

Women
in Ministry



If I Were the Next
GC President...



Hopes for
the 2010
GC Session

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Adventist *Today*

A man in a grey suit and glasses is the central focus, looking down with a serious expression. He is surrounded by numerous hands of various skin tones, all reaching towards him in a gesture of ordination. The background is dark, making the hands and the man stand out.

WANTED:
A THEOLOGY OF
ORDINATION



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General Conference President's Dilemma

J. David Newman

The next General Conference president faces a huge dilemma in determining where to lead the Adventist Church in the next five years. To find out why I write this, read the seven essays in this issue titled: "If I Were the Next GC President..."

You will see that each author spells out a wide diversity of priorities. If these represent the church as a whole, you will see that there is no consensus of where the church should go in the next five years.

We are an aging church. We are 149 years old as an organized denomination. And as churches age, they split into different factions. There are at least four wings to the Adventist airplane: the *traditional* (who follow the 28 fundamental beliefs without much dissent and worship in traditional ways; the *liberal* (who argue for theistic evolution and full acceptance of homosexuals; the *conservative* (who believe that 19th-century Adventism is the only way to go, the post-fall nature of Christ being a key point); and the *evangelical* (who teach that if Christ is not central in everything, then nothing else matters). Each group promotes a different emphasis, a different *raison d'être* for the Adventist Church.

What are your priorities for the church? Send them in, and we will print a representative sample in our next issue.

The other big issue we deal with is the continuing debate over whether or not women should be ordained as pastors. If we had a coherent theology of ordination, we would have solved this issue long ago. Please read "Wanted: A Theology of Ordination" to find out why this is so important.

Mike Tucker, the speaker/director for Faith for Today, writes about the many women pastors, evangelists, and departmental leaders working for the Adventist Church in the 19th century. Then we reprint a delightful article from an 1861 issue of the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*. The author argues for women serving as pastors and preachers, and he exegetes the key biblical passages commonly used against women being ordained as not dealing with that subject at all.

I also introduce our newest contributing editor, Nathan Brown. You already know him as one of our *Adventist Today* bloggers. Nathan Brown is a book editor and former magazine editor for the Adventist Church in the South Pacific, based just out of Melbourne, Australia. He has degrees in law, literature, and English. Edwin A. Schwisow, our director of development, because of his excellent fundraising abilities has been promoted to executive director of development.

We are an aging church. We are 149 years old as an organized denomination. And as churches age, they split into different factions.



Adventist Today Wins Awards

Adventist Today became a member of the Associated Church Press last year. Each year member publications, which include several magazines produced by the Adventist Church, submit articles, designs, websites, etc. for awards in three categories: Award of Excellence, Award of Merit, and Honorable Mention.

Adventist Today received two honorable mentions at the prestigious ACP's annual convention: one for media review with David Pendleton's "Less than Absolute Certainty" and one for magazine design, entire issue (Fall issue, Chris Komisar, designer). This is quite good for a magazine that comes out only four times a year. *Adventist Review* and *Ministry* won a number of awards. *US Catholic* won the most awards.

Speakers at the event included veteran news commentator Cokie Roberts, Senate Chaplain Barry Black and Sojourners president Jim Wallis.

C O V E R S T O R Y



WANTED: A THEOLOGY OF ORDINATION

BY J. DAVID NEWMAN

ON FEB. 6, 2010, DOUG BATCHELOR, SENIOR PASTOR OF Sacramento Central Seventh-day Adventist Church and speaker-director of Amazing Facts, brought the issue of the ordination of women as pastors back into the world discussion. He preached an hourlong sermon against women being ordained as pastors. But even more, he argued that women should not even serve as elders and pastors.

This sermon condensed into oral form what he had published last year in a booklet titled *God's Role for Women in Ministry*.

Seventh-day Adventists have long argued over whether or not women should be ordained, but we have never had a serious discussion over what ordination really means. Surprisingly, we had never developed any theology of ordination until the 1991 Annual Council. It was then published in the 1992 revision of the *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Manual*.

The Biblical Research Institute and the Ministerial Association of the General Conference prepared this statement together. I was present during the discussions and disagreed with how the biblical text was used, but I was outvoted. I disagreed because the statement tried to support the traditional Adventist practice of the three-tiered ordination system: deacon, elder, and pastor—none of which finds any support in the Bible. As I will show later, it comes right out of the Roman Catholic Church.

The “Theology of Ordination” begins

by saying that “the Scriptures distinguish three categories of ordained officers—(1) the gospel minister, whose role may be seen as preaching/teaching, administering the ordinances, and pastoral care of souls and churches (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:1-5); (2) the elder (sometimes in Scripture called bishop), who exercises oversight of a local congregation, performing necessary pastoral functions as well (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Titus 1:5, 9; 1 Tim. 3:2, 5); and (3) the deacon, to whose care the poor and the benevolent work of the congregation are entrusted (Phil. 1:1; Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim. 3:8-13).”¹

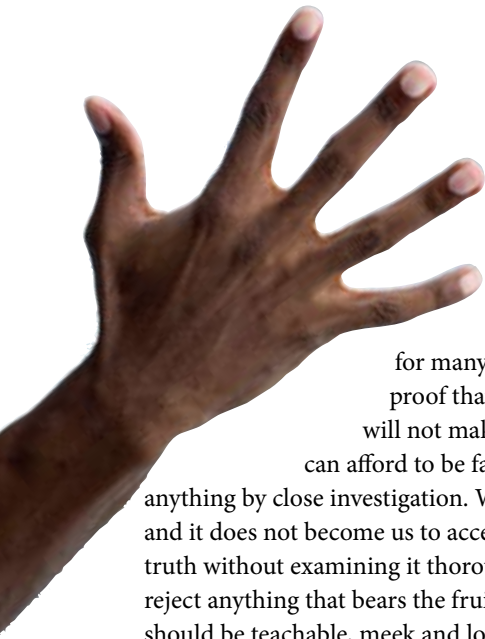
The statement then goes on to elevate the gospel ministry above the other two: “**The gospel ministry: a special call.** While elders and deacons are appointed on the basis of spiritual experience and ability (Titus 1:5, Acts 1:3), the gospel ministry, Seventh-day Adventists believe, is a special calling from God.”² This suggests that being an elder or deacon is not a special calling from God.

The statement gives no biblical basis for the ranking of the three callings in the Adventist church. Being ordained as a deacon does not qualify a person to be an elder, even though the Scriptural requirements are the same (1 Tim. 3:1-11). If a deacon is to become an elder, that person must experience a second ordination. And if that elder becomes a pastor, that individual must go through a third ordination. There is absolutely no hint in the New Testament that there were three different ordination ceremonies.

The statement above links Acts 6 with 1 Timothy 3. But scholars are divided over whether the seven men appointed in Acts 6 functioned in the same way as those in 1 Timothy 3. They are not called deacons in Acts 6, and two of them, Stephen and Philip, were prominent evangelists.

As you read the Bible verses listed in the statement, the word “ordain” does not appear in any of them. We have come to these verses with our assumptions imposed upon the text.

We need to heed the words of Ellen White when she said: “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 error. The fact the 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 doctrines will lose anything by close investigation. We are living in perilous times, and it does not become us to accept everything claimed to be truth without examining it thoroughly; neither can we afford to reject anything that bears the fruits of the Spirit of God; but we should be teachable, meek and lowly of heart.”³

This is one of those areas where we need to admit that we developed our theology of ordination to keep the status quo and not to truly exegete the biblical text.

What many Adventists don't realize is that we inherited this

among those gifts are those of evangelist, prophet, teacher, and pastor.

“In harmony with the New Testament custom, SDAs appoint ministers, who, like the apostles and evangelists of the early church, look after the general interests of the church; and elders (also called “presbyters,” or “bishops” in the New Testament) and deacons, who, like their New Testament prototypes, look, respectively, after the spiritual and temporal interests of the local congregation to which they belong.”⁵

Adventists are extremely inconsistent when it comes to the issue of pastors and elders. At the 1974 Annual Council, the church for the first time allowed women to serve as local church elders. While the world church voted this in general, each division had to vote whether or not to allow women elders in

This led to a push by some for women to be ordained the same as men. At the same time, others felt women should not be serving as pastors at all.

practice from the Roman Catholic Church (and other Protestant churches). This is ironic given our preaching against so many positions of that church. In Catholic ecclesiology, there are three levels of ordination: deacon, priest, and bishop, each requiring an additional ordination.

What is even more fascinating is that “the word ‘ordain’ does not appear in the Greek New Testament. The word ‘ordain’ that appears in the King James Version actually translates a number of Greek words, including *poieou*, ‘appointed’ (Mark 3:14); *ginomai*, ‘to become, select’ (Acts 1:22); *titheumi*, ‘appointed, place, set’ (1 Tim. 2:7); *kathisteumi*, ‘cause to be, appoint’ (Titus 1:5); *cheirotoneou*, ‘stretch out the hand, appoint’ (Acts 14:23). The English word ‘ordain’ has a Latin root, *ordinare*, which derives from Roman law, which conveys the idea of a special status or a group distinct from ordinary people. That is why most modern versions do not use the word ‘ordain’—it does not give an accurate translation of the original meaning.”⁴

“The doctrine of spiritual gifts (as taught in Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:1-28; Eph. 4:8, 11-16; Acts 6:1-7; 1 Peter 4:10, 11) teaches that God gives gifts for service to all without respect to race or gender. Included

their area. No distinction was made between their ordination and the ordination of men. Both were ordained in the same way. This led many to say, “If we can ordain women to be local elders, why cannot we ordain them to be gospel ministers?”

This action did not impose the ordination of women elders on the entire church. Each division was allowed to decide whether or not to allow women elders in their territory. It took many years, but now all divisions allow women elders. Why cannot the same be allowed for women pastors?

I was present in a discussion of the General Conference Colloquium, where former General Conference President Neal C. Wilson insisted that pastoral ordination had to be a world decision. He said: “It would not be right to ordain a woman pastor in America if she could not serve in Africa. Her ordination should be valid everywhere.”

I will never forget the response of Charles Bradford, the first African-American president of the North American Division. He said: “When I was ordained, I could not preach or pastor the white Adventist church across the street. If the principle you have stated had been in place at that time, I would never have been ordained.”



This is why we need a truly biblical theology of ordination.

Women had begun to serve in pastoral roles ordained as local elders but not as full gospel ministers. This led to a push by some for women to be ordained the same as men. At the same time, others felt women should not be serving as pastors at all. At the 1990 General Conference session in Indianapolis, a compromise was reached. It was voted that women could serve as pastors but not be ordained as full gospel ministers. In addition, to keep some kind of difference between them, it was decided that women could marry, baptize, and lead the ordinances, but they could not ordain local elders, organize new churches, or unite churches!

I mentioned spiritual gifts earlier in this article. There are four main passages that speak of spiritual gifts (Rom. 12: 6-8; 1 Cor. 12, the whole chapter; Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Pet. 4:10-11), and none of them limit any of the gifts to a particular gender. In fact, it is suggested that any gift is available to any person as God may decide (1 Cor. 12:7). And among those gifts is the gift of pastor.

Now I know there are passages that speak to the role of women in the early church and which lead some people to conclude that women cannot be ordained. But if these passages are truly followed without reference to context, then women could not serve as deacons, elders, pastors, teachers of men, and participants in worship services. However, this article does not address these issues. I am simply trying to show that it is time for the Adventist Church to reject its Catholic heritage when it comes to ordination. It should stop using the word “ordain,” which is not biblical and comes encrusted with overtones of privilege and separation (for example, the separation between laity and clergy with one group being superior to the other).

Doug Batchelor is very selective in which parts of the text he accepts literally and which parts he must find a way around. The text in 1 Tim. 2:12 says that a woman is not to teach or have authority over a man. But Batchelor allows for women to preach and teach men. This is how he interprets the text: “When 1 Tim. 2:12 explicitly states that a woman is not to teach a man, this is not to be taken to mean that women are to never communicate spiritual truth to men. In fact, women are commanded to explain the gospel to everyone, including lost men (cf. Acts 18:26). But this should always be done within the context of submission to the ordained male leadership of pastor, husband, or elders.”⁶

This is an assumption that Batchelor makes. He gives no text that says that a woman can teach under a male pastor. There is no hint in 1 Timothy 2 that this is the case. A newly appointed woman professor at the Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs (some years ago) told me that she asked one of the male anti-ordination professors about her appointment. He replied: “That is not a problem. You are under the authority of the dean, who is a male.”

Now if you use this argument, then you can say that a woman pastor over a church is under the authority of the conference president, who is a male. And the conference president could be a woman because she is under the authority of the Union president, and so on. Only at the top level, General Conference president, would you have to stop. So this argument cuts both ways.

We should be like the early church. When we appoint leaders in the church, let us have a commissioning service with laying on of hands but give no grade to these ceremonies. The same ceremony is used for any church leader. There really is little difference between the pastor and elder except that one is full time while the other is voluntary. The *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* indicates that in the absence of the pastor, the elder fulfills all the roles of the pastor even to the administering of the Lord’s Supper and, with the permission of the conference, can baptize as well.

It is time for the church take to heart the caution of Ellen White, accept that our current theology of ordination is inadequate, and develop a true and biblical theology of ordination. 🛠️

J. David Newman, D. Min., is editor of Adventist Today and senior pastor of New Hope Adventist Church in Fulton, Maryland. He served for 10 years on the General Conference Executive Committee with his responsibilities as executive editor and then editor of Ministry magazine.

¹ “A Theology of Ordination,” *Seventh-day Adventist Minister’s Manual* (Silver Spring, Md.: Ministerial Association), 1992, pp. 76.

² *ibid.*

³ Ellen G. White, “Christ Our Hope,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 20 December 1892, p. 1, quoted in *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, 1942, p. 35.

⁴ *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, article on ordination.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Doug Batchelor, *God’s Role for Women in Ministry* (Roseville, CA.: Amazing Facts, Inc., 2009), pp. 22-23.

WOMEN IN MINISTRY

BY MIKE TUCKER

NOT LONG AGO, I RECEIVED AN EMAIL from a man who was upset with my support of the policy of the Seventh-day Adventist Church regarding women in ministry. This man told me that there was absolutely no biblical support for the Church's practice of "commissioning" women as ministers. He further stated that this practice had emerged in the Church only recently due to pressure that had been placed on the Church by the feminist movement of the 1960s and '70s in the United States. Finally, he told me that the feminist movement had influenced my thinking and that those who favor women in ministry are providing tacit support for the feminist agenda.

His comments reflect concerns shared by those who oppose the denomination's stance on this issue. Is it true that the practice of licensing and commissioning women as ministers is a new phenomenon in Adventism? Can biblical support be found for this practice? Let's examine the evidence.

First let's deal with church history. Between the years of 1872 and 1915 (the year Ellen White died), 31 women were licensed to preach in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.¹ Lest you think that these women were forced to serve under the authority of a man, consider that three women were elected to serve

as General Conference treasurer during the 19th century. And in 1905, 20 of the 60 conference treasurer positions were held by women.² Licensing women as ministers is hardly a recent phenomenon forced upon the church by the feminist movement of the mid- to late-20th century!

Perhaps the earliest example is Sarah A. Lindsey, who in 1871 received a ministerial license and worked as an evangelist with her husband in western New York and Pennsylvania. Other women who held ministerial licenses in the 1870s include Ellen Lane and Hellen Stanton Williams in the Michigan Conference, Sarepta Myendra Irish Henry, also in the United States, and Margaret Caro in Australia and New Zealand.³

Hetty Hurd Haskell worked as a licensed minister for 34 years. Ten years after receiving her ministerial license, Hetty met and married Adventist pioneer and writer Stephen N. Haskell.⁴

In 1900, Lorena Florence Plummer served for a time as acting president of the Iowa Conference, having previously been elected as conference secretary. From 1913 until 1935, Mrs. Plummer headed the Sabbath School Department of the General Conference.⁵

Far from being an act of "political correctness" prompted by the feminist

movement, the current trend of women serving as pastors is actually a return to "historic Adventism."

Many 19th-century church leaders were in favor of women as ministers. As early as 1858, James White wrote in the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* in support of women in ministry: "Some have excluded females from a share in this work, because it says, 'your young men shall see visions.' They seem to forget that 'man' and 'men' in the Scriptures generally means both male and female. The infidel Paine would have been ashamed of a quibble involving such ignorance."⁶

J.A. Mowatt wrote in the July 30, 1861, edition of the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*: "Neither Paul nor any other apostle forbade women preaching, or lecturing. I affirm that such a command is nowhere in the Bible."⁷

In the same *Review*, Uriah Smith wrote in support of Mowatt's bold article. Referencing Mowatt's work, Smith wrote: "That to which the attention of the reader is especially called is the argument by which he shows that they [women ministers] have a right to do this, or any amount besides in the same direction."⁸

Ellen White wrote: "Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the Lord should be

appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor. They should be set apart to this work by prayer and laying on of hands. In some cases they will need to counsel with the [local] church officers or the [conference] minister; but if they are devoted women, maintaining a vital connection with God, they will be a power for good in the church. This is another means of strengthening and building up the church. We need to branch out more in our methods of labor. Not a hand should be bound, not a soul discouraged, not a voice should be hushed; let every individual labor, privately or publicly, to help forward this grand work.”⁹

Again, it is quite obvious that the trend of women serving as ministers is not a recent movement. Women served as full partners in ministry with their male counterparts from the earliest days of our church’s history.

These pioneering Adventist women had biblical precedent for their ministry as pastors and evangelists. Priscilla and her husband, Aquila, served together as pastors of a church in Ephesus and were responsible for teaching the full gospel to Apollos (Acts 18:2, 18, 26; Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19).

In Ephesians 4:2-3, Paul called two women, Euodia and Syntche, “true yokefellow” in that they labored with Paul in the advancement of the gospel.

In Rom. 16:7, Paul sends greetings to Andronicus and Junia, his “fellow-prisoners, who are of note among the apostles.” Junia is a woman’s name. No church commentator earlier than the Middle Ages questioned that Junia was both a woman and an apostle.

Paul expected women to speak in the church. If he did not, why would he have given the following directive? “But every woman praying or prophesying with her head unveiled dishonoreth her head; for

it is one and the same thing as if she were shaven” (1 Cor. 11:5, NASV).

Why would Paul give instructions for how women should pray or prophesy in church if they were not permitted to do so? And why did Paul commend women who served as pastors if they were not permitted to serve in that position of leadership?

With all this in mind, how are we to understand the passages that tell women to remain silent in church? First of all, we must interpret those verses in light of what we have just established—that there *were* women in leadership positions of the church. Obviously, Paul is addressing another issue entirely.

In his letter to the church at Corinth, Paul dealt with that church’s chaotic worship services. Men were seated on one side of the church, while the women and children were seated on the opposite side. The women of that day were generally uneducated, while men were more likely to have benefitted from an education. Since women did not sit with their husbands, they would often shout across the room to ask their husbands to explain the sermon.

Paul was simply telling women to wait until they got home to ask about the sermon. Obviously this issue does not exist everywhere, so his word to the first-century women of Corinth is to be viewed as a “local absolute” and not a “universal absolute.”

When Paul wrote to Timothy, he gave a similar directive regarding women. In 1 Timothy, Paul was addressing heresies and false teachings that came from the worship of the pagan goddess, Diana, including the suggestion that women were authoritative over men and had higher access to spiritual knowledge than men did.

In both of these cases, we can see that Paul is dealing with specific incidents in local churches. Sound hermeneutics will not allow us to turn the counsel Paul shared for a particular place and time into

a global “commandment.”

James White supported this interpretation of Paul’s remarks to the church at Corinth. White wrote that Paul was dealing with local issues and that his intention was to establish order there. He reiterated his conviction that Scripture supported women in ministry.¹⁰

Hopefully this brief treatment will help demonstrate that those of us who support women in ministry have not taken our position on the issue due to pressures from the feminist movement. Instead, we stand with a long line of Adventist leaders whose practice and written statements support the current denominational stance. Our conclusions have been reached only after much prayer and a careful examination of Scripture in context.

While I’m certain that this article will certainly not stand as the last word on the issue, it is my fervent prayer that we will recognize God’s calling of women to ministry. I further pray that women who have been called to preach will be afforded the opportunity to serve as the Holy Spirit directs. 🙏

Mike Tucker is the speaker/director for Faith For Today Television.

¹ Josephine Benton, *Called by God: Stories of Seventh-day Adventist Women Ministers* (Smithsburg, MD: Blackberry Hill, 1990), pp. 229-233.

² Michael Bernoi, “Nineteenth Century Women in Adventist Ministry Against the Backdrop of the Times,” in *Women in Ministry*, edited by Nancy Vhymeister (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press), 1998, pp. 220-221.

³ *ibid.*, pp. 225-227.

⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 227-228.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 228.

⁶ James White, “Unity and Gifts of the Church,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 7 January 1858, p. 69.

⁷ J.A. Mowatt, “Women as Preachers and Lecturers,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 30 July 1861, pp. 1, 66.

⁸ Uriah Smith, Foreword, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 30 July 1861, p. 1.

⁹ Ellen G. White, “The Duty of the Minister and the People,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 9 July 1895, p. 2.

¹⁰ James White, “Women in Church,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 29 May 1879, p. 172.



WOMEN a

Editor's Note:

The following letter from J.A. Mowatt was given top billing in the Advent Review and Sabbath Herald on July 30, 1861 (pp. 1, 66). It was condensed from its original version, published in the Portadown News, Ireland, on March 2, 1861. Uriah Smith wrote the editor's introduction below.

[We consider the following a triumphant vindication of the right of the sisters to take part in the public worship of God. The writer applies the prophecy of Joel—"Your daughters shall prophesy," etc.—to female preaching; but while it must embrace public speaking of some kind, this we think is but half of its meaning. We have nothing to say upon what the writer claims to have been done by certain females. That to which the attention of the reader is especially called is the argument by which he shows that they have a *right* to do this, or any amount besides in the same direction.—u. s.]

To the Editor of the *Portadown News*:

DEAR SIR, A correspondent in your paper takes up the question of women occupying positions as public speakers, and by every means in his power endeavors to show that women ought not to do so; still, as he is "open to conviction," and as he wishes for "an explanation" of the texts which he quoted, I shall endeavor to gratify him therein.

I will say here that if a woman can effect good in a world like ours, where so much is yet to be done for its reformation, I would think twice before I would discourage her or throw any obstacle in her way. Perhaps no man living has effected half as much for a revival of religion as Mrs. Phoebe Palmer; but

these women “a crown of rejoicing?” To be sure they will.

Who would object to a woman rescuing his friend from temporal death? No man. Then why object to a woman rescuing men from eternal death? Who would dare say that Grace Darling did wrong to go out in the lifeboat and rescue the

would perhaps think, to settle and arrange how a woman is to dress when she prophesieth, or preacheth. It will be seen from the verses I have quoted above that whatever every man was to do in the church in praying and prophesying, woman was to do the same; and, instead of Paul forbidding the woman, he merely

S PREACHERS and LECTURERS

“An Admirer of Woman in her proper place” would not suffer a woman to teach. I would like to know if ever he saw a female engaged in a school to teach. Could such a man not see that the teaching of which Paul writes is not such as that given in our Sunday Schools, and from our pulpits or platforms? I hold that each individual in this world is morally bound to do as much good to others as he or she can; and he or she is bound to leave the world better than he or she found it—if they possibly can. And is Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe and other ladies to teach me through my eyes, and are they prohibited from teaching me through my ears? Certainly not. Has Miss Buck, of England, powers in the pulpit equal to the greatest pulpit orator of the day, and is she not to use such powers? Are Spurgeon and such men to be lauded to the skies while sowing the heresy of Calvinism, mixed up with scraps of street songs and old wives’ fables, and is Miss Buck to be condemned while she preaches, with much superior eloquence and dignity, the glorious gospel of the grace of God to sinful, fallen mankind—none excepted? Let us hear no more of this condemnation of woman going about doing good. I suppose—indeed, I might venture to assert—that Mrs. Palmer, Miss Buck, and women like them have each done more to lead sinners to a Saviour than any man of the same period; and will not the souls thus saved be to

crew of a sinking vessel? No man. Why then object to a woman pushing out the gospel lifeboat to rescue men sinking into perdition? Who would dare say Mrs. Fry did wrong in seeking to rescue men from dismal dungeons? No man. Then why object to woman going to seek and to save those that are pining in the dungeons of sin and iniquity?

Is not Mrs. Theobald one of the ablest advocates of the Total Abstinence cause? Is she surpassed by any as a speaker on that question? I venture to affirm she is not. Then why silence such an advocate?

Neither Paul nor any other apostle forbade women preaching, or lecturing. I affirm such a command is nowhere in the Bible, and I shall proceed to prove it; and, besides, I will prove that Paul taught the very opposite.

“An Admirer of Woman in her proper place” has quoted 1 Cor. 14:34, 35. Now surely the fourteenth chapter does not contradict the eleventh, which was necessarily written before it. In 1 Cor. 11:4, 5, St. Paul says, “Every man praying or prophesying having his head covered dishonoreth his head; but every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoreth her head.” Why did not “An Admirer” read this chapter before he read the other?

Instead of St. Paul’s forbidding woman to conduct public worship—for that is what praying and prophesying mean—he actually condescends, as “An Admirer”

tells herself and the man how they are to dress—one with the head uncovered, the other with it covered. “An Admirer” has made some reference to Eve, but he is evidently totally ignorant of the nature of the temptation to which Eve was exposed, of the manner in which it was put, and of the share which Adam had in the matter.

Dr. Adam Clarke says the prediction of Joel 2:28 would not be fulfilled unless women prophesied, preached, or taught; and he says Peter understood it thus when, in Acts 2:17, he quotes it, saying, “Your daughters shall prophesy.” Dr. Adam Clarke, in a word, is entirely in favor of female preaching, and contends that the verses quoted by “An Admirer” bear no such meaning as that attached to them by those who oppose female preaching.

Perhaps some may ask, “What is prophesying?” In 1 Cor. 14:3, St. Paul says it is to speak “unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort,” and women were to do it. And, according to the word of the Lord by the prophet Joel, “Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy;” and, according to Peter, this prediction was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost; and according to Paul, women were to pray and prophesy as much as men, only to keep their heads covered. And why even this rule about the covered head? Simply because in the East then, and at present, an uncovered female was, and is, looked upon “all one as if she were shaven”—the latter being the mark of prostitution. The

reader will now see why St. Paul ordered the covered heads—that is, covered with a veil in the East—and this portion of his directions does not apply at all to our fashions.

Will the reader be kind enough to turn now to 1 Cor. 14, from which “An Admirer” quotes, and read the entire chapter over. You will see that St. Paul is

or in other words, in their turn—after one another. This was to prevent two, or three, or half a dozen men speaking at once—or even a dozen, as I have often seen in public meetings. This was a meeting for discussion and debate on church matters, such as that recorded in Acts 15, where there was much disputing. It was not a regular religious service, and could not

discussion in these church courts, he forbids the women to speak in them—they are to ask their husbands at home; therefore Miss M’Kinney cannot be included.

Having thus clearly established that the place in which a woman was to keep silence was in a court of the church, not in an ordinary regular meeting, I shall pass on to notice the passage from Timothy.

In 1 Tim. 2:12, 14, St. Paul is forbidding the woman to usurp authority; and if any reader will but read this chapter, of fifteen

Neither Paul nor any of I affirm such a com

verses, through, he or she will see at a glance that he has nothing whatever to say to public speaking. If “An Admirer” had quoted 1 Tim. 2:9, it might have been more needed in the present day. Our Methodist ladies seem to have forgotten that such a passage is in the Bible, “That women adorn themselves in modest apparel (could Paul have had hoops on a windy day in his prophetic vision?), with shamefacedness and sobriety: not with brodered hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.” There is not a word in the entire chapter against woman speaking and doing good—adorning herself with good works—in the cause of God and of fallen and debased humanity. If “An Admirer” will have a literal rendering of verse 12, then out with all our thousands of female Sunday-school and day-school teachers, for if a woman is not to teach, in the literal sense, then all our female teachers, religious and secular, in Sunday-schools, national schools, Church Education Society schools, etc., are all rushing on in



Why is he so happy?

writing on a different topic from that on which he wrote in chapter 11; and every fair interpreter of the Scripture will admit that, if in chapter 11 Paul authorizes female preaching, then he cannot in chapter 14 forbid it. Let us now see what chapter 14 refers to. There seems to have been some confusion in the church at Corinth, in their meetings of church courts; for it could not be in the ordinary or regular public service. The men speaking (verse 27) were to speak “by two, or at most by three, and that by course,”

be such. At verse 29 it is said, “Let the prophets speak, two or three, and let the others judge.” Here, again, it was not an ordinary regular service; it was a meeting for discussion, and for the election of church officers; and the candidates for positions in the church were to be heard, and all the other members were to judge of the qualifications of each, and to make their selections accordingly. At verse 33, this view is sustained still further by the words, “For God is not the author of confusion.” In order to prevent much

direct opposition to Paul when he says, “I suffer not a woman to teach.” The woman is to learn in silence with all subjection. Subjection to whom? “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord” (Col. 3:18). This is the subjection spoken of in Timothy, as is clearly shown by Adam and Eve—husband and wife, representatives of all our race of husbands and wives—being brought in by way of illustrating his subject, and the object which he had in view. A woman is not to teach, nor to usurp authority

very like an appointment of Phoebe as the first pope of Borne, for she was to have absolute authority over all the church there?

I will conclude by glancing at female characters in Scripture who occupied a position as teachers and leaders of the people equal to men. Deborah, the wife of Lapidoth—mark, she was married, too—was a prophetess, and judged Israel (Judges 4:4, 10). Huldah, the prophetess, the wife of Shallum—a married woman also—dwelt at Jerusalem, in the College;

much in the Lord; and Dr. Adam Clarke contends that they preached, for he says they prophesied, and that if a woman thus prophesied, then women preached. This is Dr. Clarke’s view, and I value it as highly as John Wesley’s.

“An Admirer” seems to think that woman is much inferior to man and throws out taunts about mother Eve, to which taunts I have already alluded. If, through Eve, sin first entered into this world—and that too, with the hearty concurrence of Adam—then let it not

her apostle forbade women preaching, or lecturing. Her command is nowhere in the Bible, and I shall proceed to prove it.

over the man—that is, a wife is not to act so toward her husband. The passage has nothing whatever to do with regard to Total Abstinence lecturers, or gospel preachers. On the contrary, a woman is to pray and prophesy (1 Cor. 11:5) just as the man, and with equal power and authority; and this is according to the prediction of the Holy Ghost (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17).

“An Admirer” could not have quoted a case that tells more against himself than that of Phoebe mentioned in Rom. 15:1. She was a deaconess. Does not “An Admirer” know that the Church of England and other churches hold that a deacon was a certain rank in the ministry? And if so, then so was a deaconess. Dr. Adam Clarke says, too, that the deaconesses “were ordained to their office by the imposition of the hands of the bishop.” In the second verse of this chapter, Paul actually directs the Christians at Rome—the men, too (I wish “An Admirer” had been among them; how it would have lowered his dignity)—to assist sister Phoebe “in whatever business she hath need of you.” Does this not look

and her dignified message to the king, who came to inquire at her mouth the will of God, does not betray any trembling diffidence or abject servility, although “An Admirer” would have woman so much inferior to man. It would be, perhaps, useless to remind him that in Christianity there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28). It is said (Micah 6:4), “For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron and Miriam.” God here classes Miriam with Moses and Aaron, and declares that he sent her before his people. I presume had “An Admirer” been there, he would have refused to go up through the wilderness under such a female leader. Need I refer to Anna, the prophetess (Luke 2:37, 38), and to the women which labored with Paul in the gospel as his fellow-laborers—therefore, preaching as he did? Timothy, in 1 Thess. 3:2, is styled a minister of God, and our fellow-laborer in the gospel of Christ. Then these were the same as Timothy, who was a bishop in the church. In Rom. 16:12, three women are named as having labored

be forgotten that by woman, without the concurrence of man, a Saviour came to bring deliverance. If woman be taunted about Eve, she can turn and point to Mary, and all the women who ministered to Christ daily up to his burial, and at his resurrection. Dr. Doddridge exhorts man to rejoice that, as by woman came transgression, so by her came redemption; and I may add—why should not women preach that redemption also?

Judging by the results which have followed the labors of such women as Mrs. Rogers, Mrs. Fletcher, Miss Tooth, Miss Culter, Miss Buck, Miss Marsh, Mrs. Theobald, Mrs. Stowe, Mrs. Palmer, Mrs. Booth, and a host of others, I rather think the Lord of the vineyard will require some more satisfactory excuse for even female timidity and backwardness in his service than the one given by “An Admirer,” before they will be justified in ceasing to labor in his cause. I may say that I think Miss M’Kinney chose an admirable hymn.

I am yours, etc.

J.A. Mowatt

My Hopes

for the 2010 General Conference Session *By Monte Sahlin*

WILL THE GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION this summer be a turning point for the Adventist movement or a real debacle? Most likely neither. We, as a people, have become addicted to routine and the predictable. Most likely we will celebrate the significant growth over the past five years and declare every strategy, program, department, and institution an unmitigated success without looking too carefully at all the facts.

Last session—in 2005 in St. Louis—we had the courage to look carefully at a number of challenges, but nothing extraordinary has been done on these topics, and the attendance (even among delegates) was low during those discussions. It is doubtful that anything significant will be discussed or voted this time around, despite the fact that the Church faces even greater challenges and needs to move decidedly, creatively forward before it is bogged down in middle-aged ennui.

A Marginalized Mission and Message?

The Adventist Church has a spectacular growth rate worldwide. When I dialogue with researchers in other denominations, they marvel at our growth and ask me, “What’s the secret?” They are particularly envious of our financial strength. But when the data is unpacked, worrisome realities surface. Even in the nations where we have the greatest rate of growth, pastors and field presidents tell me that it is not across-the-board growth. There are tribes, classes, and locations where people pour into the Church faster than we can baptize them or keep accurate records while in the same countries there are tribes, classes, and geographic areas where no growth occurs or even seems possible. In Europe, North America, and Australia, almost all of the growth is among immigrants; even among young people reared in Adventist families,

the native-born population is increasingly resistant to discipling by the Adventist movement. In the nations of the former Soviet Union, growth has slowed and there have been large losses among the big numbers of baptisms from the heady days of the 1990s. In every nation, Adventist growth is among a narrow slice of the total population and the Church is not engaging the masses. As the world becomes more urbanized, it appears that the Adventist mission and message is being increasingly marginalized.

Will the delegates who come to Atlanta take a serious look at this reality? Will they be asked to ponder our weaknesses as a movement as well as celebrate our successes? In past years there have been times when the General Conference, in session and in executive committee, has confessed the need to refocus and change. Is something similar on the agenda for 2010?

Massive Vision and Insight

The Adventist movement has become a massive thing. The General Conference strategic planning office estimates that there are probably more than 30 million adherents around the world, which makes our movement larger than three world religions—Judaism, the Baha’i, and the Sikh. (“Adherent,” incidentally, is a broader category than “member” but provides a more accurate picture of the actual number of people involved in a religion.) Its size and success, its complexity and diversity may have outrun its structure and management system. In 1901, when Ellen White insisted that a complete reorganization was in order, the denomination had grown from about 5,000 to 75,000 over a period of about 40 years. Today we grow that much every few weeks, yet we are less willing to consider systemic changes than she was at that time. Have we lost our prophetic dynamic and

succumbed to the bureaucratic nature of a multinational corporation?

When I was called to the General Conference in January of 1987, we had just made the largest change in our structure since 1901. Before I left in 1998, we had already undone almost all of the change. The rubber band snaps back so easily. Is real change no longer possible? Or has the General Conference just become relatively unimportant? Perhaps the real change has shifted to the grass roots and is going on despite the structure rather than because of it.

Dr. Jan Paulsen has displayed the wisdom of focusing on broad themes in his leadership, instead of attempting to micromanage as if we were still the few hundred thousand of the 1950s. How far has his insight about leadership been multiplied among his colleagues in Silver Spring and around the world? This may be the key issue in Atlanta in 2010. Do we have anyone to take his place? Do we have anyone among a younger generation of leaders with even the minimum capacity necessary for world leadership? I have reviewed lists of names with scores of friends who serve in our hierarchy or did until recently, and the most common response reflects a kind of despair for the future. I have seen many men turn their palms up and shrug, body language for a beseeching lack of clarity. My prayer is that Dr. Paulsen will agree to serve again.

A Voice of Experience

For the first time in decades, I am not going to General Conference as a delegate or staff member. Frankly, I am glad to stay home! If I were able to make myself heard among the 2,400 delegates, I would suggest four things:

1. If Dr. Paulsen is retiring (or when he retires), elect a person of color as president. It is long overdue! We have

division officers from the Southern Hemisphere with earned doctorates and good administrative track records. More than 90 percent of Seventh-day Adventists around the globe are people of color—Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans—and even in the Northern Hemisphere they make up a significant, growing, and energetic part of our faith. Quit playing games of white control and let the people of God emerge in the rainbow he created. We have already made significant progress toward a diverse and representative leadership at the General Conference, so it is time for the top post to be held by a person of color.

[Let me speak bluntly to my fellow white brethren: We need not fear this development. It is only a matter of time in any case, and the women, men, and young people from outside the narrow circle that has provided the pool of leaders for so long bring new energy, new ideas, and new possibilities. We need them! The old “white boy” network is almost exhausted.]

2. Ignore the issue of women’s ordination. Ignore the fact that we have already acquiesced to the ordination of women pastors in China, where local conditions make it necessary. This issue does not need the attention of the General Conference delegates. It will take care of itself in due course. It has become a confused mass of some of ugliest thinking in the history of the movement. Ordination itself is not one of the 28 fundamentals of our faith. We could switch to only commissioned ministers and not lose a jot or a tittle of the Three Angels messages. Ordination is a post-Biblical relic for the papacy to defend, not a crucial issue to the cause of Christ. By opening up further debate, we are only encouraging the defenders of our confused status quo to make the worst

mistakes of Standard Brand Christendom.

3. Have the courage to act on the Challenges papers presented five years ago in St. Louis. Vote specific strategic goals for urbanization, social concern, and the dropout problem. Take seriously the fact that as more people “come on board” the Adventist message, it is becoming more and more marginalized and irrelevant to the average woman/man on the globe. Phillip Jenkins, the well-known historian of Christianity, has said: “Adventist is becoming a world religion. The question is will it remain Christian?” In other words, will we become so successful that we no longer see the need to be identified within the wider stream of followers of Jesus, and will we set out to make an identity for ourselves that places so much emphasis on other things that we become visibly not Christian? Theologically this development could be seen as a form of idolatry. It is essential that we remain unapologetically Christ-centered and engaged with the mainstream of the real world in our contemporary context.

4. Focus on the basic values of the Adventist movement. Don’t let reactionary, fearful voices lead us off to fight over details. Our diversity demands that we work hard to be inclusive. Our mission demands that we work hard to be compassionate. Our complex and constantly changing context demands that we work hard to be creative. Our Adventist heritage demands that we work hard to be hopeful. What values make us people who are authentically filled with hope and demonstrably hopeful in a world filled with insecurities and stress? Please focus on those things, not the myriad of little issues that try to work their way onto the agenda. This great gathering of Adventist leaders from every nation, costing an estimated \$12 million for

just one week of activity, needs to do big things, not little things. Otherwise it only wearies the saints.

Let me give one illustration of what I mean. The General Conference long ago, in its first years, voted to take a stand to identify the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a “peace church” similar to the Mennonites and Quakers on the issues of war. There are more wars in the world today than ever before, and Adventists exist in significant numbers on both sides of nearly every conflict. In recent decades there have been many instances in which Adventists were literally shooting at each other. Conference officers have been convicted before United Nations war-crimes tribunals. There have also been rare occasions when Adventists served as peace brokers. I would like to see the GC Session in Atlanta reassert the position of our founding fathers. The only way to avoid killing our brothers and sisters in one political cause or another is to swear off, entirely and completely, the use of weapons or the support of military action under any circumstances. We already took this oath once upon a time. Why isn’t that old-time pledge good enough for all Adventists today? We do not hesitate to assert standards about earrings, yet we bow to “individual choice” when it comes the participation of church members in the great epidemic of violence on the globe. We need to place priority on the larger moral issues, the more foundational values of what it means to be an Adventist. This is a task worthy of a \$12 million world gathering. 🇺🇸

Monte Sahlin is an ordained Seventh-day Adventist minister, community organizer, and social analyst. He served on the staff of the North American Division of the General Conference and then as a union conference officer for two decades. He currently serves as director of research and special projects for the Ohio Conference.

If I Were the NEXT GC PRESIDENT...

Rethinking Mission and Theology in a Globalized World Tops My Agenda

BY RYAN J. BELL

If I were elected General Conference president, my priorities for the next five years would be: deepening our understanding of unity in a globalized world, theological growth and innovation, focus on concerns that are bigger than Adventism, and implementing modern communication and social networking to create generative conversation toward God's future.

rapidly changing world. Any organization that insists on global homogeneity will become brittle and fracture. The very thing we most fear will become inevitable if we do not learn how to develop some organizational elasticity. The way to do this, in my opinion, is to think afresh about what unity means.

The Adventist Church is prone to overly simplistic hermeneutics—that is, how we approach the interpretation of the text, which I'll address more in a moment—but we are equally prone to simplistic cultural hermeneutics. A theological and cultural

status quo. We must somehow involve the ordinary people of our world divisions in this conversation. We need homemakers, teachers, artists, engineers, farmers, service workers, scientists, and business leaders to come together around a common concern for the viability of our denomination as we face a very uncertain future.

In the long run, I believe this conversation about unity in a worldwide church involves some form of restructuring. The church has not been significantly restructured since 1901, but the world is a vastly different place than it was 109 years ago. Regardless of how perfect our system may have once been, there is virtually no way it could be adequate for the world we inhabit today.

This rethinking of unity in a globalized world is the hard work that lies behind other difficult issues such as adequately and efficiently funding the mission of the church, the ordination of women, and embodying the radical inclusivity of Christ at every level of the church.



REGARDLESS OF HOW PERFECT OUR SYSTEM MAY HAVE ONCE BEEN, THERE IS VIRTUALLY NO WAY IT COULD BE ADEQUATE FOR THE WORLD WE INHABIT TODAY.

Unity in a Globalized World

One of the most pressing concerns facing the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the next decade is rethinking what it means to be a world church. While I don't think "localism" is the future of Adventism, I do think we need to redefine what we mean by "unity." If the Adventist Church stubbornly insists on defining unity rigidly as uniformity and homogeneity, the church will not be flexible enough to adapt in our

outlook that sees primarily universal principles rather than complex local and contextual factors will be inadequate to the task of mission as we move into the next decade.

Therefore, I would work with Division leadership around the world to have a multi-layered conversation about culture and theology. This conversation cannot be limited to Division presidents and secretaries with a vested interest in the

Theological Growth

Inseparable from a conversation about unity and church structure, and in order for our church to have any relevance in coming decades, we must have a serious conversation about theology. I am not even referring, necessarily, to the specific issues that theology addresses as much as I am theological method.

Every serious theological question—whether it's the role of women in church leadership, sexuality identity, creation and

evolution, or prophetic interpretation—comes down to hermeneutics. How do we understand what the Bible is, how to read it, and what role it plays in the life of the church?

In the next five years, we must have a serious conversation about hermeneutics and epistemology. To that end, I would call together academic and pastoral theologians from across our church to thoroughly explore ways to create space in our church for a more nuanced conversation about the Bible.

I would begin a thorough review of the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*. This is the primary instrument of Biblical engagement with the members of the Adventist Church. It must not merely confirm people in what they already know (or think they know), but challenge them to grow in their Biblical and theological understanding.

Present truth and progressive revelation are two pillars of Adventist theology. It would be a terrible irony if a denomination born out of theological courage and innovation would settle for mere preservation. New times bring new challenges, and new challenges require new understandings of how God is at work in our world.

Turning Our Focus Outward

The future success of the Adventist Church in today's world will require us to do better at casting our gaze beyond ourselves. Our instinct, when we feel threatened by a postmodern, pluralistic world is to draw up our defenses, work harder at defining ourselves, and turn our attention inward. This is precisely the opposite of what we need to do.

It is at this moment in history that we must put more of our resources into sharing Jesus' message of hope and healing with the world, in *deed* as well as word.

Anytime the people of God become more intent on self-preservation than on self-sacrificially blessing the world, God has sent a prophet—or Jesus himself—to turn God's mission back on course. This is the moment in history when the church must risk everything, not for our own self-preservation, but for God's kingdom, which is always bigger than the church. The Adventist Church must recover its voice on issues that impact our human community and then act in harmony with our highest ideals.

Communicating to the World

Finally, I would use all available communications technology to speak to the church about these and other issues. I would have a regular video and audio address to the church. In this way I would share my vision and stimulate the conversation I spoke about above. Through various other social media like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, we can stimulate a conversation that will generate new life and new innovation to take our church into the coming decades.

There has never been a more crucial moment for the Adventist Church. More than 160 years removed from the urgent events of 1844 that birthed our denomination, we must take a serious look at our reason for existence. Being faithful to our original calling does not mean saying and doing the same things we said and did in 1844 or 1863 or 1901. It means remaining faithful to the spirit of those crucial moments: the radical pursuit of truth, the courageous challenging of long-established norms, and faithfully following the Lamb where he goes.

Ryan J. Bell is senior pastor of the Hollywood Adventist Church in Hollywood, California. He also writes the blog called intersections at www.ryanjbell.net.

I'd Work Toward Humility, Simplicity, and Courage

BY NATHAN BROWN

My first priority would be to honor and thank Dr. Jan Paulsen for his ministry and leadership. In his years as General Conference president, he has consistently challenged the church to be better—to take mission seriously, to love and serve our communities and our world, to listen to young people and other sometimes-marginalized groups.

Dr Paulsen has been statesmanlike—in the best sense of the word—which seems a rare quality among Adventist leaders. In a few personal interactions and many occasions of reading and listening, his thoughtful and spiritual leadership has repeatedly impressed me, making me feel glad to be part of a community of faith with a leader of such caliber. Any incoming president should acknowledge the shoulders upon which they will stand, at the same time humbly acknowledging the difficult path Dr. Paulsen has mapped.

With such an example and inspiration fresh in mind, I would then begin to address some of the following priorities, among others:

A Simpler Identity

In recent years, much attention has been given to the question of Adventist identity, so it should not have been surprising that the question came up in a public discussion in which I was involved a little while ago: "What should most characterize the church in its mission and ministry in today's society?"

If I Were the NEXT GC PRESIDENT...



ADVENTISM HAS SO MANY GOOD THINGS TO SAY IN AND TO THE WORLD IN WHICH WE LIVE. WE NEED TO HAVE THE COURAGE TO SAY IT.

- NATHAN BROWN

My one-word answer was “humility.” Of course, whenever we start talking about humility in this way, someone will ask whether we might not be risking our identity by practicing humility—that if we are not boldly defending who we are and what we stand for, we risk losing who we are called to be. But this is less of a concern if humility is our identity—the thing that significantly sets the faithful followers of God apart.

Of course, the model and motivation for this is Jesus himself. In John’s story of the gospel, this reaches a crescendo in the story he tells in John 13, beginning with these words: “[Jesus] now showed the disciples the full extent of his love” (verse 1, NLT). John then proceeds to describe Jesus, the eternal Son of God, washing the feet of his dusty and doubting disciples, one by one. According to John, this was the greatest, most profound expression of the love of God—in an act of incredible humility.

In response to this goodness and overwhelming humility, we expend ourselves—personally and corporately—in serving and in seeking the best for those with whom we share our lives and our world (see Micah 6:8). That should work well as an Adventist identity.

A Simpler Understanding of Faith

By contrast, too much of Adventism’s self-identity is bound up in a statement of beliefs. In the early years of Adventism, church leaders and members resisted formulating a statement of beliefs for fear that it would become a creed. Thirty years after adopting a statement of “fundamental beliefs,” perhaps we could admit that the experiment has failed and our pioneers’ fears have proved true. Rather than continuing to expand, our statement of core belief needs to be simplified.

There are two ways to build a city. The first is to build strong walls that clearly define who is inside and who is outside—but in doing this, the walls will most often be used to exclude. If, instead, the work focuses on building the center, walls are less important and the strong center will create a gravity around which people, entities, and mission can orbit and toward which they will be drawn.

With prayerful, careful, and gradual conversation, we should seek to formulate a statement of belief that says more with a lot less words. (Charles Scriven’s attempt at this in *The Promise of Peace* might be a good place to start.) Many of Adventism’s current “fundamental beliefs” would be better described as church “understandings” or “teachings,” with “fundamental beliefs” better reserved for describing the core than building the walls.

A Ministry of Apology and Reconciliation

We also need to practice treating people better—and begin apologizing for the many instances where we haven’t treated people well. After just a few years working in a high-profile role within the church, the stories of disappointment, exclusion, marginalization, and abuse that people share with me are almost soul-destroying. The “body count” of Adventism is too high.

As General Conference president, I would apologize on behalf of the church as much and as often as sincerely possible to those who have been hurt by the church system, by leaders, and by other church members. As much as possible, I would seek reconciliation with people and groups who were once part of the church and are no longer so. When we disarm and humbly apologize, we risk being walked on and taken advantage of, but that is the way of Jesus.

A Voice for the Voiceless

Adventism has so many good things to say in and to the world in which we live. We need to have the courage to say it. As one Adventist writer puts it: “What is desperately needed are people who speak distinctively and movingly from within Adventism to the larger community; voices who, from the core of Adventist particularity, express a universal message for our time; people who allow the power of the gospel to challenge those who oppress the vulnerable.”²¹

In the heart of our beliefs is a world-transforming hope. Our commitment to follow God as the Bible teaches must help us notice God’s passion for the poor and hurting. Adventism at its best can, should, and must change the world.

Hear the words of former General Conference President Arthur Daniels, spoken about the work of church pioneer

Ellen White at her funeral: “Slavery, the caste system, unjust racial prejudices, the oppression of the poor, the neglect of the unfortunate—these all are set forth as unchristian and a serious menace to the well-being of the human race, and as evils which the church of Christ is appointed by her Lord to overthrow.”²

As a rapidly growing community of faith, we should not underestimate the opportunities and responsibilities for our voices to be heard—if we have the courage to “speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those who are perishing” (Proverbs 31:8, NLT).

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¹ Charles Scriven, blog post at <http://www.spectrummagazine.org/podcast/2008/06/24/test>.

² Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1915), p. 473.

I'd Lead an Examination of Fundamental Belief No. 1

BY JOHN BUCHHOLTZ

If I were the president of the General Conference, I would have one priority during the next quinquennium. Fundamental belief No. 1 of the 28 fundamental Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) beliefs presents a complex issue, which leads to great angst among the general SDA community. Furthermore, fundamental belief No. 1 results in clashes between a modern scientific view of earth's history and the history of life and that presented by the biblical creation story. At times, faith positions may be contradicted by

modern empirical knowledge, which is not unique to Adventism alone. Thus, it seems reasonable that modern SDAs adopt a more critical and analytical view of scripture. As a church made up of individuals who incorporate both faith and rational thinking into their daily lives, we must delve into the theology, sociology, and psychology underpinning the SDA faith tradition.

The proper forum to deal with this issue is a calling of multiple colloquiums of SDA sociologists, theologians, and psychologists. The choice of these groups is necessary, I believe, because their expertise is suited to dealing with



the particular mindset within the SDA subculture. Physical and biological scientists may be added but are not absolutely necessary, because science has already presented its case to modern society with compelling data gathered through various disciplines for more than 500 years. Thus, I would conclude that this issue is mainly within the purview of the theologians and sociologists and, secondarily, the psychologists.

An Apparent Contradiction

The official overlying proclamation of the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference is that members of the SDA community accept the Bible and the Bible only as the foundation for their faith. Furthermore, the General Conference (GC) may amend or revise belief statements from time to time. This practice suggests that SDA theology is not intended to remain immutable. Fundamental belief No. 1 states that: “The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God” and that they “are the infallible revelation of His will.”¹ Fundamental belief

FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF NO. 1 RESULTS IN CLASHES BETWEEN A MODERN SCIENTIFIC VIEW OF EARTH'S HISTORY AND THE HISTORY OF LIFE AND THAT PRESENTED BY THE BIBLICAL CREATION STORY.

No. 1 appears to contradict the overlying premise that official SDA beliefs may be amended. Moreover, fundamental belief No. 1 gives the impression that most SDA church members see the Bible as “God's truth” to be interpreted literally in all cases.

In the last century, SDA higher education has embarked on a journey of academic excellence in the sciences as well as all other academic pursuits, including religion and theology. The proposed colloquiums can address the issue that higher education can and will lead to critical thinking regarding the mining of meaning from books such as the Bible. In addition, critical thinking requires

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that one ask questions that can at times be in direct conflict with a faith position and may not be answerable in the present or near future. Both SDA and other Christian theologians have long known that biblical scripture is a combination of history and the experience of a particular people. Their experiences are related through stories, some having a factual basis and some symbolic. In addition, some modern-day Christians see the Bible through a series of “lenses” that are historical and metaphorical, and whatever we say about the Bible is an inescapable human creation.^{2,3}

Two Creation Stories

The creation story is a fine example for a colloquium to use in order to discuss the issue of whether or not the SDA Church should maintain a rigid literal interpretation of scripture. Rancorous debates over the factual truth of the creation stories have marked the modern period of the Western Christian world.⁴ Theologians know that there are actually two creation stories: the “P” or six-day story dated approximately 500 B.C.E. during the Jewish Babylonian exile, and the earlier “J” story, which focuses on the creation of humankind dated approximately 900 B.C.E.⁵ The P story recounts God creating the world and humankind in six literal days, if we are to adhere to fundamental belief No. 1. However, logical and chronological problems arise when one considers that two creation accounts, the polytheistic Babylonian Enuma Elish and the monotheistic Jewish P story, are remarkably similar and share a common tradition.⁶ Theologians (including those in the ranks of Adventism) have argued that the Jewish P story recounts the Babylonian story but is unique and represents a monotheistic polemic.⁷ As suggested by the SDA theologian Siegfried Horn, attempting

to adopt a literal interpretation of the creation story where each day represents 24 hours in combination with biblical genealogy to arrive at the age of the earth is dubious at best.⁸ The story recounted in Genesis is most likely not literal and unscientific, and thus not subject to adjustment by modern cosmology.⁹

Consider a Less Rigid Stance

So what should the position of the General Conference be in such matters? Must the wheels come off the train and the church subdivide itself?

A heavy-handed, dogmatic approach would most likely not be productive and would answer no questions or concerns. Throwing the Bible out and saying that God’s word has nothing to say to 21st-century people also would seem not to be a productive approach.

What would seem more appropriate is to assemble the groups suggested above to provide a more appropriate open position in interpreting the meanings in biblical stories. Just because a story is not “true” in a literal sense, it may yet say something profoundly true about the human experience or even God as creator.^{10,11} The theologians can address the theological and symbolic implications in such matters, and the sociologists and psychologists can address the effects of such an open position by the GC in terms of the SDA subculture. When a person is brought up in a religious culture and taught that all accounts in a book such as the Bible are literal, to discover otherwise can be unsettling. Indeed, we have seen recent attacks on science faculty such as those at La Sierra University because they teach the science that underlies changes in life forms. Moreover, in the SDA North American Division, less than half of competent science teachers affirm the traditional Adventist position

on creation.¹² The GC could continue to spend large amounts of money on institutes such as the Geoscience Research Institute (GRI) in a vain attempt to support the traditional interpretation of the Genesis account of creation and the universal flood. On the other hand, using the mechanism described here we may be able to get to the real root of the problem, which is determining the difference between biblical stories based on actual events and those that are metaphorical. The theologians know the difference and always have, so why not help the rest of the SDA community?

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¹ See <http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental/index.html>.

² Marcus J. Borg, *Reading The Bible Again for the First Time* (Harper: San Francisco), 2002, pp. 4-5, 22.

³ Dalton D. Baldwin, “Creation and Time: A Biblical Reflection,” In: Brian Bull, Fritz Guy and Ervin Taylor, editors, *Understanding Genesis: Contemporary Adventist Perspectives* (Riverside, CA: Adventist Today Foundation), 2006, p. 44.

⁴ Borg, p. 59.

⁵ Borg, pp. 63-64.

⁶ Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis: The Story of the Creation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1942, p. 109.

⁷ Ivan Blazen, “Theological Concerns of Genesis 1:1-2:3,” In: Brian Bull, Fritz Guy and Ervin Taylor, editors, *Understanding Genesis: Contemporary Adventist Perspectives* (Riverside, CA: Adventist Today Foundation), 2006, p. 71.

⁸ Siegfried H. Horn, “Can the Bible Establish the Age of the Earth?,” *Spectrum*, November 1979, pp. 15-19.

⁹ Blazen, p. 71.

¹⁰ Borg, p. 69.

¹¹ Richard Rice, “Creation, Evolution, and Evil,” In: Brian Bull, Fritz Guy and Ervin Taylor, editors, *Understanding Genesis: Contemporary Adventist Perspectives* (Riverside, CA: Adventist Today Foundation), 2006, p. 18.

¹² Baldwin, p. 35.

Evangelism Must Be Our Emphasis!

BY DR. CARLTON P. BYRD

The imminence of Jesus' soon return is apparent every day as natural disasters, terroristic threats, political wars, social injustices, civil unrest, and moral decay continually erode the foundation of our world. These events mirror what Jesus outlined in Matthew 24 when he foretold the signs of his coming. "And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows" (Matt. 24:6-8, KJV).

As time progresses, coupled with the rapidity of the aforementioned events, the intensity and urgency to promote the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church must become more pronounced. This mission, as rooted in the Gospel Commission of Matt. 28:19-20, makes evangelism the primary function and duty of the church throughout the entire world.

Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines accentuates this point as follows: "The church is organized for mission service to fulfill the work Israel failed to do. As seen in the life of the Master, the greatest service the church provides the world is in being fully committed to completing the gospel 'witness to all nations' (Matt. 24:14), empowered by the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

"This mission includes proclaiming a message of preparation for Christ's return that is directed both to the church itself (1 Cor. 1:7, 8; 2 Peter 3:14; Rev. 3:14-22; 14:5) and to the rest of humanity (Rev. 14:6-12; 18:4)."¹

A "Mission First" Philosophy

If I were elected General Conference president, I would primarily seek to foster and promote an aggressive agenda that advances the mission of the church. Simply put, what is said in theoretical passion should resonate in practical application. The church's main emphasis must be evangelism—winning lost souls for Jesus Christ. Ellen White said it best: "We are not, as Christians, doing one-twentieth part that we might do in winning souls to Christ. There is a world to be warned, and every sincere Christian will be a guide and an example to others in faithfulness, in cross-bearing, in prompt and vigorous action, in unswerving fidelity to the cause of truth, and in sacrifices and labors to promote the cause of God."²

Although the clarion call for evangelism is not foreign or new to the church, given declining worldwide church growth trends (particularly in industrialized nations), ineffective evangelistic practices need to be abandoned and, consequently, modern evangelistic approaches employed to maximize church growth. To facilitate the aggressive implementation of our church's mission, it is necessary that greater resources, both human and economic, be made available for frontline ministry (i.e. local churches, missions, etc.) with the impending decentralization of duplicitous services and levels of church governance. Hence, I would promote the concept of an audit of our current worldwide church structure, enabling an authentic "mission first" philosophy to be advocated that is supported by church structure, as opposed to the reversed view.

Ask the Hard Questions

The increasing costs of ministry necessitate that if we are to effectively reach our postmodern world, we must consider innovative methods for ministry that



ALTHOUGH THE CLARION CALL FOR EVANGELISM IS NOT FOREIGN OR NEW TO THE CHURCH, GIVEN DECLINING WORLDWIDE CHURCH GROWTH TRENDS (PARTICULARLY IN INDUSTRIALIZED NATIONS), INEFFECTIVE EVANGELISTIC PRACTICES NEED TO BE ABANDONED AND, CONSEQUENTLY, MODERN EVANGELISTIC APPROACHES EMPLOYED TO MAXIMIZE CHURCH GROWTH.

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require, in many cases, greater resources. Because communication mediums and technological advances are ever evolving, resources are needed to remain current with these trends. Moreover, these advances also promote the ability to transfer or redirect our resources by more relevant means within our collective organization. Streamlining unnecessary bureaucratic bottlenecks at institutional levels, while providing for new methodologies for advancing the gospel, is needed to fulfill our church's mission. We have to ask ourselves some hard questions: "Is what we're doing effective? Is what we're doing relevant? Are we really reaching the needs of people?"

Christ's Method Alone

"Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow me.'"³

As world church leader, I would seek to promote an inclusive faith community that would truly model this passage by befriending others while proactively seeking to combat societal ills that are negatively impacting the greater world community. This would be evident in our expeditious and appropriate response to local catastrophes as well as global social issues affecting our international community. Our voice and tangible aid are needed at the humanitarian table of support to heighten the awareness and participation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In summary, let us never forget that the mission of the church is our reason for organizational existence, and evangelism is the vehicle for our mission realization. The Coca-Cola Company makes beverages, Apple® makes computers, McDonald's® makes hamburgers, and the

Seventh-day Adventist Church wins men, women, boys, and girls for Jesus Christ! It should also be remembered that the pursuit of this mission is not seasonal, but pursued daily. Every resource, opportunity, passion, and gift should be exhausted to this fulfillment. With a world population of more than 6.8 billion, and our faith group having a population of 17 million, the Seventh-day Adventist Church must meet the commission of aggressively reaching the world for Jesus Christ! "Though the Lord has never told us that the whole world will accept Him, He did definitely commission us to proclaim the gospel to every person on earth. Therein lies the challenge of our generation."⁴

It was Jesus who said, "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matt. 24:14, KJV).

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¹ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Ministerial Association, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe ...: A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1988), pp. 144-145.

² Ellen G. White, "A Working Church," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Aug. 23, 1881, p. 1; also in *Christian Service*, 1925 edition, p. 12.

³ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association), 1905, p. 143.

⁴ Gottfried Oosterwal, *Mission Possible* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association), 1972, quoted in George E. Knowles, *How to Help Your Church Grow* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association), 1997, p. 44.

I'd Focus on Finishing What We Started

BY HERB DOUGLASS

If elected General Conference president for the next five years, my priority would be to recall and re-present the two awesome and luminous appeals that were voted on at both the 1973 and 1974 Autumn Councils and have them reprinted in our church paper, *Adventist Review* (especially in each of the world editions).

In so doing, our world church would see/hear again "that the return of Jesus has been long delayed, that the reasons for the delay are not wrapped in mysteries, and that the primary consideration before the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to reorder its priorities individually and corporately so that our Lord's return may be hastened."¹

What's Causing Failure and Delay

Perhaps for the first time, the world church would hear that they "are not the first leaders in Adventist history to feel the urgency of preparing the church for the fullness of the 'latter rain' experience, the 'loud cry of the third angel's message,' and the triumphant return of the awaited Lord."²

The world church, in the next five years, would listen again to that one question that "overshadowed all other subjects" at the 1973 Annual Council: "What has happened to the message and experience that by 1892 had brought the beginning of earth's final message of warning and appeal?"³

In the next five years, the world church would hear what the 1973 world leaders recognized, that: "As a body the church still is in the Laodicean condition as set forth by the True Witness in Revelation 3:14-19. Therefore, in attempting to find the specific present causes for failure and delay, the council has noted three main factors:

"1. Leaders and people have not fully



“AS CHURCH LEADERS AT THIS ANNUAL COUNCIL WE HAVE FACED HONESTLY THE FACT THAT THERE ARE INCONSISTENCIES BETWEEN THE CHURCH’S PREACHING AND ITS PRACTICES, AND THAT TO ALLOW THESE INCONSISTENCIES TO CONTINUE WILL AUTOMATICALLY DELAY THE COMPLETION OF THE CHURCH’S MISSION AND THE COMING OF CHRIST.”

accepted as a personal message Christ’s analysis and appeal to the Laodiceans (Rev. 3:14-22).

“2. Leaders and people are in some ways disobedient to divine directives, both in personal experience and in the conduct of the church’s commission.

“3. Leaders and people have not yet finished the church’s task.”⁴

Righting What Is Wrong

In the next five years, I would lead out in re-covering what our church leaders pledged in 1973 and again in 1974: “As church leaders at this Annual Council we have faced honestly the fact that there are inconsistencies between the church’s preaching and its practices, and that to allow these inconsistencies to continue will automatically delay the completion of the church’s mission and the coming of Christ.”⁵

I would follow through, as they suggested in 1973, in reviewing specific areas of concern in our medical and educational programs, recognizing that “some institutions in various respects are losing their distinctive character as instrumentalities for the furtherance of God’s work on earth. ... While earnest efforts have been made to reform, it is recognized that as institutions grow larger, the difficulty of reforming is greater.”⁶

I would take the lead in recognizing with those leaders “that in an age of growing social consciousness and change, Adventist institutions may become involved in worthy endeavors in

which the world also participates, while neglecting that work which only the church of the remnant can do. ... One of the greatest threats to our institutions of higher learning is seen in the counterfeit philosophies and theologies that may be unconsciously absorbed in worldly institutions by our future teachers and brought back as the ‘wine’ of Babylon to Adventist schools (Rev. 14:8-10; 18:1-4).”⁷

Seeking the “Latter Rain”

I would join in spirit and in fact with the delegates of the world church in 1973 that made the following threefold appeal to all workers and leaders throughout the world:

“1. Without further delay open the heart’s door fully to the waiting, pleading Saviour (Rev. 3:20). Admit Jesus as the absolute Ruler of the life. Let Him enter the heart to transform it and to rule. Under the influence of the ‘early rain,’ live up to all the light you have. Put into practice all the counsel God has given you.

“2. Forsake the spirit of insubordination that too long has influenced individual and church decisions. This will prepare the way for the renewal of the ‘latter rain’ that has been delayed since the earlier years of our history, for God cannot send the Spirit in His fullness while people disregard the counsels He has graciously sent through that same Spirit, the Spirit of Prophecy.

“3. Make a new commitment to the church’s task of reaching earth’s billions with the three angels’ messages. This commitment will call for personal dedication, for personal witnessing, for

personal sacrifice. Moreover, it will call for deep intercession with God on the part of each member, a pleading with God for the ‘latter rain’ of the Holy Spirit’s power for effectual, convincing, loving witness in deed and word.”⁸

Individual and Corporate Repentance

I would put the intent of the 1974 Autumn Council appeal at the top of my daily agenda: “We believe that the spirit of individual and corporate repentance that resulted in the call by the 1973 Annual Council for revival and reformation must continue to be felt around the world; also that the condition of the church described in the 1973 appeal is still accurate, and that the need for revival, repentance, and reformation remains.”⁹

Further, I appeal to our world church, leaders and all church members, that we too “will have discovered joy and peace in knowing through experience that the Christian’s good works are a result of being sustained by divine power, that the ‘faith of Jesus’ produces the character of Jesus.”¹⁰

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¹ *Review and Herald*, Dec. 6, 1973, p. 1.

² *ibid.*

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 5.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *Review and Herald*, Nov. 14, 1974, p. 4.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

If I Were the NEXT GC PRESIDENT...



I Would Address the Soul of the Organization

BY JOHN GRYS

As the General Conference president for the next five years, my top priorities would involve five broad initiatives covering a wide range of areas. While each area by itself would not necessarily redress the fullness of the challenge before us, combined in totality, the cumulative effect of these five priorities could continue moving our church toward greater alignment with our overall purposeful mission. Although not in any specific order, they are as follows.

IF THE BODY IS TRULY THE BODY, THEN IT IS IMPERATIVE WE DISCOVER WAYS OF INCLUDING THE BODY THROUGH AN ONGOING DIALOGIC WAY OF GROWING WHO WE ARE.

Strengthening Structure and Mission

With an organization growing toward 20 million, there would be an immediate intentionality to begin addressing the question of organizational culture. What does an organization with a presence in almost every country recognized in the world hold as the highest values both for those who darken her doorways and for those employed by her? This asks the question, “Who do we intend, by God’s grace, to become while we pursue our mission?” This would include not only the identification of those values but finding ways to strengthen the operationalization of those values. “Value” statements, such as a belief in the Bible, reflect the current organizational confusion regarding values, beliefs, strategies, etc. Also, the seeming preoccupation with “ecclesiastical authority” would be re-imagined against the backdrop of a gift-based call to action rather than one presupposed by paycheck authority. This kind of re-imagining could help us find the necessary balance between unity and diversity without falling into the trap of coercion.

Empowering Young Leaders

A second priority would be to garner the young energy pervasive throughout our organization (a young energy predominately in the unpaid part of our “work force”) and find a way to gather this group together for the purpose of even greater training—a training not directed toward *managing* the organization (though it would not be excluded) but directed toward *leading* the organization. While the current list of values identifies “creativity and innovation,” the question remains whether there is a silent sabotage by values more operational at preserving the current situation. What would it be like to identify, gather, and continuously train the young people (under age 35) of our church worldwide to lead where they are and for the wider sectors of our organization to truly support this by allowing them to innovate and create without fear of positional loss? What if every division in the world identified the top 100 young leaders (both paid and unpaid) who have demonstrated already in their current context both innovation and creativity to meet regularly together with other like-minded men and women to be trained and sent out and to report back annually about the differences being made throughout the world church?

Broadening the Pool of Contributors

A third priority would be to include other disciplines in giving direction, input, and insight into how the church can better be the church. The historical tendency has been to let theology dictate strategy. This isn’t bad, but it is woefully insufficient. There are other “disciplines” within our wider educational community, which have much to contribute to the furthering of the mission and vision of the church, that are often excluded and not able to contribute to the decision-making

processes of the body. Why are most conference/mission presidents former pastors? Why are we more interested in what theology departments around the world (or the Biblical Research Institute) say to the church and not also giving a seat at the table to other disciplines? If the body is truly the body, then it is imperative we discover ways of including the body through an ongoing dialogic way of growing who we are.

Redefining the Measure of “Success”

A fourth priority would be to recalibrate the metrics by which we would define what “success” looks like within our context. We are slowly succumbing to the “bottom line” of financial metrics (or numeral metrics) as a way of both rewarding and unintentionally punishing various facets of the organization. While these metrics may have served us well in the past, they are insufficient today. We must begin to ask tough questions, including whether there are a set of “soft” (not easily measurable) metrics that can come alongside what we already do and provide greater depth and breadth of insight into where our strengths and weaknesses are. This again, returning to priority three, would require the inclusion of other components of our organization that remain largely ignored.

Recognizing Ultimate Truth

Having identified these four priorities, there is a fifth that remains obvious and one that may be the most important of all. While the first four deal with the outer layers of our organization, the fifth submerges and subverts what exists by getting to the heart of the organization—the very soul of our church. This may be stated as an appropriate humility generated by the acknowledgement that man is not saved by knowledge alone and that in the person of Jesus, truly everything

has changed. In him, while everything is sacred, nothing is truly sacred. What we believe is important, no doubt (the world is not flat!). However, what is at least equally important (and I would argue most important in our current climate and condition) remains the question of *how* we believe.

We must somehow come to grips (and continue to re-imagine the grips) with the tension between the simplicity of the biblical narrative centering around Jesus and the increasing complexity of a theology more attuned to fine tuning while ignoring the basic God-placed desires that beat within the chest of every human being around the globe. This thrust of humility recognizes the hand of God beyond our own doors while not diminishing our own place and contribution. This humility calls for admitting that every part of who we are as people and as a people must be subjected to the dynamic movement of the Spirit. We do not possess a corner market on the “truth.” Recognizing that truth has been redefined as a Person, as a relationship, can change the way we think and process the way we engage the wider globe.

Ultimately, these five priorities would require my own walk with my Savior, as president, to be personal priority number one—over meetings, committees, travel, and the demands of the position. Being precedes doing, and what stands as a truism at the personal level remains vitally true at the ecclesiastical level.

John Gryns serves as the executive pastor for the Napa Community Church in Napa, California. He is also founder and consulting editor of The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership.

This Would Be My Prayer

BY MARTIN WEBER

I’m supposed to begin with the sentence: “If I am the president of the General Conference, these are my priorities during the next quinquennium.”

Well, I’ve never been and don’t want to be president of anything, much less the world church. My ministry of 35 years is supportive in nature. So please consider the following as my prayerful hope for whoever is elected or re-elected as GC president.

I offer three wishes for his leadership, each representing a return to vintage principles of the earliest Adventists. Moreover, all of them currently enjoy a renaissance that deserves widespread adoption. Here they are:

1. Leverage all denominational resources to strengthen local churches;
2. Continue seeking diversity in church leadership;
3. Promote the value of “present truth”—framing historic Adventist doctrine in the context of contemporary culture.

Please consider why and how these three initiatives are both vital and doable.

Strengthening Local Churches

The worldwide Seventh-day Adventist organization rests on the foundation of local churches, where God is worshipped every Sabbath and where all members are baptized, disciplined, married, and finally memorialized. All levels of governing exist to support local churches and pastors—from the General Conference through its world divisions to union conferences and the local conferences, to which local churches belong.

If I Were the NEXT GC PRESIDENT...



I SUGGEST THAT THE GREATEST SHORTCOMING OF THE DENOMINATIONAL STRUCTURE IS NO LONGER BLOATED INEFFICIENCY, BUT THE LACK OF SYNERGISTIC COLLABORATION AMONG ADVENTIST ENTITIES.

—MARTIN WEBER

Some argue persuasively for the restructuring of denominational governance, perhaps eliminating either unions or local conferences. I respond (perhaps in selfish bias, since I work for a union conference) that the existing structure can—and must—be calibrated to optimally serve local churches.

Recent years have seen a dramatic downsizing of union and local conferences. The Mid-America Union is one-third the size of what it used to be, efficiently and effectively helping its territory as a pooled service center in ways not easily duplicated locally. Unions administrate departmental training and financing for local church outreach and nurture. They also offer a level of accountability between the global church and the local conference with its congregations.

I suggest that *the greatest shortcoming of the denominational structure is no longer bloated inefficiency, but the lack of synergistic collaboration among Adventist entities.* Union conferences are ideally positioned to orchestrate such cooperation, both proactively and reactively.

Consider our healthcare and educational institutions. Each can and should support the needs and initiatives of the other in facilitating local church outreach and nurture. Our schools struggle financially, while fiscally fit hospitals express frustration about not having sufficient Adventist employees.

Yet our educational system produces excellent nurses, physicians, accountants, and administrators. So let's facilitate a synergistic partnership in which Adventist healthcare interacts supportively with Adventist education within a union conference—much like major league baseball supplies training and funding within regional “farm systems” that educate its employees.

Similar collaboration—even to the point of consolidation—can be achieved division-wide among Adventist publishing houses and media centers, synergizing the “old media” of books and magazines with the “new media” of digitized video and Internet production. This combined enterprise could optimally support the outreach and nurture of local churches.

The GC president is uniquely positioned to hold the entire Adventist enterprise accountable for working together as a harmonized unit to support local churches.

Enhancing Diversity in Church Leadership

The Adventist Church has come a long way toward ethnic diversity of its leadership, but not far enough! In addition, we have much ground to recover in empowering women and young adults as leaders. Ellen White had supreme *de facto* authority in the foundation and operation of our denomination. She instructed and rebuked entire assemblies of church leaders. I'm puzzled that those most vocal in heralding her continuing authority seem the most resistant to ordaining (or even appointing) any other woman for significant leadership. Finally remedying this—if necessary, division by division as local culture permits—surely qualifies as a paramount priority for GC leadership.

Ellen White was not only a woman, but a teenager when called to ministry. Most pioneer Adventist leaders were twentysomethings. Now more than ever, we need the energy and insights of young adults—not just as attendees or even mere participants, but as fully empowered strategists. Current GC President Jan Paulsen is leading the way in dialogue with and promotion of young adult leadership.

Rediscovering Present Truth

Finally, I pray that the General Conference president elected in Atlanta will use his influence to restore the excitement of present truth—the most unique theological contribution of Adventist pioneers. Outreach today must interact intellectually and socially with the 21st-century culture of postmodernism—contextualizing ourselves while avoiding theological and moral compromise.

At stake here is whether the body of Christ will be incarnational. Jesus took upon himself not only human flesh, but human experience contemporary for his time and place. He tailored his teaching for his Palestinian Jewish audience. We too must be relevant in our own culture, speaking to the concerns of our time with our timeless truth.

Seventh-day Adventism with proof-texted points of truth flourished in the heyday of modernism, which glorified propositional knowledge. But postmodernists today respond to truth expressed in human experience rather than in 28 points of impersonal doctrine. And here is where the vintage Adventist Great Controversy narrative speaks powerfully to our generation. *No other*

church or world religion can offer what Adventists have for postmodern seekers: Sabbath of relational rest; heaven's sanctuary of refuge, grace, and justice; holistic health message; closure for evil, etc. Every Adventist belief, properly understood, contributes to the grand narrative of Eden lost to Eden restored.

So success in evangelizing postmodernists requires Adventists to frame our 28 fundamental beliefs in the context of our unique Great Controversy narrative. Since the Bible itself is mostly narrative, this should not be a problem for us.

All three presidential priorities here proposed, reclaimed from our earliest Adventist heritage, are fueling church growth wherever implemented in postmodern society. My prayer is that the new president will lead us onward in their fulfillment.

Martin Weber, D.Min., is assistant to the president and communication director for the Mid-America Union. He also operates the website www.sda4me.com.

Who Are the Most Creative People in the Church?

Adventist Today magazine is looking for the top 25 most creative persons in the Seventh-day Adventist Church worldwide. They may be artists, musicians, educators, pastors, evangelists, business people, medical personnel, administrators, volunteers, or anyone else who is a member of an Adventist church.

Your nominees should meet the following criteria:

1. They are members of a Seventh-day Adventist church.
2. They are making a recognizable difference in the community they serve.
3. They have developed a new method or plan that has not been tried before or, if using a tried method, they have given it a twist that makes it more successful than what has been tried in the past.

Send your nominees to J. David Newman, editor, by email to adventisttoday1966@gmail.com. Be sure to include: (1) name of nominee, (2) where and how the person serves, (3) how to contact the nominee, and (4) a description in 250 words of why you are nominating that person.



A Patient, Unchanging God—Who Repents

By Alden Thompson

My 1969 Chev Malibu knows I don't like change. I bought it new when I was a pastor in Fontana, California, and I still have it. Even the 1956 Ford from my college days is still in my brother's garage. Let's face it, old people like old stuff.

Don't get me wrong. I'm more than ready for the last great change—the one that happens “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet” (1 Cor. 15:51-52, NRSV). I don't understand the *when* or the *how*, but I live in hope of that great change.

In the meantime, I want the world to just stand still for a moment, or at least slow down. I need to catch my breath.

No use. The world of twitter, jitter, and change hastens on apace, and many of the changes, even in my church, are alarming. My students don't take notes in class anymore, so I give them handouts—and they take even fewer notes. They know less and less of the Bible, and when I have them read it, they are astonished and often troubled.

Because of the influence of Ellen White, Adventists have been blessed with an extensive educational system—one that is now at risk because “believers” think Adventist pastors need zeal, not education, and “thinkers” sense that their pastors simply want them to believe without asking the hard questions.

Remarkably, in her very first education counsel (1872), Ellen White urged that “Christ can be best glorified by those who serve Him intelligently,” a line that became a favorite of hers.¹ She pointedly told the church that the “tendency to cease to advance in the knowledge of the truth” has consistently been linked with the decline in real spiritual life. Believers become “satisfied” with what

they already know and “discourage any further investigation of the Scriptures. They become conservative and seek to avoid discussion.” If “no new questions are started by investigation of the Scriptures,” she warned, “there will be many now, as in ancient times, who will hold to tradition and worship they know not what.”²

Yet the Bible itself is a wonderful resource to help us cope with change. It shows how God preserves the unchanging principles of his character in the very process of adapting those principles to the needs of his children who live in an ever-changing world.

What I find so astonishing is how clearly the Bible illustrates the process—if we aren't afraid to see it. But devout believers are too easily frightened by what the Bible reveals about change. So they read only their favorite passages. Or they revise it. Or, more typically, they simply avoid it. Too often that leads to deadly midnight discoveries.

To be quite honest, I will admit that this very conservative Adventist has needed help from friends in learning to cope with change. Chief among them is my friend Ellen White. But that's another story told elsewhere in some detail.³ Here I focus directly on the Bible, looking first at two surprising words from the Old Testament, and then to an illustration from the New.

Surprising Words: Repent and Forever

The familiar KJV of Malachi 3:6 declares, “I am the LORD, I change not.” But for those who want an unchanging Bible as well as an unchanging God, the KJV haunts them in other passages with two difficult words: “repent” and “forever.” Let's take a quick glimpse at each.

A word study in the KJV Old Testament reveals that God “repents” more often than anyone else. Modern evangelical versions (NKJV, NASB, NIV) typically soften the troublesome word to “relent.” The NRSV is more blunt. In the story of Jonah, for example, when the people turned from evil, God “changed his mind” and didn't punish them (Jonah 3:10).

An even more startling example describes the transfer of God's favor from King Saul to David. To Saul's urgent appeal, Samuel declares that God “will not lie or repent: for he is not a man that he should repent” (1 Sam. 15:29). But just a few lines later, in verse 35, the KJV reports that the Lord “repented” for making Saul king over Israel. The Hebrew word is the same in both instances. The crucial point is that God does not repent as a man repents, for he's done nothing wrong. But when humans change, God changes, a truth vividly preserved by the KJV “repent.”

And that takes us to the second surprising word, “forever,” which sounds absolute and unbending in English. But again, Scripture surprises. When God took the priesthood away from Eli, for example, the prophetic messenger reminded the old priest of the promise that his priestly house would last “forever” (1 Sam. 2:30, NKJV). But bad behavior changed that. A new priest would be appointed who would serve “forever” (2 Sam. 2:35, NKJV). In short, one “forever” replaced another “forever”—neither of them lasting “forever”!

We are not the first to be misled by the word. The Hebrew original could be equally troublesome. The author of Psalm 89, for example, goes on and on in

celebration of God's covenant with David, concluding with the line that David's throne would be established "forever" (Psa. 89:37, NKJV). But the cold shower begins with the next verse: "But now you have spurned and rejected him" (Psa. 89:38, NRSV). In short, from a biblical perspective, "forever" does not last "forever." And that can prepare us to see the crucial New Testament illustration of divine adaptation to human needs.

Opening the Door to the Gentiles

Growing up as a devout young Adventist, I somehow concluded that the full corpus of Old Testament laws remained in place until the cross of Christ. God then snapped his fingers, so to speak, leaving in place only the 10 commandments and the health laws.

That's far too tidy. What is now clear to me is that Jesus illustrated the law of love in wonderful ways, including the principle of full equality between all human beings. While on Earth, he leveled the three great inequalities of Gal. 3:28: Jew/Gentile, slave/free, male/female. But the ideal lived out by Jesus was not implemented by his followers until many years later. Indeed, the only inequality effectively addressed in the New Testament itself was the Jew/Gentile issue. It was centuries before slaves and women began to experience anything of the freedom and the equality promised by Jesus.

Even the liberation of the Gentiles did not happen immediately at Christ's death on the cross. The New Testament record suggests that God waited some six to eight years before he addressed the issue.⁴ The first steps are recorded in Acts 10. After an angel prepares the Gentile Cornelius, God goes to work on Peter with a threefold vision: Kill and eat! Peter objects. But a voice from heaven declares: "What God has made clean, you must not

call profane" (Acts 10:15, NRSV).

So with fear and trembling and six witnesses, Peter heads out for Cornelius' home. With his first words to the Gentiles, one can almost hear Peter hyperventilating as he steps into forbidden territory: "You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile" (Acts 10:28, NRSV). At the end of their visit, Peter's Jewish companions were "astounded" that the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:45, NRSV).

The next major events come at least a decade later, described in Acts 14 and 15. Scripture tells how Paul experimented with creative forms of evangelism—and was far enough away from church headquarters to pull it off. In short, he decided that devout Gentiles (like Cornelius) could become Christians without first becoming Jews. Circumcision was unnecessary.

According to Scripture, his experiment was wildly successful—everywhere except in Jerusalem! There some insisted that circumcision was a biblical mandate. They were right. The Old Testament nowhere suggests that it would cease.

The debate was intense. Peter spoke for the Gentiles, and James formulated a conclusion making it clear that circumcision was no longer mandatory for Gentiles who follow Jesus. James' opening words to the formal declaration are a wonderful guide for all church counsels: "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us..." (Acts 15:28, NRSV).

Without fanfare, circumcision was gone, though Paul's experience with Timothy recorded in the next chapter (Acts 16) reveals a certain pragmatism: Timothy was circumcised because he would be working with Jews. Though the Old Testament nowhere suggests that circumcision would be laid aside, the

Holy Spirit led the early Christians to make the change. It was a mission-driven decision involving a God-given symbol that had run its course.

A new item on James' list is also noteworthy: namely, the prohibition against food offered to idols. It is new because of issues prevailing in the Roman world; food offered to idols represented emperor worship. The community knew it had to address that symbol. Yet 1 Corinthians 8 reveals that Paul was already taking steps to set the issue aside—except for those whose background invested the symbol with such weight that disregarding it might cause eternal damage.

Our summary can be stated in the words of Heb. 13:8: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (NRSV). Jesus was the incarnation of the God of the Old Testament. His Jewish opponents wanted to stone him for making such a claim.⁵ But it is a terribly important truth that the same Jesus is at work in both testaments, patiently waiting until his people are ready to take the next step. Maybe that's why so many of the New Testament passages admonish us toward patience. We see it in both Father and Son; by God's grace we will also see it in the church, the body of Christ, as we seek to be faithful in our changing world.

¹ *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 3, 1872, p. 160, repeated without variation in other publications while she was still alive in 1892, 1894, 1904, 1909, and 1913. The exact line also appears in compilations from 1923, 1946, 1977, and 1995. A variant including the phrase "serve him intelligently" was published in 1884, 1906, and 1908, and in a compilation from 1982.

² *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5, 1889, pp. 706-707; also in *Gospel Workers*, 1915, pp. 297-98, and in *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, 1946, p. 39.

³ See Alden Thompson, *Escape From the Flames: How Ellen White grew from fear to joy and helped me do it too* (Pacific Press, 2005).

⁴ The New Testament offers no dates. The figures noted above are estimates.

⁵ Cf. John 8:58-59.



Death Before Sin

I applaud Ole Olesen for taking on the controversial question of death before sin (Spring 2010). It seems to me that this is another issue on which church theologians and administrators would disagree somewhat with church science teachers. It would be easy as a theologian to say that death must come after sin. If not, then several well-constructed “house of cards” doctrines could come tumbling down. However, if you rigidly state that there was no death of plants or animals of any kind, then the poor science teacher goes home scratching his head.

When Adam or Eve ate fruit or vegetables, were the plant cells not dying as they were digested? Did every seed become a plant, and did every plant live forever? How can you have rich, dark soil in the garden without decay of some kind?

What about insects? How could every ant and beetle live forever without overcrowding the earth?

What about rapidly reproducing animals like mice and rabbits? Was their reproductive cycle different back then?

Today we see finely tuned killing machines like mountain lions and great white sharks. Explanations for

these creatures can border on the bizarre, with theories about Satan doing genetic manipulation or supernatural crossbreeding. And don't even get me started on the subject of dinosaurs...

The Bible is not a science book. It focuses on the human condition and God's intervening to save us. It would behoove us to be very careful what lines we draw in the sand when it comes to doctrines. And I would hope our scientists and theologians and administrators would admit that some questions just can't be answered completely right now and that's OK. Open-mindedness and honest discussion is always appreciated, as well as thought-provoking articles like Ole Olesen's.

DAVID BORECKY
Escondido, California

Church Institutions

Absolutely! David Newman in “Church Institutions Are Not Necessarily Christian” (Spring 2010) is dead on target when he calls SDA institutions to a higher ethic than secular ones. Very risky subject, though, as I personally discovered.

I preached a sermon at Forest Lake Church a few years back on this very subject. Used an illustration demonstrating how a hospital policy might be beneficial for management and financials but demoralizing to the employee. Florida Hospital and Adventist Health System administrators went ballistic. You know, Orlando is a Florida Hospital company town. Within days I had two hospital administrators in my office, followed by a summons to the CEO's office of Adventist Health System. There I was grilled by 6-8 administrators who told me that I didn't know what I was talking about, were aghast that I would question hospital policies, and accused me of deliberately undermining their leadership.

They dismissed my revelation that I received more email responses to that sermon than any in my life—the huge majority from their employees, who anonymously told me that things were worse than I depicted but that they were afraid of reprisals. Nor were the health administrators interested in my offer to facilitate a focus group between management and employees to discuss how policies might better be formed and communicated. Instead, their repeated demand was “You're never going to do that again, are you?”

Did I say “company town?” I had violated their trust by pulling back the cloak and exposing a demeaning employee policy. The insult was not forgotten. About three years later, I was dismissed from Forest Lake, partly due to my voiced concern about the use of tithe but also due to “behind the scenes” manipulation by offended AHS officials working with conference leaders to silence such embarrassing questionings (this I later learned from folks who heard these administrators talking among themselves). Seems I remember that a prophet once wrote, “What the church needs are men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.” Risky business, though.

So, David, keep raising the banner high even if the heavens seem to shake a bit.

DR. TERRY POOLER, PASTOR
Sabbath Grace Fellowship
Orlando, Florida

Mavericks Again

Once again, David Newman (Winter 2010) has hit the proverbial nail on the head. But it was just a good tap, because he fell short of declaring our need to discover the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and get involved in gift-based ministries.

Why do we need mavericks in the

church? Because “boring” and “dying” are the adjectives most applicable to so many of our churches, with the latter being a direct result of the former. We’ve become so focused on structure that we’ve lost sight of our need for the Holy Spirit as our source of power and guidance. We look forward to the “latter rain” while ignoring the power available to us today, which we must embrace now if we ever hope to receive greater power later.

The “mavericks” the church needs are not those who loudly promote a powerless form of godliness and look at issues from a contrarian point of view. It is those who are serving in the power of the Holy Spirit.

WILLIAM NOEL
Madison, Alabama



Biracial Conferences Ordain vs. Commission GC Session Predictions

Hey Adventist Man, what do you think of this year's theme “Share Him Again in 2010”?

It makes me wonder how many per diems, travel budgets, and hours were spent coming up with a theme better served at junior camp.

Roman Catholics on the Hook

Wow!!! Let me get this (Winter 2010) straight: (1) SDA interpretation of prophecy is incorrect. Regretfully or otherwise, that is what you are saying. (2) The Catholic Church really isn't so bad now. (3) Vatican II was so wonderful that we can overlook the cult of Mary, false Sabbath, idol worship, etc. and join hands and sing kum-ba-yah. (Oh yeah, regarding your Nazi persecution point, did you miss the whole Hitler's pope part of history?) (4) Ellen White was really just a bigot, but it's OK 'cause everybody was back then. Now here we are in the modern age and can just get over it. (5) We should abandon SDA end-time theology because really it is the Muslims right now being aggressive. (6) Spirit of Prophecy is obsolete.

That is about right, isn't it? You know, I have tried to avoid conspiracy theories about secret societies and their infiltration into the SDA Church, but this article (Winter 2010) has left me wondering if it is true. Other than this, the only explanation can be that your subscriptions are so low you thought something really shocking would puff them up. Either that or you are really as ignorant as your article. There is no way you can convince me you had no idea how offensive this article is. You should be ashamed to call yourself Adventists. It just goes to show that our worst enemies in the last days really will be professed Adventists.

SHAY SWAIN
Little Britain, Ontario, Canada

Adventist Man

A SATIRICAL LOOK AT ADVENTIST LIFE

How can we end biracial conferences in North America?

There are a couple of ways this could be done. One would be for administrators of each conference to arm wrestle; the winners would become the new administrators and the others would be sent back out into the field.

But perhaps the easiest way would be the outrageous and damnable suggestion that a conference be required to support itself. Imagine, expecting people to pay their own bills without bailouts. Its un-American and un-Adventist—hence, biracial conferences...and several empty academies.

What is the difference between the “ordaining” and “commissioning” of ministers in the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

A Y chromosome.

How can we get pastors to support Christian education?

Hire educated pastors as opposed to acquiring them from unaccredited Bible Schools.

Any predictions for this summer's General Conference Session in Atlanta?

People will be blessed, offended, happy, angry—and if local merchants are lucky, Adventists will break \$10 dollars this year despite not breaking any of the Ten Commandments.

Adventist Man, is it true that Eastern religious practices are making their way into Adventism?

Yes, I'm afraid it is true. There are some in our church who are attempting to bring Eastern thought into our sanctified Western culture. They have completely ignored history, which clearly demonstrates Christianity's inception in the United States about the year 1844. Let us all be wary of these “new age” methods such as “meditation,” “spiritual formation,” and “prayer.”

Do you have a tough question? Adventist Man has “the answer.” As a former member of “the remnant,” Adventist Man was ranked 8,391 of the 144,000—and working his way up. Now he relies solely on grace and friendship with Jesus. You can email him at atoday@atoday.com.

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Our mission is to help church members respect differences of opinion within our community of faith and honor the spiritual integrity of all—even those who disagree with us.



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