselves to the left side of the boat, leaning as far as possible out over the water to counterbalance the weight of the net. Nathaniel and the other two who still had hold of the net lowered it back into the water. The boat leveled. Nathaniel, Thomas, and

the two others glared at John.

“What?” John said. “So he wants to see Jesus.”

Thomas squinted at the shore. “Oh, right, that guy’s Jesus. You can see the striking features of the face, and if you look approximately six inches up from the tip of his middle finger... yup, there’s the scar from the nail. Perfect visual identification. Way to go, John.”

“Who gave man his mouth?” quoted John. “Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord?”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Thomas asked.

“He gave me sight, but made you blind and deaf, so shut your mouth,” John told him.

“Look at the net, Thomas,” James said. “The only other time I caught so many fish, he was around.”

“Oh yes,” said Nathaniel. “Yes. How could we forget the story? Just you, Peter, and John manage by yourselves to haul an entire net busting full of fish into the boats.”

Nathaniel and the other two redoubled their efforts to haul the net on board. The boat rolled to the right again.

“Lower it, lower it!” yelled James. “You forgot the next part of the story!”

“What? The part about the boats beginning to sink?” Nathaniel said. “Well, we’ll just worry about that when we get the catch on board.”

“If you get the catch on board,” John corrected.

Nathaniel and the two others eased the net back into the water. Nathaniel addressed James and John. “Hey muscleman, you’re more than welcome to take a heave at this.”

James and John grabbed onto the net. They tugged despondently for a few seconds. It remained fully submerged, fish flopping inside it.

"You know," James said. "That last time I went fishing with Jesus, we had four guys in two boats, and our boats just about sank when we got the net on board. This time we have six guys in one boat, and if that guy on shore is Jesus, then that"—he pointed at the net—"is a Jesus catch, which means we go straight down when John and I haul it on board. So let's just tow it back to shore, okay?"

James tied the net to the boat. The other disciples grumbled and grabbed oars. John scuttled back toward the tiller, but tripped as he passed Thomas. Thomas held up Peter's oar.

"Johnny, there is no wind, so forget about the tiller. Secure it and row." John took Peter's oar and secured the tiller. The disciples began to row.

Peter was up the shore, chatting with his Lord, hopping around in front of the fire drying his clothes, when the disciples pulled onto the beach, hot, sweaty, and sore from towing the net back to shore.

"I will make you fishers of men, fishers of men, fishers of men!" John sang.

"Ahoy, Lord!" the disciples called to Jesus. "We'll be right up there."

"Hey, bring some of those fish when you come up!" Jesus called back.

"I'll be back," Peter told Jesus. Peter scrambled down the shore, waded in to grab the net and dragged it onto the sand. The disciples were stepping into their clothes.

"He wants some fish, guys," Peter told them.

"Yeah, we're just about to count and sort them," John said.

"Ah hah!" said James. "On behalf of John, Peter, and me, we'd like to grant the remaining four of you exclusive rights to sort this pile of fish, since we've already witnessed one great catch, but you guys haven't yet had the privilege. We'll be up-shore talking with Jesus."

"Hold it, wise guy," Thomas said. "On behalf of the remaining four of us, I propose to grant John, James, and Peter exclusive rights to sort this enormous quantity of fish, since they have more experience. Shall we vote?"

The vote ran 4-3 in favor of James, John, and Peter sorting the fish. Peter dragged the net further up shore. John fetched the clay jars.

"Oh, all right," James grumbled, "We'll all sort the fish." Nathaniel, Thomas, and the two others didn't move. James sighed. John squatted down beside the pile of fish to separate the clean fish from the unclean fish. James stood beside him to count. Peter stood between James and the clay jars.

John picked up a fish in both hands. His forehead wrinkled in concentration. The wrinkles extended

down to his eyes. The disciples couldn't tell if his eyes were open or shut. John tossed the two fish in front of James, then grabbed two more fish, and tossed them in front of James, then grabbed two more fish, and added them to the pile in front of James, and continued to do so. The pile in front of John shrank. The pile in front of James grew.

"Clean fish, clean fish, clean fish, clean fish," John said.

"Unclean fish!" bellowed Thomas. "What are you doing, man? You just tossed an eel in with the clean fish!"

"One-two-three-four-five-six-seven," counted James, while Thomas yelled, "Six! Six! Peter, toss that eel out!"

Peter tossed all the fish into the jars.

"Hey, are we selling these fresh or salting them?" the two others asked Nathaniel. Nathaniel glanced up the shore.

"Hmm. I hadn't thought about that. Well, if we're going to spend some time with Jesus, we can't sell them fresh," he said.

"Clean fish, clean fish, clean fish," John said.

"Twenty-eight, twenty-nine, thirty, thirty-one," added James. Thomas screamed bloody murder. Peter chucked the fish into the jars. The two others poked around the fishing boat for the salt. When they returned, five disciples were running around the now-full collection of clay jars. Thomas, waving a catfish in John's face, screamed, "You call this a clean fish?"

"Ahem," the two others interrupted. They politely held up the salt. Peter slapped his head. Nathaniel emptied the jars back into a pile. He and the two others began to sort, count, and lay the fish onto a mat for salting. James, John, Peter, and Thomas soon joined them.

"One hundred and fifty and three!" John howled. "We netted 153 fish in one catch!"

"Well," James said, "Metaphorically speaking, Jesus netted five thousand in one catch when he fed them dinner."

"James, if I could do miracles on demand like him, I, too, could net five thousand in one catch—fish or converts," Peter said.

"Always keep track of the numbers," the two others said.

Up the shore Jesus sat by his fire, preparing some of his own fish. A few loaves of bread lay on palm leaves to the side. A sand dune partially blocked the view of the beach, but not the sound of the bickering disciples. Jesus rose to his feet and waited.

» **Kevan Lim is a junior business major at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Wash.**



"One hundred and fifty and three!" John howled. "We netted 153 fish in one catch!"

The Passion: Two views

EDWIN A. SCHWISOW

Adventist theologian Samuele Bacchiocchi's most recent book, the self-published, self-distributed (www.biblicalperspectives.com) *The Passion of Christ in Scripture and History* is in one sense a "there you go again" effort, consistent with the 18 or so other books the Italian-born Seventh-day Adventist cleric/author has published. Bacchiocchi uses his knowledge of Catholicism and its early and medieval manifestations to warn against the insidious infiltration of dangerous Catholic ideas into contemporary Adventism.

For a person born and reared in a Protestant-dominated culture, this may seem interesting but not compelling reading. But for people who have grown up in cultures dominated by Roman Catholic

mores, the book may have more significance. Unfortunately, any reader will be distracted by the unacceptable number of typos.

In *The Passion*, Bacchiocchi's major premise is that Mel Gibson's graphic film on the crucifixion and death of Jesus represents a return to the pre-Vatican II emphasis on the culpability of the Jews in killing Jesus. This is a dangerous turn, Bacchiocchi says, a truly bewildering return to Gothic Christianity in which infidels were demonized and believers beatified. Not once, but several times, Bacchiocchi reminds us

that Adolf Hitler found the famous, and still extant, Oberammergau Passion Play (which in Hitler's day dramatically portrayed Christ's crucifiers as literal demons with horns) highly to his liking in its portrayal of the Jews. Hitler is quoted: "It is vital that the Passion Play be continued at Oberammergau; for never has the menace of Jewry been so convincingly portrayed as in this presentation of what happened in the times of the Romans."

Bacchiocchi argues that Gibson's film is patterned, to a large degree, on the Oberammergau play, which relies primarily on mystical, extra-Gospel sources and Catholic tradition for its most graphic content.

According to Bacchiocchi, both the medieval passion plays and Gibson's film deviate significantly

from the Gospel accounts. The film, in particular, fails to include mention of the host of Jews who sympathized with Jesus and stood by him, lamenting and supporting him, during all or portions of his passion. In this, Bacchiocchi writes, the film's effective anti-Semitism is particularly egregious. By no means did all Jews reject Jesus; yet, from the point of view of the film, it seems the whole nation was given over to demonic hatred against him.

Bacchiocchi does not accuse Gibson of purposely demonizing the Jews. But he points out that Gibson, a passionate Roman Catholic, has relied heavily in his script on sources that portray the Jews as inhumane, blood-lusting demons. Performance of such plays historically preceded some of the worst massacres of Jews in Europe. This is perhaps the most salient message of the book—that in the name of Christianity, atrocities can be and are perpetrated. The caution is explicit: Let us not allow ourselves to return to those not-so-long-ago days of pogroms and demonization of other cultures, including Islam.

Bacchiocchi raises other issues, as well—the film's gratuitous elevation of the Virgin Mary to a place of co-mediation with her Son; the film's Catholic emphasis on a philosophy of suffering as necessary to appease a wrathful God; the near-veneration of the blood and flesh of Jesus (liberally flayed and spilled onscreen) as an analog to the actual Catholic mass of today; and Bacchiocchi's view that a physical depiction of Christ on screen is irreverent.

These finer points, however, pale in comparison with the larger issue—that the film in question represents a return to the horrendous mentality of the Holocaust, in which Jews are seen as so morally compromised that their elimination becomes a matter of social expediency, rather than horror. A kindred view, says Bacchiocchi, is prevalent even among evangelical, dispensationalist Christians today, whose Darbyist views on the rapture include the humiliation of the Jews as a preamble to Christ's post-tribulation return.

The issues addressed in *The Passion* go far beyond the significance of Gibson's film. The question is, Will we use Bible stories to demonize others, to separate and alienate cultures? After we have condoned the demonization of the Jews, who will be next?

» Edwin A. Schwisow is a reporter, editor, screenwriter, freelance writer and author, with 27 years experience in denominational journalism. He serves as director of development for *Adventist Today*.

» Bacchiocchi points out that Gibson, a passionate Roman Catholic, has relied heavily in his script on sources that portray the Jews as inhumane, blood-lusting demons.

DAVID A. PENDLETON

The release on DVD of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* offers another opportunity for people to reflect on one of the most influential films of 2004: Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*.

If ever there was a film with an accurate title, this film is the one. Although in contemporary usage the word "passion" connotes romance and zeal, its Latin origins refer to *suffering*. Over the years, Christian theology came to speak of Christ's suffering on Good Friday as "The Suffering" or "The Passion."

This is the most violent film I have ever seen. Yet it is not glorifying violence but being faithful to the violence that was part and parcel of the experience endured by him who first loved us.

The movie is longer than most, but its 126 minutes is not as long as the actual suffering Christ endured. Christ's torment began on a Thursday evening and concluded more than 12 hours later on Friday, prior to sundown and the commencement of the Sabbath.

I am not persuaded by the criticisms I have heard of the film. For example, "It is too Catholic." While this film is produced and directed by a Catholic Christian, it gets the basics right. Theatrical license is to be expected. But there is nothing heretical about the portrayal of Jesus. He is God incarnate. And both his divinity and humanity are evident.

I've heard criticism that the film is "too obsessed with just a portion of Jesus' life." But this is unfair. Gibson's film was never intended to be a comprehensive documentary of Jesus' ministry. It is titled *The Passion of the Christ*. Flashbacks give glimpses into the life that led to the cross, but Gibson never pretends to be filming a full-blown biographical documentary. Rather he, following the pattern of the Gospels, interprets the life of Christ through the lens of the defining act of the crucifixion. This is not a sermon but an artistic presentation of the essential event in the Christian faith.

Another criticism often leveled against Gibson's film is that it is anti-Semitic. The Jewish leaders are portrayed as politically motivated, selfish and unscrupulous. They want Jesus dead. But Gibson is filming only what is recounted in the Bible story. I guess if you do not like the movie, you probably did not like the book either. The anti-Semitic charge ignores the fact that the many heroic characters in the film are also Jewish. Need we mention that Jesus himself is Jewish? Why ignore the admirable Jews in the film and focus on those who bring about the crucifixion?

If any group comes off looking poorly in the film, it is the Roman soldiers. Should we then suggest the film

is anti-Italian? This film is no more anti-Semitic than, say, a film set in World War II would be anti-German or anti-Japanese. The historical account indicates that certain leaders took certain actions, and they happened to be from a particular ethnic group. An entire race cannot be responsible for actions taken by a small segment of that community long ago.

When I got home after seeing the film for the first time, I found myself still so overwhelmed by what I saw that I could not sleep immediately. I was speechless for hours. I actually picked up an old copy of a biography of Christ by 18th-century American Adventist author Ellen White and read two chapters, "Gethsemane" and "Calvary."

There I found words articulating what I had just experienced in Gibson's movie! It was as though Gibson's screenwriters had read those very chapters in preparation for the making of the film. Perhaps not. But clearly both White and Gibson had been inspired by the same Gospel account.

The next morning I turned to Isaiah, chapter 53. I have since seen the movie a second time, yet the prophetic words continue to haunt me: "...and by his wounds we are healed!"

The bottom line for Gibson was to reveal Christ's unshakeable and relentless love. In the garden of Gethsemane the devil tempts Christ by questioning whether humankind is worth saving at such great cost. Calvary was Christ's answer to that question.

The depiction of the devil also merits comment. This shadowy and androgynous figure is utterly terrifying. The subtle ways in which lies are intertwined with truth are a reminder to all of us to keep up our guards. Truly, if you are watching out for a horned devil armed with a pitchfork, you may miss out on one much cleverer. That is what makes evil so dangerous. Evil can appear at first glance harmless and reasonable.

I strongly recommend *The Passion of the Christ*. No review can do it justice. You have to experience it for yourself. You may love it—or you may hate it. But I promise that you will not be indifferent to this movie.

I believe that it is always a good thing to present the story of Jesus to the masses. Every retelling—whether flawed or flawless—provides an opportunity for people to be touched by the love of God.

» David Pendleton is an attorney and Seventh-day Adventist minister writing from Hawaii.

Next issue

SPECIAL ISSUE FOR SHARING

Have you ever wished for a well-written introduction to Adventism you could share with your friends? Something that describes Adventism as you live and believe it—without the beasts and horns? The March/April *Adventist Today* is a special issue featuring excerpts from a forthcoming book by editor John McLarty. It is specially designed for sharing with your non-Adventist friends. It presents brief sketches of some of the very best of Adventist life and thought. You can order multiple copies of this special issue by calling our office at 800-236-3641.



Article call | Readers

One-Minute Adventism

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY?

In 2004 we printed an article call: 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?” Here is what you sent us:

God created this world. He created this world for his pleasure and us. The Decalogue lays the foundation for Seventh-day Adventism.

God laid out man’s responsibility to himself and humankind. The first four commandments explain our position to God; the last six commandments explain our position to other individuals. The important part of Adventism is the fourth commandment, wherein God asks us to “remember.” We remember God’s love, which set apart a day of creation for our rest. We remember the six days of creation and the Sabbath day for rest and communion with a God concerned with our well-being.

We remember this loving God. We have these commandments—impossible to keep by our own effort. We remember Jeremiah explained God’s willingness to write this law upon our hearts. In God’s act of writing the law upon our hearts, he is now responsible to assist us in keeping that by which sin is revealed.

It is the act of remembering; we are created, blessed and saved, by God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Seventh-day Adventism arrives down through history from those words of the fourth commandment, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy....”

—Steven C. Schroder

Seventh-day Adventists believe that God created this world because he wanted more children to share his love with. In order to have the love relationship he wanted, God had to create the human race free.

Humans used their freedom to join Satan in his rebellion against God. But God wanted us as friends so much that he devised a plan of salvation. This plan is based on giving his life to pay the penalty of our rebellion. This sacrifice was made in the person of Jesus Christ, who was God and by the miracle of the virgin birth became at the same time man. As a result, any human who chooses to abandon rebellion and accept Jesus as Lord of his life is forgiven for all his rebellious acts and enabled by God’s power to live in obedience to all of God’s laws.

—John Martin | Littleton, Colo.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I believe God’s word is true. Jesus is the living Word that came down from heaven and dwells among us. As a Seventh-day Adventist, my Sabbath-keeping, healthful lifestyle, outreach in the community — every command in his word — has been lived out in Jesus. He obeyed his father completely. He said, “I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.”

When I surrender my life to Jesus, he lives his life again in me. As Galatians 2:20 states, “I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless, I live. Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loves me and gave himself for me. My obedience is Christ obeying in me. As long as I don’t resist him, his way is easy and his burden is light. This is why I give him the glory, the honor and the praise.

—Billy Freeny | Aurora, Colo.