

RECORD



Tertiary scholarship winners Lisi Tabuavula (left), Melaia Lutunaliwa (third from left) and Enelata Iolama (right) with Marica Tokalau (second from left), the director of Women's Ministries for the Trans-Pacific Union.

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Scholarships strapped for cash

Wahroonga, NSW

Mixed news for women studying at Seventh-day Adventist tertiary institutions: You can apply for financial help but may not receive much of it.

The worldwide church provides scholarships for women studying at Adventist tertiary institutions each year. But the scholarships—funded by sales of a devotional book produced by the church's Women's Ministries Department—amount to only a few thousand United States dollars each.

Lisi Tabuavula, Melaia Lutunaliwa and Enelata Iolama—all students at the Suva, Fiji-based tertiary institution, Fulton College—received \$US3000 between them as scholarship winners for the church in the South Pacific Division last year.

The church's scholarship appraisals committee met recently to consider this year's applicants—women studying at Fulton and Sonoma Adventist College and Pacific Adventist University in Papua New Guinea.

"We could help more women if we had more money," says Joy Butler, the director of Women's Ministries for the South Pacific Division. "Would you consider making a donation?"—**Brenton Stacey**

Stewards of the kingdom

I've often thought of the practical implications of Jesus' call to follow Him in the multicultural context of the South Pacific. An Adventist college student from one of the islands outside of Australia once told me that he no longer participates in any cultural activities of his people because of his new status as a Christian. In essence, he was telling me that his culture is incompatible with Adventism.

For this young man, following Jesus means forsaking his past, his people and his values as a person in a community. At the other end of the spectrum, I hear other Adventists saying they can't change certain behavioural patterns within their com-

earth and all of creation was affected, including human culture (expressive behaviour and belief systems).

But does the presence of sin in human society mean human culture is beyond the saving grace of God? No. To the contrary, human culture is redeemable by the gift of God in Jesus Christ who became human to save the people of the world.

Human culture and Christ

Jesus' call to His disciples (Adventists included) to seek first His kingdom in Matthew 6:33 is an invitation to let Him take control of our life, including all our human institutions and systems (political

angels' messages in the 21st century. Such understanding affirms the sovereignty of God, the authority of Scripture, the power of the gospel and the will of God to save all peoples of the world within their human cultural contexts.

This view acknowledges that God is above culture, but that He works through human means to save men and women for His kingdom. This biblical view of culture provides for us a better methodology of mission that sees people as God's creation; humans to be reconciled to God the Creator.

This view seeks to find human values, belief systems, rituals, metaphors, and cultural expressions that are compatible with Christianity, and use them as tools for communicating the truths of God's everlasting gospel.

Can I be an Adventist Christian and be myself in terms of my cultural orientation? Absolutely!

munities because the activities their people are involved in are part of their culture. On the surface, this view seems to suggest that human behaviour is determined by culture, and the lordship of Jesus Christ cannot enter into this realm.

Humans as stewards of culture

The Bible makes the point that God, in appointing Adam and Eve stewards of His creation at the Garden of Eden, also gave them the privilege of extending His dominion over all creatures and living things (Genesis 1:28). Creating human culture (including forms of worship and social relationships) was an expression of Adam and Eve's humanity and stewardship.

Their care of God's assets and gifts, and their way of responding to the Creator and to each other was to be in harmony with the principles of God's rulership. However, with their disobedience, sin entered the

structures, social structures, technology, language, economy and ideology). This call to surrender all of oneself to Jesus is made on the basis that He is Creator of all things, and Redeemer of all nations.

In short, there is nothing in all creation, including my human culture, that stands outside of the realm of God's kingdom. More importantly, my culture (values and code of behaviour) is subject to the rule of God and is judged by His Word. And to allow Jesus to come into my life and change those areas of my being that I have not surrendered to His will is the divine work of transformation. This process and event is also a gift of God.

Human culture and the gospel

A proper understanding of the relationship between gospel and human culture can help us as a church become more effective in our proclamation of the three

Being Adventist and human

Can I be an Adventist Christian and be myself in terms of my cultural orientation? Absolutely! Does the call of discipleship and living under the lordship of Jesus Christ mean forsaking all of my human values and practices that are compatible with the gospel? Absolutely not!

Living in God's kingdom makes Him number one in my life, and allows Him to be in control of my mind, my emotions and my human habits. I acknowledge Him as Lord and accept my role as a steward of His kingdom on earth in the here and now.



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Our vision is to...
know
experience
and share
our hope in Jesus Christ!

- *Affirmations on World Teachers Day* • *Aviators, clowns and health message at local show*
- *New home for Nelson Bay company* • *Double debut for Adventist bands* • *and more*

—Compiled by Kellie Hancock—

● **World Teachers Day** was celebrated at Sydney Adventist College (SAC) on October 31. Staff—pictured, are **Jodi Ralph** (left) and **Patricia Figueroa** (right)—enjoyed a luncheon, during which they received small gifts. A highlight, according to Neroli Douglas, the school librarian, were statements of **affirmation and encouragement given by**



e a c h s t a f f member to another, which were printed

out then presented. **Paul Devine**, education systems manager for the Greater Sydney Conference, also attended the lunch and affirmed each teacher.

● The **Maitland, NSW, church** has celebrated **30 years** at its current address, on October 13. In 1973, because of its size, the membership moved from Elgin to Brunswick Street. The praise service was a **retrospective of worship styles and music** from the 1970s to the 1990s. Pictured are Pastors **Owen D'Costa**, left, the church's minister during the 1970s, and **Damien Rice**, the current minister.—*Northpoint*



● The **Adventist Aviation Association** (AAA) recently ran a **health-assessment**

Healthy canteen a winner

Avondale School's primary campus canteen has received "top" recognition and media coverage this year, with canteen manager Karen Dobson awarded Canteen Manager of the Year by the Canteen Association of Australia on November 5.

Mrs Dobson is pictured with Len Farquharson, head of the Avondale School-Primary.



At the beginning of 2003, canteen management was passed to Karen Dobson, a parent, with the brief to make the canteen profitable selling healthful foods. She achieved gold accreditation status from the Canteen Association of Australia as a result of completing a healthful foods menu changeover, a facilities upgrading, the integration of healthful eating and school curriculum, and providing training for the canteen manager.

After receiving the association's stamp of approval, Avondale School nominated Mrs Dobson for Canteen Manager of the Year.

According to school reporter Karen Zeuschner, Mrs Dobson worked through the year, introducing a "delicious staff menu to rival even the healthiest gourmet cafe" and spoke in classrooms about healthful eating, emphasising to students the importance of eating healthful food.

Channel 10 was so impressed with the canteen that they spent a day filming for a documentary on childhood obesity. They will present the school's canteen as an example of the way the community can help stem the tide of childhood obesity.

Nominations for Canteen Managers of the Year came from all over Australia.

hut at the Merriwa Show for the first time. Merriwa is 190 kilometres north-west of Newcastle, NSW. The 13-man AAA team find the locals friendly and approachable, with the town **canvassed monthly** with **Signs** magazines. One, **Paul Livingstone**, was surprised to receive a friendly greeting from a roving clown, who recognised him as the one who delivered his **Signs**. Of the 113 people who undertook health testing in the booth, **71 requested further health-**



management programs and self-study guides.—*AAA News*

● The **Nelson Bay, NSW, company** has moved into a **home of their own**. After many years of saving, a house at 131 Salamander Road, Salamander Bay, was purchased and converted into a meeting place. The **first**

worship service was held on October 11. **Nelson**



Bay company extends an invitation to holiday-makers and tourists to join them for worship.—*Northpoint*

● New buildings at **Hurstville school** were officially opened on September 21 by Greater Sydney Conference president **Pastor David Blanch**. This was followed by a multicultural day, in which guests, students and staff shared "good food and fellowship," reports Hurstville principal **Diane Hillsdon**.—*Intrasyd*

● Avondale College students helped the Salvation Army in their recent **Operation Tin Can** bring home the ~~bacon~~ nutmeat, collecting **three tonnes of non-perishable food** in the drive. This year the Salvation Army supplied an extra truck, anticipating the students' enthusiasm, after they collected so much the previous year that the lone truck provided struggled to carry the load. "We nearly flattened the springs!" said organiser **Craig Vogel**.—*Connections*

● A new **Seventh-day Adventist church** has been opened in the city of Mosul, 400 kilometres **north of Baghdad, Iraq**. The dedication service, witnessed by 100 members and visitors from neighbouring towns, took place on November 1. The opening of the new church is being regarded as a “bold move,” considering the continued lawlessness in the area, coupled with a degree of ambiguity about what the future holds for all religious minorities in Iraq, according to local church leaders in Iraq.—ANN

Double debut

Two bands formed by former Lilydale Adventist Academy students launched their debut EPs at New Life Christian Community, Croydon, on November 15.



Paul Woodward

Brassed Off (pictured above) and guests Mayday (below) celebrated their debut EPs with a combined “entry by donation” concert that helped raise funds for them to attend the National Gospel Happening (NGH), a Christian music festival in Canberra, November 21-23.



Paul Woodward

The varied ages of the 130 people attending the launch suggested that the music of Brassed Off and Mayday has wide appeal. For more information on both bands, go to <www.brassedoff.org> or <www.maydaymusic.net>.

● In the year since the establishment of the new **Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division**, some 100,000 people have joined the church, a **growth rate of 4.5 per cent**, bringing membership to 1.7 million. The region is the fourth largest world church area, behind Inter-America, South America and East-Central Africa.—ANN

● A recent **Euro-Asia Division** progress report on **church growth** shows **308 church buildings** purchased and seven to be acquired. More than **200 Bible-study groups** and 101 congregations have been organised and **323 pastors** trained under this program. The aim is to enhance personal evangelism and create more Bible-study groups and churches, say division officials.—ANN

● A Federal judge listened to oral arguments recently on a motion to temporarily restrain New York City from enforcing a **ban on nativity scenes** in its public schools. Under current policy, city officials **allow only Christmas trees and similar non-religious symbols** in displays commemorating the Christian celebration, **while they encourage display of the Jewish menorah and the Islamic star and crescent during their respective holidays**. Robert Muise, a lawyer with the Thomas More Law Center, which is suing the City of New York, contends that the city's ban on nativity scenes **is both discriminatory and unconstitutional**.—*Compass Direct*

● Any hope that the new state leadership in **China**, headed by President Hu Jintao, would usher in more **liberal policies toward religious believers** appears to be **premature**. A senior house-church leader interviewed in October confirmed that repression still continues in many areas.—*Compass Direct*

Days and offerings

December 13—Pacific Islands
Advancement Offering

Off the record

● The report of multicultural celebrations at Avondale College (Newsfront, November 15) so enthused the editorial department that we **changed Harry's nationality**, giving him a Chinese surname. **Harry Neale** (not Chen) is the sport and recreation coordinator at Avondale College who took the worship service celebrating multiculturalism. He is originally from the Cook Islands.

● **Graeme Frauenfelder**, who has run STORM Co training sessions in the North New South Wales and Greater Sydney Conferences, has made an impact at the **University of Western Sydney, NSW**.



Recently graduating with distinction with a Bachelor of Applied Science, he also received awards for leadership, community service and academic achievements. In recognition of his numerous awards, he also received two scholarships from the Golden Key International Honour Society. Currently Mr Frauenfelder is undertaking an **honours research degree** that will equip him for overseas aid and development projects, utilising his skills in **creative and expressive arts**.

● **Laura Hill**, a Year 4 student at **Blue Hills College, NSW**, was recently announced as a winner in the **Australasian Schools English Competition**. She is pictured here after receiving her medal at a school assembly. Laura has her sights on one day becoming a veterinary surgeon.



First female vice-president at Avondale College

Cooranbong, NSW

For the first time in the history of Avondale College, a woman has been appointed to a senior administrative leadership position.

Dr Vivienne Watts is currently senior lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Central Queensland University (CQU). She has accepted the role of Vice-President (Academic Administration), replacing Dr Eric Magnusson, who has been covering for president-elect Dr John Cox, and will take up the position in January 2004.

Dr Watts, who has an impressive publication record and also extensive experience in university administration, says the move to Avondale will enable her to combine her work and spiritual life in a more obvious way.

"I enjoy expressing my faith through the everyday part of my life, but being able to integrate and make overt the faith that I have is not very easily done in a secular university," she says.



Dr Vivienne Watts.

"I have done similar work [in university administration] before, and I was hoping that at some point in my career I would be able to do it again, so I'm looking forward to the new role."

Dr Watts says the fact that she is the first woman to hold the post is not important.

"There have been many senior administrators in other universities who are women and I plan to follow in their footsteps," she says. "There is such a degree of equality in the general community these days that the days when gender was an issue have passed. I hope I

can just get on with the job and be seen for myself."

Dr Watts has served as associate dean of her faculty and as president of the Faculty Assembly. For the past six years she has been a member of the University Council and for the past four a member of the executive committee of the University Council.—**Heather Potter**

New editor named for Signs

Wahroonga, NSW

Signs Publishing Company has a new chief editor-elect, and he is believed to be the youngest ever.

The South Pacific Division executive committee appointed Nathan Brown, 29, to the position, which includes editorship of *Signs of the Times* and *RECORD*, at its year-end meeting on November 19.

Mr Brown says it is "exciting" that the church is willing to trust a younger person with the responsibility.

"Nathan may be younger, but it isn't about age," says current editor Bruce Manners. "It's about maturity, and Nathan has that."

Mr Brown is completing a doctorate in literature at James Cook University, Townsville, Qld, and holds degrees in law, literary studies and English. He has worked at *Signs*, and at *Adventist Review*—for six months as an intern. He is a columnist for *Adventist Review*, *Signs of the Times* and *Edge* magazines, and writes regularly for *RECORD*.

Mr Brown's nomination came with a recommendation from *Adventist Review* editor and expatriate Australian Dr William Johnsson.

Pastor Manners says, "Nathan already has a reputation as one of Adventism's finest writers. *RECORD* readers can expect good things from Nathan."

Mr Brown says he recognises he has "a learning adventure" ahead. "Our church has a proud publishing history and I'll seek to build on that by challenging myself and others to use our magazines to better communicate and connect more creatively."

Mr Brown, with his wife, Angela, will move to Warburton, Vic, in January, where he will work with the existing editorial team before Pastor Manners takes up his new position as senior pastor of Avondale College church in July.—**Brenton Stacey**



Nathan Brown.

Singapore chooses to take charge

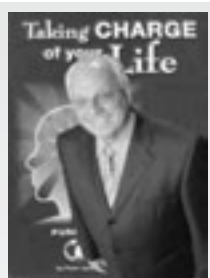
News of Pastor Peter Jack's "Taking charge of your life" seminar has reached the ears of church leaders in Singapore.

The life-development seminar planned to seat 250 for December 1, but received more than 400 reservations in the two weeks prior to the event. Pastor Jack is now conducting two sessions per night, four nights per week, until December 12 to accommodate the high level of interest.

The seminar will be followed up with the "Living your dreams" seminar in January 2004 and the new "Taking charge of your future" seminar in March. This third series is the final in the trilogy. Pastor Jack says "it digs even deeper with the felt needs approach, and yet each of the distinctives of Adventism are woven in, using language and concepts which postmodern, thinking people understand."

"The Singapore series has real value for the South Pacific Division," says Pastor Calvyn Townend, general manager for the Adventist Media Centre. "The effectiveness of this style of approach can be assessed on a large scale and it also gives Pastor Jack an opportunity to test the third seminar before it is launched in Australia and New Zealand."

The 2002 Adventist Media Offering of some \$A100,000 is funding the development of the venture.—**David Gibbons**



Adventist Media Centre

Volunteers! Your adventure starts here

by Mel Lemke

Want to do something new in 2004? Looking for the adventure of a lifetime? Why not try volunteering? It will grow you in unexpected ways!

Join the growing number of young and old who will serve around the world through Adventist Volunteer Service in 2004. Thousands do it each year. Many serve again, choosing service as a way of life. So go on—take the plunge.

Listed below are some of the volunteer positions currently available. Check the Adventist Volunteer Service web site <www.adventistvolunteers.org> for more. Then contact us. We'll do our best to place you in a current opportunity of your choice, or find a place for you if nothing you see fits. Our details are:

Mail: AVS, Locked Bag 2014, Wairoa, NSW 2075

Phone: +61 2 9847 3275

Email: volunteers@adventist.org.au

Australia

Youth pastors and pastoral assistants

- Gateway Ministry, Melbourne, Victoria
- Kellyville, Sydney, New South Wales
- Wantirna, Melbourne, Victoria
- Geelong, Victoria

New Zealand

Youth pastors and pastoral assistants

- North Harbour, Auckland
- Royal Oak, Auckland

Pinnacle Challenge, ADRAcare

- Two volunteers to serve as program facilitators for 11 months beginning on January 19, 2004.

The Pacific Teachers

- Two teachers to teach at the Siufaga Adventist Primary School in Savaii, Samoa, until May 30, 2004.



- Teacher with at least three years experience to teach at the Palm Drive International Primary School in Honiara, Solomon Islands. Position available for 1-3 years.

Short-term mission

Interested in short-term mission trips? Let us know and we'll put you in touch with your local Short-Term Mission Coordinator. We have fly'n'build opportunities in:

- Fiji
- Papua New Guinea
- Vanuatu

Rest of the world

Accountants

- Afghanistan, Italy and North Korea

College lecturers

- Bangladesh, Madagascar and Zimbabwe

Computing

- South Africa, Indonesia and Madagascar

Deans

- Kenya, Spain and the United Kingdom

Dentists

- Guyana and India

English-as-a-second-language teachers

- Korea, Japan, China, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Czech Republic, Russia, Kazakhstan, Macao, Mexico, Romania, Thailand, Ukraine

High school teachers

- Ecuador, Guyana, Kenya, Marshall Islands, Nicaragua, Puerto Rico, United Kingdom, Venezuela

Librarian

- Kenya

Maintenance workers

- Lebanon and Nicaragua

Medical personnel

- Ecuador, India, Malawi, Nepal

Nurses

- Nicaragua

Pastor

- Nicaragua

Primary school teachers

- Ecuador, Honduras, Kenya, Marshall Islands, Palau, Peru, Romania

Radio technician

- Haiti



Mel Lemke, the director of Adventist Volunteer Service, describes his volunteer year as the best of his life. "I met the woman who would later become my wife."

14 reasons to be a volunteer

by Mel Lemke

Ever wondered about why people volunteer? Here, 14 people tell why.

The church runs on volunteers. Every week at church volunteers serve others. Many also serve their community. December 5 each year is International Volunteers Day. It's a time both to thank volunteers and to celebrate their role in our church and community. It's also a time for those who have not tried the adventure of service to seriously think about doing so.

Gary Christian, Director of ADRAcare Australia, has a vision. It's to have every church member commit to giving two hours of their time each week to serve others. Only two hours. But these two hours will change the life of your church and the life of your community, because these two hours will change you.

The ADRAcare Menu suggests over 100 ways you can be involved in service in your community. If you want to know more, look up the ADRA web site under "Get Involved" to download the list of ideas, or contact ADRA on (02) 9489 5488 and ask for a copy of The ADRAcare Menu.

If we were each to give two hours (or more) each week to serve, miracles of grace would occur in our lives and in our churches. We'd better understand and live out the servant-heart of Jesus, and would be doing His work.

To the thousands of volunteers who serve their church and community in many ways, we salute you. You're helping make this world a better place.

For more information on International Volunteer Day and volunteer info-sharing and networking, visit <www.worldvolunteerweb.org/ivd>.

For opportunities globally with Adventist Volunteer Service, visit <www.adventistvolunteers.org>.

Mel Lemke is the director of Adventist Volunteer Service for the South Pacific Division.

I serve because:

"of the privilege of being co-labourers with Jesus."—*Peter and Carelle Colquhoun, Japan*



"I love the Lord and want to make a difference in people's lives."—*Scott Wareham, New Zealand*



"my part is being done to hasten the coming of Jesus Christ."—*Charlene Luzuk, Japan*



"it's a fantastic way to help others grow, and I love to meet new friends."—*Juanita Wilson, Tasmanian Pinnacle*

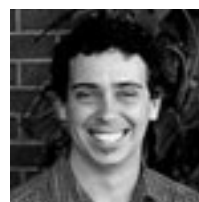
"God has blessed me in so many ways"—*Ervin Ferris, Solomon Islands*



"He has called me to serve."—*Nadine Clark, USA*



"God knew I could."—*Melody Tan, England*



"I love seeing people's lives change for the better when they meet Jesus Christ."—*Scott Dobson, NSW*

"I want to be like Jesus."—*Andrea Keele, New Zealand*



"of God's providential leading."—*Jeffrey Pau, New Zealand*



"Hemi givim plante good sumpting long mifala bifo." ["He gave plenty (of) good things to us before."]—*Ron and Nita Clarke, Kiribati*



"Jesus served."—*Carina Goncalves, Japan*

"I love Jesus and people."—*Caroline Ruocco, Melbourne*



"We can do anything through Him who gives us strength."—*Brian and Adrienne Smith, Japan*



The best investment

by Mario Cortes

I was having an animated conversation (a heated debate, actually) with another Christian about faith and money. I told Jerry (not his real name) that I planned to have a few properties to provide my family and myself with passive income in my retirement years.

He said that by doing that I wasn't living by faith. He reasoned that if God is my provider and if I try to prepare for the future, I was showing a lack of faith in His provision, and I could get to the point where I felt I no longer need Him.

But is money all I need God for? Is God just in the business of taking me out of financial messes every time I manage to get myself in them? Or is God concerned with bigger things? If I have money, will God begin to feel inadequate? If I can provide financially for my family, will God feel insecure about His role in my life?

Jewish theology has said that the richer you are the more evidence there is of God's provision and blessing in your life. Catholic theology has it that poverty helps toward holiness, and so priests take a vow of poverty as well as chastity and obedience. The more I study the Scriptures, the more I realise that neither of these views is correct.

There's only one purpose for humans and that is to serve God with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our might. This "might" includes our riches and giftings in our lives.

If you live in a poor country, God expects you to serve Him with what you have. If you live in an affluent society like ours, God doesn't expect you to deny your environment and turn feral. Use what you have. When God called Moses, He asked him, "What is in your hand?"

"A staff," said Moses.

"Good, then use it to lead my people out of slavery from Egypt."

God asks you what is in your hand today. Whether it's the ability to sing, to intercede

for others, to manage finances, to cook or to pray for God's healing, use it to the best of your ability.

A friend of mine turned down a job offering \$A100,000 a year because he thought it would lead him away from God and take him away from his parents. I told him he was being selfish. I went on to explain that God gives us divine opportunities in order to serve Him better. It's not about us. It's about God!

With that kind of wage, imagine how many ministries he could support and, being a one-hour flight from his parents, he could see them as often as he sees them now. Not only that, but his parents live in a rented house. He hadn't thought of providing a home for them!

Don't confuse humility with insignificance. Abraham was a humble man—the father of faith. He was also the richest man in the land. According to my friend Jerry, this would be impossible. Imagine having faith *and* money!

God will not give you more than you can handle. That goes for money as well. I've been working at my current business for almost eight years. I now earn in a day what I used to earn in a month even as recently as a year ago. What made the difference? I believe God can now trust me with His money. I'm His child and He doesn't want any bright-coloured "toy" getting in the way of my relationship with Him.

Let it shine!

I sent out a challenge to a good friend, a gospel singer. I told him that he needs to get big. To get known! He said he wasn't after fame. But I wasn't talking about fame; I was talking about serving God in a big way.

"Your singing voice is not your own," I told him. "It's a gift from God."

I laughed as I sang this song to him: "You're so vain, you probably think this

voice is about you . . . 'It's not about 'me, me, me.' The gift is from God and you can't hide the lamp under a bushel. You must let it shine!"

Your house, your car, your children, your voice, your gifts and your money. They're all on loan to use for God. When you push these aside, you're in effect saying to God, "Hey God, I know you want to bless me with this gift, but thanks, I'm too humble for that—You keep it. Maybe You can find someone who needs it more than me."

For too long we've excused our medioc-



city with false humility. God hasn't called us to be average, to just get by, to hang on by the skin of our teeth. He has called us to be the head, not the tail. We're so proud to be humble that we whip ourselves just to show God how good we are! Then we boast to God that we have done it for His sake. But God hasn't called us to obscurity. He has called us to shine!

In fact, it's a sin to have a gift from God and not use it powerfully to impact this lost generation.

If God wants our growth in every sphere, then how did we arrive at a twisted theology on money? It came out of the Middle Ages. The feudal lords didn't want the peasants to revolt. They certainly didn't want them to have power. So they taught the people that poverty was their spiritual heritage.

What little money they had was taken by the church to pay to help get their dead family members out of purgatory. This kept

the masses in poverty and lack. Soon it just became a way of life, enforced by the aristocracy and supported by the priesthood.

A whole theology, then, helped keep people from rising up. No wonder Karl Marx said, "Religion is the opiate of the masses." He wasn't referring to Jesus' Christianity, but some warped interpretation designed to keep people in ignorance.

The sad fact is that even today, Christians still feel the false guilt of living in abundance. Instead of sharing it, they oscillate between living in decadent opulence to living a life of mere survival.

I say it again: it's not about you and your false humility; it's not about you and your clever investment ideas; it's not about you and what you've given up for God; it's not about you and how many houses you own. It's about God and His kingdom. Everything else is either like a Monopoly game or a pitiful example of human pride.

Lessons from the parable

The parable of the talents, found in Matthew 25:14-29, helps us see that God requires not just wishes, but that we serve Him to the best of our means and abilities, and that He has called us to be significant and to make a difference in our world.

"To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability" (Matthew 25:15, NIV).

God knows that some of us can't handle more than one talent. What He does require is that we place what we do have in a high interest-bearing investment. He looks for a 100 per cent return. You can only produce 100 per cent if you give 100 per cent. You must be actively involved in the investment if it's going to produce that much. You can't let anyone else manage it!

If you're thinking, *Hey, that's too harsh!* then you have the same attitude of the man who buried his talent. He said, "I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown. . . . I was afraid and hid your talent in the ground" (Matthew 25:24, 25, NIV).

He didn't know God at all. When God gives you a talent, it's because He already knows you can handle it. He has equipped you to make it grow. The problem with this fellow is that he didn't know that God had already given him the ability to grow his investment; he wasn't a risk-taker for God.

In fact, the Master told him that if he wanted to act so irresponsibly, then he should have handed the management of it over to a banker, so at least he would have received some interest on it.

This parable teaches me new lessons every time I read it. Here are a few points to ponder:

- If you don't obey God and use your talent(s) in a powerful way, God will take it and give it to someone who can be trusted.
 - A high-yielding talent can come only from our total commitment.
 - Fear can destroy your only talent.
 - God doesn't reap where He doesn't sow.
- If He has called you, then it's because He has already given you the equipment to fulfil your calling. **R**



Mario Cortes runs <www.homeinvestor.com.au> and writes from Innisfail, NSW.

Tithing: A faith relationship

by Paul B Petersen

In dealing with tithing, Seventh-day Adventists have traditionally underlined the aspect of the law—tithing as an obligation. But there is a personal aspect, that is, the relationship between God and the individual who tithes to Him.

Most texts describing tithing are found in the legal section of the Pentateuch. Yet, as is common in the Mosaic laws, only a few references provide any theological reason for their existence. When viewed in their totality, they clearly reveal the *what, to whom, and where* of tithing. But the question *why* God chose tithing as a sign of loyalty is left partly unanswered.

Neither is it of any help to go back to the origins of tithing, because we have no knowledge of how the concept arose. When mentioned the first time, it's taken for granted as an already-established custom (see Genesis 14:19, 20). Yet we do find the theological motivation for tithing.

The theology of Mosaic laws is embedded in the narratives of Genesis and the first part of Exodus—any religious Israelite would understand this. The motivation for the Sabbath, for instance, is found in the Creation account (Genesis 2:1-3, cf Exodus 20:11). The concept of sacrifice originated in Eden immediately after the Fall, but received a profound imprint from the story of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac (see Genesis 22:1-19).

The theological basis

Two narratives in Genesis mention tithing. At first glance they seem to have little in common. In Genesis 14, Abraham has been victorious in warfare; in Genesis (28:20-22), Jacob is a fugitive. The *what* is not exactly the same: Abraham returns to God a tenth of the spoils of war; Jacob vows to give God back a tenth of what he might receive in the future. The immediate receivers, the *whom* of tithing, are not identical: Abraham brings his tithe to Melchizedek, a

priest-king of Jerusalem; Jacob never states who will actually receive his tithe. The *persons* are certainly not similar: Abraham is the "father of the faithful"; Jacob is a treacherous deceiver. But the narratives share several characteristics that help our search for a theology of tithing.

Prayer and worship

Both examples are in the context of prayer and worship. The blessing or thanksgiving by Melchizedek has the form of a prayer, and Jacob's vow is a prayer. The significance of this is heightened by the fact that though worship and dialogue with God is a major issue in Genesis, only a few prayers are recorded.

Genesis reveals how God once walked with humans, but after sin He had to reveal Himself through mediators. Approaching Him through sacrifices, humans began to worship and "call upon the name of the Lord" (Genesis 4:26). Noah, Abraham and Isaac continued this worship.

The two references to tithing in Genesis must be understood against this dominating theme of worship. Tithing is an act of worship. Like prayer, it's a response to God, who has spoken and revealed Himself and intervened in our lives. In tithing, Abraham and Jacob recognised a power higher than themselves, *Yahweh, El Elyon*—"the Lord, God the Most High" (Genesis 14:22, cf 18-20).

We learn about tithing from worship, but we also understand worship better because of the nature of tithing. In worshipping God, we fellowship with the Creator during the holy time of the Sabbath and in bringing the tithe, we share with the Provider the fruits of our activities and endeavours. Tithing and tithing becomes "holy to the Lord" (Leviticus 27:30).

The blessing

Both narratives are found within the

context of blessing. In the Old Testament a blessing may be part of a greeting—an expression of a wish for the best. It consists, however, not only in words, but also in action—in a sense it is a sharing of gifts. By blessing, the giver shares the power of health and wellbeing with the receiver. When God is blessing, He bestows His gifts upon humans.

In much religion, blessing is understood as magical and effective when performing proper rituals and pronouncing verbal formulas. Not so in the Old Testament, because blessing is part of an interpersonal relationship. Not only does God as the superior Being share His gifts with inferior creatures, humans are said to bless God (as in Genesis 24:27 and Psalms 18:47; 28:6; 31:32; 41:14). Since we can bring nothing to God that He has not provided, blessing God is an expression of gratitude (as in Psalms 66:20, 113:2; and Daniel 2:20).

The concept of blessing plays a unique role in Genesis, especially in the lives of Abraham and Jacob. Due to sin, curses have scourged the earth, but Abraham is called to counteract these curses and become a blessing to all people (Genesis 12:1-3). Melchizedek's twofold blessing (Genesis 14:19-20) is an expression of gratitude toward Abraham and toward his God, but also acknowledges that the Most High has given Abraham the victory. By tithing to Melchizedek, Abraham pays tribute to God as the source of his achievement. God has blessed Abraham by delegating his power. Abraham responds in thanksgiving by tithing.

The events in Luz (Bethel) in Genesis 28 make no reference to blessing. Yet, many years later when Jacob recounts the fulfillment of God's promises, he understands them to be blessings (Genesis 48:3). Moreover, the dramatic story of his flight and return is set in the context of a struggle for a blessing more profound than the material



Bento

goods he at first saw as the divine promises.

Jacob's flight begins with his deceitful theft of Isaac's legal blessing. The dialogue between father and son reveals his character when, asked for his identity, he claims to be Esau (Genesis 27:24-29). When Jacob's troubles in Mesopotamia are about to end, he openly acknowledges God as the source of his wealth (Genesis 31:5, 42; 33:5, 11). Yet the reader is told only through Laban's words that this is due to God's blessings (Genesis 30:27, 30).

Jacob now searches for a deeper kind of blessing and reaches it in his wrestle with the Lord (Genesis 32:24-30). The climax of this struggle echoes the dialogue between Isaac and Jacob years earlier. Asked about his identity, Jacob admits that he is Jacob, the deceiver (playing on the Hebrew meaning of *Jacob*, cf Genesis 25:26). Realising his true state, he receives a new name and becomes a new creation. God blesses him with forgiveness as Jacob acknowledges his dependency upon God's mercy.

He is now ready to return to Bethel (Genesis 35:1) where God first revealed Himself to Jacob. He now removes all gods from his household (Genesis 35:2-4) and journeys to Bethel and builds an altar (Genesis 35:6-7). The text doesn't specify that he returns tithe, but the reader can supply that information. Jacob's relationship with God has deepened. When he finally fulfils his original vow, it is no longer as a product of his own achievements or as part of a deal, but as a response to undeserved blessings of divine mercy.

Immediately afterward, God once again reveals Himself to Jacob with a blessing and a repetition of His promises (Genesis 35:9-13). Jacob then lives in the shadow of divine blessing. It is seen when he is an old, humble man greeting Pharaoh in Egypt (Genesis 47:7-10), in looking back at his experience (Genesis 48:3) and in sharing his inspired farewell with his descendants (Genesis 48:9, 15-20; 49:25-26, 28).

In the Old Testament, blessing is part of a mutual personal relationship between

God and humans. "Those who are wrongly related to God can neither bless (Malachi 2:2) or be blessed (Deuteronomy 28) and no efficacious word can alter this" (John N Oswalt, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*). In bringing the tithe, I acknowledge that my achievements are but blessings from God. Responding to these blessings, I bless God, that is, return in gratitude to God a small part of what He has already provided. Tithe is brought to God as praise and thanksgiving for His blessings of divine mercy and forgiveness.

God: Creator and Provider

Though the two narratives view the blessings of God from two different angles, they both describe God as Provider. Abraham names God "the Most High, the Creator/Possessor of heaven and earth" (Genesis 14:22, 19). The phrase "heaven and earth" within the context of Genesis brings associations to the Creation account (Genesis 1). It is an inclusive term, indicating that everything belongs to God.

The word translated *Creator* or *Possessor* is from a Hebrew word meaning "to acquire" and emphasises possession and ownership. This is appropriate in the context of tithing. In bringing the tithe, humans don't give to God what is their own, but return to God part of what is His. Returning tithe is a token of acceptance of the role given us as a steward for God in relation to all aspects of our existence.

Gladly bringing the tithe

The act of returning tithe is deliberate and voluntary, and made by choice. This comes to the fore in the dialogue between Abraham and the king of Sodom (Genesis 14:21-24). Rude and petty, the pagan king reacts strongly against Abraham's tithing. The king demands more from Abraham than was his right according to custom. Abraham chooses to be generous and abstains from personal gain. It's evident that Abraham, in sharing the spoils, acts in complete freedom. His tithing is voluntary.

This is even more evident in the narrative about Jacob, whose tithe giving is related to a personal and deliberate vow. In returning tithe, in response to God's acts of mercy, the element of choice is essential to maintain a personal relationship to God. Ellen White accentuates this element: "Every man should freely and willingly and gladly bring tithes and offerings into the storehouse of the Lord, because in so doing there is a blessing" (*Testimonies to Ministers*, page 305).

Tithing is part of my faith relationship with God. The experiences of Abraham and Jacob provide the background for the stipulations of the Mosaic laws and a foundation for a theological understanding of tithing in the Old Testament and in the Bible as a whole.

A Christological perspective

From a New Testament perspective, tithing may be seen as an expression of faith. Genuine faith in Jesus implies humility and total surrender to Him as the only Saviour and Lord.

As an act of prayer and worship, tithing exemplifies the Christian's recognition that "Jesus is Lord" (1 Corinthians 12:3). Because of Christ's sacrifice, the believer lives in an atmosphere of continuous gratitude for the blessings received by God (Ephesians 5:20, cf Philippians 4:6). Tithing may be seen as an "offer of praise to God," brought in by those who "give thanks to His name" (Hebrews 13:15). As believers, we belong to God, "bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23). As His possession, we are but stewards of all life's gifts and achievements (cf 1 Corinthians 4:2, 10). Living with Jesus in faith implies voluntary giving from a cheerful heart (2 Corinthians 9:7).

The cross of Christ reveals a God who prefers words to sword, persuasion to coercion, liberty to force, trusting relationships to mechanical submission and love to power. The gratitude of receiving all blessings from such a God provides the major biblical motivation for tithing. **R**

Paul B Petersen is the field secretary for the South Pacific Division. He has available a more scholarly edition of this article. For a copy, please email <ppetersen@adventist.org.au>, phone (02) 9847 3333 or write to Locked Bag 2014, Wahroonga NSW 2076.

Incarnation

by Nathan Brown

There are many reasons Christmas should have lost its significance: “The lovely old carols played and replayed till their effect is like a dentist’s drill or a jackhammer, the pathetic banalities of the pulpit and the chilling commercialism of almost everything else, people spending money they can’t afford on presents you neither need nor want. . . . Yet for all our efforts, we’ve never quite managed to ruin it” (Frederick Buechner, *Whistling in the Dark*).

It may be the fact Christmas continues to have any meaning is something of a miracle in itself and testimony to the grand miracle lying at its core. That miracle can be summed up in a word: *Incarnation*. It’s a miracle and mystery beyond our understanding.

However, every year we’re asked again to imagine what the first Christmas must have been like. To help us in this process we are met with groups of children with tea towels on their heads in a cardboard stable with bales of hay strewn about. It’s hardly an appropriate re-creation of “the central event in the history of the Earth” (C S Lewis, *Miracles*).

Yet somehow—and almost incidentally—it can begin to work. In the frailty of the expression, we may catch just a glimpse of the feebleness of this eternal moment.

Only in the retelling does the world stop for this moment. The town was crowded: the local residents and businesses were busy housing and feeding the influx of visitors; the out-of-towners were intent on either rest or revelry, letting off steam after a journey made under captive compulsion. It was probably not a silent night and any attending holiness would have been largely unappreciated. Only a small number of people in town that night even knew of His birth; fewer still had any clue as to its significance.

With most births and birthplaces, importance is usually only attributed with the benefits of hindsight, based on what

that person grew up to achieve. Then, the circumstances of their birth and their birthplace may come to be regarded as noteworthy. However, if Jesus had done nothing other than be born, we still would be faced with an event of unfathomable mystery. That God could somehow become human . . . and that He would choose to . . .

Only in retrospect could John say, “We have seen his glory,” but in that long-ago stable, the largely ignored birth—now almost forgotten, in the mountains of tinsel, plastic Christmas trees and other Christmas junk—already dwelt One “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14, NIV).

In the sentimental overload of Christmas stories retold, we must never forget this miracle Baby was born to die. From the moment of the earliest conception of the plan of Incarnation the end result was to be crucifixion. We can marvel at the miracle beyond comprehension and the sacrifice in God stepping down so low as to become human. Yet it is only the starting point for the ultimate sacrifice of His death. It is the darkness of that moment 30-something years later that is the source of our true hope. It was this powerful light flickering weakly in the first cries of the baby-God:

“In him was life, and that life was the light of men” (John 1:4, NIV).

From the darkness of that earthly night, that feeble light shines far brighter than the gentle lantern light in a carefully ordered stable or even the angel glow depicted on the Christmas cards. From that night, a light shines in the darkness of ourselves, our world, our despair and hopelessness—“but the darkness has not understood it” (John 1:5, NIV).

That which we do not understand is not particularly comfortable and, amid the tackiness, artificiality and stylised goodwill of the present Christmas, we still so clearly have not understood it, but that Light continues to shine its piercing beam into our darkness. God became light in the hope of being understood by the darkness. It is the central miracle of incarnation.

As Frederick Buechner describes it, “It is not tame. It is not touching. It is not beautiful. It is uninhabitable terror. It is unthinkable darkness riven with unbearable light.”

Nathan Brown writes from Townsville, Qld. He is the recently appointed editor-elect of RECORD.

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Peta Taylor

We're praying for you

Shirley Evans, SA

I can't remember being as deeply touched by an article as "Here's our problem" (October 25). My heart goes out to you, "James." It's no more a sin to be a homosexual by orientation and not practise sin than it is to be a physically or sexually abused victim who chooses not to perpetuate the abuse, or an unwed mother who chooses not to sleep with another man until married even if it means years of lost emotional and physical intimacy.

Many others empathise with you, including those with similar problems who look forward to the day when Jesus comes to banish loneliness from all causes. We will pray for courage for you to stay committed to your choice, and for compassion, caring and understanding on our part.

The here and now

Danny Bell, WA

Who is confident enough to say they're fit and ready for heaven now ("A rare prayer," November 15)? And the writer contradicts the ready-now theory by saying, "Our salvation is not in an event, but a Person." If we can work our way to a point where we feel we're ready and there's nothing more to accomplish, is that not an event?

I agree that salvation comes by focusing on Jesus, and by focusing on Him we enter a process of becoming ready. Saying that "readiness for the second coming of Christ is a present-tense experience" is like the

Pharisee who prayed, "Lord, I thank you that I have arrived and that I am ready now!" (my version). If being ready happens now, this is event-focused salvation and does away with the need for sanctification and the process of making us ready. My being ready to die in Christ is different to thanking God that I'm fit for translation.

No compromising on drink

John Prosser, Vic

In response to "To drink or not to drink" (October 18), I would like to give some reasons why I choose to totally abstain. Proverbs 23:31 admonishes us to not even look at wine when it's fermented. Ellen

egocentric—better health, clearer mind, makes for a good conversation, fear of addiction and so on. All these reasons seem to be about whether or not drinking alcohol is good for me or not.

There's another reason that focuses more outward and is why I choose not to drink alcohol. It produces an enormous amount of social evil—death, broken homes, unemployment, work-related injuries, the list could go on. I choose not to drink as a public protest against these social evils.

We should get away from arguments over the jots and tittles of the relative benefits of alcohol. Something, no matter how much it might benefit a few, should be rejected on the basis that it wrecks so

While the killing of Geoghan is terrible, he at least enjoyed a full career . . . and is now at peace.

White presents alcohol as a sinful indulgence that should be discarded (*Selected Messages*, Book 3, page 287). Our 27 fundamental beliefs tell us not to use it.

In these last days in the battle between good and evil, the battle is for the mind. We need alert minds to decipher right from wrong. I was a heavy drinker before coming to Christ and I know that just one glass of alcohol can induce violent behaviour. Is that letting your light shine for Jesus?

Steve Parker, SA

It was interesting to read Robert H Granger's reasons for not drinking alcohol. Many of the reasons I've heard are

much of what is positive and necessary for a civil society.

Questions

Peter Bamford, NSW

I was amazed and perplexed by Roy Adams's "Reflection on a jailhouse murder" (*Adventist Review*, November 8). Adams describes Geoghan as a "bad person," yet says he saw in Geoghan's face a defeated man—remorseful, contrite and utterly broken. Why, then, did the courts not see a contrite person? Where's the evidence Geoghan was contrite or remorseful? Did he at any time confess his actions?

The torment of the acts perpetuated on the victims will not as easily recede from their minds as Adams says it did from his. While the killing of Geoghan is terrible, he at least enjoyed a full career, close friendships and church fellowship, and is now at peace, no longer suffering in prison.

Meanwhile the victims have an ongoing emotional prison sentence. They need our prayers and our concerns, for they still have to live with their nightmares.

Note: Views in Letters do not necessarily represent those of the editors or the denomination. Letters should be less than 250 words, and writers must include their name, address and phone number. All letters are edited to meet space and literary requirements, but the author's original meaning will not be changed. Not all letters received are published. See masthead (page 2) for contact details.



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Avondale College appointments 2004:
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Melissa Bosnjakovic, to teach primary, Parkside Christian School, North New Zealand Conference (NNZ), New Zealand Pacific Union Conference (NZPUC).
Keira Bullock, to teach middle primary Yr 2, Gilson College, VC, AUC.
Bradley Collett, to teach Industrial Tech, Junior Maths, ICT, PDHPE, Gilson College, VC, AUC.
Brad Melville, to ministerial intern, Greater Sydney Conference, AUC.
Mere Neale, to claims assessor, ACA health department.
Melinda Ridley, to teach Grades 1-3, Hilliard Christian School, Tasmanian Conference, AUC.
Owen Ryan, to assistant staff auditor, General Conference Auditing Service, South Pacific Division.
Gregg Pratt, to ministerial intern, NNZ, NZPUC.

Weddings

Cornwall—Marshall. Darren Thomas Cornwall, son of Douglas (Yarra Junction, Vic) and Glenyse Cornwell (Cranbourne), and Wendy Christine Marshall, daughter of Barry and Sue Marshall (Warburton), were married on 3.11.03 in the Warburton Adventist church.
Eric Kingdon

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Nelson—Etto. Shaun Francis Nelson, son of Frank and Wilma Nelson (Melbourne, Vic), and Tamara Louise Etto, daughter of Winston and Maureen Etto (Melbourne), were married on 1.11.03 at "Monsalvat," Eltham.
Merv Sparrowhawk

Priest—Windus. James Robert Priest, son of George and Lynette Priest (Orange, NSW), and Allison Maree Windus, daughter of Leslie and Pamela Windus (Orange), were married on 5.10.03 at Orange Botanical Gardens.
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Tui—Fincher. James (Sonny) Leonard Tui, son of Noel and Hanna Tui (Yarra Junction, Vic), and Karen Lee Fincher, daughter of Gary and Shirley Boundy (Shepparton), were married on 31.10.03 in the Warburton Adventist church.
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Karalundi 50th anniversary celebration. Calling all ex-staff and families and volunteer workers who were at Karalundi from its commencement in 1954, to the 50th anniversary celebration at the Karalundi Camp, October 1-4, 2004. If you have any slides, photos or memorabilia from your time there, and would like to have them on display at Karalundi Camp, please contact Gordon Topperwien, 12 Coolabah Way, Forrestfield WA 6058; phone (08) 9359 2994, so that arrangements can be made to collect your memorabilia and discuss how it can be displayed. All ex-staff and families are invited to join us in these celebrations. Please contact Karalundi directly at: Karalundi Aboriginal Education Centre, PO Box 6, Meekatharra WA 6642.

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No personal cheques from outside Australia. Please use international money order or bank draft in Australian dollars. Sorry! As a volunteer ministry it is not viable for us to accept credit card payments.

Name

Address

Postcode

Post to: Adventists Affirm, Australia
PO Box 466, Mandurah WA 6210

Adventists Affirm, Australia is not an official church organisation, but is supportive of the church