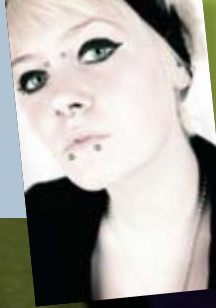




Desmond Ford on *The Apocalyptic Vision and the Neutering of Adventism*



Letter to a Church Leader



Dealing with Piercings

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Adventist *Today*



queezing THE LOCAL CHURCH



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Why Must We Change?

J. David Newman

URGENT LETTER DATED JANUARY 31, 1829:

To President Jackson:

The canal system of this country is being threatened by the spread of a new form of transportation known as “railroads.” The federal government must preserve the canals for the following reasons:

1. If canal boats are supplanted by “railroads,” serious unemployment will result. Captains, cooks, drivers, hostlers, repairmen and lock tenders will be left without means of livelihood, not to mention the numerous farmers now employed in growing hay for the horses.

2. Boat builders would suffer and towline, whip and harness makers would be left destitute.

3. Canal boats are absolutely essential to the defense of the United States. In the event of the expected trouble with England, the Erie Canal would be the only means by which we could ever move the supplies so vital to Waging modern war.

As you may well know, Mr. President, “railroad” carriages are pulled at the enormous speed of fifteen miles per hour by “engines” which, in addition to endangering life and limb of passengers, roar and snort their way through the countryside, setting fire to crops, scaring the livestock and frightening women and children. The Almighty certainly never intended that people should travel at such breakneck speed.

Martin Van Buren
Governor of New York¹

We are no different today. The church is full of Van Burens who are afraid of what change might bring. Surprisingly, Ellen White was very much for change.

“Means will be devised to reach hearts. Some of the methods used in this work will be different from the methods used in the work in the past; but let no one, because of this, block the way by criticism.”²

“Men are needed who pray to God for wisdom, and who, under the guidance of God, can put new life into the old methods of labor and can invent new plans and new methods of awakening the interest of church members and reaching the men and women of the world.”³

“The scheme of salvation is not to be worked out

under the laws and rules specified by men. There must be no fixed rules; our work is a progressive work, and there must be room left for methods to be improved upon. But under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, unity must and will be preserved.”⁴

“There are some minds which do not grow with the work but allow the work to grow far beyond them. ... Those who do not discern and adapt themselves to the increasing demands of the work, should not stand blocking the wheels, and thus hindering the advancement of others.”⁵

Today many in the church consider being conservative a good thing. Not Ellen White. Read what she says here: “When God raises up men to do His work ... He will prepare men for the times. They will be humble, God-fearing men, not conservative, not policy men; but men who have moral independence and will move forward in the fear of the Lord. They will be kind, noble, courteous, yet they will not be swayed from the right path, but will proclaim the truth in righteousness whether men will hear or whether they will forbear.”⁶

Today our church desperately needs agents for change. This issue of *Adventist Today* looks at some of those areas that need to be addressed. But as Ellen White said, be very careful about how you criticize those who are winning people for Jesus by nontraditional methods.

The Great Commission said to “go and disciple people from all nations.” It did not say to “preserve the structure for all nations.” Structure must always be the servant, never the master. Structure must always follow strategy, but too often our strategy—our way of doing things—is forced into the mold of an unyielding structure.

The old wineskins must change. The new wine is coming.

¹ Quoted by Leith Anderson, *Dying for Change* (Minneapolis: Bethany Publishers, 1990), pp. 169-170.

² Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 105.

³ Ellen G. White, Manuscript 117, 1907, quoted in *Evangelism*, p. 105.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 105.

⁵ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, pp. 104-105.

⁶ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5, pp. 262-263.

The Great Commission did not say to “preserve the structure for all nations.”



Ministry as We Know It

“The End of Ministry as We Know It” by Loren Seibold (Summer 2009) was one of the best articles that you have ever printed. I could not believe how someone could get into my mind and express my thoughts so well. I have been deeply distressed over the very things he mentioned. When the ministry itself comes out and is bold enough to hit the nail on the head as to the problem, I would



think that the hierarchy would begin to take notice. The General Conference lives in the ivory tower. They will never downsize the organizational structure. Our money goes for airplane tickets (and frequent flyer miles for the individual). We do not need Unions and Conferences and the North American Division—overhead. We need something, but not all of the above.

People sacrifice and send their children to boarding schools. Then there is no money for college. What happens is that soon these kids are out of the church. I see it happen every year.

Yes, many people are giving their money—but not through channels as the church would like. We are tired of supporting a structure that is over a hundred years old and top heavy. We have no control over anything after the local conference level (and not much there). But the one thing we do have control over is our money.

Like the article said, it is the little old ladies who are supporting the structure today. But guess what? When they die off, the next generation will not step in, and the following generation is even less in tune. Then what?

Yes, we have a problem. But there seems to be no one concerned—at least not on the level that could do something about it.

DOROTHY PATCHETT
Pasco, Washington

Finished With the Church?

I read with interest your cover article in the Summer 2009 edition of *Adventist Today* (“Is God Finished With the Adventist Church?” by J. David Newman), and it was obvious to me that you have done a lot of careful thinking about this question in its broadest implications. I noticed that it seemed to reflect a number of points raised in your earlier guest editorial (“Adventism in Decline”) and feature article (“Adventist Church Found Wanting”), both published back in the September-October 2007 issue.

I agree with you that we must take very seriously Ellen White’s little-known warning in *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 8, p. 247. Thank you for bringing it to our attention again. But I am also of the

opinion that we need to take into account the late T. Housel Jemison’s first rule [of three] of hermeneutics, found in his 1955 undergraduate textbook in prophetic guidance, *A Prophet Among You*, Chapter 23. My paraphrase of it goes something like this: In whatever line of investigative research in inspired writings that one undertakes (whether in the Bible or in the Ellen White writings), one must first take all that the prophet has said upon the given subject, before drawing one’s final “bottom-line” conclusion. Because failure to do so may conceivably lead one into an abstraction, or off upon a tangent!

So, yes, indeed, let us give the statement in *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 8, p. 247, very careful and full consideration. But also, let us give equal consideration to some of her *other* statements that she made concerning the future of the SDA Church.

ROGER COON
Berkeley Springs, West Virginia

Note: While what Dr. Coon has written is all well and good, he makes no attempt to explain the statement in question. Yes, Ellen White has written much on the church going through, but are these statements conditional? Her statement in Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 8, p. 247, seems to suggest that this might be so.

Expositions Without Error?

“There is no excuse for anyone in taking the position that there is no more truth to be revealed, and that all our expositions of Scripture are without an error. The fact that certain doctrines have been held as truth for many years by our people, is not a proof that our ideas are infallible. Age will not make error into truth, and truth can afford to be fair. No true doctrine will lose anything by close investigation.”

—Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 35.

HOW WELL I REMEMBER THE UNION president turning to me and asking, very seriously, “Now, Ed, before we take this plan any further, how will *Adventist Today* react? I don’t want to be the subject of an in-depth report by that magazine!”

That magazine...is our magazine! How effective has it been? Very!

I worked inside the Adventist Church structure for 27 years, trying (among other things) to keep the church out of the *Adventist Today* doghouse. *Adventist Today* was (and is) seen by church leaders

high officials of the church *do not* want to wear the albatross of a critically modulated article in the independent press.

Encouraging Moderation

Wasteful behavior has decreased with the emergence of the independent press. Contrary to popular belief, the Adventist Church has rarely, if ever, advocated austerity—getting a good deal, perhaps, but not austerity. Evangelists and executives on the rise have demanded—and been given—the best. Adventist

Promoting Honesty

Adventist Today has helped the church press become more forthcoming. Traditionally church executives have exerted absolute power over the denomination’s publications. Bad news about the church is normally discouraged—and for decades was not permitted in Adventist publications. But now editors of the *Adventist Review* and other publications are often told to “go ahead and write the story; better we tell it than *Adventist Today*.” I kid you not; this

Adventist Today Works!

BY EDWIN A. SCHWISOW



as wielding great influence. The church has massive public relations clout. But it cannot control *Adventist Today*. Let me demonstrate why that’s a very good thing.

Instilling Healthy Fear

The independent press, by and large, has the effect of holding the church to a higher standard of behavior. I have personally seen many retrogressive, sleight-of-hand plans in denominational headquarters scuttled out of fear of being trounced by the independent press.

Moreover, a negative article in *Adventist Today* has immense potential to further, or stymie, an ambitious church leader’s rise to high office. Yes, on the “far right,” a critical article in *Adventist Today* can become a badge of honor. But by and large, future

leadership as a rule has quietly enjoyed staying in fine hotels and traveling and dining well in its many travels. While compensation has been made to appear moderate, perks have been substantial.

But as the independent press has revealed the hidden benefits and “expense packages” afforded denominational workers, moderation has occurred. After working both in a church environment and in the private sector, I have found empire-building to be an equal incentive in both. An independently investigative press is absolutely essential to help curb an otherwise boundless drive among leaders to acquire and spend. And there still is much work to be done—and millions of reasons to do it.

happens more often than you think!

Adventist Today is providing essential competition for the Adventist press, and that’s good. Because of *Adventist Today*, conscientious editors for the church can more readily gain permission to cover those “unfortunate” stories leadership would prefer to pass over. *Adventist Today* is watching, and the church knows it.

That *Adventist Today*, which survives on less than \$150,000 a year, can wield such a mighty impact among publications with budgets in the millions is a testimony to the faith and enabling support its readers have selflessly shared through the years. But making ends meet is never easy. Plan now to add a “bit extra” this holiday season for the good work and journalism you’ve come to expect in *Adventist Today*.



Squeezing

THE LOCAL CHURCH



MAVERICK

Entrepreneur

Nonconformist



PROPHETIC VOICE

Gadfly

Loyal

The Pivotal Design

Editorial Note: The North Pacific Union and Mid-America Union terminated Ron

Gladden in 2004. He held the position of Church Planting Director in both unions. No reason was given for his firing. His ordination was voided in 2007. Why? In neither case did church leaders have any concerns about Ron's theology or morality. Ron's apparent infraction was twofold: (a) his decision to start churches that are self-determining in tithe and staffing; (b) his decision that Mission Catalyst would accept tithe. Everyone knows that virtually all independent ministries accept tithe dollars, but they act as if they don't. Mission Catalyst decided from day one to be open about accepting tithe since, biblically, the tithe is supposed to fund those who serve in ministry and spread the gospel.

BY RON GLADDEN

One discovery or invention changes everything. Whether it's penicillin, the airplane, or the Internet, a simple discovery destroys old assumptions, disturbs equilibrium, and forever alters reality. It's like watching water run uphill or the hands of a clock turn backward.

Consider the airplane. For centuries, people had a hunch that human flight was possible. After all, birds are heavier than air, yet they overcome gravity and travel at will with no regard for the land or water below. *"If they can do it, why can't we?"*

Wilbur and Orville Wright "invented" the airplane—but not alone. The collective experimentation of centuries of risk-takers was followed by the Wright brothers' research and tests. They are credited with inventing the first practical flying machine, but their creation could only result thanks to the bumps and bruises of those who had gone before. A century later, airplanes are still getting faster and safer, but they are all patterned after the pivotal design.

The pivotal design, when followed, nearly guarantees success even when other variables are adjusted. Airplanes are manufactured in many sizes and shapes, but the basic design

reverts to what Wilbur and Orville learned about roll, pitch, and yaw.

Over the last three decades, some churches have succeeded marvelously in becoming a prevailing church. Much more frequent, however, is this pattern: A new church experiences an initial rush of enthusiasm, then either stalls out at a relatively small size or even ceases to exist. The dream was compelling, the leaders worked hard and prayed their hearts out, but their invention didn't fly as they had hoped.

What happened? Do some pastors have it and some don't? Does God randomly prosper some while turning a deaf ear to others? What is the reason why a few churches—even after two or three decades—never stop reaching more people, while others seemed doomed to struggle?

We Know What It Takes

As with other complicated inventions, prevailing churches are built on the pivotal design. Some will admit that they stumbled onto the design by default while others sort of figured it out ahead of time. But now that we know what it takes, now that



we've deciphered the "roll, pitch, and yaw" of doing church, the opportunities are inexhaustible and indefinably exciting.

It isn't simply good music, transformational preaching, healthy DNA, and an accepting atmosphere, though each of these has its place. The pivotal design lies deeper. Almost every denomination looks for a visionary "Lone Ranger" leader who is extraordinarily gifted. If his wife is exceptionally talented, ever better! We now understand that it takes a team.

And not just a haphazardly assembled team. Unlocking the missional code, discovering the mix of components that result in a prevailing church, is a sizeable challenge. Assembling just the right parts in just the right way happens rarely. But it can be done.

The Pivotal Design

Here is the pivotal design in a nutshell: *The church is started and led by a team of pastors/leaders. Collectively, the team has specific gifts. Each team member has certain characteristics and paradigms. The church possesses a specific culture. And from day one, the church's structure is self-determining.*

First, a prevailing church is started and led by a team of pastors working together. No person or couple is sufficiently gifted to do it alone. Take a field trip to a series of prevailing churches, and you'll find that assembling multiple pastors to work together is essential.

Second, the team must be strategically assembled and must, collectively, share these specific gifts:

People magnet – He loves hanging out with secular people, and he prioritizes his time accordingly. His people skills are off the charts.

Visioneer – This person discerns God's desired future for the church, keeps the leaders focused on the big picture, and infects others with the vision.

Strategy architect – Once the big picture is clear, he maps out and navigates the journey from where they are to where they are headed.

Systems architect – This person develops operational systems. Systems leave no detail unattended, simplify complicated tasks, and produce consistent results, allowing the church to grow.

Excellent preacher – This person takes the Bible and makes the complicated simple, the theoretical practical, and leaves people with a desire for more.

Niche discoverer – This person identifies people's abilities and unleashes their gifts. He discerns those with leadership potential

and helps them achieve maximum impact.

No one person excels in all of these gifts. Even if he did, he cannot pitch, catch, play shortstop, and cover right field all at the same time. Leaders who plan to grow beyond the small church size get it. They understand the power of a properly balanced team. They grasp the power of synergy. Besides, it's a lot more fun to be on a high-energy team than to be the Lone Ranger.

This list does not describe the positions or roles in the church. Obviously, a prevailing church has an exceptional children's ministry, a robust small-group ministry, and transformational worship. This list includes the gifts that must be present on the primary leadership team. The pastors function as specialists as opposed to generalists. When these six gifts are deployed, leaders for the various tasks will emerge.

Third, certain characteristics must be present in each team member.

Integrity – The church deserves to know that every pastor on the team is walking with God.

Humility – Each pastor has a healthy and accurate picture of his own personal wiring, and the team affirms and agrees on his niche. Turf wars are virtually absent in a prevailing church. Jealousy? Doesn't happen!

Compassion – Some leaders are energized by being around needy people, while others feel drained. Regardless of their personal wiring, however, leaders have a heartfelt love and compassion for people in all situations. They care.

Listener – Leaders in prevailing churches seek God for wisdom, clarity, and courage. They also keep their antennas up for concerns and suggestions from their followers. While they cannot (and should not) take everyone's advice, they keep one ear to the ground and discern between pet opinions and wise counsel.

Learner – No matter how much they know today, they don't know enough for tomorrow. Each person on staff at a prevailing church takes the initiative to be a lifelong learner. They eagerly learn from attenders, peers, mentors, and other churches, and they constantly stretch and focus their minds through books, DVDs, and seminars.

Chemistry with the others – In a prevailing church, team members love working together.

The fourth component in the pivotal design is the paradigms the team holds about ministry, life, and God. These life perspectives permeate every motive and give rise to their decisions and actions.

Matthew 28:18-20 – Assembling the already convinced is important, but the primary purpose of an unselfish church is to continue the ministry of Jesus, who came to seek and save the lost.

Acts 2:42-47 – The church is not a crowd of disconnected people, but a body of those who see themselves as their brother's keeper. They bear one another's burdens. They are a family and a team.

Honest about the present; optimistic about the future – Leadership begins with vision. It continues with confronting the facts and acting on the implications. Honest people don't lie to themselves.

Abundance mindset – If God planted the vision in the hearts of the leaders, God will provide the means.

God expects fruit – Some say, "God doesn't call us to be effective; he calls us to be faithful." On the contrary, Jesus cursed the unfruitful tree. Of course God expects us to be faithful, but he plainly commanded, "Go and make disciples." Leaders in prevailing churches are never satisfied until they bear much fruit, and thus bring glory to God.

Longevity – Assemble all the other components of the pivotal design, and the aircraft will careen into Mt. Irrelevance unless the lead pastor, in particular, accepts a lifelong call to his city. Do the research.

The pivotal design's fifth component is the culture of the local church. Here is a brief overview of the DNA of a prevailing church. I will explain each point through the story of Epikos Church, a growing Mission Catalyst church in Vancouver that is

Definition of a Prevailing Church

The church ethos is unselfish: It's all about the next person who needs to meet Jesus.

The members understand and connect with the culture through music, technology, preaching, and the arts.

A high percentage of attendees have no church background.

Authentic Acts 2 community happens (largely, but not exclusively) through its small groups.

The stories of supernatural life change and radical discipleship are countless.

The church never stops reaching more people. Whatever the church's age, it continues to grow.

The church has an increasingly significant footprint in the community. You can't miss it.

patterned on the pivotal design.

Everything revolves around Jesus – Leaders love to talk about him as a friend and their Lord, they aspire to be like him in character and priorities, and they're fired up about living with him in heaven. They constantly invite people far from God to cross the line and follow Jesus. They are committed to treating every person as he did.

The Bible is front and center – A Bible is under every chair. During every message, attendees open the Bible and read it for themselves. Pastors use simple language. They are determined to make it relevant to people's lives. They tell people, "If you don't have an easy-to-read Bible at home, please take this one with you!" They proudly teach the things they have in common with other Christians, as well as the truths that make their church unique.

It's all about the next person – All of us need church, but the primary reason they turn on the lights and unleash the Word is to reach the next person. Every decision, expenditure, activity, and program is planned with that in mind.

The front door is wide open – Guests who attend feel comfortable before the program even starts. They love the friendly greeters, the smell of hot drinks and fresh popcorn at the *Café Ever After*, and popular music playing in the background. Every detail matters. Leaders ruthlessly create an inviting and familiar atmosphere.

Give your best and draw the best out of others – Excellence honors God and attracts high-impact leaders. Leaders are not pathological about perfection, but they know they can always do better. No one is exempt from grace-filled feedback.

Every weekend experience is EPIC (experiential, participatory, image-based, and connective) – Prevailing church leaders believe that everyone who attends should: (a) be accepted just as they are, (b) enjoy the experience, (c) understand everything that happens, and (d) be appropriately challenged to take a next step. The programming team meets every week to make sure the program is fun, relevant, and substantive.

Spiritual progress is normal – No matter who you are, hang around a prevailing church for a while and you will grow spiritually. Events and tools are available to help each person move toward maturity in Christ.

The stakes are high, and so is our commitment – Leaders in a prevailing church are sold on taking God seriously, and they're not shy about challenging people to pray, serve, and give. Leaders

model high commitment in their personal lives. Attenders love the atmosphere of full devotion to a kingdom cause, and they deem it normal to follow suit.

Healthy people do not demand their way; they do demand to have their way considered – Secure leaders encourage dissent. They listen to every criticism, accolade, and idea and respectfully consider each perspective. They are clear about where the church is going, and they constantly make course corrections, but they

recognize that not everyone will like this church, and that's OK.

There ain't no "us" and "them" – Seekers can sniff out spiritual arrogance. Whether on the individual or church level, leaders in healthy churches know they are not superior to others, and they don't presume their church is closer to God than a church that sees some things differently.

Children are a high priority – Jesus set the bar high by his example and his "Except you become as little children" statement. Prevailing churches go all out to prioritize time, resources, and energy accordingly.

Talented people are invited to serve – Prevailing leaders' eyes are always open for people with exceptional talent. They don't care if someone is part of their church;

they dream up excuses to unleash their talents and connect them with what God is up to.

Compassion for the "least of these" – Even as a healthy Christian sees himself as his brother's keeper, a prevailing church is moved by the tragedies in our world and is determined to unleash substantial resources on those most deeply affected.

The Fork in the Road

Yogi Berra once quipped, "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." *This* is the fork in the road. Reality: The first five components of the pivotal design can conceivably materialize in

any system. The final component is incompatible with a parental system.¹

Here is the final component: *A prevailing church is self-determining*. Throw a rock in the lake, and you can bet it will sink. Name a church that never stops reaching an ever-larger number of people for Christ, and you can bet it is self-determining.

Meaning? The local church makes its own decisions about money, staff, ministries, and facilities. If the church affiliates with a denomination or network, the local church decides the final destination of the charitable dollar, not the denomination. When the Holy Spirit reveals the right person for a ministry position, local leaders are empowered to negotiate and bring him or her on board. If the church decides to seize the day and purchase 20 acres, local leaders make the decision. No person or committee at a so-called higher level has authority over the decisions that affect the church's long-term success.

Take a long and honest look at the family of Adventist churches in North America. Somewhere north of 95 percent struggle to keep the same attendance year after year. Bursts of success in some churches are limited and temporary. Here is the unvarnished truth: *In a parental denomination, every local-church-based dream is eventually shattered*.

Under current tithing structure, a prevailing church will never happen in the Adventist denomination. With someone in a distant office having the final say in staffing, it will always be a dream. The pivotal design is out of reach.

The question must be asked (and answered honestly): *Which is more important? Maintaining a top-heavy structure that maintains status quo and squeezes the local church, or helping thousands of people far from God find Jesus?*

"You can't create the future," Rosabeth Moss Kanter asserts, "in a structure designed to repeat the past." AT

Ron Gladden is the Directional Leader for Mission Catalyst Network.

This article is condensed from a longer version that is available at www.missioncatalyst.org/pivotaldesign.

¹Grandparental denominations and networks understand their role as advisory and supportive. They don't want to control anything. Their passion is to help the local church achieve its maximum redemptive potential. They are clear that the local church is the hope of the world. Their greatest pride is seeing one of their churches reach hundreds of people for the kingdom.



TITHE — Sacrificing *the* Sacred Cow

BY J. DAVID NEWMAN

Church growth is suffering in North America because local churches are not allowed to spend tithe. There, I have said it. There is no more touchy subject for church administrators than how the tithe is spent and the percentages sent up the system. The practice of tithe is one of the most sacred cows in the denomination, and woe be to the person who dives into this subject.

Ron Gladden decided to do something about this and formed Mission Catalyst (see his article in this issue), then lost his ordination because his organization accepted tithe.

But as I will seek to show in this article, the lack of some tithe staying in the local church is greatly impeding its growth.

I, of course, am not the first to say that tithe policy needs to change. But church growth is becoming desperate in North America, and something needs to be done differently. Monte Sahlin has shown that if it were not for immigrants, the Adventist Church would be in decline in North America.¹ What worked 100 and even 50 years ago is not working now. Changes in the workplace and in our culture dictate that the tithe practice that worked before is not working now.

We are currently fulfilling this Texas saying: “If all you ever do is all you’ve ever done, then all you’ll ever get is all you ever got.”

Culture Changes

Here is just one way the culture has changed. The old-style family of father working and mother staying home to look after the two children represented 60 percent of all households in 1960. In 1990 it represented just 7 percent.² Women have less time to give because they are working full time like their husbands. This means fewer people to volunteer in the local church.

A decline in volunteerism means that it takes more staff to grow a church. But the denomination only rewards a church with a second pastor if it manages to reach a certain size. As a consequence, the vast majority of large Adventist churches are institutional churches that owe their size to being near a college or hospital or church administration center. And thus they grow, not because of baptism but because of membership transfer.

Church Staffing

A considerable body of evidence has accumulated that shows a church needs to add staff in order to grow. Ray Bowman and Eddy Hall, church consultants, point out that a pastor can minister to only so many people. Building on current research, they say: “How can you tell if your church is understaffed? We use as a rule of



thumb a ration of one pastoral/program staff member for every 150 in average worship attendance, with the provision that staff must be hired ahead of growth. This means, for example, that when a church with a solo pastor reaches or approaches 150 in average worship attendance, it is time to add a second pastoral or program staff member, either part-time or full-time, so the church can continue to grow beyond 150. Depending on the leadership style of the solo pastor, the point at which a second staff member is needed may be anywhere between 125 and 175. A church with two full-time pastoral/program staff members should consider adding a third staff member as the church approaches 300 in attendance, and so on.³

In the December 1983 issue of *Ministry* magazine, Don Jacobsen wrote an article titled: “Is Your Church Staffed to Grow?” At that time, Dr. Jacobsen (former professor at Andrews University Theological Seminary, later to become assistant to the president of the North American Division) was pastor of the Stone Mountain Seventh-day Adventist Church in Georgia.

He writes, on p. 19, that he became pastor of an 80-member church. Over the next three years, the congregation grew to 200 but could not go beyond that number. It seemed to be an insurmountable problem. He tells of how they fasted, prayed, knocked on doors, gave multiple Bible studies, sent out mass mailings, broadcast on radio, and even held evangelistic meetings.

Then he began to read the church-growth literature and discovered that for a church to keep growing, it needed to keep adding staff. He says in this article that there is a limit to how many people the pastor can follow up. He can oversee only so many people, and as the number of volunteers grows, it becomes harder and harder to train and encourage them.

Jacobsen then makes a most radical statement. One of the ways to help the pastor is for “some portion of the tithe to be retained in the local church to provide for an executive secretary for the pastor” (p. 25). He adds that conferences need to set staffing formulas that encourage church growth. He concludes his article by saying, “If we provide secretaries and additional staff members in our churches, will that mean that our pastors can take it easy? No committed pastor wants to. But it will mean that many of our churches will break through previously unattainable church growth levels. And that is what we want.”

Maintenance or Growth?

Jacobsen’s plea was not heeded by church administrators across North America. Churches are staffed for maintenance, not for growth. And one of the main reasons for this is our tithe policy, which requires so much of the money to be sent up the system.

Now some will say that in other areas of the world, pastors often serve 10 or more churches and that those churches are growing. However, what works in one culture does not necessarily work in another culture.

Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D., director of the McIntosh Church Growth Network, shares research that shows the need for extra staff to keep the church growing. He supports what Bowman and Hall said, as quoted earlier in this article.

“Based on a half century of evaluation of churches with multiple staff teams, it now appears that a realistic ration of staff to worship attendance is 1:150. While it is difficult to financially support a ratio of 1:100, churches do appear willing and able to support one full-time professional staff person for every 150 worshippers. Indeed, since 1915 the ratio of pastors to church members has consistently hovered between 1:150 to 1:200 with an average of 1:156. Using this ratio as a guidance, a more helpful table for adding staff positions follows:

Average Attendance at Worship	Full-Time Staff Positions	Support Staff
150	1	1
300	2	1.5
450	3	2
600	4	2.5
750	5	3
900	6	3.5
1,050	7	4
1,200	8	4.5

McIntosh gives examples of how this works and then adds this very important point: “The 1:150 ratio means a church desiring to grow to the next level should add a new staff person *before* reaching the projected growth level. This is a critical aspect of staffing that leaders often miss.”⁴

“Adding staff is not very helpful if support staff is not added as well. Support staff include the secretaries, janitors, sound technicians, and so on. The ratios for support staff is included in the table above.”⁵

McIntosh then describes how to finance this growth, and here is where the Adventist system departs from how other churches grow. For example, if a church is congregational it keeps all its tithe and offerings but usually allocates a percentage for missions. In the United Methodist Denomination, up to 83 percent of monies stays in the local church.

No Change in Tithe Policies

I am writing this as a local church pastor who has also served as a conference departmental director, conference secretary, editor of *Ministry Magazine*, administrator, professor at Columbia Union College (now Washington Adventist University), and adjunct professor for the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University.

When I joined the Ministerial Association of the General Conference, I was soon appointed to a subcommittee on the use of tithe. There I learned about tithe exchange. This is where the richer conferences with too much tithe (that is, more than they need to pay their current pastors) send up their excess tithe to the General Conference, which then sends back to these conferences non-tithe money (taken from offerings like Sabbath School missions). Now they can use this money for whatever they want, whereas tithe spending is somewhat restricted. There was a lot of debate about this practice, with some of us arguing that it was immoral. But this is not the place to go into the pros and cons of this intriguing practice of the church.

We actually made seven recommendations to the full General Conference Finance Committee on changing usage and percentage of tithe reversions—every one of which was rejected by the committee. The church dislikes change.

Robert S. Folkenberg wrote an article for *Adventist Review*⁶ claiming that 83.51 percent of tithe directly benefited the local church through the conference. That may be true for some churches, but it's certainly not true for churches like New Hope, where I serve as pastor.

Now regarding how much tithe the conference should send up the system. Remember that we have five levels to support in our system: local church, conference, union, division, and General Conference—all with their offices and staff. The Roman Catholic Church, which also is worldwide and much larger than we are, has only three levels: local parish, bishopric, and Vatican.

Let me review our current policy in the North American Division (NAD). The local church sends 100 percent of its tithe

to the local conference, which sends 9 percent of tithe to its local union and 16 percent to the division.

The earliest figures I have been able to find come from the 1926 Annual Council Action, although it seems clear that these percentages had been in force for some time. In 1926 a conference sent only 20 percent to the General Conference if its tithe income reached \$130,000. Below that figure, it was a sliding scale so that if the conference received only \$25,999, it sent only 1 percent to the GC. As conference income increased, so did the percentage sent on up.

Now you would assume that with inflation, those figures on which the percentages were based would increase. Incredibly, that was not the case. As the years rolled by, every conference in North America finally reached tithe income of \$130,000, which meant a reversion of 20 percent. Every year at the Annual Council, these figures were voted without change. Finally someone saw little point voting a 20-point sliding scale when every conference was at the maximum. So more than 50 years later, at the 1981 Annual Council, they scrapped this 20-tiered system and made it official that all NAD conferences in the paid the 20 percent.

However, after much pressure from the conferences, the 1990 Annual Council agreed to change the formula so that conferences would not have to send as much tithe up to the union and division. The Council adopted a sliding scale over five years.⁷ The current percentages are 9 percent to the local union and 16 percent to the division. In addition, the conference pays 7.4 percent into the retirement fund and 2.7 percent for healthcare. This does not include the subsidy for the local college and other expenses.⁸

In the meantime, the needs in the NAD conferences have drastically changed. Some years ago I conducted a study of staffing in the Potomac Conference. In 1958 the Potomac conference employed 52 teachers for 1,059 students, a ratio of

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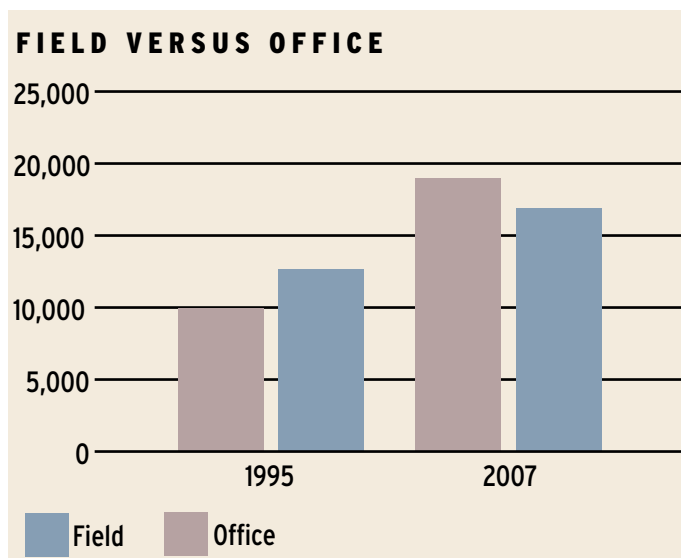


one teacher to 20.36 students. In 1998 the conference employed 105 teachers for 1,741 students, a ratio of one to 16.58. The number of teachers doubled while the number of students increased by only 65 percent, and the student ratio decreased from 20.36 to 16.58. During this same period, the number of pastors increased from 61 to 82, an increase of 34 percent, while membership increased from 9,360 to 22,533, an increase of 141 percent. But here is the highlight. In 1958 each pastor cared for an average of 153 members, while in 1998 each pastor cared for an average of 275 members.

The educational costs to the conference drastically increased, and this was the case in all conferences. So much so that at the 1985 Annual Council, the tithe-usage policy was changed so that elementary teachers could be paid up to 30 percent of their salary from tithe. Suddenly the extra need for tithe to remain at the local conference increased without any adjustment made in the amount of the money sent on up. Which meant less money to employ pastors.

Funding the Bureaucracy

Here is where we need to change the tithe policies. The original system was based on the larger and stronger churches helping the weaker churches. And that is a good philosophy. However, a very small percentage of the tithe goes for that purpose. More and more is going to support an ever-growing bureaucracy and educational



system, while Ellen White commands us specifically that we are not to use tithe for this purpose.⁹

In 1995 there were 13,787 evangelistic and pastoral workers in the field worldwide and 13,742 administrative personnel in the office.¹⁰ In 2007 there were 18,060 evangelistic and pastoral workers in the field and 22,228 administrative personnel in the office.¹¹ In those 12 years, workers in the field paid out of tithe have increased by 37.5 percent, while workers in the office paid out of tithe have increased by 61.75 percent. No wonder our churches are not growing. For the first time, we have more people in the office than in the field.

In addition to asking for all of the tithe from the local church, the denomination asks that we support a wide variety of other offerings. See the separate box labeled Personal Giving Plan.

Local Church Shows the Way

New Hope Adventist Church in the Chesapeake Conference has taken to heart the need to increase staff if it is to keep growing. In 2002 the average worship attendance was 250. This was supported by two full-time staff and a part-time secretary. By 2009 attendance has grown to more than 600, now supported by three full-time staff, two full-time support staff, four part-time staff, and two part-time support staff.

You will see that according to the staffing formulas given above, New Hope has reached its maximum. So beginning in the fall of 2009, the congregation is moving one part-time staff person to a full-time staff position. This will give four full-time and three part-time staff, still supported by the two full-time administrative assistants and two other part-time support persons. The church anticipates growing to more than 700, and then it will consider adding the next staff person.

How is New Hope paying for all of this staff? They are paying for it out of the local budget. The church pays enough tithe to warrant three pastors paid by the local conference. But it will be a long time before it reaches \$1 million dollars in tithe and will be able to have another conference-paid pastor. It costs approximately \$250,000 in tithe for each pastor. And, by the way, monies marked tithe are sent to the conference.

We are going to need to change the whole funding system of the church in North America if we are going to achieve any kind of real church growth. And the money is there. For example, New Hope had a combined income of \$1.4 million in 2008.

According to McIntosh, the larger churches (such as New Hope) should be spending 40 to 50 percent of their income on staff. At New Hope, the budget for staff is 12 percent of the total income. When you subtract the amount that the conference takes out of the church's income to pay for the three pastors, the percent rises to 29 percent. This is still well below what churches outside the denomination are spending in order to keep growing.

There is actually quite an advantage for the conference in having local churches pay for staff. When I was the pastor of Damascus Grace Fellowship in the Potomac Conference, we hired our own youth pastor. He came approved and credentialed by the conference, but the church paid all of his salary and expenses. One day the conference president asked to meet with me at the conference office. He and the treasurer were concerned that some people might be paying tithe into the local church rather than to the conference, and they wanted to find a way to "regularize" the youth pastor so he would be paid from the conference office.

I told them I had no problem with them doing that, but it was most unlikely that they would see any increase in tithe giving from our church. Some people are unhappy with the church bureaucracy and will not pay tithe to the system but are very willing to support the local church. I told them to count their blessings. They were getting a pastor for free in the conference. They acknowledged the point and dropped the subject.

Immediately some readers may say this smacks of congregationalism. Others will say that this is the selfishness of the local church wanting more money for itself. Still others will say that if we go this route, it will spell the end of the church structure as we know it today.

Functional Structures

New Hope Adventist Church follows the North American Division program of Natural Church Development (NCD). According to that program, churches grow when eight factors are high—that is, more than 65 on the NCD scale. These factors are: empowering leadership, functional structures, gift-oriented ministry, holistic small groups, inspiring worship, loving relationships, need-oriented evangelism, and passionate spirituality.

Note that one of the factors is functional structures. This includes how the local church is organized and financed. The evidence behind NCD reveals that each factor must be constantly

growing and changing if a church is to keep growing. It says that the factor that is lowest of the eight factors will prevent the church from growing. It must be addressed first.

It becomes very difficult, if not impossible, for the local church to keep growing if it has to send so much of its income away to support the increasing bureaucracy of the church. Thus it has to educate its members that where they give their money, including tithe, is up to them.

The Storehouse

There is no biblical or Ellen White evidence that the conference is the storehouse. This was admitted by Robert J. Kloosterhuis, vice president of the General Conference, when he wrote an article published in the August 1997 issue of *Ministry*, pp. 14-17. He writes: "Is the storehouse the local conference? Or the local church? It may surprise you, but the Bible does not sanction either one as the storehouse! There are those who believe the storehouse should be the local church. They see parallels in the practices of ancient Israel. They contrast the present practice of Seventh-day Adventists with that of Scripture and say it is not biblical to have the local conference as the storehouse. On the other hand, the world church follows the plan of the local conference/mission as the storehouse. Which is biblical? Unfortunately, this question is not easily answered by a crystal clear statement of Scripture either in favor of the local church or of the local conference."

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Members need to know that it is not a moral issue where they pay their tithe. It is an ecclesiastical decision. If you are going to keep the system going as it is, then tithe needs to be paid to the conference. But what if the system is breaking down? What if it is time to change?



Wine and Wineskins

Jesus talks about the need for change in his story of the wineskins: “No one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one. If he does, he will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins” (Luke 5:36-38, NIV).

Howard Snyder comments on this passage: “Jesus distinguishes here between something essential and primary (the wine) and something secondary but also necessary and useful (the wineskins). Wineskins would be superfluous without the wine they were meant to hold.”¹² But what do you do when the wineskins become old and people hang on to them? Church structure, organization, and policies are for the sake of the gospel, not the other way around. The gospel is divine; structure is human. “Wineskins result when the divine gospel touches human culture.”¹³

When Jesus told us that new wine must always be put into new wineskins, he was telling us that God is always a God of newness. While the gospel—the good news that Jesus died for our sins and offers us salvation absolutely free—never changes, the form that the gospel takes in presenting itself to the world must constantly be changing. For the gospel to be relevant and able to reach all segments of society, the wineskin (organization, methods, policies) must be constantly changing so that it continues to be relevant to the society it is trying to reach.

The church is in crisis in North America, and few seem to really care. Snyder again states the problem well: “Every age knows the temptation to forget that the gospel is ever new. We try to contain the new wine of the gospel in old wineskins—outmoded traditions, obsolete philosophies, creaking institutions, old habits. But with time the old wineskins begin to bind the gospel. Then they must burst, and the power of the gospel pours forth once more. Many times this has happened in the history of the church. Human nature wants to conserve, but the divine nature is to renew. It seems almost a law that things initially created to aid the gospel eventually become obstacles—old wineskins. Then God has to destroy or abandon them so that the gospel wine can renew man’s world once again.”¹⁴

Of course, it is dangerous to be the one who introduces new wineskins. New Hope is pushing the envelope in this area of

funding, but it is doing it with the conviction that people matter more than money, that reaching the lost is what the church is organized for.

Prophetic Voice

Walter Brueggemann, in his article “The Prophet as a Destabilizing Presence,” states that in the Old Testament kings needed the perspective of prophets, who operated separately from the ruling class. “The goal of the managers and benefactors is to stabilize the system so that it is not noticed that it is a system, but there is only one reality, the only possible, thinkable reality. And if no other social reality is thinkable or possible, then criticism of this one tends to be precluded.” He then went on to describe the work of the prophet as to challenge the status quo and show that there are other perspectives, other possible realities.¹⁵

“Thus, the prophetic is an alternative to a positivism that is incapable of alternative, uneasy with critique, and so inclined to conformity.”¹⁶

This is the role that *Adventist Today* is playing. The editorial staff and publisher are very supportive of the church, but we also feel that there must be times when we speak in a prophetic role to the church. Prophets were never popular, and many lost their lives for their strong statements. Fortunately, no one’s life will be lost because of this candid article. At the same time, we do not profess to have all the answers. All we hope for is a dialogue. After all, isn’t the purpose of the church the growth of the church,

Personal Giving Plan

OFFERING RECIPIENTS

General Conference

Weekly Sabbath School
Thirteenth Sabbath
Birthday Thank
Annual Sacrifice for Global Mission
Disaster & Famine Relief
Fall Mission Appeal
Spring Mission Appeal
Adventist World Radio
Christian Record
Oakwood College
Andrews University
Loma Linda University

North American Division

Adventist Television Ministries
Voice of Prophecy
Inner City Ministries
Multilingual Ministries
Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries

Union Conferences

Local College

not just keeping the status quo?

The church is in trouble in North America. This is a wake-up call to do something about it. AT

¹ From an analysis of the official statistics from the North American Division conducted by Monte Sahlin in 2005.

² George Barna, *The Frog in the Kettle*, (Ventura: Regal Books, 1990), p. 66.

³ Ray Bowman and Eddie Hall, *When Not to Build* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), pp. 54-55.

⁴ Gary L. McIntosh, *Staff Your Church for Growth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), p. 41.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁶ Robert Folkenberg, *Adventist Review*, June 4, 1998, p. 16.

⁷ Reported in *Adventist Review*, Jan. 17, 1991, p. 23.

⁸ Personal communication with Eduardo Muñoz, Chesapeake Conference treasurer, Sept. 8, 2009.

⁹ *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 102.

¹⁰ The following information is from page 6 of the 133rd Annual Statistical Report—1995. Denominational workers are classified by types of employment. They are divided into general workers and institutional workers. There are 52,358 general workers and 91,664 institutional workers.

The general workers are broken down into five categories: evangelistic and pastoral, administrative and promotional, primary school teachers, Bible instructors, and literature evangelists. Since literature evangelists are paid from commissions and primary school teachers are really institutional, I am leaving them out of the equation. Bible instructors also vary greatly how they are paid and classified, so I likewise omitted them. This leaves the following:

Evangelistic and pastoral workers (ordained and licensed) = 13,787

Administrative and promotional workers (ordained and other) = 13,742

As you can see, there is almost a one-to-one ratio of people in the field and people in the office. Now about another 100 could be added to the evangelistic and pastoral category, because there is no provision in the statistics for women pastors who receive Commissioned Ministerial credentials and licenses. But there are still not many of them. There is also a miscellaneous category called “other” under evangelistic and pastoral workers, which I ignore. This category lists 2,645 persons. When I checked to see who these people are (for who are pastors and evangelists other than pastors and evangelists?), I found a most curious situation. The office of Archives and Statistics could not tell me the purpose of this category. I investigated North America and found that some unions had placed their elementary teachers in this category (even though there is a separate category for them). I also found that some colleges placed their ordained religion teachers in this category, rather than under institutional workers (colleges). This section seems to be a catch-all that has no bearing on people actually working in the field, so I left this section out in my calculations. Update for 2001. There are now 15,465 evangelistic and pastoral workers and 16,452 administrative and promotional workers.

¹¹ I asked Cathy Jones, who deals with all of the statistics in the General Conference Archives and Statistics department, to explain why the column “other” under evangelistic and pastoral employees varies so greatly from year to year. For example, in 2006 it was 4,180 but in 2007 it was 11,311. It seems to be a place where the recording secretaries place the names of people they don’t know where else to place. So I am comparing what is clear—which are the clearly designated field workers, ordained, licensed, and Bible workers, who appear in a different place in the report. Jones replied, “Both divisions are answering the question based on the 2008 denominational employee’s report. I know you were asking about 2007.”

Below are answers I received from the Northern Asia-Pacific Division (NSD) and Southern Asia-Pacific Division (SSD), explaining who these “others” are in the evangelistic and pastoral employees column. However, I am not sure if SSD

understood the column I was asking about, so I am listing where the numbers fell in the type of credential or license.

NSD – Among the 5,718 workers submitted in Chinese Union Mission’s annual statistic report in 2008, they are mainly Bible instructors and workers serving their churches in various aspects (Bible studies, sermons on Sabbath, visitation, evangelistic activities, etc.). The situation in UT (China) is quite different [in] that instead of receiving monthly salary, they receive stipends and some are even working on [a] volunteer basis. After I received this information from the secretary doing the reports for the Chinese Union Mission (where the higher figures are), I immediately emailed her back and reminded her that only full-time regular employees were to be reported, not part-time, or volunteers, or contract workers. So she has sent in a revision for this year’s report, reducing the figure in the “other” column from 6,109 down to 4,473 [still higher compared to the other divisions]. The majority of these are listed as having the Missionary License in the evangelistic and pastoral employees column. Most of these used to be listed as Bible instructors, but a few years ago they were moved over to the current evangelistic and pastoral column.

Probably the NSD reported similarly in last year’s 2007 report. In 2007, the type of credential or license in the “other” column for evangelistic and pastoral employees were as follows: Missionary Credential - 32, Missionary License - 6,413, Literature Evangelist Credential and License - 3, All Other Regular Employees (no license or credentials) - 280.

I also asked Cathy Jones about the difference between Ministerial and Missionary credentials and licenses. According to the General Conference Working Policy E 05 Credentials and Licenses, missionary credentials and licenses are supposed to be issued to non-ministerial employees. She replied, “These will include regularly employed institutional and office employees and, in divisions where commissioned ministerial credentials are not used, Bible instructors.” So she tried to clarify this with some of the divisions. Part of the challenge is that not all divisions report in the right categories.

SSD – Here is the information I received from MYUM and WTUM regarding “all other employees” under the evangelistic/pastoral column: Those are the assistant church pastors, evangelists, local church pastors, and ministerial interns who are newly regularized workers. In the 2007 report, the SSD has the following type of credential or license in the “other” column for evangelistic and pastoral employees: Commissioned Ministerial Credential - 86, Commissioned Ministry of Teaching Credentials - 216, Missionary Credential - 429, Commissioned Ministerial License - 37, Commissioned Ministry of Teaching License - 86, Missionary License - 37, Literature Evangelist Credential and License - 21, All Other Regular Employees (no license or credentials) - 93.

¹² Howard A. Snyder, *The Problem of Wineskins: Church Structure in a Technological Age* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), p. 13.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

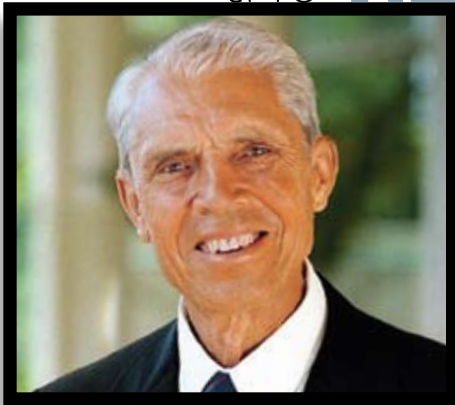
¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

¹⁵ Walter Brueggemann, “The Prophet as a Destabilizing Presence” in *The Pastor as Prophet* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1985), pp. 51-53.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

The APOCALYPTIC VISION and the NEUTERING of ADVENTISM

by Desmond Ford



George Knight has put me, along with thousands of others, in his debt by his spotlight on Adventist history, particularly as it affects our views of Ellen G. White. And his most recent work warning against the neutering of Adventism contains many excellent things, as we would expect. I wholeheartedly agree that true Adventists should be earnest students and proclaimers of biblical apocalyptic.

At the heart of this book is his claim that Revelation 10 has to do with the rise of Adventism. Note how many times he refers to “the time of the end” (or its synonyms) in pages 28-32. George assumes that “the time of the end” began in 1798-1844. He assumes also that the expression used in Dan. 8:17, 19 has no other application than to those times which would eventuate 2,000 years after Daniel was written.

These assumptions represent Adventist orthodoxy of the last half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. But since widespread studies on the relationship between inaugurated and consummated eschatology, exegesis of apocalyptic writings has changed. Add to that the fact that today we take more seriously the warning of Christ that we are not to be concerned with dates (Acts 1:7). The work of Adventist scholar Kai Arasola, *The End of Historicism*, represents current understanding.

It is true that the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* gives the early view

on Revelation 10, but the caveat on page 796 must be given its true importance. There we read that “Commentators and theologians in general have been greatly divided over the meaning of the fifth and sixth trumpets. This has been due principally to problems in three areas”, etc. Remember that Revelation 10 is part of the sixth trumpet (see Rev. 11:15).

Repeatedly the whole New Testament assumes that Christ could return in the generation of its writing. (Matthew 24:34 and 16:28 make that quite plain, as well as the many usages of the second person pronoun in the Olivet discourse. Over and over Christ assumes that his hearers could see the final events.) Christ taught that if Israel received his message, the gospel could go speedily to all the world in the disciples’ own day (see also Acts 3:19-20). The *SDA Bible Commentary* teaches that words expressive of the soon return of Christ fall into the common category of conditional prophecies (see Vol. 7, pp. 728-729). The best-known example of these, of course, is the prophecy of Jonah: “Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” It wasn’t. Because its citizens accepted the saving condition of repentance, Nineveh’s fate was not that warned by Jonah.

I quote from a work written decades ago that has been used with or without acknowledgement by most Adventist writers on Revelation in recent times:

“The presupposition most common to interpreters and most devastating to their exegesis is that the New Testament in general, and Revelation in particular, assumes that a gap of many centuries must necessarily intervene between the two advents of Christ. This view minimizes the significance of the first advent and the cross, however unwittingly, and assumes that the major purpose of Revelation is to predict twenty centuries of political and ecclesiastical events. J.H. Newman, from whose soteriology we strongly differ, wrote

much worthy of consideration. Consider the following on the matter in discussion.

“‘Though time intervenes between Christ’s first and second comings, it is not *recognized* (as I may say) in the Gospel scheme, but it is, as it were, an accident. For so it was, that up to Christ’s coming in the flesh, the course of things ran straight towards that end, nearing it by every step; but now, under the Gospel, that course has (if I may so speak) altered its direction, as regards His second coming, and runs not towards the end, but along it, and on the brink of it; and it is at all times near that great event, which, did it run towards it, it would run into. Christ, then, is ever at our doors; as near eighteen hundred years ago as now, and not nearer now than then, and not nearer when He comes than now.’¹

“Anyone who reads the New Testament from the viewpoint just expressed will find a complete harmony in its chronological statements. Such a reader will discover that the New Testament writers viewed the first advent of Christ as the beginning of the end of the world. They did not deny the literalness of another coming of Christ, but they viewed that event as an imminent completion of the End already begun.

“Consider the following passages of Scripture [from the Revised Standard Version]:

“‘He has appeared once for all *at the end of the age* to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself’ (Heb. 9:26, last part).

“‘But *in these last days* he has spoken to us by a Son’ (Heb. 1:2, first part).

“‘Children, *it is the last hour*; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know that *it is the last hour*’ (1 John 2:18).

“‘Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom *the end of the ages has come*’ (1 Cor. 10:11).

“‘I mean, brethren, the appointed time has grown very short; ... For the form of

this world is passing away' (1 Cor. 7:29, first part; verse 31, last part).

"Besides this you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, *the day is at hand*' (Rom. 13:11-12).

"The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet' (Rom. 16:20, first part).

"Behold, the Judge is standing at the doors' (James 5:9, last part). ...

"And now has manifested through the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel' (2 Tim. 1:10).

"Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out' (John 12:31)."²

"While some ... have denied the reality of the biblical teaching of the second advent, ... others, particularly the sects, have denied the truth of the eschatological nature of the first advent. It is chiefly the latter who have fathered popular commentaries on the book of Revelation and have subsequently erred throughout because of their failure to see the "end-time" nature of the Cross event, and the New Testament teaching that God intended the church should hasten the speedy return of the Saviour, an event possible in the first century itself."³

"The New Testament's last book was written to spiritually arm and prepare first century Christians for the task of the universal spread of the gospel that the end of the world might be consummated in their day!"⁴

Note, for example, the following passages in Revelation that contain plain statements regarding the imminence of Christ's return *in John's day*: Rev. 1:1, 3; 2:24, 25; 3:3, 10, 11, 20; 22:7, 10, 20. In addition, all 14 passages in the teaching of Jesus about "this generation" had reference to his contemporaries. The *SDA Bible Commentary* is clearly correct in its understanding of Matt. 24:34.

Therefore all arguments from Revelation based on events in the 19th century are irrelevant. We should remember that Luther thought he was fulfilling Rev. 14:6, and so did the early church.

Revelation 10 does indeed quote from Daniel 12, and it is certainly referring to the speedy end of the world once the open book of the gospel has been proclaimed. (Rev. 10:1-3 parallels 14:6, and Rev. 18:1, Matt. 24:14, and Mark 13:10 are all about the final proclamation of the gospel.)

However, the "bitterness" mentioned is not the disappointment of 1844, but the terrible eschatological persecution of the church that preaches from the open book. See the very next chapter.

George does in one place speak of the French Revolution. Perhaps he still holds to the view that Revelation 11 is about that event. Apocalyptic scholars do not believe that. Ellen White copied from Uriah Smith, who copied from George Storrs, who copied from George Croly, who knew next to nothing about history. (Note, for example, that there was no three-and-a-half-year period when the Bible was banned during the Revolution.)

Let us now return to Daniel. There is nothing whatever in the Book of Daniel that would link "the time of the end" to 1798 forward. Note the admonition of Dr. Reinder Bruinsma in his *Spectrum* article,⁵ to the effect that our anti-papal views sprang from the culture of the 19th century and not from Scripture, and that therefore we need to reinterpret the prophecies we have used against the papacy. Any who disagree with this thesis are challenged to find historical evidence for papal supremacy from A.D. 538-1798. It does not exist, as the best Adventist historians know.

For two thousand years and more, the little horn power described in Daniel chapters 7 and 8 has been understood by believers to be Antiochus Epiphanes and all later manifestations of the Antichrist

whom he prefigured. Any modern scholar of apocalyptic who applied the little horn solely to the papacy would be ridiculed by his fellows, and legitimately so.

George Knight may believe the myth that the Hebrew term translated "time" or "times" in Dan. 7:25 literally means a year. This can be so, but is not necessarily so, and mainly it is not the case. George has quoted Kai Arasola's classic work, but I do not believe that he has understood it. Adventists inherited most of Miller's series of interpretations, but all of these were faulty. See, for example, his 15 ways of getting to 1843/1844.

Daniel 8:17, 19 with its references to "the time of the end" is foretelling the destruction of the nasty little horn, whose devastations had just been described (see verse 25 and compare 7:26). The last fulfilment of the prophecy has to do with the final crisis precipitated by Antichrist, and the ushering in of the eschatological kingdom of God at Christ's second coming. This is set forth in Revelation 17-20, which has nothing to do with the 19th century (compare 2 Thess. 2:3-8). Read closely the article on the "Little Horn" in the *SDA Bible Dictionary*, pp. 655-656.

I deeply respect George Knight. He is a man of God who loves and preaches the gospel. For that and his excellent books on Adventist history, he will always be gratefully remembered. AT

Desmond Ford, theologian, was a popular Adventist writer and speaker until the church defrocked him in 1980 for arguing against the sanctuary doctrine.

¹ J.H. Newman, Selection adapted to the seasons of the ecclesiastical year: from the Parochial and Plain Sermons of John Henry Newman, 5th ed. (Longman, Green, 1891), p. 235. Cited by Carl E. Amerding and W. Ward Gasque, eds., *Handbook of Biblical Prophecy* (Michigan, Baker Book House, 1978), p. 9.

² Desmond Ford, *Crisis! A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, Vol. 1. pp. 25-27.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

⁵ Vol. 27, Issue 3, Summer 1999, pp. 45-52.

Hello Chester,

Greetings from your old stamping ground up here in sunny Queensland!¹ We hope that the memories of the “better land” may yet find you back again one day!

I would like to dialogue with you on a sensitive matter and feel I can do so without spoiling our friendship, which Lorraine and I treasure greatly. Indeed, we have worked with you on various planning committees and had no trouble finding common ground. But this one is somewhat more delicate. I’m about to ask you, as it were, to put one foot in boiling water and the other in freezing, hoping that on balance there’ll be no hurt. There may well be! But I’ve got to take the risk!

The reason for this letter is that we need your help.

One of the great pleasures Lorraine and I have, whenever possible, is to find our way up to Peachester to listen to our good friend Des Ford. The reason we cherish this opportunity is because we would never want to miss the opportunity to hear the gospel and the word in the incisive Desmond Ford manner. While doing so, we marvel that this man is so demonised by his church rather than being championed for what would be tremendous value to our members. We conclude that the ones who do so have never heard Des preach. Many others whom you know and respect also make their way up there, and numbers of our ministers and members devour his

books and use his CDs and videos. Not to forget those we know in administration who also are silent believers in the message he carries. Well do we remember also the days when camp-goers would flock to hear him at a time when it was legal. He preaches not one word differently today. So we wonder what brought about the change to the extent that he is now banned from our pulpits.

There is a reason.

Back in 1980 this Division was somewhat blindsided to the significance of the revised Statement of Beliefs voted by the General Conference Session of that time. Well do I remember a visit to Townsville by Keith Parmenter, [who was] making the statement that no doctrinal changes whatsoever were made in the new document. Accordingly it seems no one thought to check. There were, in fact, radical changes. When I point them out today, people drop their jaw in amazement. Particularly since the alterations vindicate Desmond Ford.

Let me briefly point out those changes, the first spelled out in Statement No. 9:

1. **“In Christ’s life of perfect obedience to God’s will, His suffering, death, and resurrection, God provided the only means of atonement for human sin, so that those who by faith accept this atonement may have eternal life... This perfect atonement...”** etc.

The administration should earnestly pray that none of the hundreds of ministers dismissed at the time ever choose to convert those words into an

Letter to a Church Leader

unfair dismissal claim. These were sacked for their belief in those self-same words. It was the church that deconstructed 1844 atonement, not Desmond Ford. By a stroke of the pen at Dallas in 1980, the church reversed the long-held position inscribed by Uriah Smith in 1872: "...which atonement, so far from being made on the cross, which was but the offering of the sacrifice, is the very last portion of his work as priest..." (*A Declaration of Fundamental Principles*, 1872, p. 3).

But it gets worse. Note the position taken in our most foundational doctrine, now numbered as Statement 24:

2. **"In it [the heavenly sanctuary] Christ ministers on our behalf, making available to believers the benefits of His atoning sacrifice offered once for all on the cross..."** (all emphasis in this letter mine).

This switch from an 1844 *making* of atonement to a *ministry* of atonement already made, is an unprecedented sea-change of which, it appears, few of our members are aware. Recall our Leviticus 16 portrayal of Christ moving into the most holy place of heaven at the end of the 2,300 years to make atonement for our sins. It is clear from the revision that atonement instead is equated with the *sacrifice*, and not a process secured through a judgment-confirmed arrival at a state of perfection. A resulting anomaly of that change, not addressed at the time, was corrected a few months later in the October issue of *Ministry* magazine (p. 2), which stated: "There is basic agreement that Christ *at His ascension* entered into the very presence of God as symbolized by the earthly high priest's entrance on the Day of Atonement." Unbelievably, shortly after that time hundreds in Australia were dismissed from ministry. Why? Because they held to those very words: atonement made at Calvary, not in 1844. Where were our administrators at that time, that they could not rightly divide the beliefs of their church?

We continue:

3. **"In 1844, at the end of the prophetic period of 2,300 days, He entered the second and last phase of His atoning ministry. It is a work of investigative judgment which is part of the ultimate disposition of all sin, typified by the cleansing of the ancient Hebrew sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. In that typical service the sanctuary was cleansed with the blood of animal sacrifices, but heavenly things are purified with the perfect sacrifice of the blood of Jesus."**

This linking of cleansing to the occasion of Calvary has, after many decades, brought our church into alignment with Scripture. It remains now only for a future conclave to delete the date 1844 from the paragraph, there being no further grounds for its inclusion. Note how awkwardly it sits there in complete contradiction to the rest of the wording. On the basis of this change, we need to extend both an apology and a welcome back into the fold to all those dismissed for holding to

the self-same view. They were the ones loyal to Scriptural truth.

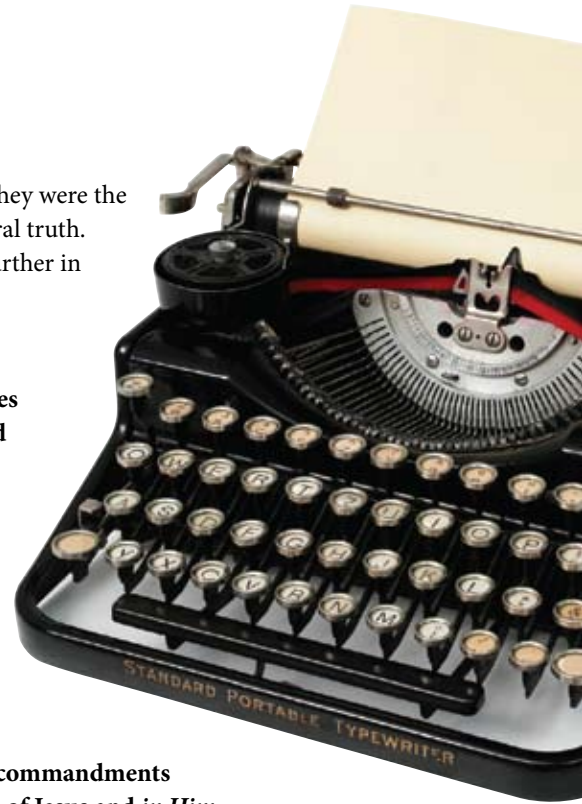
But we continue further in Statement 24:

4. **"The investigative judgment reveals to heavenly intelligences who among the dead are asleep in Christ, and therefore, in Him, are deemed worthy to have a part in the first resurrection. It makes manifest who among the living are abiding in Christ, keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus and in Him, therefore, are ready for translation into His everlasting kingdom."**

Having shifted salvation's ground-zero back to Calvary, it remained only to bring our doctrine of judgment into accord. The wording does so decisively, exchanging our once *judgment*-based atonement for *atonement*-based judgment. It discards "determinatory" judgment—the language of our previous statement—replacing it with a *pre-determined* outcome, thus *revealing* and *making manifest* a status already settled for those genuinely *in Christ*. "For there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus."

As hard as the news is, insofar at the atonement is concerned, no possible construction put on the words *1844*, *2,300 years*, and *Investigative Judgment* in the revision can alter in any way the intent of the wording surrounding them. Since 1980 those words have survived as transitional artefacts. To keep them in the mix is to lead to confusion, a fact demonstrated in the Sanctuary chapter of the publication *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*. Embarrassingly, there occur no less than 22 clear contradictions throughout the chapter. There cannot be two centres of gravity in atonement—one at Calvary and the other in 1844.

There is a name for the theology spelled out in our reworked statement. It is called *righteousness by faith*, a doctrinal transformation spelling the death knell to that human perfectionism so intrinsic in our traditional Sanctuary doctrine. This irregularity, in which faith salvation and works salvation cannot co-exist, might have been put on notice by Desmond Ford, but Ford was well and truly pre-empted by the writers of the new document. More accurately, it was



Ellen White whose words written in her later years reflect the meaning of this long-due change—very clear statements such as: **“Christ’s sacrifice in behalf of man was full and complete. The condition of the atonement had been fulfilled. The work for which He had come to this world had been accomplished”** (*Acts of the Apostles*, p. 29); that **“both our title to heaven and our fitness for it are found in the righteousness of Christ”** (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 300); that **“we are not to be anxious about what Christ and God think of us, but about what God thinks of Christ, our Substitute”** (*Selected Messages, Book 2*, pp. 32, 33).

I, like hundreds of others still loyal to the faith despite the unchristian manner in which he is treated, ask myself, “What has happened to the integrity of our church?”

Does the Church actually hold to the views expressed above, or are they a fanciful interpretation of my own? They are not. An article submitted to the *Adventist Review* entitled “What We Really Believe About the Judgment,” which canvassed exactly the same points, was not only accepted and published in full, but was inserted in the international edition for readers worldwide (see: www.adventistreview.org/2005-1523/story2.html). Further evidence is contained in the 10-point Consensus Statement of Glacier View, largely reflecting Ford’s

position. The subsequent groundswell since then may well have compelled a former editor of *Ministry* magazine to write in a recent message to Ford: “The denomination has accepted almost everything you have critiqued about the sanctuary doctrine except giving up the date October 22, 1844.”

The revision outlined above is the *fifth* change made to our sanctuary doctrine over the past decades.

It is not the intention of this letter to have anyone hung on a doctrinal creed. A person’s convictions are as sacred as his personal property. A toleration of dualism is a fair thing, for which I for one am grateful, having once preached perfectionism myself. But if truth is to ultimately survive debate, it must remain open and unshackled. And the great anomaly and injustice of our present time is the deliberate straight-jacketing of that side of the divide that happens in fact to represent the authentic view of our church! Can anything be more incongruous?

There should be no illusion as to the strength of opposition to the Dallas Statement on the part of our right-wing friends. The *Remnant Herald* of April 2002 quotes line-by-line the very points

made above as proof of the “apostasy” of the church. In this they have openly declared their hostility to that charter that binds an employee of the church: loyalty to its doctrines. And yet we witness the administration openly championing this group that so strongly espouse divergent positions, while at the same time muzzling those who don’t. In a most grievous situation we see ministerial positions being loaded with contrary exponents, and we see our churches being infiltrated and purged of those bona fide supporters of our doctrines, who are condemned for their loyalty.

As I sit and listen to that incredible champion of the gospel up there at Peachester, I, like hundreds of others still loyal to the faith despite the unchristian manner in which he is treated, ask myself, “What has happened to the integrity of our church? What would our members think should they actually get to hear the words he preaches? What if they learn the real truth of Glacier View? Who in our organisation is going to be held accountable for his scandalous treatment? What happens when inevitably our lay people rise up in righteous anger at the deliberate silencing of this great man and the message he represents?” Tragically, the silencing of Ford was code for “Righteousness by faith is finished.”

I am making the point here, Chester, that there is required a fortitude never before witnessed in this whole sorry saga; a moral fibre sufficient to reverse this continuing indictment on the Church. The gagging of Desmond Ford, the entrenched hostility, and the false accusations against him must surely cease. These have no place in a movement claiming to be led by the Spirit. Whatever process it takes, Chester, we need it to happen. I acknowledge the resulting trauma, but it’s a trauma of our own making that had its roots in the administration’s fear of the right wing. But there *was* a time here in this Division when righteousness by faith did have the upper hand, and the sky never fell at that time. There is therefore no reason at all why those days cannot be restored. Isn’t it true that officialdom from the Sanhedrin onward has often been wrong and that we must suspect God still wants Luthers to protest? Ellen White was never backward in challenging leadership decisions, and so it must surely be with every true Christian.

I earnestly look forward to your response and (hopefully) the steps that will be taken to address the situation, as will also those on behalf of whom I speak. I wish you strength and courage in this important task.

With very best wishes and kind Christian understanding,
Kevin

¹ *Editor’s Note:* This letter was sent on June 5, 2009, to Chester Stanley, president of the Australian Union Conference. Kevin Ferris, the author, is an elder, worship chairman, and choirmaster at the Springwood Adventist Church in Brisbane, Australia. Copies were sent to Barry Oliver, president of the South Pacific Division, and Angel Manuel Rodríguez, director of the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. None of the recipients replied to this letter.

“IT FELT LIKE GETTING PUNCHED IN THE ear.” That’s what my best friend said after I quirked an eyebrow at his earring.

My dad once told me, “If you want to dye your hair, go for it. Might as well do something with it while you’ve got it. You want to pierce your ears, go ahead.” That statement was probably one of the weirdest things I’ve heard my dad say. But, oddly enough, those words actually discouraged me from doing those things. Yes, I dyed my hair (four times, with three different colors), but I never got any piercings. Part of the reason why that

when The Brass says it’s okay.

But a question arises about the rightness of these actions in general. Is it okay to dye one’s hair? Is it okay to get piercings? The question of dyeing seems fairly simple. Colored hair is not a huge problem or a sin worthy of lifelong punishment. A little damage is done to one’s hair, and as long as the process isn’t repeated in rapid succession, no problems should occur.

Piercings fit into a different category. The Bible makes occasion for some piercings. In the Old Testament there is mention of nose piercings, and the

HOW DO WE DEAL WITH PIERCINGS?

By Joe Okimi

never happened is my parents’ approval.

Teenagers, as a general rule, are rebellious. It’s practically a mandate, a part of the *Teenager’s Handbook*. Section 1, Paragraph 1: “Thou shalt rebel. And the forms of thy rebellion shall be many and diverse. Firstly, thou shalt...” Many parents can fill in the rest of that sentence. Why must this be so? Because teenagers are curious. When a parent says no, their child wants to know why. If no explanation is given, the teen is more likely to do the wrong thing than if the parent sits down and talks for 10 minutes.

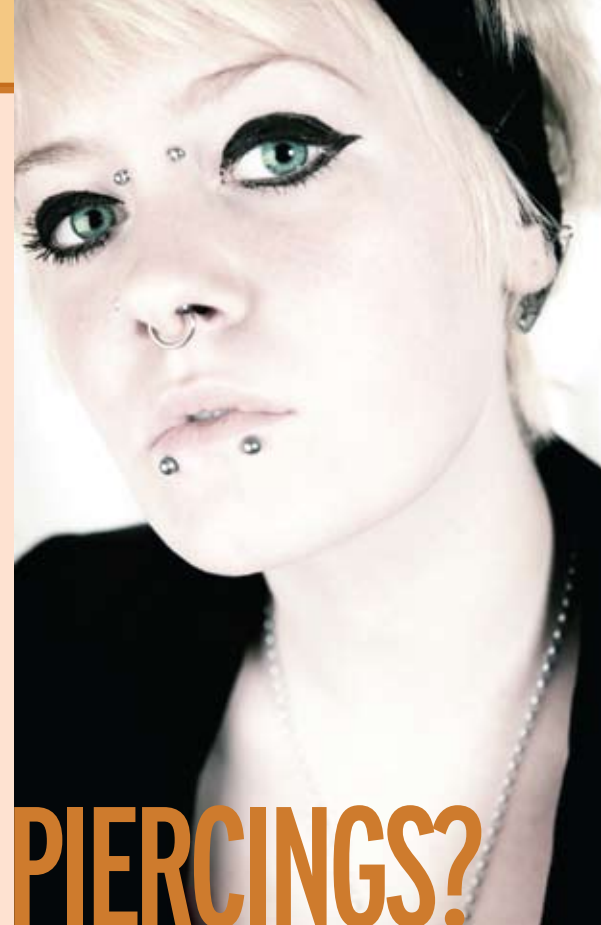
However, when tacit approval is given, the whole operation is called off. Section 9, Paragraph 15: “Shouldst thy parents approve of thine actions, cease thy labors. For in that instance, fun shall no longer be achieved.”

I was curious about hair color. I wanted to experiment. Experimentation is also part of being a teenager—a large part. In this instance, since the activities in question were not particularly dangerous or immoral, my parents felt that it was all right for me to experiment a little. Their tacit approval really robbed me of half my fun, though. It’s hard to feel rebellious

Israelites are told to remove their nose rings (among other jewelry) to be melted down to create the Tabernacle and its ornaments. Earrings are also mentioned in the Bible. God gave the Israelites a proviso for indentured servitude. The servant was to wear an earring as a mark of their willing service. Other piercings are not mentioned in the Bible. Some of them don’t look so great; others just seem unsanitary.

But what’s the real issue here? This argument is about appearances. Many people will think differently—less, perhaps—of someone who has dyed hair and piercings. Such an attitude is not Biblical. The race of man is flawed. God knows that. So he has added a few clues in the Bible to help us out. One of them is this: “But the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart’” (1 Sam. 16:7, NIV).

Should some of the younger generation change their appearance? Sure. But some of the older generation should change



their mindset. What does God want from us? Obedience. Read 1 Sam. 15:22: “But Samuel replied: ‘Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams’” (NIV). What Samuel is saying is that God wants true obedience, heartfelt obedience. Not just the appearance of obedience.

In the grand scheme of God’s amazing grace, physical appearance is somewhere near the absolute bottom. Colored hair and body piercings don’t make us saved or condemned. God looks deeper than that. Even so, there is a time for such things. And it’s probably best to get it out of the way during the younger years.

My buddy did. Eventually he took out the ear stud, and the hole closed up. He got it redone once, but he took it out again. I guess the novelty wore off. He got a little older. He changed, again. **AT**

Joe Okimi is 23 years old and was born in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. He is a senior English Education major at Union College in Lincoln, Neb.

Is the Time Right?

After 20 years, perhaps the church is ready.

BY ALDEN THOMPSON



All three kinds of Adventists belong in the church, and they should learn to live together instead of quarreling.

A thunderbolt struck me after Sabbath School on August 15. That morning our class focused on 1 John 2:29, NRSV: “Everyone who does right has been born of him.” That astonishing verse links new birth not to acceptance of Jesus Christ, but to right behavior. Instead of right behavior following new birth, doing right reveals new birth.

Some in our class wanted to flee to Rom. 3:10 (NLT), “No one is righteous—not even one.” Or to Isa. 64:6 (NRSV), “All our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth”—no real righteousness except under the banner of the crucified Lord. It was indeed a lively Sabbath School.

But for me the Sabbath thunderbolt was linked to the memory of a sermon I had preached in the College Church 20 years ago, “The Adventist Church at Corinth.” Preaching from a manuscript because I was naming names and wanted to get things right, I identified three kinds of Adventists, linking them with Peter, Paul, and Apollos, preachers whose followers were threatening to divide the church at Corinth (cf. 1 Cor. 1:10-17). My point: all three kinds of Adventists belong in the church, and they should learn to live together instead of quarreling.

The positive response to that sermon was astonishing. Never in my life before or since have I received such an outpouring of appreciative notes and letters.

That sermon attracted so much attention, in part, because it pointed back 10 years to Desmond Ford’s Adventist Forum presentation on Oct. 27, 1979, at Pacific Union College. That’s when

Ford threw Adventism into turmoil by declaring that “there is no biblical way of proving the investigative judgment.” At a stroke, he sought to sweep away Ellen White’s vivid statement that in the judgment we must “stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 425).

The three kinds of Adventists reacted very differently to Ford’s declaration. Here’s a quick summary, oversimplified, but to the point:

1. The Peter crowd: “We can do it!” These are the perfectionists, the optimistic defenders of free will, many calling themselves “historic Adventists.” Back then, key names would have included Kenneth Wood, Herbert Douglass—and Robert Brinsmead, early in his experience. Matthew, James, and 1 and 2 Peter are their books. They heartily disagreed with Ford.

2. The Paul crowd: “We can’t do it. Jesus does it for us.” These are substitutionary people, some calling themselves Evangelical Adventists. God is everything, we are nothing; Jesus takes our place. Key names would have included H.M.S. Richards, Sr., Robert Spangler, Edward Heppenstall—and Robert Brinsmead at a mid-point in his experience. Romans and Galatians are their books. They were powerfully tempted to say “Amen!” to Ford.

3. The Apollos crowd: “Do your best!” Key words are “larger view,” “truth about God,” Christian humanism. Substitution is not high on the list. Key names would have included Graham Maxwell and Jack Provonsa—and Robert Brinsmead

(briefly) at a later point in his experience. Their biblical passages are John 14-17 and the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15). “Standing in the sight of a holy God without a mediator” is not a threat, but a promise, based on John 16:26-27, where Jesus says he *won't* ask the Father for us. Why? Because we will already know that the Father himself loves us. They didn't agree with Ford, and some just shrugged.

And my August 15 thunderbolt? The realization that 1 John contains key verses to warm the heart of each kind of Adventist, but verses, of course, that would probably trouble the others in the crowd. Hence our Sabbath morning donnybrook, for everyone was defending the verses precious to their own experience. From the NRSV, here's a quick sample:

1. **The Peter crowd: “We can do it!”**
 3:6: “No one who abides in him sins.”
 3:8: “Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil.”
 5:18: “Those who are born of God do not sin.”
 2. **The Paul crowd: “We can't do it. Jesus does it for us.”**
 1:8: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.”
 2:1: “If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father.”
 4:10: “God...sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.”
 3. **The Apollos crowd: “Do your best!”**
 2:29: “Everyone who does right has been born of him.”
 4:7: “Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.”
- In spite of the enthusiastic response

from our church in 1989, the larger church was not ready. When I converted the sermon into a chapter for my proposed *Inspiration* manuscript (Review & Herald, 1991), it came back. Even my best friends said the time was not right.

Actually, the missing chapter may have contributed to the furor over *Inspiration*, for without it, the diversity I celebrate in the book could easily be seen simply as a

mean-spirited collection of contradictions.

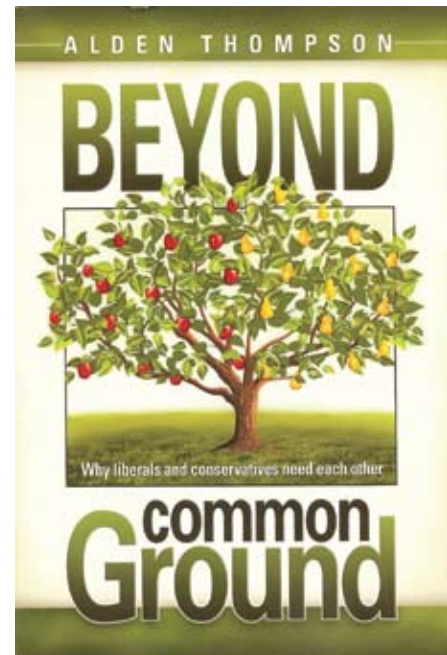
The “contradictions” are not the problem; indeed, they are the solution.

But the “contradictions” are not the problem; indeed, they are the solution, a biblical illustration of Ellen White's startling statement about our differing perceptions of truth: “Our

understanding of truth, our ideas in regard to the conduct of life are not in all respects the same. There are no two whose experiences are alike in every particular” (*Ministry of Healing*, p. 483).

Is now the time? I don't know. Pray. Check out 1 Corinthians. Check out 1 John. And now the missing chapter is there in my new book, *Beyond Common Ground: Why Liberals and Conservatives Need Each Other* (Pacific Press, 2009).

The 20-year gap between 1989 and 2009 intrigues me because of Ellen



White's startling comment in the midst of the 1888 turmoil: “That which God gives His servants to speak today would not perhaps have been present truth twenty years ago, but it is God's message for this time.”¹

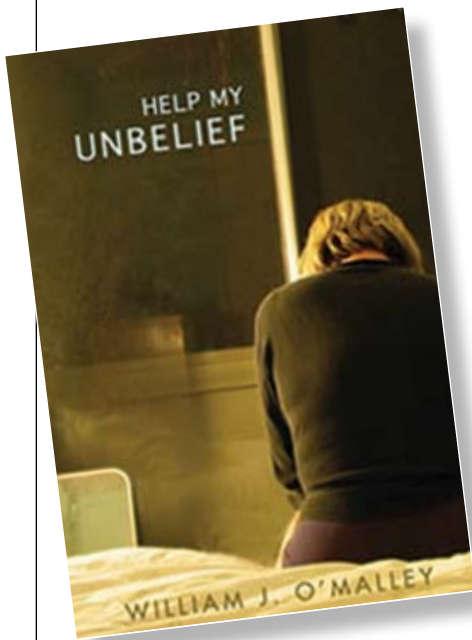
A donnybrook of a Sabbath School, but where we part as friends, all eagerly looking forward to the day when it won't have to stop at one hour because we will have an eternity to sort things out. There all three kinds of Adventists will revel together before God's throne, singing his praises through all eternity. I can hardly wait.

¹ Manuscript 8a, 1888, quoted in A.V. Olson, *Thirteen Crisis Years* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1966), p. 274.

Less Than Absolute Certainty

In making room for faith, God left room for doubt. And he invites us to trust with less than absolute certainty.

William J. O'Malley, *Help My Unbelief* (New York: Orbis, 2008), 152 pages.
Book Review by David A. Pendleton



This is not your grandmother's devotional book. Bearing its title from Mark 9:24 ("I do believe; help my unbelief"), it is a summoning statement of belief amidst an age of pervasive, if not downright fashionable, unbelief. At a time when the accumulation of facts is sometimes confused with wisdom, when the quest for power and pleasure are often paramount, and when the search for meaning itself is by so many deemed meaningless, William J. O'Malley's book is for those of faith interested in genuine dialogue not just among faith traditions.

"There are three basic human drives: to pleasure, to power, and to meaning," the author tells us. "Our present society offers us ample (often spurious) means to achieve the first and second, but little if any help in achieving meaning or wholeness" (p. 51). *Help My Unbelief* is about the search for meaning and wholeness—and

how this universal search can provide sufficient commonality for constructive conversation among all peoples, regardless of religious/nonreligious orientation.

From the introductory chapter, "Rethinking Certitudes," to the closing chapter, "Suffering," O'Malley addresses many issues—for example, how one can know God, the relationship between faith and science, how to manage the tension between tradition and doctrinal development, and how to reconcile an all-powerful and all-loving God with the reality of evil.

At times profound, pithy, and poignant, O'Malley's lucid prose reflects years of teaching history, theology, and philosophy. This book is not for those seeking to skewer nonbelievers. Those in the market for clever proof-texting with which to clobber an opponent best look elsewhere. This book is for those inclined to craft a context within which helpful dialogue can be conducted among the theist, agnostic, and atheist.

No doubt O'Malley will find himself criticized by both the Bible-thumping fundamentalists (who believe only a literal reading of Scripture is legitimate) and the vitriolic atheists (e.g., Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris) who insist that God's nonexistence has been proven beyond reasonable doubt.

Of course there are many—believers, agnostics, and atheists—who reject the extremes. These are the potential conversation partners.

"Being at least somewhat uncertain is a quite fitting position to take on nearly every serious question," contends O'Malley. "What's more, it avoids the sin of blasphemy ... since absolute certitude is the prerogative only of God" (p. 2). This does not mean that God has left no

evidence of the divine. It means that, in making room for faith, God left room for doubt. And he invites us to trust with less than absolute certainty.

"Who am I?" and "Where do I fit into all this?" are profound questions asked by both the believer and nonbeliever. Sincere inquiry is not a panacea, but it is the first step in a "search for a *myth*, a sense of an established, coherent background against which to find meaning amid all those unexpected intrusions. We need a sense that our lives have a story line, rather than random bits of 'this happened to me, and then that, and then that.' We can't survive long in a Dali landscape with no consistent landmarks" (p. 3). For O'Malley, like Joseph Campbell, myth ("consolidating framework") is neither a falsehood nor a lie but an attempt to describe overarching truths that give meaning to existence.

While skepticism may have been avant-garde at the dawn of the Enlightenment period, in the 21st century it is more the default position from which most urbanites operate. Yet even the agnostics and atheists populating today's affluent, over-caffeinated, and technology-obsessed society entertain a faith of sorts: a faith in the ultimate intelligibility of the universe, a conviction that indeed there is a truth to the matter, however difficult at times to discern. "Even articulate and sophisticated atheists like Sam Harris and Richard Dawkins," observes O'Malley, "manifest an admirable faith they are clearly unaware of" (p. 8).

"Theology is what we *know* about the God questions; belief is what we *accept* as true of what we know; religion is what we *do* about what we claim to believe," writes O'Malley, defining this "trptych" of crucial terms. "And what we do is

a more authentic indicator of what we really believe than what we claim” (p. 9).

O’Malley does not denigrate theology. He celebrates the cerebral dimension of religion and embraces intellectual rigor in the formation of our theology.

That notwithstanding, he cautions us to beware crossing the Rubicon between theological sophistication and presumption, for “with God questions—as with Heisenberg’s physics—our fallible human minds

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must be content at first with a higher degree of probability that God exists than that God does not. Faith is neither submission to evidence that compels nor a blind leap in the dark. It is both: a *calculated risk*” (p. 17).

This, then, is his *leitmotiv*: “we must accept less than absolute certitude on faith questions” and must exercise faith.

While “most born-Christians are still taught that doubt and skepticism are temptations more lethal than lust” (p. 23), O’Malley proposes that doubt, rightly conceived, can be a virtue. A Christian in the 21st century should exhibit a tolerance

for ambiguity, for life is (alas!) often less than black-and-white, and meaningful patterns must be discerned from shades of gray.

The author doubts not at all the reality of God. O’Malley’s call, rather, is to humility in our assessment of talk about God. After all, talk is just that: talk. A word is not identical with the reality described; language always falls short of that to which the linguistic expression refers.

Accordingly, theological language is all the more symbolic given the fact that the referent is infinite. This is reminiscent of Paul Tillich’s view, in *Dynamics of Faith*, regarding the nonliteral quality of all of our God-talk.

“A symbol is an inadequate way to make physical a reality that actually exists but is not physical: death (skull), achievement (diploma), freedom (wings),” writes O’Malley. “A symbol, then, is like the clothes the Invisible Man had to don in order to be seen. The symbol is inadequate because it is only an approximation, not an experience of the actual reality.... Problems arise from taking the symbol literally, thus either making it into an idol (fundamentalism) or pooh-poohing it as childish (rationalism)” (p. 53).

Diversity of opinion has characterized Christianity since its inception. There were serious differences even among the apostles.

“Not only is difference of opinion inevitable in the church, it is essential,” reassures O’Malley. “The church as a fortress is appealing only to reductionists who revere the Gospel so much they try to keep it from the slightest ‘contamination’—and, *ipso facto*, from enrichment, by hitherto undiscovered sources, like Aristotle, Ptolemy, Galileo, Columbus, Chinese rites, Darwin, Freud,

de Lubac, Teilhard. However, openness to cross-fertilization doesn’t negate the equally powerful need to preserve the essentials from distortion or rejection” (p. 99). O’Malley might concur with Abraham Joshua Heschel’s contention in *God in Search of Man* that Torah constitutes a minimum of revelation and a maximum of interpretation.

Help My Unbelief reminds us that while the nature of God does not change, our conception of God does change over time. The universal laws of physics did not change when science transitioned from Newtonian physics to Einstein’s theory of relativity to the uncertainty principle and quantum mechanics. Only our comprehension of those laws changed. In other words, the presence of “truths that don’t (yet) fit snugly [don’t necessarily] negate the whole—any more than quantum physics destroyed the usefulness of Newtonian physics in the everyday world” (p. 25).

Without dogmatically insisting on every detail of our theology, we can (and must) preserve the essentials of our faith and hope (while acknowledging love as the greatest).

With charity for all, let us converse with our fellow sojourners, agnostics and atheists included. With a shared confidence in the ultimate intelligibility of the universe, and a humble appreciation for both the capacity and limits of human reason, maybe in the fullness of time we will all find ourselves with the same confession on our lips: “I do believe; help my unbelief.”

David A. Pendleton, a workers’ compensation appeals judge, is a former elected state legislator and former high school civics and Bible teacher.

7 QUESTIONS for...Doug Batchelor

By Marcel Schwantes



Doug Batchelor is senior pastor of the Sacramento Central Church in the capital city of California and is president of the international media ministry Amazing Facts. He also hosts the weekly television program *Central Study Hour* and the *Bible Answers*

Live radio program. He can be seen weekly on *Amazing Facts Presents* and heard on the *Wonders in the Word* radio program. Batchelor is perhaps best known for living in a remote cave high in the mountains above Palm Springs, Calif., where he discovered Christ after finding a dust-covered Bible someone left in his cave. His remarkable conversion story is found in the best-selling book *The Richest Caveman*.

You and some other prominent Adventist ministers have not followed the traditional educational pathway from college theology to seminary, and so forth. There have been, in fact, allegations that collegiate studies in theology have a tendency to blunt the sharp edge of witnessing fervor, especially among new Adventists. What is the role of higher education in the preparation of ministers of the gospel in the Adventist Church?

The Scriptures are clear that education is a must. "Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding" (Prov. 4:7, NKJV).

Yet God sometimes calls people to minister who have received some unconventional "higher education." I did actually attend Southwestern Adventist College (now University) and was greatly blessed and inspired by the majority of my teachers. However, during the summer I became involved in public evangelism and never completed my degree. The university was kind enough to later confer to me an honorary doctorate of theology.

Theology students will lose their fervor only if they sit under professors who have lost theirs. If professors teach with a perspective that there is no absolute truth or that everything is relative, they cannot produce a crop of pastors who preach with

authority and conviction. A mist in the seminary will produce a fog in the church. Jesus taught with conviction and authority (Matt. 7:28-29). Thankfully, there are still some good higher education options with this caliber of professors.

In case there's any question out there on your views, please describe in a sentence or two how a person is saved.

First we look to the cross and see the goodness, love, and holiness of God. Then the goodness of God leads us to confession and repentance (Rom. 2:4). We accept by faith his gift of grace, mercy, and new eternal life (Eph. 2:8).

God creates within us a new heart through the gift of his Spirit (Ezek. 36:26). As we spend time with God in communion through his Word and prayer, our joy grows and love for him deepens. "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

Because of this love, we desire to "... keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight" (1 John 3:22). Then our natural response is to communicate this good news to others in word and deed.

Do you ever have moments of doubt or discouragement? Tell us what that is like for you.

Sure, I frequently have doubts about myself, but I never doubt God's Word or the truth of the Adventist message. What sometimes discourages me is the unrelenting nature of ministry. Progress in pastoring is hard to measure and can sometimes feel like shoveling air. Believers are under constant attack, and it's heart-wrenching when you see marriages unravel or church members abandon their faith.

You report many baptisms from meetings held by you and the other Amazing Facts evangelists, but how well do you track them staying in the church? What studies have you done that let you know two years later how many are still active Christians in the Adventist Church?

The last study Amazing Facts did was more than seven years ago. Getting survey info back from the churches was very difficult. At that time, 60 percent of those baptized were still attending two years after a meeting. More recently, our church in Sacramento planted a church in Granite Bay, Calif. Of the 40 people baptized in 18 months, 37 are still active.

Why has Jesus not come yet? Is there still a role for Adventists to play?

I am not concerned that Jesus is off schedule. I see Bible history divided into three great epochs:

- 2,000 years from Adam to Abraham for the age of the patriarchs
- 2,000 years from Abraham to Christ, the age of the Hebrews
- And we anticipate that the pattern will continue with approximately 2,000 years from Christ's first coming to second coming.

Then, of course, there will be a 1,000-year millennial Sabbath in the kingdom.

Christ also foretold that as we near the end, there will be an apparent delay. "But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept" (Matt. 25:5, NKJV). "But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,'..." (Matt. 24:48, NKJV). And of course, Jesus warned us that even some believers will doubt, saying, "Where is the promise of his coming?" (2 Pet. 3:4).

As we near the second coming of Christ, the need for Adventists who believe in the eminence of his return will not diminish, but increase.

Do you think that large-scale public evangelism should still be attempted in North America in light of the poor results over the last 20 years?

I, personally, have had my best results in the last 20 years. It is true that generally speaking, Americans are less inclined to leave their homes for evening meetings of any sort. With hundreds of satellite and cable TV channels, DVDs, and, of course, the endless cosmos of the Internet, more and more American families are gleaming their education and entertainment without ever leaving their homes.

This is one reason Amazing Facts has been creating multiple evangelism websites and television programs. While it is a little harder to pry people out of their houses, public evangelism has still, by far, proven to be the most effective means of reaching people with the gospel. Last year Amazing Facts evangelists baptized more than 400 people in live public meetings.

Ron Clouzet, director of the NAD Institute of Evangelism, recently said of public meetings: "... nothing else in Adventist evangelism has proven MORE effective. If it were out there, we'd probably be doing it."

The Adventist Church is part of the larger church community. What role do you see the Church having in building bridges among these diverse groups?

I have had the great privilege of meeting John MacArthur, Chuck Swindoll, David Jeremiah, Charles Stanley, James Dobson, Tony Evans, and the late D. James Kennedy, to name a few. I believe these leaders are very sincere about their convictions. We have built bridges by working together on certain common interests like protecting marriage. In our conversations, we focus on our universal desire to reach the lost and teach the pillars of Christianity. Having said that, I believe God has committed the oracles of truth to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Adventist Church is more than simply "another denomination"; it is a unique movement of prophecy, the remnant body into which all will be invited before the end. Jesus said, "And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16, NKJV).

The things that haven't been done before,
Those are the things to try;
Columbus dreamed of an unknown shore
At the rim of the far-flung sky,
And his heart was bold and his faith was strong
As he ventured in dangers new,
And he paid no heed to the jeering throng
Or the fears of the doubting crew.

The many will follow the beaten track
With guideposts on the way.
They live and have lived for ages back
With a chart for every day.
Someone has told them it's safe to go
On the road he has traveled o'er,
And all that they ever strive to know
Are the things that were known before.

—Edgar Guest in *The American Book of Virtues*, edited by Erik Bruun (New York: Black Dog 7 Leventhal Pub., 1996), pp. 600-601.

A few strike out, without map or chart
Where never a man has been,
From the beaten paths they draw apart
To see what no man has seen.
There are deeds they hunger alone to do;
Though battered and bruised and sore,
They blaze the path for the many, who
Do nothing not done before.

The things that haven't been done before
Are the tasks worthwhile today;
Are you one of the flock that follows, or
Are you one that shall lead the way?
Are you one of the timid souls that quail
At the jeers of a doubting crew,
Or dare you, whether you win or fail
Strike out for a goal that's new?

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Adventist Man



Talking Animals Rich Adventists Drums in Church

At my local church school, they have removed all books with talking animals. Is this right?

Absolutely! Nobody wants to engage in that sort of fanciful gibberish. I mean, what kind of amoral pseudo-Christians would allow impressionable young minds to read books that featured, oh, let's say—a talking snake? Or maybe a talking donkey? Or better yet, how about mythical beasts that have lamb's horns and speak like dragons? Ha! What garbage. After all, as Pacific Press points out in their guidelines for writing in *Primary Treasure*® and *Our Little Friend*®: "True-to-life stories do not qualify as true. Neither do stories of talking animals or other kinds of fantasy stories."¹

¹www.pacificpress.com/index.php?res=high&pgName=newsOLFPSub

Books with talking animals should never be read by Adventist young people.

How are some of the rich Adventist doctors/businessmen in my local congregation like Johann (a.k.a. John) Tetzl?

Ah, a very good question. Both believe that you can give enough money to the church and then commit whatever sin you like—including using money to promote their own personal theological agenda. Now let me ask you a question: Which is worse—the rich Adventists who use their funds in a controlling manner, or the local churches who let them?

How would you describe some of the theological positions on display at this summer's ASI convention?

All dollars—no sense.

Can my angel follow me into a movie theater?

No, an angel is no match for Cineplex 16—especially if Leonardo DiCaprio is featured in the film. But they *can* go into cities froth

with homosexual rape and inhospitality [see Genesis 19].

Does 1 Kings 6:7 (ESV), which says "When the house was built, it was with stone prepared at the quarry, so that neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron was heard in the house while it was being built," mean that we should not have drums in church?

Once again, dear reader, you are correct. The fact that the context suggests the builders were so precise in their craftsmanship has *everything* to do with drums. No hammers = no drums. Oh, it also equals no pianos in the worship service—after all, what are those little devices that strike the strings in a piano called? That's right! No more "hammer time" for you.

Long Awaited...Here at Last..... *Fatal Accounts*

Adventist Today is honored to release *Fatal Accounts*, the first-ever analysis of the momentous rise and crashing fall of the church's brilliantly controversial chief auditor (1976-1994), **David Dennis**, leading to one of the most costly court cases ever shouldered by the Adventist denomination.

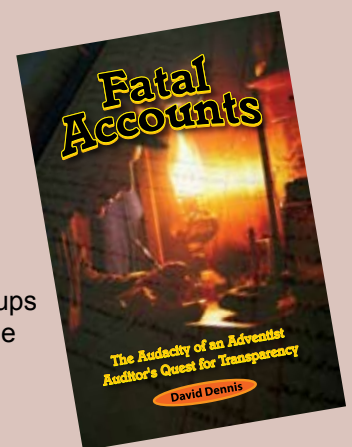
A must-read for anyone repelled by Enron-style accounting and financial cover-ups in the denomination. The author prays that in the end *Fatal Accounts* will lead the way to a new chapter in church history—that of *vital reform*.

"Dave Dennis was guilty of no crime other than trying to preserve the fiscal integrity of the Church's accounts," says William H. Shea, M.D., Ph.D., associate director (retired) of the Biblical Research Institute, and Dennis's contemporary at the General Conference office. "As a faithful servant of the Church, he served it well for nearly 35 years. A great injustice was done him, and he deserves an apology from current Church leadership."

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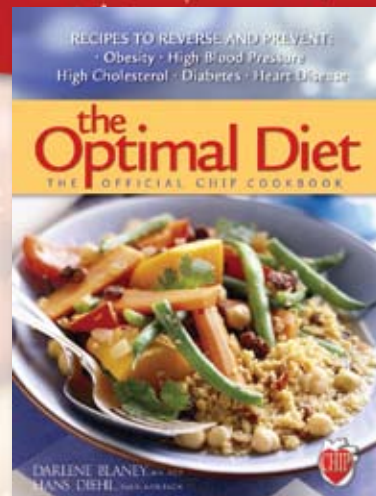
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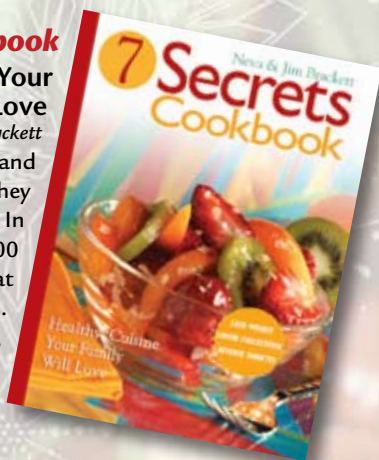
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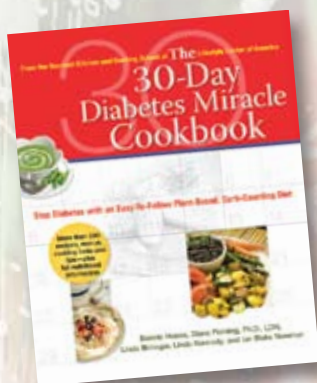
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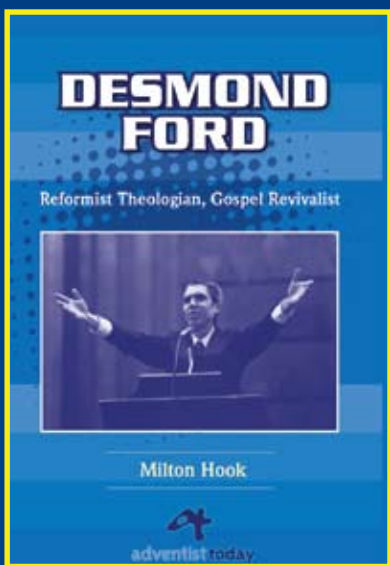
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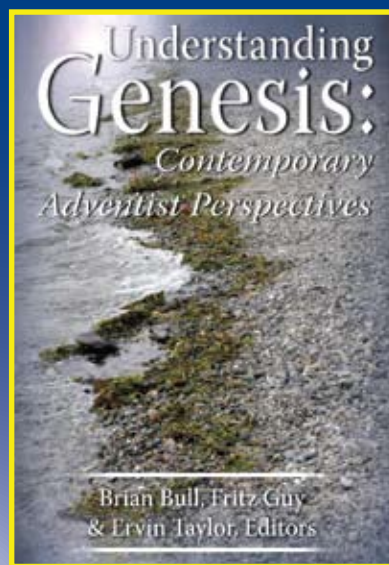
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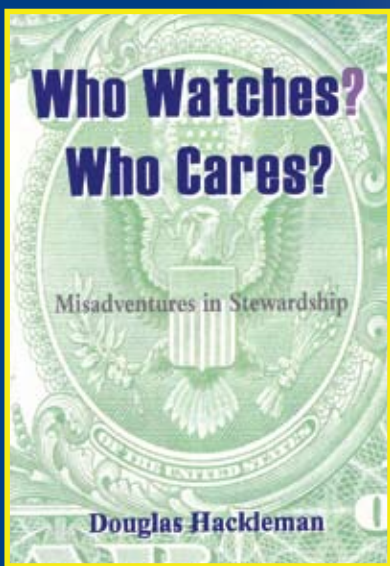
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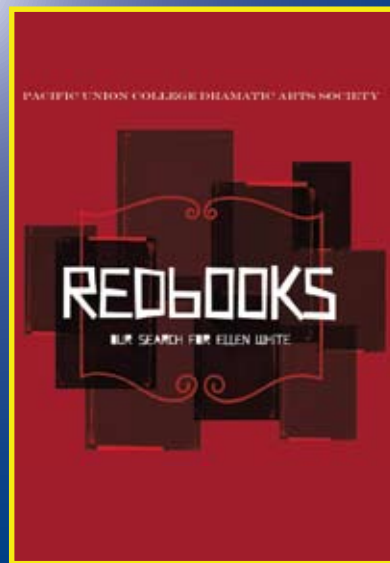
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