

# ADVENTISTS AFFIRM

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## The Truth About Telling the Truth

by *Ron du Preez*

*Is it ever acceptable for a Christian to lie, even under extreme circumstances?*

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It happened toward the end of the Second World War. Hitler's troops had invaded Austria, and the German army was out to annihilate all Jews. Out of compassion, a Seventh-day Adventist woman began looking after a 12-year-old Jewish boy, named Fritz. All too soon that fateful day arrived when the Gestapo showed up. As she opened the front door, a direct question was fired at her. Calling her by name, a soldier asked: "Mrs. Hasel, do you have Fritz in your house?"<sup>1</sup> What should she say? Should she tell the truth, or mislead these murderers? The life of an innocent boy was at stake! What would *you* say? What *should* your answer be if you were in that situation?

While that predicament may admittedly seem remote, it is a fact that each of us is frequently confronted with the temptation to be less than honest: the inflated income tax figures, the innuendos intended to impugn another's character, the padded report or the doctoring of numbers meant to enhance one's status or career.

For some employers, this question of truth-telling has become quite an issue recently. What are you to do when a former employee, who was not a very reliable worker, requests a letter of recommendation? To avoid being sued by either side, author Robert Thornton suggests you give a totally ambiguous response. For example, to portray someone who is constantly negative, you could say, "Her input was always critical;" to characterize a lazy person, you might suggest, "You will be very fortunate to get him to work for you;" to depict a person best suited for janitorial type work, you could state, "If I were you, I wouldn't hesitate to give her sweeping responsibilities;" and to describe a candidate who is certain to foul up any

project, you could advise, "I am sure that whatever he undertakes--no matter how small--he will be fired with enthusiasm."<sup>2</sup>

Now, I am not suggesting that this is the way a Christian ought to respond to difficult questions. I'm sharing this only to illustrate that at times the "truth" is told in such a way as to deceive. You might have heard the story of the automobile race held in the former Soviet Union. Only two cars participated: an American car and a Russian one. The American car won. However, the following day the official newspaper report briefly stated: "Yesterday there was a car race, in which the Russian car came in second, and the American car second to last!" Now technically the "truth" had been told; but it had been reported in such a way as to deceive. As Ellen White has noted, "Even the statement of facts in such a manner so as to mislead, is falsehood" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 309).

## Literal "Truth"?

What does "telling the truth" really mean? As a student in high school, I understood this phrase in a rather narrow and strictly "literal" sense. Thus, while I was scrupulously careful to never utter an untruth with my lips (for "lying lips are an abomination to the Lord," Prov 12:22<sup>3</sup>), I had no qualms about misleading someone by means of a well-timed shrug of the shoulders or the carefully choreographed question, "How should I know?" It was only later that I learned that the same book that condemned oral dishonesty also castigated those who used non-verbal deception. Solomon describes the wicked person as one "who goes about with a corrupt mouth, who winks with his eye, signals with his feet and motions with his fingers, who plots evil with deceit in his heart" (Prov 6:12b-14a NIV). Or as the Contemporary English Version succinctly puts it: "Worthless liars go around winking and giving signals to deceive others" (vss. 12, 13).

Ellen White concurred: "By a glance of the eye, a motion of the hand, an expression of the countenance, a falsehood may be told as effectually as by words" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 309). Indeed, "a word, even an intonation of the voice, may be vital with falsehood" (*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 68). Thus, the challenge to all believers is to "never prevaricate, never tell an untruth, in precept or in example" (*Child Guidance*, p. 151).

Now it is true, as some scholars have pointed out, that the ninth commandment, "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor" (Ex 20:16 NIV), is written in clearly legal language, specifically forbidding malicious perjury. However, throughout both the Old and New Testaments a variety of terms repeatedly condemns the practice of deception in a broad sense, thus indicating that we should not limit this prohibition merely to judicial cases. For example, Leviticus 19:11 says: "You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another." Speaking of the remnant of Israel, Zephaniah 3:13 reports that they will "speak no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths." While Paul admonishes that believers should be "putting away lying" (Eph 4:25) and ought to be found "speaking the truth in love" (Eph 4:15), John the Revelator emphasizes that there will be no liars in heaven (Rev 21:8, 27; 22:15).

## Absolute Honesty

In fact, as one reads through the entire Bible, especially the books of Psalms and Proverbs, it becomes abundantly evident that the Scriptures make a clarion call to total truthfulness and absolute honesty under all circumstances. Notice how Ellen White expressed this: "The Bible condemns in the strongest terms all falsehood, false dealing, and dishonesty" (*Testimonies for the Church*, 4:311). "Falsehood and deception of every cast is sin against the God of truth and verity" (*ibid.*, p. 336).

Furthermore, this matter of truth-telling is not merely an external issue. Talking about those who have diabolic designs, the Bible says: "Deceit is in the[ir] heart" (Prov 12:20; cf. 6:14 NIV; 23:7; Jer 17:9). As Jesus pointed out in the Sermon on the Mount, all sin really begins in the mind, before it finds expression in the life (see Matt 5:21, 22, 27, 28). Therefore, it is

correct that "an intention to deceive is what constitutes falsehood" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 309), which "is a transgression of the law of God" (*Testimonies for the Church*, 4:312).




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## The Truth About Telling the Truth -- 2

### Bible Stories

Naturally, the question arises, But what about all those Bible stories of people who used deception for so-called "worthy causes"? For example, Rahab lied to save the lives of two Israelite spies (Josh 2). And Shiphrah and Puah, the two Hebrew midwives, misled the Pharaoh concerning the baby boys they had been commanded to exterminate (Ex 1). What lessons concerning truth and deception emerge from narratives such as these?

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Speaking about the experiences of the people in the Old Testament, the apostle Paul says, "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition" (1 Cor 10:11a; cf. Rom 15:4). Based on this passage, some have claimed that "it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that these were God-approved examples of how He wants us to behave in similar moral conflicts."<sup>4</sup> Thus, some conclude that stories such as those of Rahab and of Shiphrah and Puah have been included in the Bible so that believers will know what to do under similar circumstances. In other words, these stories allegedly demonstrate that lying to save life is perfectly legitimate, and actually is the morally right thing to do, without any need for repentance or forgiveness, since this kind of lying is supposedly not considered a sin by God.<sup>5</sup>

But is this what the Bible is actually saying in 1 Corinthians 10:11? This verse is really the summary of the preceding passage, in which Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians, "Now these things became our examples, *to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted*" (1 Cor 10:6). Then Paul enumerates some of these evils, such as idolatry and sexual immorality (see vss. 7, 8), together with some of the judgments meted out by God (see vss. 8-10). Clearly then, far from suggesting that Christians should emulate the actions of Bible characters uncritically, 1 Corinthians 10:11 is calling on believers to avoid the

transgression of God's moral requirements, which includes the command to refrain from all deception.

Incidentally, some have noted that the Bible nowhere directly condemns Rahab or the Hebrew midwives for their falsehoods. However, it is equally true that throughout the Word of God these lies are not commended either. Careful study of the Scriptures reveals that a lack of any direct commendation or condemnation of actions is no indication of the rightness of wrongness of the deeds performed. For example, nowhere is there any condemnation of the incest of the daughters of Lot with their father, as recorded in Genesis 19. Since the oldest daughter had a son named Moab, who became the ancestor of Ruth, and ultimately of Jesus,<sup>6</sup> should one conclude that this incestuous act was actually a good thing? Obviously, just as in this case, so the deception of Rahab as well as that of the Hebrew midwives "violates a clear commandment of God,"<sup>7</sup> and needs to be judged on this basis.

## God Is Faithful

It is vital to note that, shortly after 1 Corinthians 10:11, Paul reminds us that "God is faithful," and He "will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make a way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (vs. 13). In other words, God will never permit anyone to be in a situation where that person is forced to practice deception; there will always be a morally correct way out of the problem. Ellen White reminded us that, though each person is a free moral agent whose loyalty must be tested, *"he is never brought into such a position that yielding to evil becomes a matter of necessity. No temptation or trial is permitted to come to him which he is unable to resist"* (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 331, 332, emphasis mine). Indeed, "God requires of all His subjects obedience, entire obedience to all His commandments" (Ellen G. White comments, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 6:1072), "and His commandments are not burdensome" (1 Jn 5:3), for the Christian "can do all things through Christ" (Phil 4:13).

So, what is the faithful Christian to do when faced with a life or death emergency? What did Mrs. Hasel, in our initial story, say when asked whether she had Fritz in her house? Trusting in God to bring about the best results, she looked the soldier straight in the eye and said: "As an officer of the German army you know what your responsibility is, and you are welcome to carry it out." With the culpability of the evil of his action now fully on his shoulders (where it rightfully belonged), the Nazi turned on his heel and left that home undisturbed.

## Examples

Incidentally, accounts of this kind of uncompromising faith linked with radical obedience can be multiplied. Allow me briefly to share just two more. First, a story from Poland, which also occurred during World War II. Mrs. Knapiuk and her daughter were living in a room in a two-story apartment, when a Jewish girl being chased by German soldiers ran into their room and hid under the bed. Now they were well aware of how dangerous this could be, for in the adjacent house a bakery owner and his daughter had been arrested and taken to a concentration camp because he had sold bread to a Jew. Mrs. Knapiuk was a woman of great faith, but since things had happened so fast, she had had no time to think about what to do. So she sat down at the table, opened her Bible, and started to pray and read. When a German soldier entered their room, he immediately recognized what she was reading. He uttered only two words--"good woman"--and promptly left the room.

A more recent incident, which occurred in the mid-1990s, came to me indirectly from a former classmate of mine, Dr. Robert Wong. With some editorial adjustments, let me share the e-mailed story: "In China, the people work under the watchful eye of the government. On one occasion quite a large number of people were to be baptized, so they hired two trucks as transportation. Since they had never been to the lake before, they stopped at an intersection to ask for directions. Too late they realized that they had actually asked for information from the state security forces. Before they could leave, the officer in charge asked, 'What are you going to do at the lake?' Now, what should they say, since conducting a baptismal service was

strictly illegal? Since they trusted in God and did not want to lie, they honestly replied that they were on their way to have a baptism. As soon as they left, three police motorcycles swung in after them to make arrests when the time came. But just then, a sudden rainstorm erupted; miraculously the rain fell *only behind* the trucks, soaking the motorcyclists, and making the road muddy and impassable. The result? The people got to the lake unmolested, were baptized without further incident, and all went home safely." Yes, indeed, we still serve a miracle-working God!

## Consequences

Twentieth-century stories such as these remind one of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and their uncompromising loyalty. While these three Hebrews knew that God had the power to deliver them from the fiery furnace, they informed King Nebuchadnezzar that even if God chose not to rescue them, they would still remain faithful to Him (see Dan 3:16-18). Commenting on such unswerving allegiance, Ellen White observed, "True Christian principle will not stop to weigh consequences" (*The Sanctified Life*, p. 39).

That seems to be the problem with so many of us when confronted with life-or-death dilemmas--we attempt to project what would happen *if . . .*; and then we make decisions based on these speculations. However, "Christ's ambassadors have nothing to do with consequences. They must perform their duty and leave results with God" (*The Great Controversy*, pp. 609, 610). How then should we make moral decisions? Ellen White wrote, "In deciding upon any course of action we are not to ask whether we can see that harm will result from it, but whether it is in keeping with the will of God" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 634). This identical principle underlies the admonition given by Jesus Christ: "Do not be afraid of what will happen to you. . . . But be faithful, even if you have to die. If you are faithful, I will give you the crown of life" (Rev 2:10 ICB).

Even though in the Bible we do find some worthy illustrations to emulate, such as that of the three Hebrews, we must realize that our ultimate model of morality is Jesus Christ. Peter not only points out that we are "to follow in His steps," but he specifically notes, "nor was any deceit found in His mouth" (see 1 Pet 2:21, 22 NASB). To put it more directly: rather than relying on Rahab, a pagan prostitute, to be our pattern, our ethical example must be our sinless Savior, Jesus Christ.

## Secret

Jesus Christ--He is really the "secret" to this entire issue of truth-telling! For "those who have the mind of Christ will keep all of God's commandments, irrespective of circumstances" (*The Sanctified Life*, p. 67). In fact, the apostle Paul stresses the vital necessity of a dynamic relationship with our Creator, Jesus Christ, as the key to the issue of truth-telling in any Christian's life (see Col 3:9, 10). Similarly, Ellen White, noting that "it is not a light or an easy thing to speak the exact truth," affirmed that "we cannot speak the truth unless our minds are continually guided by Him who is truth" (*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 68).

In brief then, what is the "truth about telling the truth"? Ellen White put it in unmistakable terms: "Everything that Christians do should be as transparent as the sunlight. *Truth is of God; deception, in every one of its myriad forms, is of Satan;* and who ever in any way departs from the straight line of truth is betraying himself into the power of the wicked one" (*ibid.*, emphasis mine). Indeed, "even life itself should not be purchased with the price of falsehood" (*Testimonies for the Church*, 4:336).

All of us must make a pivotal decision: Either we will choose to follow Satan, "the father of lies" (John 8:44 ICB), or we will elect to imitate Jesus Christ, who declares of Himself, "I am the truth" (John 14:6 ICB)!

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## Homosexuality in the Church: Should This "Born-a-Gay" Lifestyle Be Baptized?

by *Samuel Koranteng-Pipim*

*Why is homosexuality an Adventist "hot potato"? Are there clear answers to the new interpretations of Scripture we are hearing?*

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All manner of sin can be forgiven, provided we admit our wrongdoing, repent, and turn away from it. But there can be no forgiveness when sinners are in denial--when they insist that their lustful desires and practices are not sinful, when they re-interpret Scripture to justify their sins, and when they defiantly maintain that they will not turn from their sinful ways.

Such is the case today with a sin called homosexuality.

Next to the issue of ordaining women as elders and pastors, homosexuality is the hottest "hot potato" item on today's theological menu. It is so "hot" that anyone attempting to touch it risks being "burned." To challenge the morality of homosexuality in today's climate of "enlightened" ethical sensitivity is considered "wrong-spirited and wrong." Those who dare to do so are often perceived as "uninformed," "un-compassionate," and "judgmental" (as in the case of Christ's disciples, who condemned a congenitally blind person as a sinner [Jn 9]).

Already, in certain quarters of our own church, those who forthrightly express their views on the twin ideological issues of women's ordination and homosexuality are considered "divisive," "controversial" and "extreme fundamentalists." These uncomplimentary labels have exerted powerful psychological pressure on some church leaders and scholars either to endorse the unbiblical practices, or at a minimum, to remain silent. But should Bible-believing Adventists be intimidated by these labels? Should they remain silent or neutral when established biblical doctrines are being undermined? The courage of biblical convictions requires that we "prove all things [and] hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess 5:21; cf. 2 Tim 4:1-5).

## Homosexuality Has Come to Church



Almost two decades ago, a former dean of the Theological Seminary at Andrews University perceptively noted: "The gay crisis has come to church. Some homosexuals are coming to church not only for forgiveness and mercy but to say to the church, as they have to the world, 'Homosexuality is not sinful; it is natural to me. God made me this way. He accepts me and my homosexuality as good. Therefore the time has come for the church to accept me as I am and join me in saying that gayness is good.'"<sup>1</sup>

The above statement aptly captures the essence of the "born-a-gay gospel" and its varied "ministries" or "support groups."<sup>2</sup> Though advocates of this gospel employ the term "ministry" to describe their "outreach" to gay and lesbians, such "ministries" for the most part do not teach homosexuals to repent of their particular sin. Instead, they suggest that the church itself must be "educated" to own up to its "immoral" past, when it failed to "understand" and recognize homosexuality as a morally legitimate lifestyle. Regrettably, an increasing number of Christians are uncritically embracing this new "gospel."

Even in our own Seventh-day Adventist church the attitudes of some are changing on the issue of homosexuality. We may find evidence for this change in Adventist discussions on the Internet, in written declarations by some scholars, in discussions at annual professional meetings of the church's Bible teachers, in some carefully written, yet troubling, articles in our church publications, and in the mumblings, if not deafening silence, from our pulpits. Discussions at the last two General Conference sessions (Indianapolis, Indiana, 1990, and Utrecht, the Netherlands, 1995) over the innocuous wording of certain portions of the *Church Manual* also reflect this shifting mood.<sup>3</sup>

The question before us is: Should we embrace the "born a gay" gospel as a morally legitimate part of the Christian lifestyle? This article is not about how we should relate to homosexuals who, like other sinners, come to church for God's help to overcome their sin. Rather, we are concerned here with the biblical soundness of the arguments undergirding the "born a gay" gospel.

## The Changing Attitude Toward Homosexuality

Homosexuality is not a new sexual behavior that has suddenly burst upon our modern culture. The practice has been present in almost every human society. Not unexpectedly, the Bible also deals with the subject in such texts as Genesis 19 (cf. Jude 7; 2 Pet 2:6-10), Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, Romans 1:24-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, and 1 Timothy 1:8-11. If there is anything new about the practice of homosexuality, it lies in the fact that contrary to the church's response in the past, many churches in our day are accepting homosexuality as a morally legitimate lifestyle.

Why are Christian churches favorable toward this practice today? Probably the major factor is the vigorous campaigns by various homosexual lobbying groups and by civil rights organizations to end not only discrimination against homosexuals generally, but also to decriminalize homosexual practices between consenting adults. Beyond this, they seek to liberalize public opinion, attitudes, laws, and policies on homosexuality.

For example, in 1973 the American Bar Association called for the repeal of laws which in the past had placed homosexuality in the category of *crime*. That same year, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its official list of mental *illnesses*, and the American Psychological Association also decided that homosexuality was no longer an *abnormal* behavior. With such influential actions to remove homosexuality from the categories of crime, illness, and abnormal behavior, it did not take long before Christian churches began to hear calls from pro-gay advocates, urging the church to remove homosexuality from the category of *sin*.

**Even in our own Seventh-day Adventist church the attitudes of some are changing on the issue of homosexuality.**

In their effort to remove homosexuality from the category of sin, advocates of gay theology have employed two major methods to silence or challenge the Bible's negative valuation of

homosexuality. First, they argue that the Bible texts which have been understood historically as condemning homosexuality are either obscure or refer to the *abuse* of homosexuality in such practices as gang rape, idolatry, promiscuity, and prostitution, but not to genuine homosexual orientation as we know it today.

Second, they put forward some Bible characters as examples of allegedly healthy and loving homosexual relationships. For example, the friendship love (what the Greeks called *philia*) between biblical characters like Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1-4) and David and Jonathan (1 Sam 18-20) they interpret to mean sexual love (*eros*). Consequently, they present these Bible characters as Christian models of lesbian and gay relationships. Advocates often argue that Ruth and Naomi exchanged their lesbian marriage vows when Ruth said to Naomi: "Wherever you go, I will go with you, wherever you stay I will stay with you; your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. . . . *Till death do us part*" (Ruth 1:16, 17, my adaptation).

Regarding David and Jonathan, advocates of gay theology string together the following interesting argument to suggest that they were two "male lovers": The Bible itself says Jonathan "loved" David (1 Sam18:3); David declared publicly that Jonathan's love was "wonderful," passing even "the love of women" (2 Sam 1:23); Jonathan allegedly "stripped" in David's presence (1 Sam 18:4), the two "kissed" each other (1 Sam 20:41), subsequently "wept together" and (David) "exceeded" (1 Sam 20:41)--terms advocates take to mean a sexual encounter! (Readers may wish to read the Scriptural account of the relationship between David and Jonathan to ascertain for themselves what the Bible actually says.) Other proponents of gay theology also consider Joseph and Potiphar (Gen 39), Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel (Dan 2, 4), as well as Jesus and John ("the disciple whom Jesus loved," Jn 13:23; 19:26; 20:2) as genuine models of loving and committed homosexual relationship. Some even consider the virgin Mary as a lesbian, describing her as "one courageous woman who did not need a man to have a child."

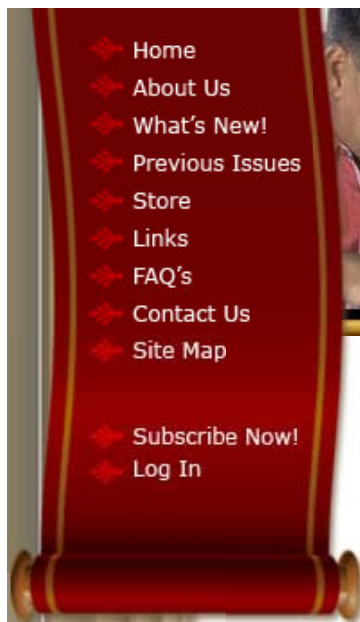
Even though we may easily dismiss the above examples of allegedly healthy gay and lesbian relationships in the Bible as frivolous inventions, not all the arguments of pro-gay theology can be rebuffed so handily. Some of the arguments are quite sophisticated, often invoking scientific, philosophical, or logical arguments to show that (i) people are born homosexual (i.e., homosexuality is genetic or inborn); (ii) the sexual orientation of people "born gay" should be viewed as a natural or normal trait of their identity, like the color of the skin, eyes, or hair, or as a God-given gift; (iii) a person's "God-given" homosexual orientation is morally neutral and unchangeable; and (iv) the Bible is silent, or does not condemn, homosexuality as such, but only its abuse.

Sincere, Bible-believing Christians are often caught off-guard by the subtle and plausible-sounding arguments in favor of homosexuality today. In an effort to clear away the smoke-screen which often clouds this issue, I will list some of the arguments in circulation, following each with a response which I hope will make clear the fundamental issue at stake for the Christian. I believe that the reader will find in Scripture a clear and consistent guide to God's will in this highly-charged matter.

Because of space limitations I can only summarize and respond to some of the major arguments put forth by those attempting to reconcile the "born a gay" ideology with the Bible's "born again" theology. Those seeking a fuller discussion and documentation on the subject should consult my forthcoming book, *Must We Be Silent?* (see note 3).



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## Homosexuality in the Church: Should This "Born-a-Gay" Lifestyle Be Baptized? -- 2

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### Non-Biblical Arguments for Homosexuality

#### 1. "To learn the truth about homosexuality, talk to real homosexuals"

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For many advocates of gay theology, it is not sufficient to trust the Bible writers as the dependable source of truth on this matter. They argue that in order to "learn the truth about homosexuality," we must update our knowledge by actually listening to homosexuals themselves. This seems to be the point in some recent Adventist publications.

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For example, one Adventist mother wrote that after she had spent "years of reading, observing, and eventually talking to people," her homosexual son finally confirmed to her that indeed, "homosexuality is a condition, not a behavior. Whatever may cause a homosexual orientation, it is not something a person chooses." Her son "told us that from his earliest memories he knew he was `different.'" She also reported learning that God may change a person's sexual orientation only "on rare occasions," and that one can be a homosexual and be "deeply spiritual."<sup>4</sup>

A Princeton Theological Seminary professor of Old Testament Language and Literature, an ordained elder in the Presbyterian Church (USA), best articulated why we supposedly need to go to homosexuals themselves to learn the truth about homosexuality: "I used to believe that homosexual acts are always wrong. Listening to gay and lesbian students and friends, however, I have had to rethink my position and reread the scriptures. . . . I have no choice but to take the testimonies of gays and lesbians seriously. I do so with some comfort, however, for the scriptures themselves give me the warrant to trust that human beings can know truths apart from divine revelation."<sup>5</sup>

#### **Response**

We must offer a sympathetic ear to the pains and genuine struggles of homosexuals. But Bible-believing Adventists need to ask whether the testimonies and claims of homosexuals are an adequate basis to learn the truth about homosexuality. Are homosexuals, by virtue of their experience, more qualified than the Bible writers to speak on homosexuality? The

inspired writers of the Bible served as dependable spokespersons for the Creator of human sexuality. Is the attempt to justify homosexuality on the grounds of personal experience or empirical studies, rather than biblical revelation, a legitimate starting point for any investigation regarding sexual morality? Are the testimonies and claims of homosexuals necessarily true?

We are dealing with the fundamental question of how to know truth, a study philosophers call *epistemology*. I will restate my response: Does one really have to be a homosexual in order fully to understand the truth about homosexuality? Must we experience a particular kind of sinful tendency in order to understand that sinful reality? Even if we assume that homosexual orientation is part of a person's constitutional make up (just as a person's color or gender is), can true knowledge about that condition only be accurately obtained by persons with that kind of sexual identity? If so, does this mean, for example, that one has to be black, African, and a woman in order to fully understand and accurately address the pains of people in that category? By analogy, could Jesus, a single Jewish male, have understood the experience of, say, Maria, a single-parent Hispanic woman?

## 2. "People Are Born Homosexual"

When advocates of pro-gay theology assert that people are born gay, they actually go beyond the generally accepted view that genetics and environmental factors *influence* a person's behavior. They suggest that homosexuality is largely *caused by* a person's genes. They cite "scientific studies" which allegedly offer conclusive proof that people are born gay.

### *Response*

First, although future studies may one day bear this out, the research findings often cited as evidence of the "born a gay" condition are, at best, inconclusive and are questionable at worst.<sup>6</sup> I am not suggesting that genetics has no influence toward a homosexual predisposition. I contend simply that the studies often cited for the claim that "people are born gay" are not as conclusive as proponents would have us believe.

Second, even if one could prove that homosexuality originates in the genes, the hormones, or the environment, would this make homosexuality morally legitimate? Does being "born" alcoholic, pedophile, or gay make alcoholism, pedophilia, or homosexuality right? It seems that "the studies" are put forth to imply that homosexuality is not a sin to be repented of, but a mark of one's identity to be celebrated.

Third, the studies are flawed because they are based on the deterministic philosophy of behaviorism. In such a view, people have practically no choice in their moral actions and therefore may not be held morally accountable for their actions. Human behavior, according to behaviorism, is largely predetermined by one's environment and genetic code. But behaviorism or biological determinism is incompatible with the Bible's view of man. Human beings are created in the image of God and endowed with freedom of choice. We cannot reconcile a belief in behaviorism's naturalistic philosophy with the biblical doctrine that we are accountable to God for our conduct (the doctrine of judgment). Furthermore, this "I did not choose, I cannot change" philosophy raises serious questions about Christ's power to help us "overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 671; cf. *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 175, 176).

## 3. "Homosexual Orientation Is Natural or Normal"

Based on the debatable assumption that homosexuality is inborn, that is, of genetic origin, advocates argue that we should accept homosexuality as a natural or normal human condition.

### *Response*

Leaving aside the important issues of the manner in which the scientific "research" is conducted and the kind of interpretation given to the research "findings,"<sup>7</sup> even proving that homosexual orientation is inborn will not make homosexuality normal or desirable. Many defects or handicaps today are inborn, but hardly anyone would call them normal on the basis of that reason alone. Why should homosexuality be considered natural or normal, even if it might be inborn?

**If one could prove that homosexuality originates in the genes, the hormones, or the environment, would this make homosexuality morally legitimate?**

When we say that something is natural, we refer to what happens repeatedly in the world of nature; we do not assign moral judgment to it. For example, spiders kill and eat other spiders, including their mates. "But as a moral category natural refers to something that is in accord with God's intention. Actions are good or bad: for example, people sometimes kill and eat other people. But the fact that cannibalism happens in the world--perhaps in satisfaction of deeply held religious beliefs or peculiar culinary tastes--does not make it *natural* in the sense that it conforms to God's will. In summary: that which is *natural* to human experience or human desire is not necessarily *natural* in God's moral design."<sup>8</sup>

#### 4. "Homosexual Orientation Is God-given"

Many homosexuals claim that since childhood they have *always* had homosexual feelings. Hence, they say, their "natural" homosexual tendencies are from God.

##### **Response**

Scripture nowhere suggests that if a thing seems natural it is inevitably God-given. On the contrary, the Bible teaches that many "natural" states and desires are not of God and are contrary to His will.

For example, "The natural man does not receive the things of God" (1 Cor 2:14). Before conversion, we "were by nature the children of wrath" (Eph 2:3). "The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be" (Rom 8:7). Scripture teaches that we are a fallen race, born in sin: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity" (Ps 51:5; cf. Jer 17:9; Rom 5:12). Sin has marred our physical and spiritual natures (1 Cor 15:1-54; Jn 3:5, 6). We cannot therefore assume that because something is natural or inborn, it must be God-ordained.

#### 5. "Homosexual Orientation Is Morally Neutral"

From the assumption that people are born gay, proponents argue that we should view homosexuality as a neutral expression of human sexuality. Like heterosexuality, they claim, homosexuality can be rightly used or abused. The abuse is wrong. But, they argue, homosexuality within a loving, consensual, and monogamous relationship is morally right.

##### **Response**

Just because homosexuality may be natural or inborn (an unproven assertion), is it morally neutral or legitimate? If we could demonstrate conclusively that adultery, incest, pedophilia, violence, and lying are inherited, would we be justified in considering them legitimate or neutral? Should the standard for morality be determined by what is inborn?

Contrary to this teaching of the "born a gay" gospel, the Bible teaches that homosexuality is immoral. Like other sexual deviations, any such practice or lust outside the context of a loving, consensual, monogamous, heterosexual marriage is an abomination (Lev 18), whether that practice or "orientation" is inborn or acquired. "And immoral behavior cannot be legitimized by a quick baptism in the gene pool."<sup>9</sup>

Morality is not determined by what *is*, even if inborn. The Ten Commandments and God's pre-fall order provide the moral guidelines for whether homosexuality is moral and immoral. The leap from *what is* (alleged "facts" of the homosexual condition) to *what ought to be* (the morality of homosexuality) is too large for us to make.

## 6. "Changing the Homosexual Orientation Is Difficult and Rare"

Proponents claim that because homosexuality is an inbred condition, the homosexual has no (or very little) prospect of ever changing. And since there is no possibility for the homosexual to change, any changes must come from the institutions of society, including education, law, and religion.

### Response

The oft-repeated claim that "changing one's homosexual orientation is difficult and rare" almost suggests that it is impossible to change one's sinful tendencies.<sup>10</sup> This may indeed be the case if transformation is a human work. But if God performs this operation, as Scripture and Ellen G. White teach, then changing a person's sinful orientation is not "difficult and rare."

Even if we suppose that it is "difficult and rare" to change the homosexual condition and that no amount of prayer, counseling, and effort of any kind can make a homosexual easily change his orientation, do the "difficulty and rarity" of change make homosexuality less sinful? Definitely not. The statement of one former homosexual is worth quoting: "There is no contingency factor in any scriptural reference to any kind of sin, in either the Old or the New Testament. We never read anything like: 'Thou shalt not do thus and so! (Unless, of course, you tried hard to change, went for prayer and counseling, and found you just couldn't stop wanting to do thus and so. If that's the case, then thus and so is no longer sin. It's an inborn, immutable gift and you can [feel free to] indulge in it!'"<sup>11</sup>

Second, the "it's difficult and rare to change" doctrine, if accepted, leads to a "once a sinner, always a sinner" doctrine. Since I will deal with this argument in the next section, here I will simply mention that this cardinal pillar in the "born a gay" doctrine challenges Christianity's "born again" promise. It implies that even after conversion, an addict to drugs or alcohol, or a habitual or compulsive liar, or a sexual pervert will always remain as they were. But thousands of miraculous conversions and transformed lives in our day negate this pro-gay argument that changing one's sinful orientation is "difficult and rare."

## 7. "Once a Homosexual, (Almost) Always a Homosexual"

This is where the logic of biological predestination eventually leads: People are born gay; it's difficult and rare to change their condition; therefore, they will always remain gay. If anyone has to change, it must be the institutions of society and the church, not the homosexual. The laws of society and the Bible must change to accommodate the homosexual who, once gay, will always be gay.

### Response

Perhaps the most important question the issue of homosexuality raises is whether Christ has power to help people overcome sin in their lives. This is of course an important question if homosexuality is sin. It forces us to answer the question whether the transforming power of God is more effective than the impotent power of psychological therapy.<sup>12</sup> The testimony of Scripture exposes the lie that "once a homosexual, always a homosexual." Homosexuals can be, and actually have been, changed through the transforming power of Christ.

Writes the apostle Paul: "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor *homosexual* offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers

nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. *And that is what some of you were* [past tense]. *But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God*" (1 Cor 6:9-11 NIV, emphasis mine).

Similarly, Ellen G. White stated unequivocally that "a genuine conversion changes *hereditary and cultivated tendencies to wrong*" (*Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 6:1101). Indeed, "Those who put their trust in Christ are not to be enslaved by any *hereditary and cultivated habit or tendency*. Instead of being held in bondage to the lower nature, they are to rule every appetite and passion. God has not left us to battle with evil in our own finite strength. *Whatever may be our inherited or cultivated tendencies to wrong, we can overcome through the power that He is ready to impart*" (*The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 175, 176). Again, "Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome *all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil*, and to impress His own character upon His church" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 671).

In short, "We are a spectacle unto the world, to angels, and to men. Angels and men are taking note of us to see what manner of spirit we are of, to see whether we are meeting the approval of heaven. You may feel that you cannot meet the approval of heaven. You may say, 'I was born with a natural tendency toward this evil, and I cannot overcome.' *But every provision has been made by our heavenly Father whereby you may be able to overcome every unholy tendency*. You are to overcome even as Christ overcame in your behalf. . . . *Christ died on Calvary that man might have power to overcome his natural tendencies to sin*. But one says, 'Can I not have my own way, and act myself?'--No, you cannot have your way, and enter the kingdom of heaven. No 'my way' will be there. No human ways will find place in the kingdom of heaven. Our ways must be lost in God's ways" (*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Feb. 23, 1892, emphasis mine).

Perhaps the most important question the issue of homosexuality raises is whether Christ has power to help people overcome sin in their lives.

## 8. "There's a Difference Between *Being* a Homosexual and *Practicing* Homosexuality"

Discussions on homosexuality often define it in two ways: (a) homosexual *orientation, inclination, or tendency*--an inborn sexual attraction, predisposition, or desire toward a member of one's own sex, and (b) homosexual *behavior or practice*--an erotic activity with a member of one's own sex, whether one judges such activity to be morally right or not.<sup>13</sup>

On the basis of this distinction, some writers argue that homosexual *orientation or condition* (also referred to as "ontological" or "constitutional" homosexuality or "inversion") is a permanent and unchangeable part of the individual's constitutional make up. It is like the color of a person's skin--a non-behavioral trait, morally neutral, and a condition from which no one can change. On the other hand, they argue, we must judge homosexual *practice or activity* according to morally acceptable norms. "*Being* a homosexual is not sin," they claim, but "*homosexual sexual activity* is sinful--it is apart from God's will."<sup>14</sup>

### Response

Many have embraced this argument uncritically. But the argument is meaningless, if not misleading and erroneous. Is homosexuality something that you *are* (like being black, elderly, handicapped, or female), or is it something sinful you *do, cherish, or lust for* (like adultery, incest, or lying)? This question goes to the heart of the pro-homosexual claim that "there is a difference between *being* a homosexual and *practicing* homosexuality."

Let's think a little more carefully: Can a person really be a homosexual without practicing homosexuality?

The fallacy of the above statement becomes obvious when we change the sin of homosexuality to that of adultery or polygamy. The statement will then read: "There is a difference between *being* an adulterer and *practicing* adultery"! "There's a difference

between *being* a polygamist and *practicing* polygamy"! These statements are meaningless. An adulterer is a person who practices adultery; a polygamist is one who practices polygamy; and a homosexual is one who practices homosexuality!

But more than this, the argument that makes a difference between *being* a homosexual and *practicing* homosexuality is also a subtle error. Though few realize it, this pro-gay argument elevates the sin of homosexuality to a morally-neutral mark of a person's identity. Rather than distinguishing between *being* a homosexual and *practicing* homosexuality, it is more theologically sound to distinguish between the *temptation* to act upon one's sinful homosexual tendency (being tempted itself is not wrong) and actually *choosing* to cherish and act upon that temptation (a wrongful choice). If allowed to stand unchallenged, the distinction made by pro-gay advocates between "being homosexual" and "practicing homosexuality" would raise a number of theological and ethical questions.

First, the Bible writers do not adopt today's distinction between homosexual *orientation* (condition) and homosexual *practice* (behavior)--between *inversion* (constitutional homosexuality) and *perversion* (the abuse of homosexuality). Biblically, such a dichotomy is a questionable rending of actions from attitudes. For how can the *practice* of homosexuality be wrong, and yet the cherished inclination toward or the longing for that action be neutral? Jesus dismissed this argument when he stated that the sin of adultery includes lusting in the heart after a woman (Matt 5:27, 28; cf. 1 Jn 3:15). Obviously, a person with an *orientation* or strong desire toward a sinful act needs as much help to overcome that inclination as the individual who has already acted upon that sinful desire--whether it be lying, stealing, adultery, or killing, etc.

Second, homosexuality is no more inborn than adultery, polygamy, bisexuality, or bestiality. They are all distortions of human inclinations and sexuality. If homosexual *orientation* excuses the sin of homosexual desires, does it not imply that other sinful orientations (such as compulsive lying, compulsive adultery, compulsive racism, compulsive stealing, compulsive disobedience to authority, etc.) should all be excused as irreversible sinful conditions? Wherein, then, lies the power of God's transforming grace?

Third, we are all born morally corrupt, with weaknesses and tendencies to evil (Ps 51:5; 143:2; cf. 14:3; 1 Kgs 8:46; Prov 20:9; Rom 3:23; 7:14-24; 1 Jn 1:8). But does the universal human sinfulness mean that our sinful tendencies or propensities are morally neutral, and therefore, not something to be repented of or overcome by the power of Christ (Rom 7:25; 8:1; Eph 2:1-10; Jn 1:13; 3:5; 2 Cor 5:17)? Because we are all morally corrupt, provision has been offered for rebirth ("Ye must be born again" [Jn 3:5]). This spiritual rebirth is an actual rebirth at the moral level. When homosexuals (or adulterers) are born again, they cease to be homosexuals (or adulterers; see 1 Cor 6:9, 10). They may be *tempted* by those sins; but unless they cherish, yield, or act upon them, they cannot legitimately wear those sins as badges of identity (Jas 1:12-15)! "If anyone be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor 5:17).

## 9. "God Does Not Want Homosexuals to Give Up 'Who They Are'"


Based on the assumption that people are born gay, and on the basis of texts like Psalm 139:13 ("For you created my inmost parts") and Psalm 100:3 ("It is he that hath made us and not we ourselves"), pro-gay advocates maintain that people's homosexual *orientation* or *condition* is part of their identity, defining who they are as sexual human beings. Consequently, they argue, "Since God made me the way I am, and since I have had my orientation from my earliest memories, why shouldn't I express my God-given sexuality? Why would God ask me to change something which He Himself has given me?"<sup>15</sup>

### **Response**

The truth is, God wants every one of us, including homosexuals, to give up something we have had all our lives--*our selves*, our sinful selves. The Bible condemns all forms of self-love or self-indulgence as expressions of idolatry and presents *self-denial* as the hallmark of



Christian discipleship (Lk 14:26, 27; cf. Rev 12:11). The only way really to find one's self is by losing it (Mk 8:34-37). We cannot change ourselves; but Christ can change us if we truly want to be changed from our besetting sexual tendencies.



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## Identifying the Issues in Christian Entertainment

by *Richard W. O'Ffill*

*How should Christians choose their entertainment? On what should they base their choices?*

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To paraphrase a contemporary expression, you don't have to be a rocket scientist to know God's will in respect to Christian entertainment. Differences of opinion on the subject result from different understandings of the word "entertainment." In contemporary culture, "entertainment" is a word that does not lend itself to the sacred but to the profane. By contrast, words such as "recreation," "rest," and "a change of pace" are not nearly so likely to be abused.

In this article I will not quote from the writings of Ellen G. White. At the end, however, I have added a short list of relevant references. I have tried to delve deeper than simply addressing whether we should go to the theater or participate in one kind of entertainment or another. The purpose of the Christian life and, therefore, all that has to do with entertainment involves doing the will of God. I am convinced that we cannot know how to please God until we are clear about who God is. Therefore, I will first address the question, Who do we mean by "God"?

### Who--or What--Is "God"?

Although all sides of religious issues these days reference God, I suspect we are not always talking about the same God. This should come as no surprise, because our Lord said that in the last days many would come saying they were the Christ (Matt 24:5).

It has been said that if you take over your enemy's language, you make it impossible for him to communicate his ideology. The devil now speaks the Christian's language. As a result we may be using the same words that have come down to us over the generations but they may not mean the same thing. This is why we must begin our discussion of entertainment by defining "God." It would be pointless to sit among our peers discussing how God wants us to live if we were not talking about the same God.

## God Is Holy

One of our problems in the contemporary context is that we have generally studied more, learned more, and experienced more about sin than we have about holiness. Yet of all God's attributes, none is more foundational, none explains more clearly the essence of God than does the revelation of His holiness. God says of Himself, "I am holy" (Lev 11:45). Holiness is God's highest attribute; it is expressive of His very being and nature, His infinite moral perfection. To discuss the love of God, His mercy, His forgiveness, and His grace, without having a clear concept of His holiness will result in a serious underestimation of the person of God and may well result--and indeed already has resulted--in the invention of false gods. We can rise no higher than our concept of God. The consistent refusal to acknowledge the holiness of the Almighty has resulted in crafting gods in our own image.

One of the root meanings of the Hebrew word for holiness (*qodesh* or *kó-desh*) is "apartness" or "separateness." The significance of this may not be immediately apparent. But inasmuch as God is separate and apart, those who want to serve Him must also be set apart. This, indeed, is the meaning of "sanctified." Jude 1 begins, "Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified [set apart] by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ." Those who come to a holy God must necessarily become a holy people.

Separation in itself is not holiness; it is the way to holiness. There can be a separation that does not lead to holiness, but there can be no holiness without separation. We must be aware at the outset that inasmuch as holiness is an attribute of God, it is not what we are or what we do that makes us holy, it is the presence and glory of God that makes holy. In Scripture when a vessel, cup, altar, or other instrument was set apart for divine worship, it was never again to be used for common purposes. No one except the priest could drink from the consecrated cup. The altar could not be trifled with. The bronze laver was not for ordinary washings; even the tongs were never to be used on ordinary candles.

Should articles that come from the hand of man be holy and man who has come from the hand of God be profane? The Scripture says in 1 Peter 2:9, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." Out of darkness. Separate from evil. Set apart to live in the light of God's holiness.

In the Old Testament are many other texts that call us to holiness: "I am the Lord your God, ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and be holy, for I am holy" (Lev 11:44). "Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy, for I am the Lord your God. And ye shall keep My statutes and do them: I am the Lord which sanctify you" (Lev 20:7, 8). "Ye shall be holy unto Me: for I the Lord am holy, and have separated you from other people, that ye should be Mine" (Lev 20:26). "I will be hallowed among the children of Israel; I am the Lord which hallow you" (Lev 22:32).

The issue of entertainment in the Christian life cannot be settled until we first understand that God is holy and that we who are His possession purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ are set apart in this world to will and to do His good pleasure.

In view of this, is it unreasonable to expect that we who have taken upon ourselves the name of Christ should find it incompatible with our profession to participate in the types of activities that brought about His death? Surely to do such would be incongruous, totally inconsistent with our high calling.

**If there is one external influence that is doing more than any other to compromise faith in God, it is television.**

## A Compromising Influence

I am convinced that if there is one external influence that is doing more than any other to compromise faith in God, it is television. It is not necessary to do longitudinal sociological

studies to say that television as watched by the average Christian is incompatible with what we ask the Holy Spirit to do in our lives. Many who profess the name of Jesus might more accurately be described as peeping Toms, voyeurists, and sadists. TV is a celebration of the sins for which Jesus died.

In a practical sense we are wasting our time discussing Christian entertainment so long as we fail to factor in the impact of television, inasmuch as TV is the master key in the devil's hand to sabotage the spiritual life of professed Christians today.

Some years ago, my work had taken me away from home. At the end of the work day, my hosts escorted me to my motel. Traveling can be a lonely business; you can't go home at night!

On this occasion, after returning to the motel I ate supper. Soup and sandwiches cannot last all evening, so after supper I sat down and turned on the TV, more to keep me company than anything else. I did not watch HBO or pay TV, I watched only the local channels. Finally it was time to retire. I knelt beside the bed and prayed.

The first part of my prayer was about the usual things, but when I got about half way through I stopped. I couldn't continue. What I was saying didn't make sense. You see, I heard myself asking God to make me like Jesus.

How could I ask Jesus to give me a new heart when I had spent the last several hours watching people lie and kill and steal and make sport of illicit sex? How could I pray for the Holy Spirit to give me the mind of Jesus when I had been filling my brain with the mind of Satan? I knew I couldn't have both.

I decided then and there which way I would go. If I really wanted a holy life I would have to, as they say, put my money where my mouth is. I would have to bring my life into line with my prayer. The Scripture says that by beholding we are changed (see 2 Corinthians 3:18). We must live consistently with what we ask God to do for us (read 2 Tim 3:5).

## "Jesus Went to Parties"

In order to justify participating in worldly entertainment it is not unusual for some to point out that Jesus associated with sinners and therefore so should we. There is no doubt that Jesus could often be found in the company of sinners. But we should not for a moment think He visited red light districts to participate with prostitutes, but to call them to salvation. He visited adult book stores, but only to share His faith with sex perverts.

Jesus was accused of drunkenness and gluttony ( Lk 7:34). But it would be wrong to think He participated in drunken orgies to save the lost. Sinners did not lead Him into sin; He called sinners into righteousness and holiness. He told the Pharisees, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Mk 2:17).

I am concerned by those who assert that Jesus went to parties. Although it is recorded that He attended certain festive occasions (Jn 2:1), it could never be said He went to parties as the word is understood by our generation, where people get high on drugs and immorality. Those who think otherwise err (2 Cor 6:17). God is holy, and He will have a holy people, set apart from the world in harmony with Jesus' prayer: "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil" (Jn 17:15).

## Our Worship Styles

The corruption of our worship styles in many places has come about, I believe, because many are bringing into the house of God on Sabbath the lifestyles they practice the other six days of the week. I could expect that a person whose music is worldly six days a week would feel more comfortable with "Pray Around the Clock Rock" than with "A Mighty Fortress Is Our

God."

I can suppose that a person who is continually exposed to the fantasy of video, television, and the theater will feel more comfortable if the worship service is dramatized. But we are sinners gathered before an awesome Judge. It is the Word of God that leads sinners to repentance.

The Christian lifestyle may be seen as lived between two walls. One wall is that we are a holy people and as such are set apart from the rest. The other wall is that the Christian cannot love the things of the world and maintain his allegiance to God. 1 John 2:15 says, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." James 4:4 makes the matter even more serious: "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."

These texts go beyond a simple discussion of what may be "right" or "wrong." They extend the principle of Christian lifestyle to exclude whatever is "of the world." This embodies perspective, value systems, and culture. There is such a thing as guilt by association!

## "But It's My Culture"

Much is said these days about culture. Unholy entertainments are approved as simply a part of the culture to which we happen to belong. But the way I see it, the way we live, whether in Europe, Africa, Asia, Latin America, or North America, is either to the glory of God or it isn't. To say that something is justified simply because it is done a certain way "in my country" is not true. It makes no difference where we are. The test of every component of our lifestyle must be the Word of God and not the way it is done in a particular place.

Every culture--in any place at any time--must be tested by the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and Philippians 4:8. These passages provide a universal description of how a Christian is to live. There are those who use Scripture, particularly the Old Testament, to justify certain types of behavior. But have you noticed that people are more prone to identify with David's adultery than with Joseph's victory?

Although there is a clear morality and a clear immorality in lifestyle, there are also lifestyle considerations based on what might be termed holiness (apartness) considerations. We have learned that those whom God will make like Him He must first separate from the rest.

## You Can Always Tell a Sikh

During eight years of my ministry my family and I lived outside the United States. We had the opportunity to begin our mission experience in what was then the Southern Asia Division in the country of Pakistan. The subcontinent is rich in cultures and subcultures. I was surprised to learn that in that part of the world who a person is is manifested in their name, the way they dress, their language, and even in the way they eat.

An interesting group who live in the Punjab are the Sikhs. It is easy to recognize a Sikh. The men wear turbans. Their hair is long but neatly tucked inside the turban. The men have full beards, which are nicely shaped by an elastic band that comes down from the turban. On their wrists they wear silver bangles, and somewhere on their person they carry a symbolic sword. Their last name is likely to be Singh, which means "lion."

One has only to see such a person to know who he is. A Sikh who begins to change his lifestyle and omit the characteristic marks of his religion is, to that extent, opting out of the religion. It is important to note that many of the people groups, including the Sikhs, have customs and lifestyles that are not in themselves moral issues. Yet they are definitely issues that *identify* the person as part of the group.

This phenomenon leads me to conclude that it is not strange for God to expect those who are

born again to be noticeably different from those who aren't. This would not necessarily be just in issues

**It is not strange for God to expect those who are born again to be noticeably different from those who aren't.**

of faith and morals, but their lifestyle itself would set God's people apart. For those whom God would sanctify (make holy) He first separates.

Returning to the example of the Sikh, a Sikh is recognizable because of his differentness. Is it unreasonable, then, that a Christian should be recognizable for the same reason? Let us cast this illustration in a negative light. Suppose that child molesters always wore orange neckties. Although there is nothing intrinsically wrong with an orange necktie, under those conditions I would not own one. I certainly wouldn't wear one, and I doubt that any of my readers would. First Thessalonians 5:22 says, "Abstain from all appearance of evil." Is it not surprising then that some Christians adopt values

and lifestyles promoted by those who make no pretense of faith in Christ and who are in fact warring against the commandments of Jesus?

## One Message for All

In the Old Testament God called out a people who were to prepare the world for the Messiah's first coming. The doctrine of the Messiah was a message not just for the Jews but for the whole world. In the same way in these latter days He has established a people to carry a message that will prepare the world for His second coming. That people is the Seventh-day Adventist church.

In the case of the Jewish nation, the corruption of the people entrusted with the message represented a threat to the integrity of the message itself. So in these last days, corruption of the people to whom the last warning message has been entrusted represents a threat to the integrity of the message we have been commanded to give.

It is no wonder then that as confidence in the Spirit of Prophecy erodes, the message that will prepare a holy people to meet a holy God is at risk. To put it plainly, to corrupt the messengers is to compromise the message. Just as a surgeon makes himself free of organisms that would infect his patient, so the people of God will be sensitive to anything that would endanger the integrity of the life-and-death message God has given them to proclaim.

The illustration of a surgeon may also be compared with priests in the Old Testament. A level of purity was required of them that exceeded the purity of worshipers as a whole, just as the surgeon, because of his special mission, must be without contamination to an extent not required of patients in the waiting room.

It has long been recognized that we become like those we admire. Paul wrote that by beholding we are changed. Many habits and lifestyles are not, of themselves, moral issues. But in seeking to follow the customs and habits of the rich and famous, a Christian is slowly and perhaps imperceptibly changed to reflect values and ideologies of persons who are not seeking the kingdom of God.

## Summary

This article, with the exception of mentioning the impact of television, has not been a long list of dos and don'ts. As a church, we may have made a mistake in the past by living according to an "approved list." Given the fast pace of our changing culture, the list could never be up to date. For this reason as people of God we must understand the issues and principles involved. Know this, whether we live in one culture or another, whether we be of one generation or another, in all we do, whether we eat or drink, we will--by the indwelling Holy Spirit--do all to the glory of our holy God (see 1 Cor 10:31).

On contemplating the matter of Christian entertainment, which is a part of the Christian lifestyle, we will consider it only a matter of personal opinion, local culture, or a generational issue unless we can agree that how a Christian lives is determined by God. Inasmuch as holiness is His foundational attribute, those in whose lives He dwells by His Spirit will live only in the context of holiness.

Finally, it must be seen that separateness is necessary to protect the identity of those called to bear God's special message for this hour (Rev 14). During the Gulf War a soldier's uniform was not a moral issue; it was a life-and-death issue, because his uniform indicated which side the soldier was on. Likewise, Christians will avoid anything that might cause anyone to confuse their identity, because to do so puts at risk the message that is to prepare this generation to meet our holy God.

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## Dressing Up or Down: The Testimony of an Ex-Model

by *Gwen Shorter*

*What happens when high fashion meets the High King of Heaven?*

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The streets of New York City, with their hustle, bustle, bright lights, and millions of people, were the place to be! "How exciting!", I thought to myself, as I hurried from one appointment to another, swinging my portfolio. I was a model in the fashion capital of the world, and dressing up or down was highly competitive.

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Models set the standards for what most women call beauty. On television, in the magazines, newspapers, shows, etc., there used to be set styles. Anyone can put clothes on, but models must put it all together to attract and alarm the senses. They must sell clothes and themselves. And there I was, right in the middle of it all. I knew the power of a fashionable, well-dressed woman, and I wanted to use that power to help me climb the show business ladder.

In those days I wore micro mini skirts, pants and form-fitting sweaters, shorts, and anything else I wanted to help draw attention. "You can look, but don't touch!"--that was my motto.

And I loved my shoes! Every time I bought a new dress I had to buy a new pair of shoes. My heart would actually speed up with the excitement of just looking at a pair of fancy shoes. I just knew they were made for me--just my style! I would deny myself food, if necessary, to buy what I wanted to dress up or down.

My manicure and pedicure were always polished to perfection in order to keep up with my "beauty." I had jars, bottles, and tubes of all sorts of concoctions. Between facial masques, moisterizers, toners, foundations, eye shadow, pencil liner and brush, lipstick and lip gloss, body powder and face powder, perfume, polish for the nails, polish remover, files, expensive hairdos, false eye lashes, leg shaving paraphernalia, etc., etc., I spent hundreds of dollars just to keep myself "together."

Dressing up was not complete without my jewelry. To my eyes, those precious trinkets and



ornaments of gold and silver made any outfit look exquisite. My jewelry box overflowed with all kinds of earrings, necklaces, bracelets, brooches, and rings. To be honest, *I worshiped jewelry!* I felt naked without it--and besides, it made *me* look *good* whether I dressed up or down!

## Perfect?

Always in the mirror I was checking this and checking that--everything had to be just perfect. My everyday ritual of pampering and primping took about two hours of time before I was ready to face the public. When I emerged to meet the public eye, I would get those whistles, cat calls, and turn-around looks from men. I would appear not to hear or even see them. My motto was "Look, but don't touch."

The first argument I had with my husband, Rick (before we were married), was over the mini skirts and low cuts I wore. I flatly told him if he didn't like it, "find someone else," and I meant it. I had no intention of changing, and he never brought up the subject again. Nobody was changing me! And besides--change to what? I only knew one way--*my* way of dressing up or down.

**To be honest, I worshiped jewelry! I felt naked without it.**

As a model in the early 1970s with one of the top black modeling agencies in New York City, my fee was \$60 an hour, \$30 an hour to try on the clothes and have them fitted. There is hardly anything in the world that fosters pride and vanity more than being in front of a camera!

## The "Max" Factor

Make-up was just about the most important factor in my so-called beauty. It was not unusual for me to spend \$40 to \$50 for make-up regularly. Most of the make-up focused on the eyes. A determined effort goes into making the eyes as seductive and glamorous as possible. Much skill and precision is employed to make the result appear "natural," but everyone knows the naked truth. The idea is to make it appear that your eyes are big, your cheek bones high, your nose thin, your lips thin, your cheeks aglow with rosiness (a false look of health), your eyebrows thin and haughty-looking. This fosters vanity, pride and self-deception. And the Bible says that those who love or make a lie will be outside the gates of the city (Rev 22:15).

Make-up is meant to attract. And just what it attracts is not always desirable. Many times in my career as a model, actress, and nightclub singer, I would not take off my make-up for days at a time. I dreaded facing the truth of what I really looked like. So I know from experience that make-up subtly builds up a feeling of insecurity or makes a bad case of insecurity worse. However, it is supposed to do just the opposite: make you feel good about yourself. It doesn't work, but you pretend it does anyway. I saw the phony it had made of me. I was already out on that limb--and didn't know how to get back. Will I be accepted without my make-up? This was a big question in my mind.

## Clear Lives

As Christians, our lives should be as clear as crystal. We have nothing to hide or be ashamed of. Our appearance--hair, face, style of dress and shoes--should speak of plainness and natural simplicity in beauty. After becoming a Christian and stripping myself of all jewelry (a ring on almost every finger, pins, pierced earrings, bracelets, necklaces) and arched eyebrows, nail polish, make-up, I literally had to get used to the "new" me all over again.

It was a battle with self all the way. Only through Christ was I able to overcome this obsession for worldly things. Ellen G. White was right: "The life of nine tenths of those who are devotees of fashion is a living lie. Deception, fraud, is their daily practice; for they wish to appear that which they are not" (*Messages to Young People*, p. 359). The most important

thing to be remembered about wearing make-up, jewelry, or anything to attract attention to self is that people do it to make "self" appear to be that which it is not! It is like an "enemy in the camp."

## Being a Christian

So you want to be a Christian? Certain things work to help you and certain things work against you. You will never, ever overcome pride and vanity unless you rid yourself absolutely of all these "enemies in the camp."

Make-up is like a bad seed in good soil: it will bring forth its fruit, and you won't like the harvest. Resolutely decide by God's grace to have nothing to do with these enemies, and you'll really begin to accept yourself just as God made you! In this Christian warfare we need all the help we can get, without throwing the door wide open and inviting the enemy in!

**As Christians, our lives should be as clear as crystal. We have nothing to hide or be ashamed of.**

Here are twelve reasons why wearing make-up and jewelry is not in harmony with the consecrated Christian life:

1. It's a waste of money.
2. It fosters pride and vanity in the heart.
3. It destroys simplicity and modesty of demeanor and appearance.
4. It covers your natural beauty--as God made you.
5. It develops feelings of insecurity (you think you don't look your "best" without it).
6. It's a waste of time (making-up). Time (every minute) is a talent from God.
7. It will force you into associations which are frivolous and unChristlike.
8. It is unhealthful to clog the pores and risk damaging the eyes with these dangerous chemicals and dyes.
9. Make-up and jewelry are meant to attract, therefore you might attract--you know what.
10. It's a lie, and Satan is the father of lies.
11. It destroys love of eternal realities.
12. Your heavenly Father doesn't like it.

## Jesus Made the Difference

Meeting Jesus was like a miracle. Everything I ever wanted in life--love, acceptance, security, and peace of mind--I found in Him. I *did not* have to change for Jesus, but His love changed me! I did not know I could have a personal experience with my Savior. I did not know He loved me so much--as if I were the only one in the whole wide world. I did not know Jesus was soon coming back to His earth again.

When I learned these things, no one had to tell me, "take off your make-up, jewelry, and immodest clothes." When I looked in the mirror after I surrendered my life to Jesus, I didn't look the same to myself. What I had thought was so beautiful looked ugly, phony, pretentious, and proud! I was like one of the proud daughters of Zion described by the prophet Isaiah in Isa. 3:16-26.

## Shedding

No one had to tell me jewelry was inappropriate for the humble follower of Jesus. When I read those Bible texts on jewelry, I began shedding all my little precious idols from head to toe. What a relief! Nothing between my Saviour and me! "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works" (1 Tim 2:9, 10).

"Whose adorning let it not be the outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even

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and proud!**

the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Pet 3:3, 4).

No one had to tell me to get rid of mini skirts, pants, and low cuts. One day I packed them all up and took them to a local thrift shop. Why? Because I knew Jesus would not like them and I wanted to do everything to please the One who saved me from death and destruction. I had to ask the Lord to forgive me, because I knew I had caused many a man to sin in his heart because of the way I dressed.

And no more nakedness for me, in the name of water, sun and fun! That "colored underwear" I used to wear to the beach, all of a sudden became "strange apparel" (see Prov 7:10).

Now I know God made man with a sexual nature quite different from that of a woman. Man's sexual nature is so sensitive that it can be ignited into a fire by just the sight of a half-dressed or seductively-dressed woman. The short or tight skirt, low cut blouse, stocking legs, form fitting sweaters, pants, or jeans, all distract the minds of most men with unholy thoughts. The indulgent look, with desire, can destroy a man--and a woman! That strange apparel could mean the loss of eternal life not just to one man, but a whole host of them.

*Before*, I was dressing to bring attention to myself. *Now*, I want to hide behind Jesus. *Before*, I wasted hundreds of dollars and hours of precious probationary time trying to make myself beautiful by the world's standard. *Now*, I spend those hours in the study of God's Word and in prayer. I realize now that real beauty consists of a Christ-like character. *Before*, I loved dressing up or down--showing off fine clothes, forcing more and more clothes into my already overflowing closet, and trying to keep pace with the ever-changing fashions. *Now*, I measure my wardrobe by God's Word. *Before*, I was insecure. I wouldn't let anyone see me without my "make-up." *Now*, I am plain, placid, and pleased to be a child of the King. I feel secure because I know Jesus loves me just the way I am, and this gives me the courage to share this message of truth with all who will listen.

With my burden lifted and my idols torn down, what peace, sweet peace I enjoy! The change in me happened over 25 years ago. I still like to *dress up*, but only in Christ's beautiful robe of righteousness, and *down* with everything that displeases Him.


[Adapted from *Thy Nakedness: Lord, What Shall I Wear?* (Earlton, N.Y.: Homeward Publishing, 1997).]

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## Christian Lifestyle in Action

*by Paul Ratsara*

***Under extreme conditions, some Africans have demonstrated the radical difference real Christianity makes.***

*"He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt 10:37-39).*

One of the saddest realities of Christianity is that there are many Christians but few disciples. There are many intellectually-convinced believers but few converted. Many have a knowledge about God but do not know Him experientially. Their religion does not touch the reality of life but remains at a theoretical level.

But there are some notable exceptions. Some Christians today truly believe that "We are called to be a godly people who think, feel, and act in harmony with the principles of heaven" (*Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists*, #21). In their general manner of life, they demonstrate that they are not here to stay, but to get ready. And because they have already been crucified with Christ, they are not intimidated by fear of poverty, reproach, separation from friends, suffering, or even death.

These people, who are seeking to put Christian lifestyle into action, can be found in various parts of the world. Their lives challenge us to be true disciples of Christ. Recently, I spent one of the most enriching and rewarding trips of my ministry in the company of such believers in the Central African countries of Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire). Let me share with you a few of their stories.

### 1. "Don't Deny Me From . . ."

Have you been so hurt that you find it difficult to forgive? If so, please reflect on the experience of one woman in Rwanda.

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The genocide in Rwanda has left many widows and orphans, even among Seventh-day Adventists. More than 15,000 of our members were killed. But our mighty God turned the tragedy of murder and loss into a wonderful opportunity to witness for Him.

## Her Family's Killer

An Adventist widow was told that the man who had killed her loved ones had been captured and was in a prison not far from where she lived. Upon hearing this, she went to the prison guards and requested to see the man. When asked why she wanted to see him, she told the guards that the man murdered her relatives but she wanted to take care of him according to the teaching of Christ. They couldn't believe their ears. Thinking she cherished vengeful, sinister motives, they declined her request. But she persisted. In disbelief, the guards asked, "How can you do such a thing?"

Our dear sister explained that she was a Seventh-day Adventist Christian and had decided to follow what the Bible teaches no matter what. "It is written," our dear sister quoted, "'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your father which is in heaven;' and 'Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink. . . . Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good'" (Matt 5:44, 45; Rom 12:19-21).

After quoting the Scriptures, she pleaded with the prison guards: "Please, don't deny me from practicing my Christian duties: to love my enemy, feed him and give water to him."

Moved by her words, the guards granted her the permission to take care of the one who killed her loved ones. On a regular basis, she visited the man in the prison, fed him, gave him water, and provided for his daily needs.

## Rewards

Here is Christian lifestyle in action. If you ask whether this kind of lifestyle is worth the trouble, our dear sister will most likely refer you to the following words in Matthew 25:34-40:

"Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

## Forgiveness

Why should we forgive those who have hurt us so badly? Jesus answers with the parable of two debtors and concludes, "O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? . . . So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (Matt 18:32-35). And any time we say in the Lord's prayer, ". . . forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors," let us also remember the words of Christ: "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt 6:14, 15).

## 2. No Hutu, No Tutsi!

An endless cycle of civil wars and violence plagues the African continent. Sometimes these stem from tribal hatred. Tribalism is the belief that one ethnic group, distinguished by certain easily-noticed characteristics, is inherently superior to all others. Taken to its logical conclusions, this belief allows the "superior" ethnic group to dehumanize, oppress, and even kill the "inferior" group.

But Africa holds no patent right to tribalism. The spirit of tribalism is alive wherever we despise, separate, exploit, and wound people just because of the shape of their noses, the color of their skin, eyes, or hair, or some other external feature--including age, weight, gender, disability, language, or even economic or social status. What exists in Africa as tribalism exists also in other parts of the world as black-and-white racism, anti-Semitism, anti-Arabism, male-female chauvinism, classism, etc.

### Transcending Tribalism

Can Christians transcend these different manifestations of tribalism? Some of our believers in Africa think so. Consider this incident from the 100-day genocide in Rwanda.

One evening, a Seventh-day Adventist choir was practicing in the church when armed militiamen suddenly walked in. The soldiers stopped the practice and separated the singers into their Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups. Then they ordered the Hutus to kill their fellow Tutsis or lose their own lives as well. But the Hutu choir members refused. They said, "In the church there is no Hutu and Tutsi. All are brothers and sisters." The killers put a lot of pressure on them, threatening them with deadly weapons, but those members kept on saying that they could not kill their brothers and sisters. When no amount of pressure could cause them to do otherwise, all choir members, except a very few who escaped, were ruthlessly massacred.

**The soldiers ordered the Hutus to kill their fellow Tutsis or lose their own lives as well. But the Hutu choir members refused.**

### New Choir

After the genocide, a new choir was reconstituted. The Emmaus Choir (see Luke 24) emerged from the ashes of their martyred members. Today, this new choir is singing about the soon coming of Jesus to resurrect their fellow believers who died believing that in Christ, "there is neither Hutu nor Tutsi."

This also is Christian lifestyle in action. Is it worth it? Jesus said, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, *yea, and his own life also*, he cannot be my disciple." "He that findeth his life shall lose it: *and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it*" (Lk 14:26, Matt 10:39, emphasis mine). "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:12, 13).

Can we imagine the powerful impact our Christianity will have if we live out the implications of this teaching of Christ? Writes Ellen G. White: "If Christians were to act in concert, moving forward as one, under the direction of one Power, for the accomplishment of one purpose, they would move the world" (*Christian Service*, p. 75).

## 3. Ready to Live and to Die

Sometimes, believers are called upon to bear unbearable loads. These heavy burdens may involve painful losses, illness, betrayal, or even death. Like Paul's enigmatic "thorn in the flesh," relief seems to defy their persistent prayers. This is the case with some of our believers in the Democratic Republic of Congo, formerly Zaire.

This region is currently occupied by two rebel forces, both of which are fighting the government based in the Congolese capital of Kinshasa. Recently I conducted two ministerial council meetings for our pastors and their wives who are living in this area, one council in each of the two war zones. (Due to the war, the East Congo Union has been divided into two

sectors, each headed by a coordinator.) I was joined by Dr. Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, Director Public Campus Ministries for the Michigan Conference in the U.S.A.

After spending a few days in Rwanda, we flew on a small aircraft to Gisenyi, a northern border city in Rwanda. The presence of several heavily-armed soldiers and military aircraft at the airport indicated to us that we were entering a war zone. The coordinator of our Northern Congo Sector was at hand to meet us and drive us across the border into Goma, a Congolese city of about one and a half million inhabitants. To this city many Rwandese fled during the genocide. Hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives there through war, famine, and cholera.

This was not the first time I had been in Congo. In fact, I was serving in that country when I was called to my new assignment at the Africa-Indian Ocean Division headquarters in Cote d'Ivoire. My recent trip, however, was my first visit since the civil war erupted in Congo. Knowing how the city of Goma used to look, I was particularly saddened by the war's devastation: dilapidated buildings, widows patiently sitting in a public square awaiting job assignments in exchange for food, soldiers at every turn, the presence of the international organizations like Red Cross, U.N. personnel, etc. The war's toll on property and lives verifies the saying that "war does not decide who is right but who is left."

We spent the night in Goma, and the following day we flew 350 km northward in a 25-seat aircraft to Butembo, a city of one million people. Ten church pastors, led by the president of the local field, were at the airport to meet us. I cannot describe the joy on their faces when they saw us. They had not been sure we would make it. From there, we drove 40 km to Lukanga, where we have the Adventist University [Elton] Wallace campus and a mission headquarters. This location was the site of our first assigned ministerial council meeting.

### **Believers' Plight**

As we drove the one-hour journey from the Butembo airport to Lukanga, the local field president shared with us the plight of the believers, surrounded as they are every day by the evidences of war. He explained that they live as though each day would be their last. They could die (and several have already died) at the hands of soldiers, armed robbers, militiamen, etc. They could be imprisoned for no valid reason. Many pastors and church members have lost their homes. For their own "safety" they live in the bush/jungles. In order to attend meetings, some wake up at 4 a.m. and walk 3-5 hours to be at Sabbath School by 9 a.m., then walk back to their jungles.

When asked what theological questions church members ask in the face of these endless wars, deaths, and loss, the field president replied, "Our members are not asking why all of these things are happening. They already know the answer. They know that we are living in the last, perilous days. And as long as we live in this world, we shall continue to experiencing these tragedies. This is why our people are actively preparing themselves and others for the second coming." In his opinion, the main reason why those of us in the free world are engaged in frivolous theological discussions is that we have nothing else to do. We are too comfortable in this world, oblivious to the fact that it is headed for destruction.

But our believers in East Congo have counted the cost and are willing to bear the cross. They have made a commitment to take seriously Christ's words, "Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Lk 14:27). Though the burden is heavy, they hear Christ saying to them, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9). "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33).

## **4. Faithful No Matter What**

God sometimes calls upon us to leave the comfort and security of our jobs, paychecks, homes, or retirement benefits. In such selfless ministry, Christ's followers also display Christian lifestyle in action. We saw such ministry in East Congo, after we returned to Goma

(from Lukanga) to conduct a meeting with the other group of pastors and their wives.

One Sabbath, we spoke to some 5000 church members as they sat and stood quietly in the hot sun, for there was no place available that could hold the large number of people. The leaders told us that many districts in that part of the country are empty. The members have been displaced or they have had to flee to the forest because so many killings are still going on. They have to hide there; otherwise, the killers may come and exterminate them. But it is extremely difficult to live in the jungle. Because of the war there is not enough food to live on there.

## Faithful Pastors

But the most moving part of this story is that the district pastors of those members, even though they were not obliged to do so, decided to follow the members into the forest to minister to them, to feed the flock. They said they cannot abandon the sheep. They made up their minds that, with salary or without it, they would be faithful to their calling, no matter what. Because there is no food there, a certain pastor ventured to go out and look for food for his family. The killers saw him, and he was assassinated. That was just a few months ago.

Since the members of their districts are scattered in the forests, these faithful ministers go looking for them. They visit them by the jungle streams, in the caves, and under trees, and they conduct meetings for them. Without cars or bicycles, they continue to minister in spite of all of the obstacles.

When the pastors and their wives heard of the ministerial councils, they really wanted to attend. They were eager to be spiritually charged. They longed to be with their fellow ministers. They desired to attend the meetings to learn how to be better ministers for God. But they also knew that it was not easy to slip out of the forest without being noticed by the killers. Yet, risking their lives, eighteen of them walked through the jungle for three days, coming one by one. The Lord helped them to make it even though they could not start with us.

Some of them arrived at the last meeting, which was a communion service. The ordinance of foot-washing takes on a whole new meaning when you are called upon to wash the dirty feet of a fellow pastor whose shoes and socks are completely worn out. The profound nature of their prayers and the kinds of things they pray for will rebuke us for the kinds of prayer requests that often escape our lips. Their enthusiastic hymn singing and hearty "amens" will not only wake us up from the ice-cold lethargy, formalism, and luke-warmness of our worship services, but also put to shame those of us who are allowing so-called praise music and applause in some of our churches today.

The pastors of our churches in East Congo and their wives seek to be totally committed to Christ. Even in the face of extreme poverty, homelessness, famine, sickness, and death, they are seeking to do God's will and God's work. This life of total commitment is Christian lifestyle in action. It takes Christ's words seriously: "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (Lk 14:33).

Such a lifestyle of radical discipleship arises as a grateful response to God's magnificent salvation through Christ. Church members and pastors whose lives have been spared in the civil war are asking, "What can I give back to the Lord for saving me?" In response, they are giving their time, means, and talents for the advancement of God's cause in spite of the difficulties.

This life of total commitment is expected of those whom their Master has truly called. And without doubt, these pastors have heard the charge from God through Paul: "But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" (2 Tim 4:5 NKJV).

But should ministers sacrifice the comforts of this life for a life of affliction and hardship? Shouldn't they be concerned about their homes, cars, paychecks, and even their very lives?



To these questions, our pastors in East Congo would most assuredly reply with the words of the apostle Paul: "But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24 NKJV).

Paul finished his race. These dear believers in Africa will finish theirs, also. And what the Apostle of old said about himself is applicable to them: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" ( 2 Tim 4:7, 8 NKJV). Real crowns are reserved for our faithful workers in Congo. They believe that when Jesus Christ, "the Chief Shepherd," appears they "will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away" (1 Pet 5:4 NKJV).

## The Price and the Prize

The experiences I have shared here are just samples of what is happening in the Africa-Indian Ocean Division. Many parts of our division are disturbed by wars and troubles. But, praise God, the Holy Spirit is using men and women to do everything to glorify His name. They are ready to sacrifice everything, including life itself, for the cause of Christ.

Time is short. Let us also ask God to help us be uncompromisingly loyal to Him. Let no one deny us from practicing our Christian duties. Let there be no Hutus or Tutsis or any other form of tribalism--in the church. Let us be ready to live and to die in allegiance to Him. Let us be faithful, no matter what. This is the essence of Christian lifestyle in action.

Though eternal life is free, it is not cheap. It cost our Savior His life. Today, He bids us to follow in His steps. The *prize* of eternal life is worth the *price* of the Christian lifestyle.