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**Christ Our
Righteousness**

**The revolution
we all need**

**Evolution
and diversity of life**

**Career in the
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Volume 23

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EDITORIAL

Rules of engagement

Rules of engagement determine how military operations are conducted. Those rules are extremely important, as they provide consistent, understandable, and enforceable standards for how military forces act in times of war.

As Christians, we are engaged in serious warfare – the cosmic conflict between God and Satan (Ephesians 6:12, NRSV). Do we have any rules of engagement so that our victory in this great controversy will be sure and certain?

The Gospel of Luke gives us a clue at its outset. Here Luke tells the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth, the first two individuals to be directly involved in the redemptive mission of Jesus. The Gospel’s portrayal of the childless couple informs us of at least five rules of engagement – the nature and modalities of our partnership with God in His plan to save the world.

Rule 1: Obey the will of God our Commander unflinchingly.

Both Zechariah and Elizabeth “were upright in the sight of God, observing all the commandments and regulations blamelessly” (Luke 1:6). The notion of obedience almost feels offensive to rugged individualists and even to so-called “liberated” Christians. However, as followers of Jesus, we are conscious that we are involved in a spiritual warfare against the rulers, authorities, and powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:10-18); we do not even understand the nature of the enemy’s operation. Our only safety and effectiveness is found in staying close to the counsel and guidance of our Commander in Chief, factoring His instructions and values into the simple as well as the complex decisions we make on a daily basis.

Rule 2: Obedience is no insurance against life’s perplexities.

Although Zechariah and Elizabeth were obedient to God and willing soldiers in His great army of righteousness, “they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years” (Luke 1:7). Unflinching obedience to God is no insurance against life’s problems and perplexities. When faced with life’s darker realities, a question that is commonly asked is, “Where did I go wrong, or what have I done to deserve this?” The assumption behind such a question is either self-doubt (“Was I really obedient?”) or self-righteousness (“I was obedient, but does God care?”). Such was certainly not the case with Zechariah and Elizabeth, for they were blameless “in the sight of God.”

That is not to say we do not reap the consequences of our wrong choices, but here, such was certainly not the case. One cannot imagine a more natural and legitimate wish and prayer for a God-serving and God-honoring young couple: to have a child, a fruit of their love and union to brighten their home. Coming from a priestly lineage, they would be very familiar with the words of the Psalmist, “Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your sons will be like olive shoots around your table. Thus is the man blessed who fears the Lord” (Psalm 128:3, 4). Yet they had been deprived of the blessing and were now “well along in years.” In life’s warfare, God’s people must live with the reality that faithfulness and obedience are continually confronted with the puzzles and perplexities of this sinful world.

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Rule 3: Remember that God answers the prayers of His people; He answers in His time and in terms of His greater purpose to save the world.

Zechariah and Elizabeth led a life of obedience, prayer, faith and hope, and yet life seemed bewildering. Even as they accepted this perplexity of childlessness, God chose to answer their prayers to fulfill His purpose in the great controversy. The answer could not be mistaken: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son” (Luke 1:13).

One can imagine the angel Gabriel taking a pause after uttering the first phrase, “Your prayer has been heard.” Zechariah may have wondered to which prayer the angel was referring, because he was a man of prayer who regularly and daily presented his petitions and supplications. Gabriel was referring to a prayer Zechariah probably forgot: the prayer for a child. After all, both he and Elizabeth were “well along in years.” They had forgotten. God had not. They had passed the age of child bearing; but nothing is impossible for the Commander in Chief. He always answers, but does so in His time and in terms of His greater purpose.

Their son was to bring them great joy and delight; he would be filled with

the Spirit and would prepare the way for the Lord Jesus. He would “go on before the Lord in the power and spirit of Elijah” (Luke 1:17 NIV). God’s answers are always the best for us and contribute to the advancement of His cause. Greatness in the sight of God is not measured by the way world defines greatness – power, fame, wealth, and position – but by our usefulness in the kingdom’s cause.

Rule 4: Because nothing is impossible for our Supreme Commander, with whom we are in partnership, He expects us to believe the unbelievable.

Imagine Zechariah’s astonishment at the momentous announcement. “How can this happen?” he asked. “I am an old man and my wife is well along in years” (vs. 18). One would expect some sympathy from the angel; a few words of explanation would have helped. Instead, Zechariah was chastised for his unbelief, at least temporarily. “And now you will be silent and not be able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which come true at their proper time” (vs. 20).

The human heart tends to assess our predicaments in terms of the resources we naturally dispose of and thus overlooks the fact that God has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Jesus. As we yield to this tendency, we weaken our position as God’s representatives in the great controversy. But our Commander in Chief continually draws our attention to His sacred Word to acquaint us each day with the infinite resources at our disposal and with the certainty of victory in our spiritual warfare. Therefore, God’s rules of engagement demands: “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His power” (Ephesians 6:10, NRSV).



Rule 5: There is always a good ending to the story of our partnership with our Commander in Chief.

Finally, the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth, the story of their faith, prayer, obedience and hope, ended well. The elderly priest makes a great prayer of confession: “[God] has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people” (Luke 1:25). Taking away our disgrace, restoring our dignity, giving us a place of honor in partnering with Him in the greatest of all rescue operations: this is what our Commander in Chief offers us. Soon there will be an end to our earthly story and a beginning of an eternal one at His second coming. Yes, there is indeed a good ending to our story as we embrace His rules of engagement.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gilbert R. Cangy'.

Gilbert R. Cangy
*Youth Ministry Director, General
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Christ Our Righteousness – Our salvation, our mission, and our hope

by Ted N.C. Wilson

Only Christ-empowered justification and sanctification will save us, change us, and nurture us into true disciples of Christ. It is something that Jesus does both for us and in us.

Often Seventh-day Adventists have been accused of being legalistic, promoting salvation by works. Nothing could be further from the truth! As we understand our need for revival and reformation in these last days, we need to realize that the foundation of revival and reformation is nothing less than a full and correct acceptance of Christ and His all-encompassing righteousness. The voices of Seventh-day Adventists should be the strongest in proclaiming salvation through the grace of Christ and Him alone! The two great provisions of salvation – justification and sanctification – cannot be separated, for they constitute the fullness of Christ, Our Righteousness.

At times, there seems to be a confusion about justification and sanctification and how they relate to each other and our salvation. Some promote justification to the exclusion of sanctification and arrive at what has been termed “cheap grace.” Others focus almost exclusively on sanctification and arrive at what has been termed “perfectionism,” or a self-initiated form of legalistic salvation by works. But God’s all-encompassing righteousness involves the completeness of both justification and sanctification. It is His plan, not ours. It is His way of bringing us into an immediate and

long-term relationship with Him in preparation for spending eternity with Him. It is His divinely-appointed means of not only calling us good but also making us good; of changing both our standing in the books of heaven and our character in life here on earth.

God’s plan of salvation is so marvelous and assuring, and yet incomprehensible in every detail. It is so simple that a child can understand it, and yet so grand that we will be studying it throughout eternity. Jesus, the Son of God, came to this earth to become one of us. He lived a perfect and sinless life on this earth, died for us, rose to life, intercedes for us in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary, and will soon return to take us home.

Special privilege of Adventists

God has entrusted into the hands of His last-day people the privilege of proclaiming the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14, that focus on Christ and His righteousness and turning people back to the true worship of God. “In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light

from the Word of God. They have been given a work of the most solemn import – the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels’ messages. There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention.”¹

What this means is that we are to lift up the true worship of God, our Creator, giving glory to Him and proclaiming the everlasting gospel and the arrival of His judgment. We are to proclaim the fall of Babylon – the forces that bring spiritual confusion among people – and return to a pure and simple understanding of God’s plan of salvation. We are to warn against worshiping the beast or his image and receiving the mark of the beast on our forehead or hand – which means accepting the authority that has claimed to change God’s law and promote a false teaching of biblical truth and Christ’s righteousness.

The truth as in Jesus

Adventists have been called to proclaim the truth as it is in Jesus. He and He alone is our salvation. Paul declares unequivocally: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone would boast. For we are His

workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:8-10).

The grace of God alone saves us from sin, justifies us through Christ’s righteousness, and proclaims us perfect before God. As we accept the power that accompanies justification, Christ begins to sanctify us, transforming us into His glorious image. This entire change is due to the all-encompassing righteousness of Christ. That is why Paul, after describing the incredible humility of Christ in coming to die as a perfect substitute for us as sinners, proclaims in Philippians 2:12, 13: “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”

This is not a call for salvation by works. This is a call for righteousness

by faith in God “who works in you both to will and to do.” When we accept Jesus into our lives, a miraculous Spirit-filled conversion takes place and Christ changes us into His likeness. Christ justifies and allows us to connect with Him so that we become more and more like Him.

That is why the unconverted become converted. That is why drunkards become sober. That is why loose-living people become moral. That is why mean-spirited individuals become peacemakers. That is why liars become honest. That is why filthy-minded people become pure. That is why evolutionists become creationists. That is why selfish, self-centered people become selfless, generous benefactors.

It is all due to the power of God that begins to produce the fruits of the Spirit in our lives. Hence, James is right: “Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:17). By focusing our complete atten-

tion on Christ and His righteousness, we are placed in a right relationship with Him, and His power changes us from within.

Paul describes this provision for a right relationship in one of the most powerful verses of the Bible: “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). God, the Father, provided His Son as a sacrifice for our sins, that we would be able to take on the perfect righteousness of Christ. This is the “born-again” experience Jesus proclaimed, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

This born-again experience makes us an entirely new person. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). Through the leading of the Holy Spirit, as we confess our sins and fall at the foot of the cross before Christ, we are cleansed of our sins and recreated into the image of God. “If we confess our sins,” says John, “He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). He further states, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12, 13). And again: “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith” (1 John 5:4).

What is Christ’s righteousness?

We are saved by grace and we live by faith, all because of and through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord! We can proclaim with Paul, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who

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loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). That is to say, accepting Christ and His righteousness means accepting Him and obeying Him and the wonderful truths and doctrines of the Bible, all centered in Him. As Paul says, “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:11-13).

In verses 5 and 6, Paul indicates that it was “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.” Note what Paul says: we are justified through Christ’s power alone (“according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration”) and sanctified through Christ’s power alone (the “renewing of the Holy Spirit whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior”). All our righteousness, either in the books of heaven or in our lives on earth, comes through the grace and power of Christ alone.

Paul further states in verse 7 “that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” We are justified by Christ. We are covered with His robe of righteousness. This justifying righteousness is imputed to us. We appear perfect before the Father, just as if we had not sinned. *That is Christ’s righteousness.*

In verse 8, Paul says, “This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.” The good works are not done by our own strength but accomplished by the sanctifying power of Christ. The Holy Spirit works in us

to make us more and more like Christ. We are totally dependent on our relationship with Christ for sanctification. *That is Christ’s righteousness.*

The Spirit of Prophecy gives us some wonderful insights on Christ’s righteousness. Here are some selected gems:

Christ has made a way of escape. “We have no righteousness of our own with which to meet the claims of the law of God. But Christ has made a way of escape for us. He lived on earth amid trials and temptations such as we have to meet. He lived a sinless life. He died for us, and now He offers to take our sins and give us His righteousness. If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ’s character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned.”²

Christ changes the heart. He abides in your heart by faith. You are to maintain this connection with Christ by faith and the continual surrender of your will to Him; and so long as you do this, He will work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure. ... So we have nothing in ourselves of which to boast. We have no ground for self-exaltation. Our only ground of hope is in the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and in that wrought by His Spirit working in and through us.”³

A life in Christ is a life of restfulness.... Your hope is not in yourself; it is in Christ. ... Let the mind dwell upon His love, upon the beauty, the perfection of His character. Christ in His self-denial, Christ in His humiliation, Christ in His purity and holiness. Christ in His matchless love – this is the subject for the soul’s contemplation. It is by loving Him, copying Him, depending wholly upon Him, that you are to be transformed into His likeness.”⁴

Christ is our all in all. “In taking upon Himself man’s nature in its

fallen condition, Christ did not in the least participate in its sin. ... We should have no misgivings in regard to the perfect sinlessness of the human nature of Christ. Our faith must be an intelligent faith, looking unto Jesus in perfect confidence, in full and entire faith in the atoning sacrifice. ... Divine power is placed upon man, that he may become a partaker of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. This is why repenting, believing man can be made the righteousness of God in Christ.”⁵

Conformity to God’s will.

“The righteousness which Christ taught is conformity of heart and life to the revealed will of God. Sinful man can become righteous only as they have faith in God and maintain a vital connection with Him. Then true godliness will elevate the thoughts and ennoble the life. Then the external forms of religion accord with the Christian’s internal purity.”⁶

A work of a lifetime

Let no one in the Seventh-day Adventist Church think of himself or herself as better than anyone else or accuse others of not being holy or perfect. We are all sinners at the foot of the cross in need of a Savior who provides for us His righteousness. As we consecrate ourselves to Christ and allow Him to work in us, we stay close to Him and His Word. In this process, “Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.”⁷

It is not in ourselves to accomplish this task of perfectly reproducing the character of Christ in us. We must daily allow the Holy Spirit to change us more and more into the likeness of Christ. It is the work of a lifetime. We are to ask for Christ’s character in our lives as we learn practical obedience to His Word through His power.

We are not to work towards what may be termed “perfectionism,” reflecting a legalistic checklist or pulling ourselves up by our own power. We must not point out the faults of others or bring about division in the church with accusations that we are more righteous than others. We are not to think of ourselves as perfect, except as we are perfect in Christ’s righteousness – what He does for us justifying us, and what He does through us sanctifying us.

We are to be unified in Christ in word and action. “The secret of unity is found in the quality of believers in Christ. The reason for all division, discord, and difference is found in separation from Christ. Christ is the center to which all should be attracted; for the nearer we approach the center, the closer we shall come together in feeling, in sympathy, in love, growing into the character and image of Jesus.”⁸

We are not to think that we are righteous in our own right. We are completely dependent on Christ for any changes in our lives as we submit to Him. We are never to boast of being perfect or having attained per-

fection. “No one who claims holiness is really holy. Those who are registered as holy in the books of Heaven are not aware of the fact, and are the last ones to boast of their own goodness. None of the prophets and apostles ever professed holiness, not even Daniel, Paul, or John. The righteous never make such a claim. The more nearly they resemble Christ, the more they lament their unlikeness to Him.”⁹

“When men learn they cannot earn righteousness by their own merit of works, and they look with firm and entire reliance upon Jesus Christ as their only hope, there will not be so much of self and so little of Jesus. ... God works and cooperates with the gifts He has imparted to man, and man, by being a partaker of the divine nature, and doing the work of Christ may be an overcomer and win eternal life. ... Divine power and the human agency combined will be a complete success, for Christ’s righteousness accomplishes everything.”¹⁰

This is truly Christ’s all-encompassing righteousness. We are totally dependent on Him.

How, then, should we live?

So how should we live in these last days of earth’s history just before Christ’s second coming? How should we understand the plan of salvation?

Cheap grace will not do it. It denies the power of the Holy Spirit to change the life of the believer day by day to become more and more like Christ. Legalism will not do it. It blocks the only way to salvation, which is total dependence on Jesus Christ, our only way to salvation. An intellectual, higher-critical approach will not do it. It destroys the very miracle of conversion and sanctification and strips God’s salvation of its power to change lives.

Only Christ-empowered justification and sanctification will save us, change us, and nurture us into true disciples of Christ. It is something that Jesus does both for us and in us. “There is no excuse for sin, or for

indolence. Jesus has led the way, and He wishes us to follow in His steps. He has suffered, He has sacrificed as none of us can, that He might bring salvation within our reach. We need not be discouraged. Jesus came to our world to bring divine power to man, that through His grace, we might be transformed into His likeness.”¹¹

Through His grace we can have divine power and His character, as we are made more and more like Him. Christ came to this earth. He lived a sinless life, died for us, rose for us, intercedes right now for us in the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary as our High Priest, and will soon return as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. What a wonderful day that will be! The culmination of all of earth’s history and the end of the great controversy! It will be the ultimate revelation of His all-encompassing righteousness and salvation! We will go home to be with Him forever, never to be tempted again, never to be separated from our Lord!

Ted N.C. Wilson (Ph.D., New York University) is the president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

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The revolution we all need

by Lincoln E. Steed

The world is in a revolutionary phase.
Why not us?

Periodically, our world is flushed with revolution. Times when the old order is shaken and a new model emerges. History shows that such moments not only reshape their times but radically shape the future.

The China of 1963 was drifting toward stagnation. No workers' paradise had emerged from the post-World War II civil war. An erstwhile ally, Russia, had taken to treating the Chinese as irrelevant. And the United States had begun massing troops in nearby Vietnam, partly in order to check Chinese power.

In 1963, Chinese leader Mao Zedong penned a poem. The old revolutionary reached deep to recapture the imagery of another time. "So many deeds cry out to be done," he wrote. "And always urgently: The world rolls on. Time presses. Ten thousand years are too long. Seize the day, seize the hour! The four seas are rising, clouds and water raging. The five continents are rocking, wind and thunder roaring. Our force is irresistible, away with all pests."

Within a short time China was convulsed by the Cultural Revolution. But the result was not what Mao expected. The result was Nixon in China, openness to the West, and the ultimate emergence of China as a new economic superpower.

Today we are witnessing that same radical testing of norms in the Arab world. First Tunisia, then Egypt has been convulsed by popular revolutions that toppled their regimes. Hardly a

country in the area has escaped urgent popular calls for change. Even the usually solid Kingdom of Saudi Arabia looks soft in the face of demands for change. In Syria, the regime has sent tanks into the streets to sweep away the ever-growing dissent. In Libya the civil war rages on.

Revolution to where?

Where is this moment of revolutionary fervor taking us?

As World War I was imminent, Ellen G. White wrote that "rulers and statesmen, men who occupy positions of trust and authority, thinking men and women of all classes, have their attention fixed on the events taking place around us. They are watching the relations that exist among the nations. They observe the intensity that is taking possession of every earthly element and they recognize that something great and decisive is about to take place — that the world is on the verge of a stupendous crisis." That description applies with much more force today. This is a revolutionary moment hardly without precedent.

As is so often the case, religion is a central dynamic. Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Internet access may have functioned as enabling tools for change in the Middle East, but it was the clash of religious outlooks which fed it. First it was the war on terrorism, and now the desire for change. Freedom is in the air. But freedom from what, and freedom to believe and

practice what? The story is ongoing.

Jesus began His ministry with a revolutionary moment at the synagogue in Nazareth. He was a young, untested man by the standards of His day. But the rabbi was open-minded enough to honor the return of the hometown boy with His few followers by allowing Him to read from the Torah. Given the book of Isaiah, Jesus read from chapter 61: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18-19, NKJV). Powerful words, indeed. This was followed by Jesus' telling those present, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Downtrodden vassals of Imperial Rome could not help but be thrilled by those words.

A little over three years later, Judas would betray his Master over a misunderstanding of those words. And a few years after that, Rome would utterly crush the Jews and destroy Jerusalem after a revolt fueled by the same misunderstanding of the revolutionary concept.

Jesus presented religious freedom as the central point of His mission. Man was enslaved to sin. He must be freed. He could be free. This revolution in thinking was possible. This is the gospel story.

Adventists and religious freedom

Seventh-day Adventists are people of prophecy. Our church is the inheritor of the deep Bible study by mostly young people who became convinced from Scripture that Christ was about to return to bring in His eternal kingdom. They came to understand that the call to prepare is a call to religious freedom. They came to understand how important it is for us to freely choose to serve the Lord. They saw in the prophecies for the last days an outline of how Satan will prevent many from preparing for Christ's return. He will move upon church and civil leaders to compel others to false worship. Religious freedom is thus a necessary outcome to enable a response to the final call.

There is probably no more contentious moment for Seventh-day Adventists than the General Conference Session of 1888. At the center of the debate was Alonzo T. Jones, editor of the religious liberty journal *The Sentinel*. And the debate had everything to do with religious liberty.

That year a coalition of mostly Protestant groups, with a certain Senator Blair at their head, put forward a bill that went way beyond any "blue law" still on most state statute books and proposed a national law of Sunday sacredness. A.T. Jones was in the thick of the debate and filled the pages of *The Sentinel* with arguments against it from history and prophecy.

Jones drew a parallel between the process by which pagan Rome embraced Christianity and then used its power to compel all to obey religious edicts, and the devolution of the American Republic from its secular role toward a similar compulsion to worship and a very denial of its Constitution. In short, he saw prophecy being fulfilled. He saw the U.S. moving into the model of the third angel's concern in Revelation 14. This was the time for a remnant people to object to the final act of denial of God

and His freedom. This was the time for revival. This was the last revolutionary moment of history. Evil was about to fully reveal itself; therefore God would honor His prepared faithful with a special power to witness.

When he spoke at the General Conference Session in 1888, Jones, together with his associate editor E.J. Waggoner, urged revival, a return to the centrality of Christ for our witness. Curiously, the response was quite muted. There was more debate than decision. The revolutionary call was in large measure ignored, even as Ellen White endorsed it.

At the next General Conference Session in 1893, Jones was again a featured speaker. Again he urged action and more than the time before, he explained it in the context of religious liberty. Today, in our day of global revolutionary fervor, of the old isms passing, the old identities blurred, his words must surely call us to attention.

Jones put the case to his hearers in the starkest terms: "When he [God] calls upon you and me to take a position in allegiance to His law, which will forfeit our lives, that will put our lives in jeopardy so that some earthly power would deprive us of it, What then? Well, He simply says, Let that life go. It will vanish away in a little while anyway; here is one that will last through all eternity.... Therefore the man or woman who has only this life to start with, need not start with the third angel's message, because when the test comes that this life is at stake, he will stick to it. That's the danger. A man can't go through what the third angel's message is to go through, with only this life that he has. He can't do it. Because it is all he has, and he will stick to it, when it is brought into jeopardy. But he who will let this life go, count it worth nothing, and take that life that measures with the life of God, that life which is the life of God, will have a life that can never get into jeopardy. That man is safe. He can go wherever the message calls him."²

This is the revolutionary logic that Mao was stumbling toward: "our force is irresistible." This is the great truth that Jesus was proclaiming in Nazareth: the revolutionary freeing of the soul for spiritual action!

Calls for action do not always have an immediate response, but there is a certain inevitability to truth. The Sunday law proposal in A.T. Jones' day faded, as did the call for an appropriate response. But today we face a similar dynamic, and religious liberty must again be argued from its true, spiritual basis. And in a time of revolutionary fervor, we are called upon to embrace a transforming message to a most unfree world. After all, with God, our force is irresistible.

The newly-liberated Middle East is embarking on a political and social journey that must navigate between the pull of fundamentalist violence and the likely dictatorship of public will. But it needs to hear the true message of liberation – of true religious liberty.

The so-called Christian West is searching for security from external threats. It too is vulnerable to distinctly coercive solutions to the social and religious fix it is in. The recently-designated Sunday family rest day in Europe is probably just the beginning. They need to hear of true religious freedom.

The United States is more fixated than ever before on the war on terror. It is more concerned than ever with defining its identity to protect itself from the enemy within – some form of state religion is bound to emerge. The United States needs to discover true religious liberty – something that exists beyond the hitherto reasonable protection of a first amendment. The revolution is coming, and what ideas will replace the present ones? We need to work to ensure that biblically-based models of religious freedom are placed before the wondering public.

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Evolution and diversity of life

by David L. Cowles
and L. James Gibson

Does the theory of evolution explain the diversity of life?

The answer you may receive to the question posed above will differ greatly depending on who you ask. Evolutionary theory is a vast and far-reaching body of ideas, buttressed by huge amounts of careful scholarship, and offers immense explanatory power. For most biologists, Theodosius Dobzhansky's statement¹ that "nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evolution" is literally true. Though most biologists do not study evolution directly, they work within a framework of ideas that supposes all living organisms are united by common descent; because they assume common descent to be true, they work as if it were so. However, a minority of biologists, ourselves included, perceive some major gaps in the evolutionary paradigm, which in our view call into question its ability to explain the full diversity of life.

Evolution depicts the diverse assemblage of living things via an "evolutionary tree" (figure 1), which postulates that all species are united by a branching pattern of descent from a common ancestor. This ancestor, thought to have formed spontaneously from nonliving materials, forms the root of the tree. Various lines of its descendants form the different branches, all the way out to the twigs (not shown) that represent species – living or fossil. Each major evolutionary change or innovation is represented by a new branch on the tree. The

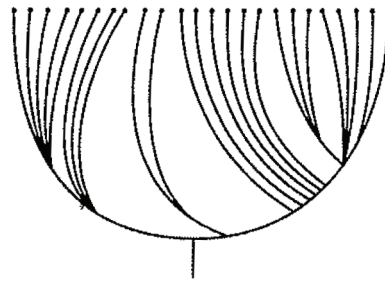


Figure 1. An evolutionary tree. The branches represent higher taxa such as phyla.

whole tree is held together by its roots and major branching points. Those points will be the focus of this essay.

The root of the tree

A whole set of significant gaps in explanatory power can be found at the tree's base – in a biogenesis, or the forming of life from nonliving materials. The first postulated step in a biogenesis is the production of simple organic molecules (for example, amino acids) from inorganic materials. Although these molecules have been synthesized, the conditions required are not plausible on an early earth. The next step is polymerization – the linking of the small molecules together. While a few natural conditions allowing polymerization have been found, none help form the precise, complicated sequences characteristic of molecules in living cells. The gap

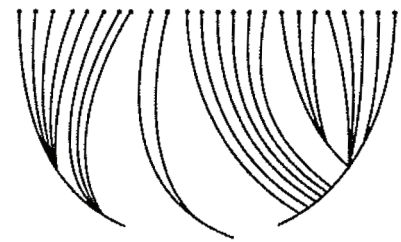


Figure 2. Evolutionary tree with hypothetical last common ancestors removed.

between what random polymerization processes can be shown to produce and the simplest living cell is enormous.

Another feature characterizing living things is the ability to reproduce detailed copies of themselves, which in turn are also able to reproduce. This highly-complex process involves a whole suite of different molecules, all interacting with one another in a precisely-directed way. However, the entire complicated system of molecules is required in order for the cell to be able to copy itself. If any part of the chain of interacting molecules is missing, the entire process fails, and the cell cannot function or reproduce itself. This fact has long been recognized as a formidable challenge for the evolutionary theory of the origin of life.²

Looking beyond the molecules

themselves to the organized structure of the cell, we see that living things are extremely complex, ordered systems with specific architecture. Many cellular components are essentially molecular machines, with interacting parts functioning in ways similar to human-designed machines.³ Just as the structure of an automobile is not inherent in the basic properties of metal, plastic, and paint, neither is the structure of living cells inherent in the properties of the molecules of which they are made. Instead, cells are “built” in specific ways, with the complicated patterns and combinations of materials required to carry out their functions.

The cell must constantly work to maintain its internal environment and keep itself in a functional state. The DNA (an acid containing the instructions necessary for the functioning of all living organisms) stores detailed information for how this is done and how all cell functions are carried out. However, such information is not inherent in the structure of DNA, either. Much as the sentiments expressed in a sonnet do not arise spontaneously from properties of the alphabet, the cell’s information had to be put there by some means outside of what can be found in the properties of DNA itself. The lack of a naturalistic source for this information represents another important gap in the theory of abiogenesis. Thus, the lack of a credible explanation for life’s origin leaves evolutionary theory with no known root for the evolutionary tree (see figure 2).

The major branches of the tree

We will next explore the attachment of major branches to the evolutionary tree. While evolutionary models attempt to explain how evolutionary information can arise incrementally by a combination of random mutation and natural selection, these models work best for rearranging information that is already present, such as may

occur with species changing gradually over time. This is analogous to variations along the branches of the evolutionary tree.

The models quickly encounter huge and growing probability problems when attempting to explain how random changes could have produced large amounts of the new, specific, and complex information needed for originating life or producing an inherently new and different kind of creature.⁴ However, this is precisely what would be needed to produce a new branch on the tree. Attempts at an explanation have been made, such as exaptation (using existing parts for a new and different purpose than their original function).⁵ However, these explanations do not reveal how the original function developed in the first place, or what directs the parts to come together in a new way to perform some other function. No doubt much more research will be done on this question in the future.

Another hurdle for explaining the diversity of life via the evolutionary model is based on the structure of chromosomes. Chromosomes are composed of DNA, a very long, linear molecule. Genes, which contain the information necessary for cell function, are sequences lined up like sentences along the DNA strands. Occasionally, a gene is accidentally duplicated, producing an extra copy. The mutation/selection model of evolution posits that random small changes (mutations) in the DNA of the extra gene copy slowly accumulate. If these differences provide a benefit, they will be favored by natural selection. Over time, the model suggests that these small changes can produce a gene that performs a new function radically different from the original one.

One problem with this model stems from the fact that most mutations either have little effect or are in fact harmful. These harmful or slightly harmful mutations are likely to be

much more common than any rare, beneficial mutation. Some evolutionists have presented mathematical models purporting to show how beneficial mutations can accrue by selection and eventually form new genes. Yet these models rarely account for the fact that each beneficial mutation will be linked to a large number of harmful or meaningless mutations, since they are all part of the same long chain of DNA. Given accepted estimates of ratios of beneficial to harmful mutations, models that take this into account suggest that the rare beneficial mutations will be swamped by the cumulative effect of the many harmful mutations linked to them on the DNA.⁶

These harmful mutations may be in the same gene or in more distant genes that are nevertheless linked by being on the same chromosome, all of which is usually inherited as a unit. In other words, it is difficult to take many steps forward while you are strongly tied to many other individuals that are taking steps backward. It is true that this linkage is not absolute – genes do have ways of swapping positions and rearranging on the chromosome. Nevertheless, the principle of negative mutations outnumbering positive ones should be true regardless of what portion of the chromosome a gene is in. At the very least, this gene linkage greatly complicates the already formidable barrier to producing genes for new, functional molecules by purely random mutation and natural selection. This linkage issue would be a problem for virtually any new evolutionary feature and would likely apply to many small and large branches on the evolutionary tree.

Artificial selection is another line of evidence providing insights into the problems of producing new branches on the evolutionary tree. Darwin used the analogy of artificial selection to claim that natural selection could accomplish even larger-scale changes, given enough time. But many scien-

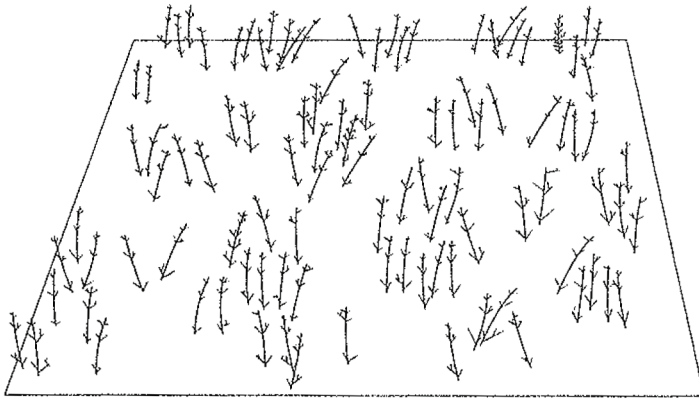


Figure 3. Insufficient evidence for joining the branches leaves a “forest” of separate trees.

tists are skeptical that the small-scale changes observed in breeding experiments, or in nature, are sufficient to explain the differences among major groups of organisms. Can nature produce a horse from a fish using the same kinds of changes we observe from our study of finch beaks or our experience in breeding dogs or chickens? Probably not, irrespective of the amount of time available.⁷ The problem lies in the need for *new* genetic information, not merely an increase or decrease in the information that already exists. We can see how a single ancestral species may produce a variety of descendant species adapted to different environments, but the resulting pattern looks more like one small tree in a forest of separate trees than a single tree (figure 3).

Fossils and the evolutionary tree

The fossil record provides another way of assessing the problems of evolutionary branching. One of the most striking features of the fossil record is the abrupt appearance of most phyla (major types of organisms) in a relatively short stratigraphic interval in the Cambrian rock layers. This pattern, known as the Cambrian Explosion, offers one of the most compelling lines of evidence against the evolutionary tree. A large number

of phyla and classes of animals found in the Cambrian have no ancestors or links to each other. The pattern is well summarized by the phrase “disparity precedes diversity.”⁸ In other words, the major differences among living organisms appear earlier in the fossil record than the many varieties with minor differences. No fossil evidence exists showing a gradual divergence over long ages to produce organisms with new body plans.⁹

Systematic gaps are another feature of the fossil record that does not support evolutionary theory.¹⁰ The shortage of transitional fossils is a widely-recognized feature of the fossil record, expressed in the familiar phrase “missing link.” Occasionally one hears reports of the discovery of a previously-missing fossil link, and these discoveries are hailed as evidence of evolutionary connections between different branches of the evolutionary tree. However, the most significant aspect of the problem is that the links are missing in a particular pattern.

We may compare the fossil record of horses and donkeys, for example, with that of clams and crabs. Horses and donkeys are very similar, and one might easily explain a lack of intermediates between them. After all, there might be only two or three intermediate species and therefore little chance

of finding a fossil from such a small sample. In contrast, clams and crabs are very different. Following evolutionary theory, the number of fossil links connecting them to a common ancestor should thus number in the thousands. One would logically expect to find many fossils from such a large sample. In fact, the reality is exactly the opposite. There are many species of fossil horses, some of which may be regarded as linking horses and donkeys, while there are virtually no fossils that are believed to link clams and crabs. This is exactly the pattern one would expect if different types of organisms originated independently and varied within limits. Again, the pattern is more like a forest of independent trees than a single evolutionary tree.

A few examples of evolutionary links between higher taxa (or families of organisms) have been proposed, some of which appear quite convincing at first glance. When examined critically, they are not compelling to those with doubts about evolution. One important problem is the sequence in which some of these species appear in the fossil record. The fish-tetrapod fossils provide a good example. Soon after Darwin’s theory was published, scientists began looking for potential evolutionary ancestors for the terrestrial vertebrates.¹¹ Lungfish were the first ancestors proposed, but were deemed too specialized. In the 1940s, the fossil fish

Eusthenopteron was described in detail and became the model of a tetrapod ancestor. Description of the fossil fish *Panderichthys* in 1980 and *Tiktaalik*¹²

in 2006 provided further examples of fossils with combinations of traits intermediate between fish and tetrapods. This fossil sequence has been used to argue that tetrapods evolved from the lobe-finned fish. More recently, however, a fossil tetrapod trackway was found in a layer lower in the strata than the fossil fish pur-

ported to be the tetrapod ancestor.¹³ In evolutionary terms, the purported descendant came before its ancestor – obviously impossible. Thus, it seems some other factor(s) must be at work in producing this fossil sequence.

Fossil whales provide another example of a proposed evolutionary series. Several fossil mammals have been found that are claimed to be whale ancestors.¹⁴ These fossils show combinations of traits unlike anything living today, and seem to show a trend of increasing similarity to whales. However, none of these fossil species is believed to be ancestral to any other known species, living or fossil. If one wishes to determine whether these fossils were part of an evolutionary lineage or were separately created, one must consult some explanatory theory, since the evidence is quite incomplete. An evolutionist could accept them as the result of evolution, while a creationist can look for another explanation, such as separately-created kinds, or the result of some unknown factor such as is illustrated in the tetrapod example in the previous paragraph.

Summary

In summary, although most scientists would say that evolution is adequate to explain the diversity of life, in our view it falls far short of that goal for several reasons. These include the lack of an information source for new forms, linked harmful mutations swamping beneficial ones, fossil disparity before diversity, and systematic gaps in the fossil record. Collectively, these observations show that the evolutionary tree is imaginary, and that the pattern of nature is more accurately illustrated by a “forest” of trees that represent independent-created lineages. We believe that evolution cannot explain the origin of life, the origin of any major new form, or even the development of major new structures within an existing form. Therefore, it cannot explain the broad diversity of life we see today. To us, the evidence

inherent in the structure of life itself is compelling evidence that “in the beginning, God created” a diversity of “kinds.”

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Evolution...

Continued from page 10

When I think of revolutionary change, I think of young people. It is a fact of history and physiology that the young are often stirred to action and are then more energetic to see the moment through. Certainly the faces in Egypt, in Iran, in Libya are young. The faces that Jesus saw as He looked around the table at the Last Supper were young. The faces of those who came together to form and proclaim an Adventist identity were young.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church today is again speaking of revival. I am convinced that it must come soon. The world is in a revolutionary phase. Why not us? After all, the true religious liberty which is so sorely needed is a revolutionary concept.

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Career in the marketplace: Is it appropriate for a Christian?

by Michael E. Cafferky

All settings where productive and legitimate service can be provided are valued in the Bible so long as each endeavor is pursued in a manner that honors God.

A generation ago, working for the church became synonymous with serving God through one's career. Some Christians even believed that a career in a for-profit business was in contradiction with the Bible. Others viewed it in full agreement with biblical principles.

How should the Christian view a career of service in the commercial sector? Is working in a for-profit company something we should encourage the Christian to do? In this article we will address these two questions by exploring the biblical perspective on work in the marketplace. We begin with Creation.

Creation and Sabbath

Even though the central theme of Scripture is our relationship with God, the material side of life has a respectable place in the Bible. Work that brings enjoyment of God-given material blessings is a legitimate pursuit; however, the material dimension of life cannot be separated from spirituality, as shown in God's work of Creation and the Sabbath.

Creation provides a foundation for how to think about wealth, regardless of whether we work in the for-profit, nonprofit, or government sectors. At Creation, God made all the wealth-building materials. He created human beings to be interdependent with each other and with the created environment. He asked humans to both sub-

due the earth and care for the earth as loyal servants (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15). The reason: God is the owner of all things material and has commissioned humans to work on His behalf on this earth. How we treat these resources and the people who share them is done before the One to whom we owe everything.

God pronounced this material world "very good" (Genesis 1:31). God's original plan included humans working in the material world (Genesis 2:15). Yet, the greater aim of work, as paradoxical as it sounds, was not to accumulate economic value earned from the production and sale of material possessions but rather to enter into rest with God. The weekly Sabbath, a foreshadowing of God's covenant of grace, is inseparable from the commission to work. In the Sabbath rest, we demonstrate our loyalty to God by resting from our pursuit of material goods. The Sabbath was designed, in part, as a barrier to materialism, but sin marred the human experience with work and with Sabbath. Work became burdensome toil. Workers needed rest not only from the weariness of toil but also from the brutal battle for survival. More than this, humans need the constant Sabbath reminder that that confidence in our work should never replace trust in God.

Covenant, shalom, and blessings

In His wisdom, God knew the

impact of sin. God's covenant of grace – offered immediately after sin (Genesis 3:15) and then repeated throughout Scripture – is a covenant that addresses all dimensions of life: spiritual, physical, social, political, economic, etc. Under the power of sin, the natural human tendency is to turn something good into something selfish. Just as work became toilsome, so also work from the desire to accumulate wealth became a source of weariness (Proverbs 23:4-5). When God stated the covenant to Moses, He reminded us of the importance of Sabbath (Exodus 20:8). Humans saw the work of their own hands and, forgetting the import of the Sabbath, began trusting their own power to earn economic wealth.

Giving the power to build wealth is described in covenantal terms: "But you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers" (Deuteronomy 8:18). The covenant was not just a promise of economic prosperity, but it was also a promise of a full covenantal relationship with God, with family, with the community, and with all nations, based on spiritual abundance. The meaning of this full, abundant life was captured in the concept of "shalom" (peace). Under God's covenant, the whole world would be blessed in every dimension of shalom, including economic prosperity;

however, economic prosperity generated apart from a covenantal relationship with God is the kind of prosperity which takes a person in the opposite direction from God's plan.

Business principles in the Bible

The Bible is full of counsel on business. In Proverbs, Solomon counsels specifically that we should watch over our wealth-building assets, because our economic future is uncertain (Proverbs 27:24-27). Pruning fruit-bearing plants results in higher production (Leviticus 25:3, 4; John 15:1, 2). In grain farming, certain factors increase yield (Genesis 26:12; Matthew 13:8, 13:23; Mark 4:8, 4:20; 2 Corinthians 9:6). The clear implication is that higher yield is more highly valued than lower yield. Therefore, it is unwise to use technology that is inefficient or useless. Using technology must be done in a wise manner so that the full purpose of the technology can be achieved, so long as doing so honors God (Proverbs 1:17, 24:27; Ecclesiastes 10:9,10)

The Bible also speaks disapprovingly about unproductive resources (see Deuteronomy 29:23; 2 Kings 2:19; Proverbs 26:7; Ezekiel 15:3-5; Luke 13:6, 7, 14:35; Hebrews 6:8). When a resource becomes unproductive, the owner of the resource should correct the problem by using the resource in a better way or, lacking that, get rid of the unproductive resource and replace it with something that produces. The principle of destroying unproductive assets and replacing them with productive assets may be the rationale behind Solomon's wisdom that there is a time to plant and a time to uproot that which is planted when the asset cannot be salvaged and becomes irreversibly unproductive (Ecclesiastes 3:2. See also Matthew 3:10; Luke 3:9; 13:6, 7). These business principles highlight the spiritual norm that it is God who owns all wealth-building assets; humans are coworkers with God in using these resources. The land – and by extension all that it contains, including technol-

ogy that is used in commerce – is to be holy, set aside for service to God.

Business technology

The Bible mentions hundreds of technologies used in business endeavors. Nowhere does the Bible criticize these technologies or the pursuits they represent. God is interested in business technology. In Bible times, the technology crucial to earning a profit was the technology of a trader who bought and sold goods. This was the system of weights and measures used to calculate the price of buying and selling. Those who engage in business are to consider their business technology and currency used in trade as belonging to God, not merely because He is the owner of all things material (1 Chronicles 29:11; Psalm 50:10; 104:24; Proverbs 16:11; Haggai 2:8), but also because the business transactions in the market that involve the use of His assets for the good of His creatures must be carried out in a way that honors Him and watches out for the interests of His community (Leviticus 19:35, 36; Deuteronomy 25:13-15; Proverbs 11:1; 20:10, 23; Ezekiel 45:10-12; Hosea 12:7; Micah 6:11). Thus, any work that humans do with technology to advance their economic welfare is a work for and with God. As humans devise inventions that are useful for promoting justice, they are also advancing God's work on earth. By the same token, it is an abomination to wrong others under the charade of using technology.

Jesus and the market

Jesus criticized the rich, money-loving Pharisees for their greed and unethical practices that made them wealthy, but not for their wealth per se. He accepted dinner invitations from the rich and received resources provided by others (Matthew 23:25; Luke 11:39; 16:14.) Still, He warned others to be on guard against all kinds of greed (Luke 12:13-15). He counseled a wealthy manager to sell all that he pos-

sessed and give to the poor, but He did not make this a general principle that everyone should follow (Luke 18:18-30). For example, when Zaccheus, the wealthy chief tax collector, accepted Jesus, he gave half of his goods to the poor. Jesus did not command him to give away the rest (Luke 19:1-10).

Jesus helped His disciples in their trade (John 21: 6-11). He used wealth, wealth-building resources, and wealth-building work as illustrations of great spiritual truths. He never questioned the right to own property. Many of His healing miracles resulted in helping the sick and the disabled to become well, not only in body and spirit but also in their ability to provide for themselves economically. An important tension exists here. Prosperity is born through diligence and the wisdom that comes from God through our experience and the experience of trusted, God-fearing members of the community to whom we should listen (Deuteronomy 8:10-20; 1 Chronicles 29:12; 2 Chronicles 1:11,12; Proverbs 3:13-20). The problem is that when prosperity is obtained, people can easily begin to trust in their wealth, ungratefully taking themselves away from God who has provided the ability and resources to build that wealth with the resources He created (Proverbs 11:28).

Occupations in the Bible

The Bible describes hundreds of occupations related to all three sectors of the economy: for-profit, nonprofit, and government. The Bible considers all these pursuits legitimate. The assets by which a person could build wealth in biblical times included land, precious metals, jewels, animals, equipment, and the harvest that was dependent on the sun and the rain. Trade was expected and even encouraged. Employment of workers was expected to increase production (Deuteronomy 24:14, 15; Mark 1:20; Matthew 20:14, 15). Not all humans intend to bring God honor from their wealth-building activities. Some acquire wealth with integrity,

others with dishonesty. But both the righteous and the unrighteous should expect to obtain wealth (Psalm 17:4; 37:16; 49:5, 6; 52:7; 73:3; 73:12; 92:7; 109:8; 123:4; Matthew 5:44, 45).

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob became wealthy as sheep farmers. Jesus Himself worked in what must surely have been considered a for-profit endeavor in the field of construction. Some of His disciples worked in the fishing industry. The apostle Paul was no stranger to business endeavors. Although all the details of his own work are not provided in the Bible, he appears to have operated a tent-making trade. He warned that the love of money is the root of evil (1 Timothy 6:9, 10). While some traders took advantage of others through dishonest practices, people like Lydia are mentioned in positive regard because of their association with the ministry of the growing church.

Service in the marketplace

Biblical service to others is a response to God's gifts placed as a divine loan during the limited days of our life and not as a means of obtaining God's favor. Peter admonished the early Christians to use their spiritual gifts to serve one another in a way that demonstrated stewardship of God's grace. The reason is that in all we do, regardless of the economic sector in which we work, we bring glory and joy to God (1 Peter 4:8-11). Paul would probably agree with Peter when he likewise counseled believers to work heartily as for and in the name of Jesus who is the Lord and not merely for human beings (Colossians 3:17-23).

Productivity and profit

The Scripture assumes that humans will attempt to be as productive as possible. Humans are expected to be useful, and when they are not they are considered to be destructive (Proverbs 18:9; Titus 3:14). Diligent, honest work produces honest gain, though such gain is not automatic. Some who are diligent may lack economic

plenty. In the Bible, both economic gain and economic loss are seen as gifts from God. However, humans do not go to all the work of planting seeds and tending crops without expecting that they will get something good in return, something more than what they put into the processes (Deuteronomy 20:6; Proverbs 27:18; 1 Corinthians 9:7). Thus, one measure of usefulness is the idea of comparing the value of what one owns before diligent work with the value after work – the idea of gain or profit (Proverbs 3:13, 14; 15:27; Ecclesiastes 3:9; Jeremiah 6:13; 12:13). Profit is one indicator that the business decision-makers are serving as good stewards of resources entrusted by and sometimes shared with society. So while not “loving” profits, the faithful business professional listens to what profits say about business operations.

While the idea of achieving gain is not criticized per se in the Bible, achieving gain unjustly or dishonestly comes under judgment. Bible prophets speak vigorously against the evil business practices where the rich were taking advantage of the poor. The Bible also condemns achieving prosperity by immoral and unjust actions. In this regard, the Bible's criticisms of leaders building their wealth unjustly are lodged against political and religious leaders just as much as against those whose primary work is in commerce. Apparently greed, fraud, and corruption are sins that beset those who work in nonprofit and government organizations and not just in commercial firms (Isaiah 1:23; Jeremiah 8:10; 22:17; Ezekiel 22:27, 28; Amos 5:11; Micah 3:11).

Conclusion

How should the Christian view a career of service in the commercial sector of the market? In short, a career in the for-profit sector is a career working for God while working to benefit others as good stewards of God's grace. Career life in the for-profit world must be balanced by a life of the Sabbath,

whereby we continually hold high the economic constraints of the Sabbath in honor of the God who owns all that we work with.

Is working for a for-profit firm something that we should encourage the Christian to do? Absolutely! We have responsibilities to be good stewards of community resources. Honest gain earned from hard work, managing development, and exchange of community resources should not be denigrated, but instead appreciated. Dishonest gain achieved from taking advantage of others must be avoided at all costs. Further, working in a legitimate occupation in the for-profit setting is an opportunity for the Christian to carry an influence for good, not only in terms of supporting productive work but also in terms of transforming the world of work, where necessary, by encouraging others to pursue periodic rest from the unrelenting compulsion to generate economic gain. This is one way that those in business can carry the Sabbath-rest with them Monday through Friday. Life, even work life, is greater than the material abundance which can be generated “for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions” (Luke 12:15). All settings where productive and legitimate service can be provided are valued in the Bible, so long as each endeavor is pursued in a manner that honors God.

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PROFILE

Norma Nashed

Dialogue with the president and founder of Restore a Child

Interview by Shelley Nolan Freesland

To meet Norma Nashed is to enter the eye of a hurricane. As the founder of the nonprofit organization Restore a Child, Nashed has an all-consuming passion for serving orphans around the world, and she's not shy about enticing others to join her cause. Our initial introduction is barely completed before the rapid-fire questions begin: "Are you married? Yes? Do you have children? No? Good! Then you should have free time to volunteer with us."

Such audacity goes a long way toward explaining how Nashed has managed to coordinate Restore a Child's outreach to thousands of children virtually single-handedly for the past 13 years. This is a woman whose own life has dramatically changed course and faced daunting challenges numerous times, yet she has steadfastly maintained an unshakeable faith in God and His leading.

Norma was born in Palestine, but her family soon moved to Jordan, where her father found a job. Their resources were very limited, and nine family members lived in one room. A few years later, her father died of cancer, leaving her mother penniless, at age 37, with seven children. To earn some money, Norma's mother borrowed a neighbor's sewing machine at night – the only time it was available – and took on sewing jobs.

Unfortunately, she became blind a few years later.

Norma's mother had become an Adventist years earlier, and an Adventist missionary family took Norma into their home for six years while she attended school. After completing two years of college, she found a job so that could help her mother and siblings. Actually, the job turned out to be of some status, although that wasn't important to her. She worked for a man who founded Jordanian Airlines and became its president and chairman. He was also an advisor to the late King Hussein. The king occasionally passed through the airline's office with his bodyguards, and Norma could hardly believe that she was in such close proximity to the king. She, a simple orphan girl! Since then, Norma's life and ministry have been devoted to the less privileged in society.

Over the years, her service touched the lives of young people both within the church and outside. Eventually, her interest in children, especially orphans, led her to establish Restore a Child. Based in Maryland, U.S.A., Restore a Child's mission is to provide basic care to children: food, water, medical care, education, and in some cases shelter. It began informally with educational support for students in Jordan and now serves children in 13 countries:



Bolivia, Chad, Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, Indonesia, Jordan, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, the United States, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

■ *Let's begin with your first job. How did you land such a plum job?*

Yes, it was a plum position all right. But I never expected to get that job. When I interviewed for the post, I had two hurdles. Jordan is a Muslim country, and as a Christian I did not expect to get the appointment. Then there was the Sabbath. I told the interviewing manager that I could not attend work from Friday afternoon to Sabbath sunset, and that time was necessary for me to keep the Sabbath. But to my surprise, I was selected. When the manager was asked later how he could manage without an assistant on Saturdays, he replied, "To get someone like Norma, I can go one day without help."

■ *But then your life took a turn, and you began working for the church.*

My foster parents – especially my dad – and my mother are my greatest inspiration. Even though my mother was a widow and poor, she always shared what little she had with the poor and the needy. Even if she had just a loaf of bread to feed her family, she would readily share that with someone who knocked on her doors. My mother was a woman of faith. She always told me, “Norma, leave your job and work for God, and He will take care of you.”

I heeded my mother’s counsel and started working for the church. For several years, I worked in various positions at Home Study International [in the U.S.]. When I was the student accounts manager, I developed the belief that children should not be punished because of poverty. We weren’t able to release students’ grades until their accounts were paid, which of course limited their ability to continue their studies.

I transferred to the General Conference youth department, where I was also able to work on behalf of young people. Then I got cancer, and that was a turning point.

■ *How did that become a turning point?*

Quite simply, I felt God calling me to a new direction in my life. I quit my job and started a ministry for children.

■ *Just like that?*

I was living in an apartment in Takoma Park, Maryland. It was not a poor area, yet in those apartments were children who would ask me for food when they saw me coming home with grocery bags. I could not believe it! I started buying a bit extra to share with them. Their mothers were suspicious of me, so at first I couldn’t go to their homes. When I was able to visit, I saw that inside their apartments they had no furniture, just carpet, and very little food.

I went to grocery stores and talked to the managers. They would give me

store credit to buy a supply of food, which I would then distribute. I was also allowed to collect donated food items in a cart displayed with a sign in the store. I did this for more than six years. It was a lot of food, so I had to store it at different people’s homes.

■ *How did your international work for children start?*

When I had cancer, I went on a visit back to Jordan. There I visited an Adventist school I had attended. The school was about to send two children home because their parents were poor and couldn’t pay the fees. I saw how humiliating it was for the children, so I asked how much they needed. It was \$500 each, which I was able to arrange.

On my way home, I knew that if these children were being treated like this, there must be many more like them out there. I strongly believe that we must make sure that kids get a good education. It’s the key to their future: to get good jobs, to improve their lives, as well as the lives of their families and the whole community. Girls in particular are not given opportunities in developing countries. They are going to be the mothers of the future; if we train and equip them with a good education, the impact will be seen in their children.

■ *So how does a person go about starting up a charitable organization?*

I reached out first to people I knew and could trust with funds. I had lived in Egypt and had friends there, so I helped send children to Nile Union Academy in Cairo. One of my brothers was a diplomat stationed in Pakistan, and through him I started helping students at an Adventist school in Karachi. From there I made contacts in India, then Thailand (helping Burmese students from a refugee camp), and it just grew all over, including Africa.

Now we are working in 13 countries, helping around 3,000 children,

generally between the ages of 4 and 10. I haven’t counted everyone we have helped over the years, but it would be a large number. Last year alone, we fed 5,000 kids. We are funding whole schools in Haiti and Ethiopia, paying for teachers, uniforms, and books. In Indonesia, we started helping children seven years ago; in the last three years, 143 of “our” youth there have been baptized. Our aim is to care not only for the physical needs of children, but also for their spiritual needs.

■ *Where do you find the strength to do this enormous work?*

When I had cancer and was going for treatment, everyone around me asked, “How are you so happy?” A year before, I had recommitted my life to God, and He had given me peace in my life. Cancer turned out to be a blessing, because it drove me closer to God and put my trust in Him. I didn’t question God or cry – not once. I knew that if He were with me, whatever He brought my way would be because He had a plan. What it was, I had no idea. Now I know: it was this ministry. I focused on these children, not on myself, and God gave me the strength.

The peace and joy I have is inside. I can’t express it. You’ve just got to have that relationship with God to experience it. I truly believe that “all things work together for good.”

When I came back from my visit to Jordan, I knew I should start this ministry, and I did – immediately. The first three years, I used my own savings, and then as it grew, my family helped me. I started talking to my friends, and then began fundraising officially.

I first worked on providing education, but many orphans are also homeless, especially girls, so we began to build orphanages. Every two seconds, a child is orphaned. At any time there are 145 million orphans across the globe. They are in desperate need of love, care, education, and dignity.



■ *How do you view your ministry as being different?*

God has endowed us with various gifts, but when it comes to the poor it's not an option, it's a commandment. In Deuteronomy 15, God says, "thou shalt" lend the poor sufficient for their needs. If you want pure religion, look at James 1:27, which states that pure and undefiled religion is caring for the orphans and widows. You may tell a child, "Jesus loves you," but that statement means nothing to a hungry and homeless child. Through our humanitarian work, children can see that Jesus cares for them. When Jesus was on earth, He was always mingling with the poor and the sick, the hungry and the lame.

■ *Have you ever wavered in your commitment to your mission?*

There were times when I almost felt like quitting. But when I was at my lowest ebb, God would send somebody – either a donor, or somebody to help with the work. Three years ago, we were building an orphanage in Ethiopia. I got an e-mail from a television station in Maryland saying, "Your apartment building is on fire. We Googled your address and found you through your charity. We want to interview you. If you go to our website, you will see your home in flames." It was true. I lost nine

years of documents, my ministry was gone ... that time I cried. I felt, "I love God, I'm doing His work, why would He allow this?"

But I stayed in Ethiopia. I had a mission, work, things to do. When I returned, three TV networks were at the airport to meet me. Because of that fire, a Jewish doctor from Washington, D.C., saw me on the news. I was an Arab woman, but that didn't prevent him from reaching out to me. Eventually he gave our ministry \$200,000 and said he was committed for life. God doesn't waste tragedies; something good always comes out of them.

■ *What have you learned about how God works?*

When God calls a person to serve Him, He will always provide the skills, the opportunities, the resources. He did that for me, and even though I am human and do get discouraged, the truth about God is that He will always provide, in His time. At one time we had less than \$2,000 in the bank, but some people who read an article about my work were impressed to help our ministry, and they sent in \$150,000. Other people heard about that gift and sent sizable donations too.

I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, and people respect that. I

always say I'm an Adventist. I'm proud to be a Seventh-day Adventist. God has given each person three T's: time, talents, and treasure. What we do with these gifts sets us apart from other people. Do you use them on yourself or share them?

■ *Can you share the story of one particular child who has been helped through your ministry?*

Seven years ago, in Tanzania, we took a boy literally from the street. Samuel Atupele was age 12; he had no shoes, no money, no schoolbooks, and no home. We sent him to an Adventist boarding school. I met him last year when I visited Tanzania, and he's an amazing gentleman. I asked what he would like to do when he finishes high school, and he said he wants to be a pastor. Imagine if we had left him on the street. What would have become of him? He could easily have turned to crime or drugs, but instead he wants to be a pastor and help the children in his country.

These children are going to be the future leaders of our church! Giving them a chance to become good citizens is not just a good investment for them, but also for us. We are all connected, not isolated. If you give orphans a chance, they can become leaders and do great things. All children need a hero, somebody to care for them, to show them respect and restore their dignity. That's our responsibility.

Shelley Nolan Freesland (M.S.M., Johns Hopkins University) is communication director for Adventist World Radio. E-mail: nolans@gc.adventist.org.

Norma Nashed can be contacted at president@restoreachild.org or www.restoreachild.org.

PROFILE

Dennis Dean Tidwell

Dialogue with an Adventist U.S. Foreign Service Officer

Interview by Charles H. Tidwell, Jr.



Dennis Dean Tidwell is currently working with the U.S. Department of State in Kabul, Afghanistan, where he assists in the coordination of international development assistance.

Tidwell began his career with the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Thailand, and for nearly 20 years worked primarily with the Karen ethnic minority group. In 1989, he joined the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) and helped establish ADRA as a nationally-recognized development agency in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. In 1992, he moved to Hanoi, Vietnam, as the director of ADRA Vietnam. Next, he was the country director for ADRA India for six years and helped obtain governmental recognition for the aid agency.

After a short interlude as regional program manager for Habitat for Humanity's Asia regional office, Tidwell joined the U.S. Department of State in 2004. Before moving to Kabul in January 2012, he served as a foreign service officer in Rangoon, Myanmar (political officer); Mumbai, India (consular officer); and Chiang Mai, Thailand (political/consular officer).

Born into a missionary family, Tidwell grew up in India and completed high school at Vincent Hill School

in Mussoorie, India. He earned a bachelor's degree in theology at Andrews University, a master's from Indiana University in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), and a master's in public health from Mahidol University in Bangkok, Thailand. His parents were both educators and served their entire life in the mission field – India, Sri Lanka, and Hong Kong. He speaks Thai, Karen, Hindi/Urdu, and Lao. He is married to Lila Goertzen, also a missionary child. They met at Vincent Hill School, and thus Adventist education has had a lot to do with the life, mission, and service of the Tidwell family. They have two sons, who also work for the U.S. Department of State.

■ *What prompted you to devote a major portion of your life to humanitarian work? And then, what prompted you to switch to the U.S. State Department?*

Having grown up in India, I always saw myself living and working in an international environment. I originally went to Thailand to supervise hill tribe pastors, but after seeing the poverty and manifold physical needs of the hill tribe people, I became more involved in community development work. It was a logical step to

join ADRA shortly after it was established.

When I was in college, I always thought I would take the Foreign Service exam after I graduated, but I was invited to work in Thailand and forgot about the State Department. When we were living in Hanoi, my sons hung out with the children of a U.S. diplomat who had come to lay the groundwork for re-establishing official relations between the United States and Vietnam. I recalled my earlier interest in the State Department and decided to apply at the earliest opportunity.

■ *You have essentially been a career expatriate. What have been the challenges in working outside your home country for almost your entire life?*

It actually seemed quite normal to work outside my home country, because I left the United States when I was quite young to follow my parents to India. It seemed like living and working in the United States was the greater challenge. Being separated from family has been a disadvantage while working overseas, plus I sometimes feel like a stranger to my own culture.

■ *What do you see is the role of an*

Adventist Christian in the State Department?

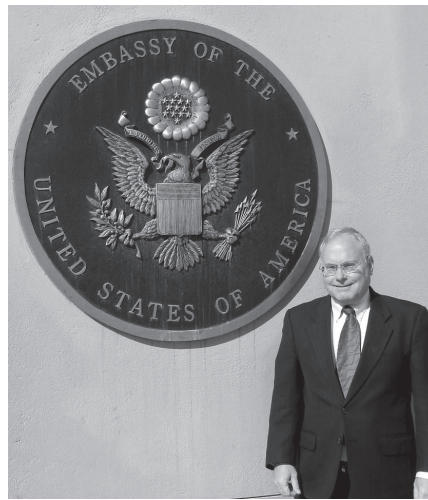
I think it is important to be a witness to my beliefs. For example, all my colleagues in the State Department know that I do not drink alcohol, and I try to follow a vegetarian lifestyle. Recently, they had a farewell for me at the U.S. Consulate in Chiang Mai, and they served a vegetarian menu with “Shirley Temple” drinks. They were paying honor to my beliefs and lifestyle.

I view my job as a “tent maker,” and while it is not permitted to conduct religious activities on government property, I have been able to support and encourage the local Adventist churches wherever we have served. I have also been involved in writing the State Department’s annual religious freedom report and felt that with my Adventist perspective I was better able to understand religious freedom issues in different countries. I was also more aware than the average foreign service officer of religious freedom issues and had opportunities to reach out to religious leaders in each country where I served. Twice I organized *iftar* dinners – the evening meal at the end of each day of fasting during Ramadan – for local Muslim leaders to demonstrate our respect for their beliefs.

■ *What are the most significant rewards of your career – as pastor, NGO employee (ADRA, Habitat for Humanity), and diplomat?*

As a pastor, I found it rewarding to help church members spiritually and physically, train village health workers to serve in areas where there was very little or no health infrastructure, and help organize companies and churches among Karen communities along the Thai-Myanmar border as well as hire pastors to shepherd them.

As an NGO employee, I found it exciting to establish ADRA in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam and grow ADRA into vibrant country



programs. This included establishing a unique “cow bank” project in rural Vietnam to increase farmers’ income, and responding to various disasters in Vietnam and India, including typhoons, cyclones, floods, and earthquakes. It was rewarding to lay groundwork for Habitat for Humanity to establish offices in Laos and Myanmar.

As a diplomat, the rewards have been highlighting human-rights violations in Myanmar, keeping America’s borders safe through careful adjudication of visas for non-immigrant visitors, and detecting and investigating visa fraud. In particular, there has been a strong sense of satisfaction in working with ethnic minorities from Myanmar to help them achieve unity and to negotiate with the Myanmar government for peace.

■ *What are the challenges you face as an Adventist Christian in working in non-church organizations?*

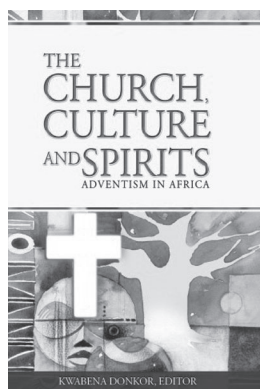
There is nothing that can’t be overcome. Sometimes colleagues tend to leave you out because they know you don’t drink alcohol. Occasionally, you are called on to escort a visitor on Sabbath. In such cases, you have to plan unique activities that you feel comfortable doing or request colleagues to help you out. Contrary to

what some think, you do not have to drink alcohol to be a successful diplomat. People in the State Department are very tolerant and generally respect other people’s different religious beliefs.

At the request of *Dialogue*, Charles H. Tidwell, Jr. – elder brother of Dennis – conducted this interview. E-mail: tidwell@andrews.edu.

Charles H. Tidwell, Jr. (Ph.D. University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada) recently retired as dean of affiliation and extension programs at Andrews University. He worked for more than 43 years as a teacher and administrator in the Seventh-day Adventist education system in the U.S., Canada, and Hong Kong.

BOOKS



The Church, Culture and Spirits: Adventism in Africa
Edited by Kwabena Donkor
(Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2011. 242 pages, paperback).

Reviewed by Hudson Kibuuka

Christianity in Africa is going through a crisis that has impacted both the theological position and the pastoral-evangelistic mission of the church. Although Adventist theology has attempted to keep its flock within the biblical framework of faith and belief, it has not been easy to keep church members fully aware that while they are in the world, they are not of the world – in belief and practice. In the absence of such awareness – and attacked by strange doctrines emanating from witchcraft, ancient cultural practices, and spiritistic forces – a new theology combining pre-Christian and Christian positions is threatening the biblical stand on faith and belief. The book under review is part of the church's answer to the problem.

Edited by Kwabena Donkor, an associate director of the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, the book's aim is to help pastors and teachers to be aware of the dangers of this new phenomenon and deal with it as it threatens to mislead Adventist believers. The book is not a one-person work: it has brought together leading Adventist theologians, Bible teachers, ministers, and church administrators from across sub-Saharan Africa, as well as two international scholars well-informed with the challenges Christianity faces in Africa. The essays deal with culture, the world of the spirits, the broad deviations from biblical Christianity, strange interpretations, and non-biblical worldviews that challenge the Adventist Church in Africa. The book is a tool that could not have come sooner to preserve the truth of Adventism and to guard against distractions from a biblical worldview.

This compilation of essays notes that issues of spiritualism, magic, demon possession, and witchcraft are real in many communities in Africa and affect many people, including those who profess the Christian faith. Early mainline Christian missionaries, notes Nathaniel Walemba (p.133), relegated these issues to traditional practices and

superstitions that they assumed would die away as converts became well grounded in Christianity. This grounding did not happen, but instead the influence of the false systems led away many believers into a dangerous mix. Another cause that gave rise to this false religious phenomenon, according to Vida Mensah (p.146), is the doctrine of immortality. Since most of the “mainline churches believed in the immortality of the soul, it was easy for Africans to make a connection with the concept of ancestors,” which is part of the whole issue of spiritualism. Donkor (p. 4) points out that contemporary independent churches, mainly Baptist, have taken advantage of the non-biblical doctrine of the soul's immortality to introduce elements of traditional and cultural beliefs into Christianity, to the detriment of its biblical core. Chapter 12, by Sampson Nwaomah, discusses the subject of anointing with oil and other contemporary practices that are predominant in two charismatic churches. Nwaomah points to three main types of anointing common in African churches: anointing for sickness, for breakthroughs, and for material possessions. Nwaomah correctly points out that while anointing is biblical, the way it is done through a mixture of tradition and religion is nothing but a gross perversion of biblical statements that are often quoted in support of anointing.

All contributors to the book emphasize that Africans are people with strong community ties and beliefs in the immortality of the soul, which in turn leads them to believe in spiritualism and ancestor veneration. The book warns of two possible extremes – either doubting the existence of demons, on the one hand, or having total belief in them, on the other. The authors argue that demons are real beings – the fallen angels that were cast out with Satan when he decided to rebel against the authority of God. Brempong Owusu Antwi deals with the reality of the devil. As Ellen White points out (p. 67), “even the power of demons is under the control of our savior.” Appendix 1 makes an important distinction between being harassed and possessed by an evil spirit (in the sense that all humans are tempted) and attributing to devil possession physical problems of human neurology and physiology. Where this distinction is compromised and given up, the false phenomenon of devil possession takes over.

Donkor's work is a call to return to the Bible and Christ as the way to receive total freedom. The individual has to choose not to take sides with the devil. Philemon Amanze and Kayode Makinde make a very useful suggestion that ministers in training should have courses in African traditional religion, as well as seminars for those who are already in service, to help them in dealing with this issue in their ministry.

The concluding section gives specific guidelines and recommendations to church members and leaders on various spiritualistic manifestations of the devil. Since community

ties are very strong in Africa, workable suggestions have to take this into account, and one of the recommendations is for the church to act as a surrogate family. The challenge is for this family to have the same kind of “binding” as the traditional family normally has on its members. Such families would take care of the various celebrations or rites of passage of the different stages in life, based on biblical principles, for all members of the church.

Healing is a specific problem in which church members need guidance: how should we help them distinguish between herbalists and mystical healers – the explicable and the inexplicable traditional medicine men? The former deals with practices that are scientifically and pharmacologically explainable, while the later uses mystical, magical, psychical, supernatural, occult, and metaphysical practices. Useful herbal knowledge and practice of healing has been discredited and ostracized as a result of confusion brought about by mystical healers as they try to confuse their clients, as well as some religious teachers.

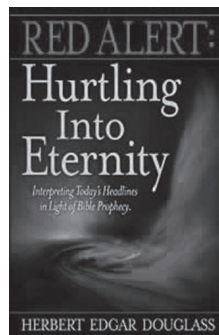
With regard to dealing with devil possession, the Bible does say that Jesus gave to the apostles the power to cast out demons, and this power is available to the church today. But, as the book points out, it is wrong to accept witch-hunting and to look for opportunities for exorcism, as some contemporary religious organizations appear to do. Christ’s commission to the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to preach that the gospel is the source of freedom. The devil would be happy to have the church concentrate on anything other than that which will bring about freedom to those who accept Jesus and thus make him (the devil) a loser. Ekkehardt Mueller makes clear (p.107) that Christians can be victorious only by conquering the dragon and the beast by witnessing to God and the Lamb.

Although the term Africans and Africa are used, most of the examples given are from sub-Saharan Africa, which probably was the unannounced delimitation of the book. I, however, would have learnt much from knowing something about the Arab territories of Africa, as well as the immigrant citizens in South Africa.

Overall, I recommend the book to all ministers in service and training, educators, and church leaders, as well as all church members. It provides a lot of light on this subject and offers very useful guidelines and recommendations.

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Red Alert:

Hurling Into Eternity

Herbert E. Douglass (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2011. 216 pages, hardcover).

Reviewed by Gerhard Pfandl

Herbert Douglass is a prolific Adventist author. He has written many books – from the simple to the profound – and this latest one is neither for the weak nor for the fainthearted. So steady your heart, sharpen your mind, and enjoy a soul-filling, intellect-challenging feast.

In the first half of the book (Chapters 1-6), *Red Alert* takes us on a whirlwind tour of recent world events. It begins with a discussion of the increase in Marian appearances and the rise of Mariology among Protestants and Muslims. Chapter 2 chronicles the exponential rise of disasters (natural and man-made) earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, volcanoes, famines, diseases, et cetera. The next chapter, titled “The World’s Bloodiest Centuries,” reviews the wars of the 20th century and highlights the powder kegs of religion and race in many of the civil unrests and wars in the world. Chapter 4 looks at the reasons behind the current financial crisis and the recent street riots in Europe. The issue of globalization and the push for a one-world government and one world religion is the topic of Chapter 5. This is followed by a chapter on the astonishing worldwide appeal of the papacy in recent times.

The amount of facts and figures that Douglass marshals together in these chapters describes a world out of control, reeling from the impact of all these events in nature and society. This condensed dose of negative “signs” may cause readers to have nightmares. Nevertheless, it is a reality check that we are truly living at a time when “men’s hearts [are] failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth” (Luke 21:26).

The second half of the book (Chapters 7-12) emphasizes the great controversy theme that provides the spiritual rationale for these world events. *Red Alert* discusses the role of Satan in this war between good and evil, as well as America’s role in the last-day events according to Revelation 13:12-14 and the writings of Ellen White. Two chapters are devoted to the tsunami of the new spirituality – the emerging church movement which Douglass sees as the predicted counterfeit spirituality. The book concludes with a discourse on the Second Advent and how Jesus saw

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LOGOS

His Word endures forever!

Psalm 119 declares the full sufficiency of God's Word in the life of the believer.

by Artur Steele

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible; indeed, there are many biblical books that are much shorter than this single psalm. Charles Spurgeon once told the story of George Wishart, a bishop of Edinburgh in the 17th century, who was condemned to death along with his patron, the Marquis of Montrose. When Wishart was on the scaffold, he made use of a custom of the times that permitted the condemned to choose a psalm to be sung. He chose Psalm 119. Before two-thirds of the psalm was sung, a pardon arrived, and his life was spared.

David Livingstone, pioneer missionary to Africa, won a Bible from his Sunday school teacher for repeating Psalm 119 by heart when he was only nine years old. This actually reminds me of my youth. When I was growing up in the Soviet Union, it was not easy to get a Bible. Bibles were not published; indeed, they were prohibited. But when believers came together for worship, usually in private homes, they had Bibles. So, when I was around five, I was obsessed with the desire to get a Bible of my own.

I learnt that only church leaders could get one. So the next time I saw Pastor Kulakov – who was the unofficial leader of the church for many years¹ – I asked him if he could help me get a Bible. He told me, “You had

better learn to read first, and as soon as you learn to read well, you will get your Bible.” So I started to study diligently. Occasionally, the leaders of the church would meet in our home, and Pastor Kulakov would be there to chair the meetings. But it was almost impossible to get close to him, because everyone wanted to talk with him. I tried to figure out how I could make known to him that I already had learned to read well and that was time for him to get me a Bible. I noticed that occasionally Pastor Kulakov would come out of the meetings to go to the rest room. I decided: this is my chance. So as soon as I saw some movement, I stood outside the rest room, reading a book – thus sending Pastor Kulakov a signal: it's time to give me a Bible.

In those days, the Bible was not only spiritual food, but its message was also the actual key that opened doors of house churches and homes of believers. You see, the church had to operate underground. Special agencies of the government were trying to infiltrate the church. If you as a believer visited another town or city, you would naturally try to find believers and worship with them.

Usually, before traveling, you would talk to your pastor, and he would give you the addresses of some believers.

Arriving at the door of a believer, you would knock. Then you would hear a voice asking, “Who is there?” Usually you would say, “I am an Adventist; your brother or your sister!” Occasionally you would hear some more questions, such as: “Who gave you my address? What is the memory verse for this week? What was the morning devotional reading for today? Do you know the fourth commandment?” But if the owner of the house still had some doubts, reciting Psalm 119 would do it for sure! It was a master key.

One of the striking characteristics of Psalm 119 is that it is written in an acrostic form. The 176 verses of the Psalm are arranged in 22 groups of eight. All eight verses of the first stanza start with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, “Aleph.” Each line of the eight verses of the second stanza starts with the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, “Beth,” and so on until all 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet have been used.

Why 22 stanzas of eight and not of seven? The word “seven” in Hebrew comes from a word that means “to be full, satisfied, to have enough of.” Thus, it would be very appropriate to use 22 stanzas of seven! However, the word “eight” in Hebrew comes from a word that means “to make fat, to super-abound.” Thus, “seven” is enough, but “eight” is more than enough. There is superabundance beyond completion in the Word of God. Here in the Word of God you will find every bit of advice and wisdom you need in superabundance!

The book of Psalms has both the shortest chapter in the Bible (Psalm 117) and the longest chapter (Psalm 119).

The shortest chapter invites all nations, all people, to praise God, “for His loving kindness is great toward us and the truth of the Lord is everlasting! (It is constant, it is never changing).” The longest chapter praises God's Word, His revelation, His law,

His guidance, putting special emphasis on the fact that His Word endures forever.

The full sufficiency

A remarkable feature of Psalm 119 is that almost every verse of the psalm refers to the Word of God, to the Bible. There are a number of synonyms for Scripture used in this psalm. Some argue for eight, others, including the rabbis, see 10 synonyms for Scripture. For example: Law – *Torah*, 25 times; Word – *Dabar*, 24 times; Sayings, Promise or another Hebrew word for Word – *Imra*, 19 times; Rulings or Ordinances, 23 times; Testimonies, 23 times; Commandments, 22 times; Decrees or Statutes, 21 times; Precepts or Charges, 21 times and so on....

Franz Delitzsch wrote, “Here we have set forth in inexhaustible fullness what the Word of God is to a man and how a man is to behave himself in relation to it.”

Psalm 119 declares the full sufficiency of God’s Word in the life of the believer who loves and obeys it. Who does not remember the words of Psalm 119, such as, “Your Word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (verse 11), or “This is my comfort in my affliction, that Your Word has revived me” (verse 50).

The psalm speaks of the internal delight of God’s Word. It makes a special emphasis on the fact that God’s Word cleanses the heart, consoles the soul, comforts the spirit, conquers all fears, counsels, enlightens, empowers the mind, gives understanding, encourages the heart, incites zeal, enriches the life, brings hope, increases faith, supports in persecution, infuses peace, shows the way, leads to truth, satisfies fully, sustains firmly, gives life, protects from destruction, protects from evildoers, revives, provides mercy, and fills with joy!

The most fascinating feature of Psalm 119 is the fact that exactly in the middle of the psalm, in the heart

of the psalm, we find the following statement in verse 89, which actually is the foundation of all that has been said so far and will be said in the following verses until the end of the psalm: “Forever, O Lord, Your Word is settled in heaven” (NKJV). “Your Word, O Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens. Your faithfulness continues throughout all generations” (verses 89, 90 NIV) “You have established the earth, and it stands...” (verse 90 ESV). This is the heart of the whole Psalm! This is the real foundation of all that has been said in the Psalm.

Eternal nature of God’s Word

In this stanza, the focus is on the eternal and infinite nature of God’s Word. God’s Word is eternal and stands firm in the heavens, forever immutable, always new, fresh, and relevant. God’s faithfulness is a synonym for Scripture, meaning God is forever committed to keeping His promises through all generations, including the 21st century. As God established the earth by His spoken Word and it stood fast, so also it is and ever will be with His written Word. It also will stand fast and firm through all generations.

Note here the reference to heaven, to God Himself, and to His Faithfulness. It actually means that the One who inspired the Word, the One who sends us His Word is still alive, and as long as He is alive His Word will also be alive and ever relevant. This is why the psalmist in the same 119 psalm cries out, “Open my eyes, that I may see” (verse 18).

Because the One who stands behind this Word is alive, we should always expect new discoveries as we embark on a journey of Bible study. There never will be a time when we can say we know all that the Bible has to say. As we open the Word, our prayer should always be: “Open our eyes, that we may see.” Since God’s Word is eternal in heaven, it can also be clearly

trusted here on earth! Martin Luther once stated: “The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold of me. The Bible is not antique or modern. It is eternal.”

Ellen White wrote: “The Word of God is the only fixed, changeless thing that the world knows. Like its Author in character it is ‘the same yesterday, today, and forever.’”² “Man’s word fails, and he who takes the assertions of man as his dependence may well tremble, for he will one day be as a shipwrecked vessel. But God’s Word is infallible and endures forever. Christ declares, ‘Verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled’ (Matthew 5:18). God’s Word will endure through the ceaseless ages of eternity.”³

John Charles Ryle, an Anglican bishop, once was asked what will happen since the Bible is under attack by the higher critics. He replied, “Give me the ... theory of biblical inspiration with all its difficulties, rather than doubt. I accept the difficulties and I humbly wait for their solution. But while I wait, I am standing on rock.” We have a choice: a solid rock or ever-changing human theories and philosophies.

Everything changes in this life. Nothing is solid. Kingdoms come and go, leaders come and go. I was born in a country that does not exist anymore. Then later I went to another country for my college education. However, this country also does not exist anymore. The Soviet leaders promised the people a nice retirement. The people worked hard, believing their leaders. However, when the time for retirement came, those who promised were gone, and the country that promised was gone. Not so the Bible!

The One who speaks through the Scriptures, the One who makes promises in the Bible, is still alive! He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. Only He and His Word are unchange-

able, immovable, and totally reliable. Human theories, as popular as they may be, do not last very long: philosophies come and go. There is only one solid rock! The book of Daniel, in Chapter 5, describes an interesting occasion when Belshazzar the king meets with Belteshazzar the prophet. Belshazzar the king needs someone to interpret the handwriting on a wall. He promises Belteshazzar the prophet riches and gold, a very high position in the kingdom. In fact, the third-highest position in the country.

See the intrigue of the story: Daniel knows that the end of the kingdom has come. An army has already surrounded the city. The kingdom is almost taken. But Belshazzar the king keeps promising: "... Now if you are able to read the inscription and make its interpretation known to me, you will be clothed with purple and wear a necklace of gold around your neck, and you will have authority as the third ruler in the kingdom" (Dan. 5:16).

Look at Daniel's reaction: "Then Daniel answered and said before the king, 'Keep your gifts for yourself, or give your rewards to someone else; however, I will read the inscription to the king and make the interpretation known to him'" (Dan. 5:17).

The king promises what he actually does not have. How often we face the same choice: this world offers us very attractive things, and it seems we are tempted to follow the idea of the day, forgetting that this world has nothing to offer that will last. I will never forget the day, when as a soldier in the Soviet army, the key military officers – after many hours of brainwashing and interrogations – invited me in to the office of the chief officer of the unit and told me, "Don't be so stupid; do not destroy your young life. Just forget your God, at least for a while, while you are in the military. We will make your life wonderful: we will give you vacations, a pleasant life, and you will have a nice future ... but with

your God you will lose all of that." I ask myself today, where are those who made these promises to me? But my God is still on the throne!

Enduring promises

The blessings Psalm 119 promises are all real today. If you need wisdom, understanding, and knowledge today, Psalm 119 tells you where it is found: "Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. Your commands are always with me and make me wiser than my enemies. I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts" (vs. 97-100, NIV).

If you are lost today and cannot find the way, Psalm 119 tells you where to get a state-of-the-art GPS: "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path" (vs. 105). "Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me" (vs. 133, NIV).

If you need help or protection today, Psalm 119 tells you where to get the best insurance policy: "You are my refuge and my shield; I have put my hope in your word. Away from me, you evildoers, that I may keep the commands of my God! Sustain me, my God, according to your promise, and I will live; do not let my hopes be dashed. Uphold me, and I will be delivered; I will always have regard for your decrees" (vs. 114-117, NIV).

One of my former students, who is pastoring now in one of the Caucasus countries, told me a recent experience. He had started to give Bible studies to one young man. The father of this young man was in prison for the second time; both times he was sentenced for murder. When he was finally released from prison, he came home and noticed a change in the life of his son. After finding out that his son was attending an Adventist Church, he was devastated. For the father, it was an unknown sect. So he decided to save his son from what he thought was

a dangerous sect. Talking to his son did not help. Then he started to beat his son, which did not help either. So he thought, "Well, if I continue this way I might kill my son. Is it not better to kill the pastor who influenced my son so strongly?"

So the father decided to kill the pastor. He already had enough experience. He took a knife, which was more like a small sword and forced the pastor to get into his car. They started talking. While they talked, the pastor tried to talk about the Word of God – which actually is, as the Bible tells us, "a double-edged sword." The father tried to get hold of his sword, but as soon as he touched it, his hand got numb and he could not move it. While they continued talking, the "double-edged sword" of the Bible got hold of the father. Last year the father got baptized. After the baptism, when the church members congratulated him, he asked for a microphone and said, "I have a gift which I would like to give to the pastor. This is the sword, which I was trying to use to kill him. But the other sword, the double-edged one, the Word of God..."

Dear friends, God's Word endures forever. His sword is powerful enough.

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VIEWPOINT

Our darkness or His light?

God's method for dealing with the dark corners of our lives

by Marcelo Falconier

Psalm 139:12 has often puzzled me: "Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light *are* both alike *to You.*"

What is the psalmist saying? Are all things alike to God? The rapist and a philanthropist? Hitler and Mother Theresa? An outrage and a noble deed?

After reading the psalm many times in its immediate context and the biblical macro context, I am certain of one thing: God does not look the same way at the innocent and the guilty, the just and the unjust, but He reveals something big, extremely big, that every human being should know.

Ignoring darkness

Psalm 139:11 states, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me." There seems to be an assumed inevitability about darkness falling on us, a defeat of a very active system in human self-preservation, indeed a darkness that engulfs us by every possible means. We do not want others to peek into our inner misery. Thus, we have developed an odd way of avoiding reality. Specifically as regards our own darkness, we avoid seeing, and we fail to see that we are avoiding it.

Heinz von Foerster¹ tells of a World War I soldier, struck in the head by

a bullet. The soldier had a blind spot almost as big as the total field of his retina. All of us have a blind spot, usually a small one that does not affect us seriously because our brain reconstructs that tiny space through an input of the rest of the information collected. The soldier's blind spot was so extended that he was not able to see innumerable objects, and further, he did not know that he was not able to see them. Caught in this denial of reality, the soldier was not fully capable of seeing his surroundings. He became a victim of his blind spots.

For more than a century, scholars have attempted to analyze the cause and possible cure for these blind spots. Some have placed the cause of the phenomenon on individuals themselves; others have thought of it as a result of social mechanisms that prompt a denial of darkness. Darkness is still there, but we make every possible effort not to see it. Thus, we feel more peaceful, more respected, more honorable, and live in a state of denial and risk.

When darkness becomes self-evident

The problem arises when such an "honorable" peacefulness goes through a period of crisis and becomes self-evident in moments of darkness. "Am

I really like that?" "Impossible!" "I can't believe it!" "It is not real," we say to ourselves.

Finally, when we are forced by circumstances to give in before the evidence, we feel tattered, with our personal dignity and self-respect hitting rock bottom. We keep asking, "How long has it been like that?" "I just found out, but for how long have my family and friends known it?" Often, when we are not able to deal with the one who denounced our darkness, we punish ourselves by saying, "How is it possible?"

David states that God knows the darkensses we are not able to see, even the ones we do not dare to acknowledge. But even then, He does not run away from us! "The darkness and the light are both alike to You." His infinite knowledge knows both.

The truth is that some dark corners are always dusty. In a house, they are usually over the curtain rods, on top of the highest pieces of furniture, or behind the fridge or the family piano. Filth does not bother us as long as we do not see it. When I was a student, I used to sell books during summertime. I have been in hundreds of homes, and more than once I met a housewife who was really intent on having her house spotless, at least, as far as her field of vision was concerned. But I could see where she could not see, because I am taller than the average person, and I could spot what most people could not see: on top of the fridge, a cupboard, or over some bookshelves.

This experience has prompted me to reflect on the spotless corners of my life, and in those that remain filthy. I think of those spots we usually check and show others in order to feel good, and in the ones we do not even speak of. We try to take the garbage out and far away, so it can go unnoticed. But garbage refuses to melt away, and its producers and containers are as real as ever.

In every context, there is a fairly

good idea of what is respectable and what is not. But it is usually harder to accept when others are not around. We know those dark spots belong to us, and we can hardly endure it. We would even like to pay in order to be able to forget them, because we have stopped believing in the possibility of overcoming them. Thus, we usually turn to any other thing which may “do us the favor” of dressing and soothing our infected wound.

God vs. my darkness

God sees us this way: He sees the best in us, and He also sees the worst. He knows everything. He sees it all. But He does not get frightened away. He is not appalled to realize our dark corners and our human tendency to hide them. In power struggles, it is not uncommon to look for the dark corners of one’s adversaries in order to make them public or reach a deal or even blackmail. Our God is different.

John 3:17 reminds us that “God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world.” There was no need for it, since it was already condemned; it is just like saying that He did not come to get dirty corners dirty. God sent His son “that the world through Him might be saved.”

My own darkness

As I write these lines, I feel unworthy and outraged. I feel unworthy because I am forced to face some of my darkness; outraged, because it should not be that way. I like feeling respectable. I hate finding elements in me that prove otherwise. Even though difficult to notice, the evidence is to notice. I feel I am invited to come closer to God – without feeling a willingness to drag myself to Him, but without arguments not to do it.

God then reminds me of Genesis 28, which I have read so many times. I sympathize with Jacob the transgressor, who is left by himself, openly exposed to his filth and darkness. I can see how it is within that context

that God shows the patriarch the open skies, and a ladder connecting heaven and earth. I feel moved, and I shudder. That ladder is always there, but it becomes more significant where there is darkness around. There are many who are willing to build bridges and make exchanges in our shining moments, but only God knows the depth of our misery, and even then He is willing to build a bridge of communication, hope, and restoration. It is a divine trait, not a human one.

God leads us to green pastures and is beside us in our moments of peace and prosperity as well as crisis (Isa. 43:2). He leads us through the valley of the shadow of death (Ps. 23:4). He is not a God who loves darkness, but He loves us even in our moments of darkness. When He arrives, darkness fades away. He never dazzles or acts pushy, as some people like doing with their alms. But He has a way of improving those dark corners of ours. He suggests an alternative path to darkness (Eph. 2:10; Tit. 3:3-8).

What is more significant to me is that He keeps that attitude. Because I have chosen – and keep choosing – I walk that way. But often I run again into my darkness, and I feel even worse because I had decided on something different. At other times, I feel that it is not worth even trying.

God, however, comes again to meet me in my darkness. He shows me His ladder. He points to Jesus, who won the battle on the cross. When I feel I am worthy, I am just offering to replace my \$10 bill with a \$20 one, to pay a gift worth millions. In fact, I am actually offending Him with my offer. But then, my anxiety for adding up merits fades away, because I now own the merits of Jesus (who overlooks this and all my other trespasses). What cannot fade away, but revive, is my desire for a better life and cooperating with God in my restoration, having as my ultimate goal complete regeneration, when all things will be re-created and the tares that encircle

me will be destroyed forever.

God before other alternatives to darkness

One day I was chatting with a friend about cars, and he mentioned that he had read somewhere that close to 90 percent of off-road trucks never actually hit an off-road. Many of them are just vehicles used to provide their owners with some kind of social status, and most of them are just driven from home to school, the food store, the gym, or the mall. That is the reason why some car brands provide the market with new models that are similar to the previous off-road trucks, but which lack the expensive 4x4 traction system.

Religion can end up being like one of these off-road trucks: it looks interesting, it makes us feel great ... but it never leaves the main road. Again, using the same metaphor, we can say that the biblical off-road truck performs very well on the highway, but it also keeps going on other roads where most cars do not make it. In ancient times, there were many peoples with their deities and priests, but Yahweh breezed through where Baal got bogged down. In our times, there are countless worldviews, but the gospel implies more “horsepower,” because it is “power of God” (Rom. 1:16). It performs really well in our bright moments, but it stands out even more in the midst of the mud of our darkness.

Some time ago, I visited a jail where I was able to listen to some of the inmates witnessing about how they have found the light of the gospel. They talked about some of the “road tests;” the “gospel truck” was able to perform outstandingly in the harshest of roads and conditions. And believe me, it does so with flying colors. It just keeps going. The religion of Jesus is suitable for any kind of road, even the most difficult ones. Indeed, it is

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FIRST PERSON

Your God is superior

My faith in God is not for review or compromise. In keeping Sabbath, I simply obeyed His command.

by Funmilola Ifeoluwapo Babalola

“Your God is great. Your God is great. Your God is great!” she declared.

It all started on a Friday. The head of the department had rescheduled an examination in histopathology from Friday to Saturday – and this was a big blow to me. I am a fourth-year medical student at the Olabisi Onabanjo University Teaching Hospital in Nigeria. During my years of study, I have had encounters concerning Sabbath exams, but this would be a testimony I will tell for life. On most occasions, I have had Sabbath exams changed after people prayed for me. I have also missed a couple of other exams, but through it all God has been faithful.

Once on an earlier occasion, I approached the head of the department concerning seminar presentations that were scheduled for Saturday. Students were expected to present their topics during these seminars. He denied my request, questioned my seriousness as a student, and admonished that if I continued the way I was going, my studies would be at risk. I approached one of my lecturers, who was my supervisor. After much discussion, he agreed to give me the Sabbath off, with the condition that I had to work harder to make up. I thanked him very much, because that was grace for me. When the head of the department learnt of the arrangement, he was furious. Because of that, I was

not only unable to make my presentation, but I was also to lose marks.

I was not very worried, because that was only a presentation. The final examination was scheduled for Friday, and I could do well and make up for the earlier loss of marks. However, I was shocked and devastated when the department head changed the final examination from Friday to Saturday. I had already lost marks for not being at the presentation, and now the exam was rescheduled to Saturday. I was so sure the change was made because of me that I decided to meet the department head. I tried to apologize to him: had I offended him while trying to present my earlier case? He insisted that I did not offend him, and drove off in his car.

A battle line was drawn up for God (not me) and my head of the department. Friends advised me to give in. “God will not be angry at you succeeding.... Stop being an extremist; after all we all believe in God. Does it make us all sinners for taking the exam on Saturday? Many people had their opinions, but God’s opinion was final for me. I was really tired when I got home that night. I was confused, but I am thankful for good Christian friends who set me back on my feet and told me to take my stand for God.

Two weeks were left before the examination. God’s children continued their prayers for me. I had never felt God closer than then. I felt loved

and proud to belong to the family of God.

When I got back to school, I approached my course representative to see what he could do for me. He promised to help, but then totally forgot about it. When he finally remembered, he approached the department head, who told him he would think about it. A week before the examination, the head of department was still thinking about it. I kept on preparing for the examination, believing that God would honor the prayers of His saints. Then it was five days to the examination, and my head of the department was still thinking about it. I approached the course representative again, and there was still nothing definite. On the third day before the examination, the course representative told me that the examination day would remain the same: on Saturday, the day of my appointment with the most important person in life, God. At that point, I stopped preparing for the examination and gave out my materials to anyone who needed them. I told myself if this was God’s answer to my prayer, it would not stop Him from being God.

On Friday – now a day to the examination – I went to school for my lectures and looked forward to my Sabbath rest. I got to school late, and did not find my course mate. Another course mate joined me in search of others. As we moved from one class to another, we met two of our course mates and asked what had been going on. The first thing I heard was that the examination had been postponed to Friday the following week. I jumped for joy. I still cannot express my daze and delight. “This is a miracle!” I said to myself and to any one that I met.

It was praise time. As I met a lot of my course mates that day, all of them congratulated me and affirmed that my prayers were answered. “It’s your faith that worked for you,” many declared. “Your God is good.”

But the point that struck me most was that of my housemate at school. With a smile of disbelief and wonder, she asked, “What did you intend to do if the examination date was not changed? Did you have the conviction that it will be changed?”

My answer was simple. “My faith in God is not for review or compromise. In keeping Sabbath, I simply obeyed His command. The Creator who gives such a command also knows how to enable me to achieve my life goal. And He always comes first in my life. If the examination had remained on Saturday, I just would not have written. God comes first.”

To this she declared, “Your God is indeed great.”

“Yes, and greatly to be praised,” I said.

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Darkness or Light?

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an insult to suggest that God cannot intervene in our complex situations of darkness and resolve them.

The message

Next time our darkness becomes self-evident and we feel we are not worthy of coming closer to God, we would do well to remember that even when we do not happen to notice, God is already looking at us, aware of our position, and is willing to stay by our side!

This is not my idea. The Bible tells me so: there is no darkness – not mine, not yours, not ours – too complicated for God.

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Red Alert

Continued from page 24

the end of the world.

Red Alert puts the great controversy in the context of recent world history and shows that we are indeed living in the end time. It also shows that many of these signs are only “the beginning of sorrows” (Matthew 24:8); however, we are told that “the final movements will be rapid ones” (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 11). In this book, Douglass introduces readers to God’s warnings about future events. He writes, “I can say without ambiguity that the coming ‘storm’ that arises from each of the areas highlighted in this book will truly be ‘relentless in its fury.’ And together, the combined effect will catch us all with ‘overwhelming surprise.’ All of us! But the better we are prepared, the easier it will be to balance ourselves when we are surprised” (p. 204).

Every Adventist who truly believes in the reality of the great controversy needs to read this book; every pastor will find a wealth of material and illustrations for sermons on last-day events in *Red Alert*. After all, isn’t the topic of last-day events part of the revival and reformation emphasis in our church today?

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ACTION REPORT



Adventist university students organize nationally in Indonesia

“Loving God, Loving Each Other” was the theme that brought 200 Adventist university students to the Temu Mahasiswa Advent se-Indonesia (TeMA) in Yogyakarta during August 2010. The five-day event was organized by Keluarga Mahasiswa Advent Yogyakarta (Yogyakarta Adventist Students Association) and was supported by the West Indonesia Union Mission. This event is held once every two years and is designed to attract all Adventist students (especially those who study in non-Adventist institutions) to worship, study challenging topics from a biblical perspective, fellowship with students from all over Indonesia for social and spiritual purposes, and dialog with each other on matters relevant to spiritual and intellectual pursuits on their campuses.

The official program began with an opening ceremony and introductions from all delegations. The primary purpose of the retreat was to establish a countrywide organization that can speak with one voice on issues that affect Adventist student

life and spiritual focus on universities throughout Indonesia. The result was the official establishment of IMAI (Ikatan Mahasiswa Advent Indonesia), the Indonesia Adventist Students’ Association.

For years, Sabbath classes and examinations have been a persistent problem for Adventist students in most universities in Indonesia. Many attempts were made by local Adventist student associations and the union conference authorities to appeal to the universities on the basis of religious liberty and freedom of conscience, but with little or no success. After many such attempts, local Adventist student fellowships and associations decided to unite and establish a new Adventist student association on a national scale, to try to appeal to higher levels of organizations, even to the president of the Indonesian republic. This new association will hold annual fellowships; provide a national forum and focus on Adventist educational and spiritual needs; and bring together the many local associations on a national scale.

The retreat did not concentrate just on organization. A focus on spirituality and service formed an essential part of the student get-together. In addition to worship services and devotions, the conference challenged the youth on what it means to live an Adventist life on non-Adventist campuses. These discussions were formatted under the overall theme “Loving God, Loving Each Other.” Pastor Jobbie D. Yabut, AMiCUS director of the Southern Asia Pacific Division, coordinated and led out in the seminars. The seminar sessions provided opportunities for students to share their personal experiences of how they walked the Adventist journey in campuses that largely have a non-Adventist focus and emphasis. Living with others of different persuasions, loving them with genuine care, praying for those in special need, and negotiating Sabbath challenges with sensitivity and personal witness were some of the areas that students shared their experiences with the participants at the conference. Often these sharing sessions turned so emotional that students, with tears, praised God for being their enabler in moments of challenge and in making hard decisions to keep their faith burning.

Sabbath was the highlight of the conference. Many students experienced God in a new and intimate way. They all felt that on their return, they should be ambassadors for God – living a more vibrant life, genuinely loving their fellow students and teachers, and witnessing authentically to their faith.

As a symbol of their commitment, the session ended with a candlelight service. Each candle was an indication of the light they ought to be in the world they live in. With that pledge, the students went back to their universities with renewed energy to lead a life of genuine faith, even as they proceed on their journey of academic achievements.

INTERCHANGE

Expand your friendship network

Adventist college/university students and professionals, readers of *Dialogue*, interested in exchanging correspondence with colleagues in other parts of the world.

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Invitation

If you are an Adventist college/university student or professional and wish to be listed in Interchange, send us the following information: (1) Your full name, with your family name in capital letters; (2) your age; (3) your sex; (4) your marital status; (5) your current field of studies or degree obtained and specialty; (6) the college or university you are attending or from which you graduated; (7) your top three hobbies or interests; (8) language(s) in which you would like to correspond; (9) the name of the local Adventist congregation of which you are a member; (10) your mailing address; (11) if available, your e-mail address. Please write clearly. Mail this information to *Dialogue* Interchange; 12501 Old Columbia Pike; Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600; U.S.A. You can also use e-mail: schulzs@gc.adventist.org. We will list here only those who provide all of the 10 items of information requested above.

Dialogue cannot assume responsibility for the accuracy of the information submitted or for the content of the correspondence that may ensue.

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Killing or Redeeming time?

By Marcos Paseggi

Apparently, Albert Einstein was not the only one who cogitated on the relative properties of time. Many of us do it too, even if we are not often aware of it or follow in his footsteps for much more prosaic reasons. For example, even my three-year-old son, who still refers to “yesterday” to mean either “two hours ago” or “last month,” sometimes implies time is as elastic as his mini-trampoline.

Every Thursday evening, he attends a Bible club with other kids. Together they learn Christian songs, memorize

short Bible verses, and review the great stories of the Bible. When I go to pick him up at the end of the session, he is always eager to share his impressions about what has transpired during that hour and a half of “serious fun.” “Everything was so long today,” he sometimes complains, sighing heavily. On other occasions, as soon as he sees me coming, he stares at me with an expression of unbelief. “Is it time to go now? But it was so short today!” Of course, his weekly Bible class usually keeps him busy from 6:30 pm to 8

pm, exactly 90 minutes, no more, no less. But it is his *perception* of time that somehow is disrupted, depending on how bored, tired, focused, or amused he feels after a particular session. Time has not changed; he has.

Unfortunately, his three-year-old fortuitous rendezvous with the seeming flexibility of time is not something he will ever grow out of. As every college student knows, not every class lasts the same. It all depends on how much (or little) we like the professor, the topic discussed, or even our classmates and school. One hour waiting for news outside a surgical ward where a close loved one is going through a life-threatening operation lasts “much longer” than four hours at a baseball play-off game (providing, of course, we do not hate baseball!).

The truth is, scientists seem to agree with this and other time-related perceptions. They even have a name for one of them: “time dilation.” It refers to a notion that “elapsed time as recorded by two observers with identical clocks will differ if one of the observers is traveling at a velocity with respect to the other.”¹ In the field of neuroscience, some researchers have shown – by means of very simple experiments – that our perception of the duration of an event can be easily distorted. For instance, imagine someone flashes a square on your computer screen for half a second. Now, if the person flashes a second square that is larger, you will think the second one lasts longer. And the same happens if the square flashed is brighter, or if it is moving. All of them “are perceived to have a longer duration than the original square.”² Thus, scientists have concluded, “the perception of time is actually a construction.”³

Killed or redeemed?

Now, even in regard to our “faulty” perception of time or precisely because of it, we are beckoned to pay special attention to the way we spend it. “Killing time” is an aptly-put

metaphor that nevertheless encloses profound “realistic” overtones. Time killed is time buried. Forever. There is no expiation, no atonement to make up for time that we let slip through our fingers to never come back. Ellen G. White wrote, “Time squandered can never be recovered. We cannot call back even one moment. The only way in which we can redeem our time is by making the most of that which remains.”⁴

Against this backdrop of “partial reimbursement,” the Bible also calls us to redeem time, to “repurchase” it, by making the most of every second God gives us on this earth. It becomes a moral imperative, not in a Kantian sense based on pure reason, but within the context of a biblical worldview, which has a word on everything we are, say, or do. Time is valuable because our life is valuable. And our life is valuable because God has given us value, first when He himself made us in His image, and later when He gave himself at the cross for every one of us. Talk about valuable! It does not stop there, though, for through the promises He bestows on us, the Lord also guarantees our safe surfing through the ups and downs of life.

But God’s promises do not end in the present. They extend to a future time. Thus, a time-redeeming stance also implies being aware of our place and moment in the history of this world (which in biblical terms, equals no less than the story of redemption.) Paul wrote, “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, *because the days are evil*” (Ephesians 5:15, 16, emphasis mine). Indeed, our role in the concluding episodes of the great controversy requires us to be more mindful of time than ever before.

As Christians, we have no time to kill but to redeem, whatever the time we have left. Even Moses, when confronted with the reality of his own mortality, exclaimed, “We finish our days like a sigh” (Psalm 90:9). But a

moment later, he wisely entreated the Lord, “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12). Our ultimate goal is to reach a day when time and the perception of it – as we know it – shall be no more.

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Notes and references:

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