

## ANNUAL COUNCIL

San Jose, Costa Rica, October 1 to 9, 1996

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## ANNUAL COUNCIL

## GENERAL CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

October 1, 1996, 6:40 p.m.

## PRESENT

Cesario Acevedo, Miguel Adonia, Milton Soldani Afonso, Keith D Albury, Christian Aliddeki, Benilde Almerida, Eliel Almonte, J Alirio Amaya, Erich Amelung, Niels-Erik Andreasen, Garth Anthony, Radisa Antic, Ronald E Appenzeller, Vanston Archbold, Alfredo Argueta, Delbert W Baker, Bryan W Ball, M S Baluku, Harold W Baptiste, Saul Barcelo, Graham M Barham, Maurice T Battle, Bert B Beach, Matthew A Bediako, B Lyn Behrens, Tsefaye Bekalo, Bekele Biri, Elifas Bisanda, Violetto F Bocala, Adrian Bocaneanu, Per Bolling, Emmanuel Boma, Gloria Brown, Reinder Bruinsma,

James M Campbell, Daniel Carbin, Joseph Carlson, G Tom Carter, R William Cash, Milton Castillo, Sergio Celis, Selma Chaij, M E Cherian, P D Chun, Larry R Colburn, Lowell C Cooper, Jose Orlando Correia, James A Cress, George H Crumley, Vasco Cubenda, A David C Currie, Rajmund Dabrowski, Chakravarthy Daniel, Luka T Daniel, Alipio Bernardo da Rosa, Mart De Groot, Abner De los Santos, Marenus V S De Paula, Graciela De Souza Di Prinzio, Gary B DeBoer, Sandy Dee, Joaquim Dias, Paterno M Diaz, Daniel Duffis,

Misael Escalante, Ramon Escalante, Raul Escalante, Jose M Espinosa, Laurie J Evans, Birgit Faber, Ghanem Fargo, Sergie B Ferrer, Ronald M Flowers, Robert S Folkenberg, Philip S Follett, Louise Fomuso, Daniel Fontaine, Ulrich Frikart, Agustin Galicia, Don Leo Garilva, L James Gibson, Julian Gomez, Raul Gomez, Erwin Gonzalez, Luis Gonzalez, V E Gorbul, Malcolm D Gordon, Rodolpho Gorski, Gordon R Gray, John Graz, Eugene W Grosser, Lindon Gudge, Patrick Guenin, Alberto C Gulfan Jr, Roberto Gullon, Stenio Gundadoo, Joseph E Gurubatham, Patricia Gustin,

Sang Woo Han, H G Harker, Alex Hendriks, Sein Han Hla, Eugene Hsu, C Lee Huff, Stelian Iacob, Pedro Iglesias, Donald G Jacobsen, Asser Jean-Pierre, Sven Hagen Jensen, Theodore T Jones, William G Johnsson, Raili Kalliokoski, Michael F Kaminsky, Gerry D Karst, Dennis C Keith Sr, Donald E Kent, Ivan F Khiminets, Robert J Kloosterhuis, Henk

Koning, G W Kore, P D Kujur, Robert E Kyte, Harold Lance, Victor Leger, Israel Leito, Lionel Leitzke, Robert E Lemon, Bruno Liske, Jose R Lizardo, Juan Lozano, Espoir Lukumbi,

P Machamire, Oswaldo Magana, S G Mahapure, Fitzroy Maitland, Lily Mandalas, Famara Mansal, Ralph W Martin, Rene Martinez, W L Masoka, Reuben Matiko, Ramon H Maury, Benjamin C Maxson, Carlos R Mayer, Siegfried G Mayr, Alfred C McClure, S N McKinney, Jose Ribamar P Menezes, Peter O Mensah, Vicente Meza, Marcel Millaud, Armando Miranda, Kenneth J Mittleider, Eric Monnier, Charles Montille, Thomas J Mostert Jr, Girimoio Muchanga, Baraka G Muganda, W Mukoma, Miguel Munoz, M M Murga, L Mwamukonda, Moses Mwenya,

Ruy H Nagel, Daegeuk Nam, Marcio Nastrini, Wai Chun (Stanley) Ng, Jacques G Ngororano, Benigno Nova, Karel Nowak, Antoine Oculi, Soo Jong Oh, Joseph A Ola, Ivan Omana, Eufrazio Oropeza, Moses I Ostrovsky, J Othoo, Rose M Otis, David Pacheco, Julio Palacio, Maxine Pape, Orville D Parchment, Gary B Patterson, Jere D Patzer, Douglas Paulsen, Jan Paulsen, David Javier Perez, Juan O Perla, Pablo Perla, Cecil R Perry, Olga Pervanchuk, C Pheirim, Leon C Phillips, Efrain Piedra, Inestral Pierre, Adamor Lopes Pimenta, Larry J Pitcher, Pekka Pohjola, Wladyslaw Polok, Hans Ponte, Haynes Posala, Peter J Prime, Nord C Punch, Donald G Pursley, Carlos Puyol,

L D Raelly, Ted L Ramirez, Ely B Ramos, Alex Rantung, Leo Ranzolin, I Nagabhushana Rao, Humberto M Rasi, Robert L Rawson, Benjamin F Reaves, Nils Rechter, George W Reid, Moises Reina, Rick Remmers, Hilda Flores Rendon, Gordon L Retzer, Samuel Brito Ribeiro, Robin D Riches, Alvin Ringer, Sylvia Nanette Rivera, Roger Robertsen, Donald E Robinson, Calvin B Rock, Bernardo Rodriguez, Alejandro Rosa, Denis Rosat, Steven G Rose, Amon Rugelinyange, Reinhardt Rupp, Michael L Ryan,

Theart Saint-Pierre, Hector Sanchez, Charles Sandefur, Paul Ratsara Saotra, Tercio Sarli, Don C Schneider, Makvala Shavlikadze, Marion Shields, Takashi Shiraishi, A F Shvarts, Roger C Silva, Alicia Estevez Sistiva, Dolores Slikkers, Dennis Slusher, Virginia L Smith, Javier Sol, Richard O Stenbakken, Wilson Stephen, Warwick H Stokes, V D Stolyar, Robert L Swezey, Jozsef Szilvasi, Mack Tennyson, Jairo Tenorio, John Moreless Thangkhiew, Valesius Thomas, G Ralph Thompson, Jeff K Thompson, Elias Tinoco, Mrs V Tlhabiwe, Athal H Tolhurst, C A Townend, Max A Trevino, Jansen E Trotman,

Andre van Rensburg, Villaney Vazquez, Mario Veloso, Juan Carlos Viera, Flavio Villarreal, Mario Villegas, Daniel B Villosa, V S Wakaba, Philemon Wandera, D Ronald Watts, Ralph S Watts Jr, Cristobal Werekeitzen, Albert S Whiting, Bertil Wiklander, Measapogu Wilson, Ted N C Wilson, Edward E Wines, Harald Wollan,

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Agegnehu Wondim, F Martin Ytreberg, James W Zackrison, Maurice Zehnacker, Valdis A Zilgalvis, Hernan Zuniga.

## OPENING

Adly Campos, international lay evangelist, led the song service.

Gerry D Karst, Administrative Assistant to the General Conference President, opened the meeting with prayer and welcomed the attendees to the 1996 Annual Council.

The following platform participants were introduced: Rajmund Dabrowski, G Ralph Thompson, Robert L Rawson, Israel Leito, Ramon H Maury, Agustin Galicia, Alfred C McClure, Alfredo Garcia-Marenko, Gordon L Retzer, Philip S Follett, Jan Paulsen, Matthew A Bediako, Leo Ranzolin, Calvin B Rock, Robert J Kloosterhuis, Benjamin C Maxson, Larry R Colburn, V S Wakaba, Eugene Hsu, Bertil Wiklander, M E Cherian, Bryan W Ball, Ruy H Nagel, Ulrich Frikart, C Lee Huff, L D Raelly, P D Chun, and Luka T Daniel.

Attendees to the 1996 Annual Council were welcomed by Israel Leito, President of the Inter-American Division; by Juan O Perla, President of the Central American Union; and by Mario Vargas, Assistant to the Mayor of San Jose.

The scripture, John 21:14-22, was read by Agustin Galicia, Secretary of the Inter-American Division.

The congregation sang "The Glory Song," followed by the pastoral prayer given by Ramon H Maury, Treasurer of the Inter-American Division.

## CALL TO ORDER

G Ralph Thompson, Secretary of the General Conference, read Article XIII, Section 2-a, and Article XIII, Section 4, of the General Conference Bylaws which state the constitutional provision for convening the Annual Council. All conditions had been met.

Leo Ranzolin, General Vice President of the General Conference, declared the 1996 Annual Council open for the consideration of business.

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#### AGENDA NOTEBOOK DISTRIBUTION

Notebooks containing the program and agenda items for the 1996 Annual Council were distributed in the Secretariat work area prior to the meeting. They will also be available following the evening meeting.

96AC to GRT

#### DAILY PROGRAM

VOTED, To adopt the daily program for the 1996 Annual Council, as follows:

##### DAILY PROGRAM October 4 to 10, except Sabbath

Morning	0645 to 0745	Steering Committee
	0800 to 0900	Devotional Meeting
	0900 to 1030	Council or Committees
	1030 to 1045	Recess
	1045 to 1230	Council or Committees

##### LUNCH

Afternoon	1330 to 1430	Special Committees
	1430 to 1545	Council or Committees
	1545 to 1600	Recess
	1600 to 1730	Council or Committees

##### DINNER/SUPPER

Evening	1840 to 2100	Evening Meeting (October 2, 3, 4, and 6)
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SEC/ADCOM/96AC to LCC

#### ANNUAL COUNCIL - 1996—STANDING COMMITTEES

VOTED, To approve standing committees for the 1996 Annual Council, as follows:

ADDITIONAL PERSONNEL TO STANDING COMMITTEES

Matthew A Bediako, Chairperson  
Lowell C Cooper, Secretary

Harold W Baptiste, Gary B DeBoer, Gerry D Karst.

FINANCE

Robert L Rawson, Chairperson  
George H Crumley, Secretary

Members: Erich Amelung, Graham M Barham, Alipio B da Rosa, Gary B DeBoer, Sergie B Ferrer, Gordon R Gray, Dennis C Keith Sr, Robert E Lemon, Jose R Lizardo, Ramon H Maury, Donald G Pursley, I Nagabhushana Rao, Donald E Robinson, Steven G Rose, Warwick H Stokes, Edward E Wines, F Martin Ytreberg.

All other Annual Council delegates not attending the Policy Committee.

NOMINATING

Robert S Folkenberg, Chairperson  
G Ralph Thompson, Secretary

Members: Milton Soldani Afonso, Niels-Erik Andreasen, Ronald E Appenzeller, Delbert W Baker, Bryan W Ball, Harold W Baptiste, Maurice T Battle, Matthew A Bediako, B Lyn Behrens, G Tom Carter, R William Cash, M E Cherian, P D Chun, Larry R Colburn, Lowell C Cooper, James A Cress, George H Crumley, Rajmund Dabrowski, Luka T Daniel, Gary B DeBoer, Mart De Groot, Ronald M Flowers, Philip S Follett, Ulrich Frikart,

Raul Gomez, V E Gorbul, Malcolm D Gordon, John Graz, Sang Woo Han, H G Harker, C Lee Huff, William G Johnsson, Dennis C Keith Sr, Robert J Kloosterhuis, G W Kore, Eric A Korff, Robert E Kyte, Robert E Lemon, Israel Leito, Espoir Lukumbi, Lily Mandalas, Benjamin C Maxson, Alfred C McClure, P O Mensah, Baraka G Muganda, Ruy H Nagel, J Othoo, Rose M Otis, Gary B Patterson, Jan Paulsen, Pablo Perla,

Olga Pervanchuk, Larry J Pitcher, Pekka Pohjola, Haynes Posala, L D Raelly, Leo Ranzolin, Humberto M Rasi, Robert L Rawson, Benjamin F Reaves, George W Reid,

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Samuel Brito Ribeiro, Donald E Robinson, Calvin B Rock, Denis Rosat, Michael L Ryan, Virginia L Smith, Richard O Stenbakken, John Moreless Thangkhiew, Mrs V Tlhabiwe, Athal H Tolhurst, Mario Veloso, V S Wakaba, D Ronald Watts, Ralph S Watts Jr,

Albert S Whiting, Bertil Wiklander, Ted N C Wilson, Naomi Yamashiro, F Martin Ytreberg, James W Zackrison.

### POLICY

Calvin B Rock, Chairperson  
Athal H Tolhurst, Secretary

Members: Harold W Baptiste, Maurice T Battle, Bert B Beach, Bekele Biri, Violetto F Bocala, Reinder Bruinsma, James M Campbell, Larry R Colburn, Lowell C Cooper, Laurie J Evans, Agustin Galicia, Roberto Gullon, Michael F Kaminsky, Charles Montille, Carlos Puyol, Humberto M Rasi, Donald E Robinson, Mario Veloso, D Ronald Watts.

All other Annual Council delegates not attending the Finance Committee.

### STEERING

Robert S Folkenberg, Chairperson  
Athal H Tolhurst, Secretary

Members: Harold W Baptiste, Maurice T Battle, Matthew A Bediako, Walter E Carson, Larry R Colburn, Lowell C Cooper, James A Cress, George H Crumley, Rajmund Dabrowski, Gary B DeBoer, Linda M de Leon, Philip S Follett, Agustin Galicia, William G Johnsson, Gerry D Karst, Dennis C Keith Sr, Robert J Kloosterhuis, Israel Leito, Robert E Lemon, Ramon H Maury, Alfred C McClure, Rose M Otis,

Gary B Patterson, Jan Paulsen, Leo Ranzolin, Robert L Rawson, Benjamin F Reaves, George W Reid, Donald E Robinson, Calvin B Rock, Michael L Ryan, Melvin Seard, G Ralph Thompson, Mario Veloso, D Ronald Watts, Ralph S Watts Jr, F Martin Ytreberg.

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## ANNUAL COUNCIL PROCEDURE

VOTED, To adopt the procedure for routing policy agenda items to a discussion group, as follows:

In the management of the 1996 Annual Council, the same procedure will be used which was introduced at the 1992 Annual Council, thus dedicating more Council time to consideration of issues and initiatives directly connected to, or a part of, the mission of the Church. As a first step, agenda items encompassing routine business and policy amendments will be routed to Discussion Groups prior to presentation to the Council. Inasmuch as it is usual for several Discussion Groups to meet concurrently, it is expected that the time-consuming processes of debate and amendment will be cared for, in the greater part, in the Discussion Groups, thus freeing up more Council time for other major discussion items. Should consensus be reached in the Discussion Groups, and this will certainly be encouraged, it is hoped that when the same agenda items are brought to the Council, they will be processed without undue deliberation.

Any of these procedures, and the routing of agenda items, may subsequently be modified by action of the floor.

The following are the Discussion Groups, the chairman and secretary for each Group, and the meeting places. The Discussion Groups will meet on Sunday, October 6, at 1430.

- |    |               |                |                  |
|----|---------------|----------------|------------------|
| 1. | Policy Items  | Chairman:      | Calvin B Rock    |
|    |               | Secretary:     | Athal H Tolhurst |
|    |               | Meeting Place: | Salon Orquideas  |
| 2. | Finance Items | Chairman:      | Robert L Rawson  |
|    |               | Secretary:     | George H Crumley |
|    |               | Meeting Place: | Salon la Paz     |

All Finance Committee members are expected to attend the finance discussion meeting, and any other delegates are welcome to attend. All Policy Committee members are expected to attend the policy discussion meeting. Division secretaries are urged to attend the policy discussion meeting, along with the remaining delegates.

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#### ASSIGNMENT OF AGENDA ITEMS

VOTED, To adopt the agenda and assign items to the standing committees as listed in the agenda notebook.

#### ADVENTIST WORLD RADIO—TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF BROADCASTING

Gordon L. Retzer, President of Adventist World Radio, introduced a video illustrating the work of Adventist World Radio as it celebrates, on this very day, 25 years of broadcasting. Following the video, a large gift box was opened representing the gift recently given to Adventist World Radio by the Italian Ministry of Telecommunications. They have granted a license to Adventist World Radio so that a new Adventist World Radio broadcasting facility may be constructed in Italy for broadcasts to the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Europe.

The audience then sang "Lift up the Trumpet," the song that has become the theme song for radio outreach around the world. Philip S. Follett offered a prayer of thanksgiving for the work accomplished by Adventist World Radio.

#### WORSHIP IN MUSIC

The Tucker Family Trio sang the song, "The Mission."

#### PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

Robert S. Folkenberg, President of the General Conference, presented the keynote address entitled, "Total Commitment to God." Scripture texts are taken from the New International Version, unless noted otherwise.

Open your Bibles with me to 2 Corinthians 13:5-8: "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test? And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test. Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong. Not that people will see that we have stood the test but that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth."



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What was the most difficult test or evaluation you have ever experienced? A geometry examination in academy? A calculus or German test in college? An anatomy or physical chemistry test at the university? A Greek or Hebrew test at the seminary?

I have experienced quite a few tests in life. Several challenges I have faced spring to my mind. One in particular stands out.

Events leading up to this particular test began about four o'clock one morning, about 125 miles out over the Pacific Ocean, while I was flying an Aztec (a small, twin-engine aircraft) on my way to California from Guatemala. Due to inadequate weather information, I found myself in big trouble. I had ended up on the wrong side of a line of thunderstorms, which I learned later was the tail of a hurricane, and the storms were pushing me toward Hawaii, not my destination, California!

While I was penetrating the line of storms, and just after a flash of lightning had momentarily blinded me, I promised myself that if I survived this flight, I was going to trade in the poorly equipped Aztec for a plane with radar and engines that would help me fly over violent storms. I was also going to get advanced flight training.

I knew advanced flight training was going to be difficult, very difficult, because the next step up was the "big one"—the Airline Transport Pilot's rating. For years I had heard horror stories about the difficulties of passing the examinations to get this coveted license.

Furlough was approaching, so I shared with Anita why, for safety reasons, it was important to get this license—and she agreed, since she and our children frequently flew with me. Then I began to make plans. I found a highly qualified Seventh-day Adventist instructor, Aubrey Kinzer, who lived in Southern California and who was willing to accept me as a student and provide me with intense flight training.

I knew the date when our furlough ended and we needed to return to Central America, so I marked on my calendar that I should try to schedule my oral and flight tests for two days before our departure. Then I worked my way back on the calendar as I figured out when I would have to take the challenging, eight- to ten-hour written examination and the number of days it would take the Federal Aviation Administration to grade my written test and send me the results. Passing the written test was a prerequisite to taking the oral and flight tests.

Finally, I crossed off the weeks I would have to study for the written exam. I flew daily with Aubrey Kinzer, the instructor.

Bottom line: nearly every day of our furlough would have to be devoted to studying and taking the series of written, oral, and flight tests. But concern for the safety of my family guaranteed that I would devote my highest level of effort to this great challenge.

The days seemed a blur as I became engulfed in my study program. Almost before I knew it, I had taken my written examination—and passed.

Then the day arrived for my oral and flight examinations. I drove to the Ontario, California, International Airport, where I was to meet the examiner. He was a tall, thin, pleasant gentleman, but everything in his dress, demeanor, and conversation was no-nonsense.

All morning I sat across the table from him in a well-lighted but very simply-furnished office as he plied me with a never-ending series of questions and asked me to explain FAA rules and regulations, and the flight characteristics of a Boeing 727 aircraft. Finally, with the oral test now behind me, we made our way out to the twin-engine, 10-passenger, Piper Navajo in which I was to take the flight test. I had already traded the Aztec for this better-equipped model.

While we were at the end of the runway, ready to take off, the examiner said, "I tell every person I am testing that if, by chance, there should be an actual in-flight emergency, not the simulated problems I will cause to happen as part of the test, but an actual in-flight emergency, how you handle that emergency will be part of the test. If I touch the controls," he warned, "you fail!" Then, sweating in the plane that had been heated by the intense Southern California sun, we took off to the west, on runway 27, toward Los Angeles. Immediately after lift off, I put on my "hood," a device which, like blinders on a horse, permitted me to see only the flight instruments until we were ready to touch down at the end of the test. My most difficult test was under way.

We turned southwest and climbed up through 10,000 feet, to the point in the sky to which the examiner had cleared me. I put the plane into the holding pattern he had prescribed.

Then, while I was doing some precision maneuvers, just as he asked me to shut down one engine, the cockpit filled with smoke. Just what I needed—an actual emergency! And one that every pilot fears—the possibility of an on-board fire!

Since the smoke smelled like burning rubber or the insulation on electrical wiring, I immediately reached down and shut off the master electrical switch and the two alternators which charge the battery. Suddenly I had no communication or navigation radios. The radios were dead, as were most of the instruments on the panel. In a few seconds the smoke thinned a little and I turned the master switch back on but left the two alternators turned off. My

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instruments came back to life—but they were operating on the battery, and I knew it would soon be out of power. But I was relieved. What might have been a fire apparently had been contained.

The examiner turned to me and asked, "I presume we will cancel the test and return to the airport?"

My thoughts raced. If we canceled now, I would have to fly back to Guatemala in two days without my license. How many years would it be until I could go through the process to again prepare for and take this test!

"No," I responded. "Let's continue. I still have battery power." I quietly hoped the examiner would have mercy and maybe shorten the test—just a little. He agreed to continue the test, but I soon realized he had no plans to shorten it at all!

We were shooting a back-course approach into Corona, California. This is a complicated approach since all your instruments appear to be reversed. We were descending very close to the minimum altitude where I would either have to land or go around when, suddenly, all my radios quit—those through which I was talking to the tower as well as my navigation radios.

"Why don't you land here and we will cancel the test," the examiner suggested.

"No," I responded. "I have been thinking that one of the two alternators is good and the other is bad, so I am going to turn the left alternator back on." And, without waiting for his response, with a quick movement I turned on the left alternator. Instantly, all the instruments and radios came back to life—and no smoke flooded the cabin! I added, "Let's continue the test."

It was with an enormous sense of relief, after several hours of flying, that I heard the examiner tell me to lift the hood, and I saw the Ontario Airport just ahead of me. As I taxied the plane to the ramp in front of the FAA offices, I heard those sweet words I will never forget. The examiner looked at me with a slight smile and said, "Well done. You have passed the test."

"You have passed the test." Mission accomplished! What joy! What relief!

But, the test was not really my objective—safer flying was my goal. Preparing for the test helped me improve the quality of my flying and evaluate progress toward my real objective.

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Tests! Evaluations! Life seems to be full of them. We take them for granted—usually. Children in school meet the challenges of arithmetic, spelling, language, social science, and Bible tests.

Parents of students expect to see report cards that show how their sons and daughters measure up to accepted academic standards.

Church and secular accrediting organizations periodically evaluate schools, colleges, and universities.

Professional commissions evaluate hospitals on their quality of care and service to their patients and communities.

Seventh-day Adventist professionals are accustomed to taking examinations that evaluate their competence to practice their professions.

We subscribe to magazines that test the products we see in life's marketplace so we can discover if they measure up to our expectations.

Evidence of some type of evaluation can be found in just about everything we do in life. We are concerned with getting good quality for our investment, whether it be our time or money.

And to a degree, within the Church we are used to certain kinds of evaluations and reviews of our work. Many church employees are periodically evaluated on their job performance. The elected church leaders are evaluated in another way—by constituencies that periodically meet and review the progress of the work and the job performance of their elected church leaders.

Yes, everyday life is full of tests and evaluations. As Christians we know from the study of our Bibles that there will be ultimate spiritual evaluations too! Revelation 14:7 tells us: "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come."

Yes, God too in the judgment will do some evaluating! Matthew 25:31 and 32 tell us that: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, . . . he will separate the people one from another."

He will do the separating by determining whether each person has trusted Him as Savior and submitted to His authority as Lord.

Since the scriptures make it clear that this day will come, is it appropriate for us to examine ourselves in advance? Should we do, or can we handle, a "reality check?"

The apostle Paul's counsel, which we read at the outset, was: "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test? And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test."—2 Cor 13:5, 6

Our real objective is to be certain that Jesus Christ is in us.

The Spirit of Prophecy contains numerous statements that set standards and clarify objectives for the Church, its members, and its institutions, and suggest some of the evaluations we might be doing. From the scores and hundreds of statements available, here are a few samples:

What kind of evaluations should pastors be doing? "If ministers would make the actions of each day a subject of careful thought and deliberate review, with the object to become acquainted with their own habits of life, they would better know themselves."—2T 512

What kind of evaluations should conference presidents be doing? I quote from the *Review and Herald*, April 22, 1884: "It may be far easier for the president of a Conference to labor himself than to direct the work of others; but it is his duty to take an oversight of the field, and see that all are working to the best advantage."

How could we measure the success of elementary schools? "When very young, children should be educated to read, to write, to understand figures, to keep their own accounts. They may go forward, advancing step by step in this knowledge. But before everything else, they should be taught that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."—CT 168, 169

Consider this spiritual standard: "The children are to be trained to become missionaries; they must be helped to understand distinctly what they must do to be saved" (CT 168).

Yes, life is full of spiritual priorities, measuring and evaluating. Yes, the Bible speaks of the final judgment. Yes, the Spirit of Prophecy instructs us to measure ourselves, our work, and what is done in Church institutions.

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You and I know that the members of the Church have a right to assume that all of us are doing our very best to achieve God's ideals. We all want to make sure things are functioning well and that the tithes and offerings do, in fact, fulfil the Gospel Commission, to "go . . . teach . . . baptize . . . make disciples."

We can approach such evaluations in several ways. We can assume everything is functioning as it should. Or we can demonstrate our commitment to the Lord's command by simply asking ourselves if we are as effective as we should be in reaching His objectives.

It seems to me that, as church administrators, we sense that many church members and many church leaders feel we need to be more accountable to God's desire for us, and that we need to develop a more principled way of evaluating the effectiveness of the ministries and activities of the Church.

For example, a few minutes ago I read two quotations about schools from Ellen White's book, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers and Students*. Together, the quotations indicate we should be teaching children reading, writing, and arithmetic—but more importantly and more distinctly, we should be giving students an understanding of what they must do to be saved.

We evaluate students regularly on their advances in reading. We evaluate students regularly on their advances in writing. We evaluate students regularly on their advances in mathematics. But do we periodically check to see if students are learning what they must do to be saved?

If they are not learning that most important subject of Christian education, are we adjusting the educational program to ensure that they not only learn what they must do to be saved, which is eternally most important, but that they experience the joy of salvation in Christ?

Yes, we want to make sure Church ministries are accountable, that they are doing what our Lord expects and what church members assume they are doing. But at the same time, we must be sensitive, we must be careful, when assessing spiritual outcomes.

What is the condition of the congregation where you attend church?

How many times in the last ten years did the entire congregation spend time considering their spiritual or numerical growth?

How many are hurting with nobody to care?

How many have for so many years neglected to study the Scriptures to understand the prophetic foundations of this movement that they feel the distinctive elements of our message are optional?

How many families have had children stop attending church and—instead of an avalanche of love, and a day of fasting and prayer—nobody noticed. How many heartbroken, grieving parents were left to cry alone?

How many have contracted AIDS and suffered not only from the disease, but from the rejection of their spiritual family? Fearful of condoning sin, those commissioned to offer care and comfort offer condemnation instead.

While we must approach our self-evaluation from a positive perspective, let us not avoid reality just because it is painful. Cynics may object and say that we have no business trying to assess the spiritual outcomes of congregations, organizations, and ministries. Cynics may cry, "Oh, this will upset everyone, it will destabilize our members or institutions and cause divisions among the members or employees." While those who object deserve a sensitive response, we must do what God clearly calls us to do. "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves" (2 Cor 13:5).

As we review and restate our spiritual objectives and assess our current state of affairs, let us do our best to be positive in our perspective, while seeing with brutal clarity the realities we look at every day. We must honestly ask ourselves whether we are "Totally Committed to God," or whether we are trying to make God after our image and after our likeness. We dare not be more committed to being "positive" than to being "Totally Committed" to God's will as revealed in His Word.

A rich byproduct will be an increasing trust and respect by members for their Church and the mission it is accomplishing under God's blessing. If we are careful to apply God's criteria—as revealed to His Church through Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy, and as He sends His Spirit to move on our minds—and not to apply mere human standards, we will please both God and the millions of church members who want each of the ministries of the Church to be what God wants it to be.

One key agenda item for this 1996 Annual Council is a pastoral call to every element of the Church—every member, every employee, every institution, and every church organization—to demonstrate a "Total Commitment to God."

To be systematically and appropriately accountable . . .

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1. For our individual spiritual growth;
2. For the spiritual and numerical growth of every congregation; and
3. For developing spiritual master plans and assessment programs so each organization and institution will be more likely to achieve its basic kingdom objectives.

This proposal attempts to unite the beliefs and values that define this movement, which we enshroud in our mission statements, with the realities of life as we live it both individually and organizationally. This proposal calls for increased accountability within the Church to meet God's expectations, and those of the membership.

If we positively and prayerfully seek to discover and accomplish God's will for each of us and the organizations we lead, I am confident we will see God's power explode, effectiveness blossom, resources increase, and, under Christ's leadership, the day of His coming hastened.

Briefly, the proposal asks the basic questions . . .

1. What does "Total Commitment to God" involve for each member?
2. What does "Total Commitment to God" involve for each pastor?
3. What does "Total Commitment to God" involve for each congregation?
4. What does "Total Commitment to God" involve for primary and secondary schools?
5. What does "Total Commitment to God" involve for colleges and universities?
6. What does "Total Commitment to God" involve for hospitals and other health care institutions?
7. What does "Total Commitment to God" involve for publishing houses and media centers?
8. What does "Total Commitment to God" involve for food industries?
9. What does "Total Commitment to God" involve for conferences/missions and union conferences?



10. What does "Total Commitment to God" involve for the General Conference and each of its divisions?

In short, the Annual Council proposal regarding our "Total Commitment to God" asks some key questions:

1. Do the wheels and gears of the Church just turn out above-average products and services that cannot be readily distinguished from their secular counterparts?

2. Does the Church make sure its basic products and services reveal to the world the way to eternal life?

Then it proposes ways in which we as a Church, working together as members, congregations, conferences, unions, the General Conference and its divisions, and all church ministries and institutions can assess whether we are meeting God's expectations.

Our Lord has given each one of us—every member, congregation, institution, and organization—a mandate. We call it the Gospel Commission. It is a commission that fires the souls of Seventh-day Adventists everywhere. Our Lord Himself said: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt 28:19, 20, KJV).

Another version (NIV) states: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations."

Our resurrected Lord told the Apostle Peter: "Feed my lambs . . . . Take care of my sheep . . . . Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17).

Our mandate is clear. "Go . . . teach . . . baptize . . . make disciples . . . feed my sheep!"

Pray for this Annual Council and the work we will do here. Pray that the Holy Spirit will move among us in a strong way, that He will impress on our minds our Father's will for the Church in these last days.

Let us each ask ourselves the heart-wrenching question: Am I individually, and is the organization or institution I lead, honestly "Totally Committed to God" to "Go . . . teach . . . baptize . . . make disciples . . . feed my sheep?" Or, am I more committed to my agenda than to His? May God's will, and not our own, be done during every minute of this council.

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October 1, 1996, evening  
GCC Annual Council

The benediction was offered by Alfred C McClure, President of the North American Division.

Adjourned.

Leo Ranzolin, Chairman  
G Ralph Thompson, Secretary  
Mario Veloso, Editorial Secretary  
Carol E Rasmussen, Recording Secretary

ANNUAL COUNCIL  
GENERAL CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

October 2, 1995, 8:30 a.m.

DEVOTIONAL MESSAGE

The devotional message entitled "The God Who Comes Looking" was presented by Calvin B Rock, General Vice President of the General Conference.

"Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, 'Where are you?'"—Gen 3:8, 9, NIV

The Bible documents many instances of the personal interaction of God with fallen humanity. God spoke with Adam and Eve in the garden, He wrestled with Jacob at Penile, He bargained with Abraham at Mamre, He confronted Moses at Horeb, and it was also at Horeb that He conversed with Elijah in the still small voice. What these and other encounters tell us is that the God who made the earth, the God who created this planet and the vast universe beyond, is also the God who condescends to covenant with His creatures. And that, more than anything else, is a never failing source of wonder. He is the great "I Am," "A Consuming Fire." He is "Wholly Other," "Absolute Transcendence," "The First Cause," "The Cause Without a Cause," "The Eternal Now." But, as highlighted by our scripture, He is also the God who aggressively searches and seeks for His lost creation—He is the God who comes looking!

What must be emphasized is that He not only has the ability to look—He looks! Not only does He "neither slumber nor sleep," but "His eyes run to and fro in the earth." He is not a passive potentate or, as one author put it, "a stellar deity who haunts the lucid interspace of worlds above where never creeps a cloud nor moans a wind, nor ever falls the least white star of snow, nor ever lowest roll of thunder moans, nor sound of human sorrow ever mounts to mar their sacred, everlasting calm." No. He is the God who comes looking!

But it is not that He can and does come looking that anchors our faith and staggers our imagination. God's looking, while incomprehensible in terms of its logistics, is not all that surprising. After all, He is God. What is surprising, and delightful, and redemptive is how and why He comes looking. He comes looking, as did the woman who sought for the lost coin, and the shepherd who looked for the lost sheep. He looks for us individually. And as with Adam and Eve, He looks before we call. It was not the "plea" but the "plight" of the first pair that occasioned His presence. He was looking while they were hiding; looking even though they wished not to be found. He is like that—this God who comes looking. He does

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not wait for our dull senses to alert us of our need for Him. He does not withhold His attention until our proud hearts will to seek Him. Before we call, He is already in the neighborhood of our concern—looking. He knows what things we have need of before we ask. Even as we hide behind the transparent trees of our obvious guilt, covered with the fig leaves of self-serving excuses whereby we blame others—our parents, our teachers, our spouses, our Church, our society—He is already looking, caring, calling.

The Bible authors who make strict judgment a sure element of His looking are not wrong. After all, this is His world, created for His pleasure, made rancid by our disobedience. We have polluted His otherwise perfect creation and He, whose holy nature is antithetical to evil, demands just recompense for our transgressions. Sinners may think that because punishment against evil is not executed speedily they can, with impunity, transgress His law. But it is not so. The “looking God” always demands strict accountability for our deeds.

In the garden He did not equivocate. His words were clear. To the serpent He said, “You shall crawl on your belly and eat of the dust.” To the woman He said, “I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception, in pain will you bring forth your children and your desire will be to your husband and he will rule over you.” And to the man He said, “cursed be the ground for your sake and in the sweat of your brow shall you earn your bread till you return to the ground.” The God who comes looking is the Ultimate Paymaster.

There is no escape from the looking God! Whether He must find us in the wide wilderness, as with the lost sheep; or within close confines, as with the lost coin; or in the tree-lined garden of our daily activities, He will find us! David had that in mind when he asked, “Whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; . . . the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.”—Ps 139:7-12, KJV We cannot hide from God. He is everywhere all the time—He is always looking!

And for what specifically is He looking? The elements of our conduct that are the primary basis of His judgment are stressed by Isaiah, who observes, “He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold weeping” (Isa 5:7, NKJV).

It is important to note that the words justice and righteousness are often linked together in Scripture. “Clouds and darkness surround Him; Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne” (Ps 97:2, NKJV).

"The LORD executes righteousness And justice for all who are oppressed" (Ps 103:6, NKJV).

"I will make justice the measuring line, and righteousness the plummet" (Isa 28:17, NKJV).

Through Amos, He looked in derision upon the sacrifices of those who neglected the poor and demanded that they bring Him, instead of music of praise and offerings of fat beasts, justice that runs down like water, and "righteousness like a mighty stream" (Amos 5:24, NKJV).

The repeated linkage of justice and righteousness in the Old Testament is best understood when we remember that for the Hebrews there was little or no difference between them. The view of righteousness as meaning our devotional, privatized, vertical relationships to God, and justice our ethical, social, or horizontal relations with each other, is a distortion of more recent centuries. For the Hebrews, justice, both distributive (or fairness) and corrective (or redress for harm done), was the defining element of God's righteousness as well as of that which He required of His people.

The God who punished Pharaoh's ruthless ways, the God who penalized Babylon's cruelty, the God who exposed Israel's inequities, the God who excoriated the Pharisees' extortions, still views with disdain our individual and corporate injustice. He sees our genocide, our infanticide, our tribalism; He sees the abuse of the poor by politicians who rape the land of its riches; He sees the privileged who fatten their bellies and their bank accounts while helpless children starve; He sees our inordinate protectionism, our continued repression of women; He sees our neglect of the aged, the blind, and others physically challenged; He sees our indifference toward the orphans and widows of the land; and He abhors these breeches of righteousness. The last six commandments are no less His will than the first four. In fact, true reverence and true worship are unfailing companions of pure ethics and proper sociality.

Emil Brunner, the Swiss theologian, is not correct when he reduces Christian duty to response to God's will with little need for written rules. But he is absolutely right in portraying our response to His covenanting in terms of love that issues "in service to neighbor within the orders of society." Our God is not a God of repression; neither is He an absentee landlord. He is an Unbiased Accountant, a Just Judge. Someday He will avenge the oppressed and recompense the keepers of false balances. He is the God who comes looking!

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But the view of judgment as the only, or even the primary, element of God's looking is not a complete one. The grand motive of His coming and looking is not our destruction, but our deliverance and return to favor.

This is illustrated, first of all, in His approach to the offenders in Eden. The record is that, when He came looking, He came walking in the garden in the cool of the day. He did not come as He might have, flying on the wings of the whirlwind with sword unsheathed or with thunderclap and lightning of damnation. He did not come in the dead of night when darkness would have intensified the fear and confusion of earth's first sinners; nor did He come in the early morning, as if in haste to slay the disobedient. He came in the cool of the evening when the last rays of sunshine were glowing upon Eden's golden harvests, when the gentle mist sprayed refreshing dew upon its fragrant flowers, when the silver moon was rising to rival in beauty the fading sun; when the skies were slowly but surely lighting their nocturnal lamps; when the evening breeze gently caressed the land, and the animals were retreating to rest; it was then, when the guilty pair could best reflect upon their state, that God came looking.

The second indication that it is not summary judgment God intends in His looking is provided by the fact that, in the garden, census preceded censure; explanation came before excommunication. God's first attempt, when He comes looking, is always to contrast the jeopardies of sin with the joys of salvation.

God's first question to His cringing creatures was, "Adam, where art thou?" (Gen 3:9). In this question, He was not referring to the physical location that Adam had assumed behind the tree, but to the spiritual position he now occupied under the law. And so the question, "Adam, where art thou?"

Before He extracts us from the quagmires of difficulty in which we place ourselves, He first makes us cerebral about our plight and place. He jostled with Jacob before He changed his name; He sobered Samson before He restored his strength; He enlightened Elijah before He sent him from the cave; He jolted Jonah before he made the fish to cough; He humbled Hezekiah before He gave his kingdom peace; He shamed Simon Peter before He charged him, "feed My sheep." Before restoration and reconciliation must always be recognition and realization. The looking God knows where we are, but He requires responsible repentance as a right condition of rescue.

The second question, "Who told you that you were naked?" (Gen 3:11, NIV), emphasizes the dire nature of our dilemma—one of alien bondage. Alien because we have yielded allegiance to other than the Creator who alone deserves our loyalty; and bondage because by naked is meant the loss of our innocence, the vanishing of our immortal glow, the

occupying of our being with the evil propensities that stunt our nature, stain our characters, stifle our strivings, strip our energies, stymie our devotions, and stamp all our righteousness as "filthy rags."

The third question addressed to Adam, "Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" (Gen 3:11, RSV), emphasizes the core element of our disobedience—ingratitude. In this light, God's inquiry, "Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" is not the equivalent of "Adam, I told you so!" It is not God's standing with the rod of recompense ready to bludgeon the guilty pair. It is God saying "Adam, how could you? Adam, with all I have done for you during our brief but happy relationship—Adam, I trusted you! Adam, I gave you every plant that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. Adam, I gave you the rivers of Pishon and Gihon and Hiddekel and Euphrates. Adam, I gave you the gold of Havilah. Adam, I gave you dominance over the fish and the fowl and the beasts and the birds. Adam, I gave you the tree of life! Adam, how could you?"

Sin is not simply defiance. It is disrespect, it is disloyalty, it is ingratitude to God.

And the final question, posed to Eve, "What is this you have done?" (Gen 3:13, NIV), emphasizes God's absolute fairness and our consummate folly. His fairness provides us the power of choice. Our folly causes us to abuse that high and holy privilege. The question to Eve is a reminder that sin is not of God's creation. Sin is of human origin; it is the souring of the good that God created, a negation of perfection; it is what we have done and what we do with the personal freedoms that He designed for willing obedience.

Satan had promised Eve, "Ye shall be as gods" (Gen 3:5, KJV), and in a perverse way he was right. Our actions did give us creative powers. For whereas God had made beauty of the void and deep, we now make deep void of that beauty. And the knowledge of good and evil that He planned we should gradually learn in association with Him, we gained by sudden but lethal experience.

All of this is instructive for our concept of the God who comes looking; but it is Genesis 3:15 (NKJV) that best demonstrates His covenanting qualities. Here Scripture reads, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed, He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." How wondrous! Right there on the scene of the crime, while still distributing His judgments, the Father gives the forlorn pair and their doomed descendants the promise of a personal Saviour.

It is one thing for God to peer over the walls of glory and gaze upon the calamity of humanity from afar. It is one thing for Him to dispatch angels to examine our situation and

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take back their unerring reports. It is one thing for Him to appear at a distance as to Moses on the mountain, shielding us from His glory. But it is an entirely different thing for God to reduce Himself to our level and come looking through our eyes. That God would pull our humanity over His divinity and live in our flesh is more than marvelous! It is more than amazing! But that is exactly what He did. After 4,000 years of looking from without, He came looking from within. He was not satisfied to remain approachable only through the ranks of holy intermediaries, or to speak by proxy to this diseased and dying world. He is a different kind of God. This God who comes looking is a singular breed, a unique deity, unduplicated and unduplicatable; He is the God who condescended to see and sense, as do His fallen creatures. That is why, translated into the most practical of terms, Paul's words read, "In the fullness of time"—the Holy God came looking (Gal 4:4).

Consider the beauty and power of God's coming and looking from our perspective. There is, first of all, the willingness of His coming. We shall never know, nor can our finite minds ever understand, nor will eternity provide sufficient time for us to comprehend, that God came personally looking. The very thought is anomalous. Why, with myriads of adoring angels who obey His every bidding? Why, with uncounted galaxies of worlds so numerous that they appear as clouds of dust, or nebula, to our telescopes? Why, with 99 sheep safe in the celestial fold, would God look at all—not to mention come personally looking in this lost world? That unfathomable reality is plaintively expressed by Isaiah who, stunned by the incredulity of it all, cried out, "who can believe our report?"—and by John who, frustrated in his attempt to adequately describe God's gift of Himself, abandoned his search for superlatives and said in eloquent finality, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed."

Second, consider the logistics of His coming. How did God operationalize His wish to personally look from the viewpoint of humanity? Galatians 4:4 (KJV) again supplies the answer. "When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman." And how was that? Our prophetess states, by a "painful process, mysterious to angels as well as to men" (7BC 915).

I like the imagery given the incarnation by the poet, George Herbert, who wrote:

Hast thou not heard that my Lord died?  
Then let me tell you a strange story;  
The power of God as He did ride  
In His majestic robes of glory,  
Resolved to light, and so one day,  
He descended, undressing all the way.  
The stars, His attire of light . . . obtained  
The cloud His bow, the fire, His spear,



The sky, His azure mantel gained;  
And when they asked what He would wear,  
He smiled and said as He did go,  
He had new clothes a-making here below

“The word became flesh”

And then consider the time of His coming. Isaiah had said of the day of His appearing, “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, . . . darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people” (Isa 60:1, 2, KJV). And it was so. When God came personally looking, the tide of human existence was at its lowest. Four thousand years of sin had well nigh drained humanity of not only its Edenic vitality, but its physical resemblance to the progenitors of our race. (See DA 36.)

From our experience in Eden to the time of the flood, our loss of vitality was gradual. Those before the flood lived almost one thousand years. Noah, whose life spanned the flood, lived to be 953 years old—300 of which were lived after the flood. But from the flood to Bethlehem, the deterioration accelerated. Abraham, who was called about the time that Noah died, lived to be 175; David, who lived six centuries after Abraham, considered three score and ten to be a ripe old age. And by Bethlehem, nine centuries after David, longevity was the briefest in human history—22 years of age.

By the time of Bethlehem, our weakened humanity was staggering toward extinction. Infant mortality, blindness, leprosy, insanity, and other crippling infirmities were pandemic. Deadly plagues often destroyed whole tribes and villages. The so-called scientists had no clues. Physicians killed more people with their cures than they healed with their instruments. By Bethlehem, Satan had made of humanity a virtual “Disneyland”—a death house of deranged minds and distorted limbs. It was when heaven and earth could clearly see the full consequences of Lucifer’s rule, that God came personally looking.

Consider now the nature of His coming. There are some among us who understand His looking as being necessarily limited if, as others believe, He came without the post-fall propensities to evil bequeathed by Adam to his descendants. These interpret the flesh that He wore as having not only our infirmities, or the consequences of sin, but our evil drives or natural predispositions to transgression as well.

Those who ascribe incompleteness to Christ’s looking, if indeed He did not see from the tortured position of creatures born with evil desires, are correct. But so are those in the opposite camp—those who ascribe to Him the ability to look as do those besieged by evil cravings, though He did not possess them. These views may be harmonized, I submit, by the

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correct understanding of the following statement by our prophetess: "As soon as Christ entered the wilderness of temptation, . . . He felt the overwhelming tide of woe that deluged the world. He realized the strength of indulged appetite and of unholy passion that controlled the world" (1SM 271). Not until His suffering in Gethsemane did He take on our sins and become a curse. But in the wilderness, and no doubt on other occasions of lengthy fasting, He who knew no sin and had no internal drives to wrong felt the full force of sin's craving, addictive power.

That leads us to the cost of His coming. The price of His coming and looking is far beyond our knowing. But this much we can calculate: it cost Him 4,000 years of apprehension on the part of unfallen beings who wondered about the plan that allowed sin to exist so long; it cost Him the disruption of His orderly rule; it cost him the distance of reduction to our low estate; it cost him the dissonance of dwelling in fallen flesh; it cost Him the discomfort of evil accusations and the disgrace of being numbered with transgressors; it cost Him the disdain and rejection of those whom He had come to save; and as our flawless sacrifice, it cost Him His life. He came not just looking, He came longing and loving, and that love drove Him to Calvary—where He paid a debt He did not owe because we owed a debt we could not pay.

The consequences of His dying find ultimate focus in Genesis 3:21, where God replaced the fig leaves our parents hastily sewed with the lamb's skin He lovingly provided. The inadequacy of their self-made covering symbolizes the futility of human works, and the lamb's skin represents the necessity of divine intervention.

But in order for the covering to be provided, the lamb had to die. Jesus is not only the Good Shepherd who came looking for His sheep. He is not only represented by the woman looking for her coin. He is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. The death that He suffered was not just the dying of the sick and aged around Him—the natural death of infected flesh. It was the second death—the payment of blood that grants full justification, that is, forgiveness and complete sanctification, the covering of His righteous robe.

He came looking for ways to fulfill prophecy, looking for ways to vindicate His Father's honor; looking for ways to awaken our dazed and drugged humanity, looking for ways to bind the strongman in his lair and set the captives free. And when He had fulfilled His destiny, when He had gloriously triumphed in His mission, He returned a conquering hero to His glittering throne.

God the Son is no longer here physically looking, but He has sent One just as capable, God the Holy Spirit. And through Him, in the presence and power of His word, He is still the God who comes looking.

He has found His lost sheep. He has found His lost coin. He is no longer looking for ways to save us. Salvation is already assured. The requirements for everlasting life are already met.

God is now looking for individuals who will accept Him—men and women among the billions of earth who love Him so much that they are willing to disassociate from all that would pollute a pure relationship with Him.

But to reach them He needs human helpers. So He is looking for ambassadors. He is looking for those for whom the thrill of rescue is so sweet and the joy of salvation so complete that they are driven to tell others.

He is looking today, looking in this meeting, looking in this council. And He will continue to come looking until at last He comes calling—calling with a shout and with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God.

Shall not we who plan to answer then, whether it be with the multitude who have slept or the remnant who have survived, to gladly respond to His presence here today? If you join me in such surrender, will you stand?

Jan Paulsen, Chairman  
Maurice T Battle, Secretary  
Lowell C Cooper, Editorial Secretary  
Carol E Rasmussen, Recording Secretary

ANNUAL COUNCIL  
GENERAL CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

San Jose, Costa Rica

October 2, 1996, 2:30 p.m.

GOD'S HEART BEATS FOR HIS BRIDE: A BIBLICAL  
REFLECTION ON THE EXPERIENCE OF JUSTIFICATION -  
MESSAGE AND MISSION PRESENTATION

The presentation entitled "God's Heart Beats for His Bride: A Biblical Reflection on the Experience of Justification," was made by Gregory P Nelson, Senior Pastor of the College View Seventh-day Adventist Church in Lincoln, Nebraska. Scripture texts are taken from the New Century Version, unless noted otherwise.

I will never forget, as long as I live, that moment almost 21 years ago. It was a little past 6:00 p.m. on Sunday evening. The church was packed with people and filled with expectation. I was surrounded by eight handsome men and beautiful women, a Bible boy and flower girl, and my dad and grandfather as officiating pastors.

I was dressed in my very best—a black tuxedo with tails. The candles were shimmering softly all around us. The stage was covered with scented flowers and poinsettias. The aisle in front of me was lined with candles, each one surrounded by holly and ivy, all the way to the back. My most favorite music began to fill the sanctuary—Rachmaninoff's *Second Piano Concerto*, middle movement.

And then it happened . . . the doors in the back slowly opened. I suddenly realized my palms were sweaty, my knees a bit weak, my heart was pounding—not because I was nervous, but because I was excited, an excitement I had never felt to this degree in my whole life! All I could do was stand there and watch the most beautiful thing in all the world coming toward me!

*[A man holding a pole with a wedding dress on it walked into the sanctuary, down the center aisle, and planted the pole in a stand on the platform.]*

*"Hey, wait a minute! Wait a minute! Stop the music! Stop everything! Where is my bride? Where is my bride? The dress is beautiful, but it is just not the same without my bride!"*

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Can you imagine how I would have felt if this had happened 21 years ago? This scenario is so painful to imagine because it was the bride herself that I wanted! The dress, as beautiful as it was, was only important to me as it represented the woman I loved. It was the woman I was in love with. It was the bride I had been dreaming about all those years—waiting, longing, and living for the moment when I would be joined with her as my wife!

My heart beat for my bride! And am I glad that 21 years ago Cindy was inside that dress as it came down the aisle. I took her hands in mine and pledged my love to her for eternity. She is the greatest thing that has ever happened to me!!

Do you know what, friends? If I can feel that kind of passion for my wife, and you for your special person, how do you think God feels toward His bride? Do you think He gets excited, too, as He anticipates His wedding?

The reality is that one of the significant motifs that weaves and winds its way through Scripture is marriage. The world begins with a wedding in the Garden of Eden and ends with a wedding in the New Earth.

In between, God is pictured as the divine Lover who passionately pursues His people, betroths them to Himself, and eagerly anticipates His wedding (see Isa 61:10; Hosea 2:19, 20; Eph 5:27). God does everything He can because His heart beats for His bride. And it is from this *a priori* reality that literature and the media get their powerful love stories.

Do you know why this picture is so significant to you and me, living when the end is in sight? Do you remember those months, weeks, and days leading up to your wedding? I sure do. I was working extra jobs trying to earn enough money to pay for our honeymoon. I was in my senior year in college. It was not an easy time, trying to juggle all my responsibilities: working, studying, planning, preparing.

Our wedding was during Christmas break. Unfortunately, before the wedding I had to take semester finals in my difficult classes, like Hebrew, Advanced Greek, and Biblical Archaeology. My folks wondered if I could make it.

But do you know what kept me going through all those things? The thought of our wedding. The thought of seeing my bride coming down that candle-lit aisle to take my hand and become my wife! I could have handled anything in anticipation of that moment.

That is why this picture of God and His bride is so important for you and me living when the end is in sight. This tomorrow can impact our todays as we struggle to survive.

The future can change the now. The book of Revelation closes by telling us how. Let us look at the picture: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth had disappeared, and there was no sea anymore" (Rev 21:1).

The final vision Jesus gives to John is of heaven. Notice that it is not a vision of an ending, as we might expect at the end of a book, it is a vision of a new beginning. "I saw a new heaven and a new earth."

You see, in this love story the hero does not ride off with his bride into the sunset. This Hero takes His bride into the sunrise.

One of the most frustrating things to me about modern love stories depicted on film or in literature is that the story always ends just when it starts to get good, when the man finally gets the woman. I hate that! I want to see how they go on to enjoy each other. I want to vicariously enjoy their new life together.

That is why I love this biblical story: it does not end when the Man gets the woman. John goes on to say "I saw a new heaven and a new earth." Life goes on in an even better dimension. Notice the description of this new life together: "And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Now God's presence is with people, and he will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them and will be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death, sadness, crying, or pain, because all the old ways are gone.'"—Rev 21:3, 4

Because God's heart beats for His bride, He takes her to a whole new level of existence, a life in which they will always be together, as verse three describes. God will live with His bride, no longer separated by distance or by sin. Instead, as verse four says, He gives her an unending life with Him that is unsullied, unshattered, unencumbered by tears, death, sadness, crying, and pain. Could you handle that kind of life with Him? Because God's heart beats for His bride, that is the kind of life He has reserved for her. Verse 5 says, "The One who was sitting on the throne said, 'Look! I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this, because these words are true and can be trusted.'"

So who is this bride for whom God's heart beats so wildly, so passionately? Notice how John describes her: "And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, . . . like a bride dressed for her husband" (Rev 21:2).

Does it not seem surprising that God's bride would be described as a city? Throughout the Bible, cities often depicted the very worst. The first city was built by the first murderer, Cain, and destroyed by the flood. The second city, Babel, was built in an arrogant attempt to

storm heaven and defy God. God finally had to intervene by causing the inhabitants to speak different languages. There were other cities, such as Sodom and Gomorrah, upon which God visited his judgment. And in John's earlier vision, all the forces opposing God are described as a city—Babylon, the prostitute.

Now suddenly we have another city, named Jerusalem, which is referred to as God's bride. Think about Jerusalem's sordid history: this was the city that David captured from the pagan Jebusites and then dishonored with adultery and murder. This was the city that became infamous for its child sacrifices and witchcraft. This was the city that mocked the great prophet Jeremiah and refused to listen to Isaiah. This was the city that was twice destroyed in judgment, first by Babylon and then by Rome. This was the city to which Jesus came and, when He saw it, He wept. This was the city which murdered the Son of God outside its own walls. Jerusalem!

Now suddenly, at the end of the story in Revelation, this city is God's bride, the one for whom God's heart beats so wildly. How can this be? What does this mean? She does not seem like a bride worth marrying, does she? She is somewhat like unfaithful Gomer, the prostitute, whom God asks the prophet Hosea to marry. What is this all about?

The description is still not over. Notice the following verses: "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last troubles came to me, saying, 'Come with me, and I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.' And the angel carried me away by the Spirit to a very large and high mountain. He showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It was shining with the glory of God and was bright like a very expensive jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. The city had a great high wall with twelve gates with twelve angels at the gates, and on each gate was written the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south, and three on the west. The walls of the city were built on twelve foundation stones, and on the stones were written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb."—Rev 21:9-14

Two elements of this description stand out in stark contrast to its beauty: the gates of the city and foundation stones. The gates are inscribed with the names of the twelve sons of Jacob, and the foundation stones are inscribed with the names of the twelve disciples of Jesus.

What is the significance? Do not these names seem to be unlikely material for gates into the city of God and foundations for the city? Remember the twelve sons of Jacob who became the twelve tribes of Israel? Their stories are full of brutality, fraud, violated and violent sex, cowardice, and disobedience. These names represent anything but righteous heroes of faith. Why does God place their names on the gates, the entrances to the city which is His bride?

Remember the twelve disciples of Jesus? They were a rather motley group of men: two of them sons of thunder; another pulled a sword, cut off a man's ear, and then denied his Lord; all of them grasping and fighting and arguing their way toward positions of importance; one a doubter; and the rest so ordinary there are no stories of them. These names represent anything but powerful heroes of faith. Why does God place their names on the foundations on which the rest of the city, His bride, is built? How could God make such choices for His bride? What is this all about?

Last fall the news services in the United States reported about Craig Randall, a 23-year-old garbage truck driver from the suburbs of Boston, Massachusetts. He sometimes brings his work home with him. There was that old-fashioned sewing machine he salvaged one day. There were some books he rescued from the trash. It is amazing what you can find in people's garbage.

One day Craig lifted a Wendy's soft drink cup off a pile of trash. It had one of those peel-off contest stickers Wendy's has been promoting lately. He figured, "Hey, why not? Last week I won a chicken sandwich. Maybe this time I will get lucky and win some fries to go with it." So he took it with him.

While driving his rounds outside Boston, he peeled back the sticker. The ticket read: "Congratulations! You have won \$200,000 toward a new home." \$200,000!! From the trash!

Well, Craig and his fiancée refused to believe it until Thursday when he drove his garbage truck to a Wendy's restaurant and turned in his sticker . . . and they handed him a check . . . for \$200,000!

Can you imagine finding such value in the trash? Imagine how those people felt who threw that Wendy's cup away as just some garbage left over from a quick trip to the fast-food joint! You see, what is trash to some people is treasure to others.

Could it be, my friends, that this amazing city, God's bride, is described like this in Revelation 21 to show the love God has for us and the value He places on us in spite of our backgrounds of shame and lives of unfaithfulness? What is trash to some is treasure to others. Could it be that this description is here to show us that God persistently brings about the salvation of wretches who do not deserve to be saved to reveal His glory; to show us what it really is that makes His bride beautiful?



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Craig Randall, 23-year-old garbage collector, did something with that dirty Wendy's cup that the owner apparently did not consider worth doing: Craig pulled back the sticker and saw the value of what was underneath.

Satan and the world look at us and see how we look. Let us face it, we often do not look very good: we fail, we cave in to pressure, we compromise, we rebel, we act out our insecurities. We are sinners. So Satan calls us trash, worthy only of the cosmic garbage dump.

But, like Craig Randall, God comes along, picks us up out of the trash, and peels back the sticker. He sees incredible value. He sees our worth. He sees us as children bought by the blood of His Son. We are the apple of His eye, bruised and battered though we may be. In a mystery beyond our fathoming, He chooses us as His bride. In us He sees a treasure worth keeping! This is justification! He chose us long before we ever thought of choosing Him.

Remember the words of Jesus to His disciples in John 15:16 (NIV)? Jesus is echoing the Old Testament picture found in Deuteronomy 7. He says, "You did not choose me, but I chose you to go and bear fruit." Our status as God's bride is not first and foremost a product of our choice. It is primarily because of God's choice! And this picture in Revelation emphasizes that reality!

Listen to the way Eugene Peterson puts it: "We are not, apparently, to think of heaven as great heroes carrying trophies, swept into heavenly honor in a swirl of breathtaking legend. If heaven is for such people, it will not have much to do with my life. But nothing in the life of faith or John's vision suggests that. Simeon and Reuben [two sons of Jacob] (surely not them!) are building materials for heaven, as are Bartholomew and Thaddeus [two disciples of Jesus] (who are they?). Such being the case, there is nothing so evil in my unfaithfulness and nothing so obscure about my life that is not, even now, being fashioned into the foundation stones and entrance gates of heaven. . . . Everything in history is retrievable." (*Reversed Thunder*, 176, 177)

That is the power of justification. In other words, God takes our lives right now, whatever condition they are in, unfaithful or obscure, and makes them into something so beautiful that the dazzling light of His glory shines through, as verse 11 says. Our beauty comes from Him! The story of Scripture is that God takes a prostitute and turns her into His bride. He is not in love with the dress, He is in love with the bride!

That is why, in Revelation 21:15-21, the angel who measures the city in all its dimensions finds her perfectly formed and perfectly shaped. How did this happen? Has the

bride shaped herself, trued every wall and plumbed every line? No! This picture is clear: God shapes, fashions, and molds His bride into a work of exquisite beauty and value. Why does He do that? Because He sees her as possessing inherent worth and having eternal value. He has already chosen her to be His bride.

Notice the conclusion to this passage in Revelation 21:22, 23: "I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the city's temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, because the glory of God is its light, and the Lamb is the city's lamp." You see, the reality is that the bride's beauty comes from His glory, a glory and beauty which she can never earn or deserve! His glory is her glory. God has chosen her because He loves her and chooses to make her His bride.

My friends, the description of this city which is God's bride says far more about God than about the bride. It shows us the amazing lengths to which God goes to save people, to build people, to heal people, to transform people. In the end, everyone has equal access to God's presence in Heaven, no matter what their background or life experience. Do you know why? Because what is trash to some is treasure to others. And God has done the choosing! God does whatever it takes to bring us to Him. Why? Because God's heart beats for His bride!

Brennan Manning, in his book *The Signature of Jesus*, tells about a five-day retreat he held one summer in Iowa City, Iowa. The small number of participants allowed for an unusual degree of dialogue, sharing, and interpersonal fellowship.

One mid-thirtyish woman in the group was conspicuous by her silence. She was a slender, attractive woman who neither smiled nor sighed, laughed or cried, reacted, responded, or communicated with any of them.

On the afternoon of the fourth day, Manning invited each person to share what the Lord had been doing in his or her life the past few days. After a couple of minutes of silence, the uncommunicative woman reached for her journal and said, "Something happened to me yesterday, and I wrote it down. You were speaking on the compassion of Jesus and you developed the two images of husband and lover found in Isaiah 54 and Hosea 2.

"At the end of your talk, you prayed that we might experience what you had just shared. You asked us to close our eyes. Almost the moment I did, something happened. In faith I was transported into a large ballroom filled with people. I was sitting by myself on a wooden chair when a man approached me, took my hand, and led me onto the shiny wooden floor. He held me in his arms and led me around the room.

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“The tempo of the waltz increased and we whirled faster and faster. The man’s eyes never left my face. His radiant smile covered me with warmth, delight, and a profound sense of acceptance. Everyone else on the floor stopped moving. They were staring at us. As the music increased and the movement quickened, I glanced at His hands, and then I knew. There were scars on His hands, as though from a battle long ago. The music tapered to a slow melody and then stopped. Jesus held me close, looked into my eyes, and whispered to me. Do you know what He whispered?”

At this moment, every person in the chapel strained forward to hear what she would say. Tears rolled down her cheeks. A full minute of silence followed. Her face was beaming and tears were streaming as she finally spoke. “He said to me, ‘Christine, I am wild about you!’”

My friends, whether you are comfortable picturing it in an elegant ballroom, or a wedding feast in Cana, or on an old rugged cross, God cries out to us, “I am wild about you!”

It is the deep conviction of my heart that Seventh-day Adventist Christianity is not primarily a moral code wrapped up in a unique theology. It is a grace-filled mystery cloaked in an unbelievable relationship. It is not essentially a philosophy of love, but a love affair; it is not keeping rules with clenched fists, but receiving a gift with open hands. It is living, as Francis Schaeffer once said, moment to moment by the grace of Jesus Christ. Seventh-day Adventists should be first and foremost a people living life out of the truth that God is wild about us . . . period! That is the love story of justification.

No wonder Revelation ends with the responsive cries between two lovers: “the Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come!’ Let the one who hears this say, ‘Come!’ Let whoever is thirsty come.”—Rev 22:17 And Jesus replies, “‘Yes, I am coming soon!’”—Rev 22:20

My friends, do you not want to join with the rest of His bride and respond to John’s reply, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”

Jan Paulsen, Chairman

Mario Veloso, Secretary

Harold W Baptiste, Editorial Secretary

Rowena J Moore, Recording Secretary

## ANNUAL COUNCIL

## GENERAL CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

October 3, 1996, 8:30 a.m.

## DEVOTIONAL MESSAGE

The devotional message entitled "My Response to Freedom" was presented by George W Reid, Director of the Biblical Research Institute. All Scripture references are from the Revised Standard Version.

Here we stand, all agog, wide-eyed, with the priceless gift in hand. We are justified—declared righteous before the court of eternity. In the blood of Christ we are reconciled. "We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation" (Rom 5:11). When we choose Christ, hanging on Him our very will and life, He confers on us the full virtue of His life, death, and resurrection, in a dynamic so potent that every plot of a million devils is confounded.

From the gloom of sin's lair, its chill reaching from the very gates of Eden, we now are set into full harmony with our Creator. A warm glow floods our life. We take off the filthy rags of human weaving and put on the gleaming garment of His perfection. Dare I use this word? Oh yes, that is what it is in every detail. His perfection—now made ours by a sweeping gift of grace. Imagine the joy: in one moment transformed from a starving pauper in the alleys of earth to an owner of measureless wealth, to noble standing, to joint heirship with Christ in His glorious kingdom that spans the universe. How does this happen? It is the fulfillment of the gentle words of Jesus, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). Dare we break with propriety for a moment to say, "Hallelujah?"

In this banquet, everything is reversed. It is God's feast, not ours. His ways, not our way. And in His banquet, the dessert comes first. Soup, salad, and main dishes are all there, but the dessert comes first. We start at peace with Him, all at peace. Gone is the reign of cringing fear, the leaden weight of guilt. The gleams of the golden morning spill across the hilltops into our lives. To be sure there are clouds out there still, clouds that sometimes hang dark and heavy and oppressive. But we are free. We are no longer in bondage to sin and Satan. We are free—free! Whatever storm rages across our world, we stand facing the wind. Beyond the storm the eye of faith spots the harbingers of a better day. We are delivered from the anxious times which were built on ignorance and clouded by an uncertain future. We know how it all will end, and that end is, as David put it, "Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb" (Ps 19:10).

Is your heart lifted into the air by such jubilation? We hear the shouts of the prisoner, long in bondage, now set free. And the fact is, this prisoner was guilty as charged. By every accepted standard of justice, he deserves exactly what he is getting, and by all rights should end up in no good place. But now all that is changed. We were the enemies, scowling at God from our cage of sin, wrapped up in self, spitting blasphemies from tainted mouths, blaming Him for the tragedies of life, vowing someday to get even, and truly reflecting Lucifer in both attitude and behavior. What irony that noble man, created in the very image of his Creator, sinks to this level.

In this very moment the Creator Himself, moved with compassion, comes to offer Himself as sacrifice, to have laid upon Himself the consequences of our rebellion. In our place he suffers the ignominy of extinction by eternal death, the rightful end of such corruption. Behold such love that none ever can fathom. While we were yet enemies, Christ died for the unrighteous.

Two thousand years have passed since Christ's death. The story is so well known that hundreds of us here can repeat the texts by memory. Satan's first tactic is to persuade us that such language indulges in overstatement and melodrama, that the picture is not really us. We are upright people, well-washed, tidy, and groomed, as we have always appeared to be before our fellow citizens. From a purely human perspective, that may seem quite the case.

What happens when we turn the coin over and see it from God's perspective? Now the scale is the divine scale. Of all those ever worshiped as gods, only the one true God reveals Himself as infinitely moral. His flawless character stands as the norm for all that is right or wrong. Despite an insistence within contemporary culture that morality is culture-bound and comparative, and that words like right and wrong are no longer acceptable in correct society, these things can no more change than can God's character. "All thy ways are righteous." The verdict in our case is "guilty as charged." Not until we understand the pit from which we were lifted can we begin to grasp what it took to lift us. But the glory in our case is that those who were forgiven much, love much. This sets the foundation for the future of the justified person.

Satan's second ploy is to push into the background the very things we are reviewing this morning. He intends that tracking through the foothills must so occupy our attention that we will never reach the heights from which cometh our help. All these things, good things for the most part, lead us to act as though the Saviour has evolved into a piece of history, a wonderful teacher in a faraway time and place who inspires us, but is less than the center of our lives today. In such a setting the sense of our lostness fades among the thousand urgent duties, and we live lives preoccupied. Still, we have a kind of vague hope that one day we will recover that strong personal walk with Jesus. But, at the moment, this something I am

doing just has to get done. So the important falls victim to the urgent. This disease is not unknown among church leaders.

Seventh-day Adventists are world famous as doers rather than thinkers. Jesus also was a doer, but He understood how necessary it is to maintain a clear vision of the will of God and to live in perfect submission to the Father. His example must teach us how necessary it is to keep our walk with God the prime goal of our lives. Then the Holy Spirit can have His way with us.

Let us be altogether practical. What is God's plan for the justified Christian who now realizes the magnificent dimensions of what it means to have such a gift? The Scriptures are as explicit about this as they are about Christ's saving sacrifice. God's plan is to transform that person into a dedicated, sanctified servant of God, filled with the joy of salvation.

An unnecessary confusion persists among Seventh-day Adventists about justification and sanctification. Almost every church member is familiar with a well-known saying from Ellen White, that "sanctification is the work of a lifetime." Although true, Ellen White never intended this as a plenary definition, for it is but a portion of the biblical teaching of sanctification. In her own writings, she broadens the understanding of this experience.

On this statement, however, many of God's people have erected a curious theological structure that promotes the concept of a lifelong process of improvement on which hangs our final acceptance with God. Since a person's life stretches ahead of him, the process means a perpetual regression of certainty about salvation. Full acceptance with God seems to stand at the top of a long stairway, to be reached by some form of patient, persistent toil. The truth that we are accepted by faith on the basis of Christ's sacrifice, and that we carry acceptance with us as long as we love and serve Him, seems to recede into the corner. In its place surfaces a program of meritorious moral improvement. As we climb the stairway of life, which indeed we all must, we go with unsteady step for fear that a misstep may cost us the progress we have made, perhaps even eternal life itself.

Ellen White's earnest appeals for growth in Christian living, and her warnings to remain close to Christ, become bent into a message of uncertainty, with the result that what should be a reassuring gospel highway is plagued with struggling souls bound to a program of merit-bearing efforts. We are told that all success in this program comes from Christ, so that makes it Christ-centered. But, sadly, the shoulders of this roadway are littered with pilgrims who have given up in despair. Further along, the despair degenerates into a comparison with others that silences the last songs of rejoicing. Some simply give up and disappear.

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We accept fully the truth that only by continuing in Christ is our place in the plan of God secured. It is possible to turn away. The epistle to the Hebrews counsels us to "exhort one another every day . . . that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end" (Heb 3:13, 14). The Bible itself provides classic examples, and we are forewarned. But to turn this possibility into a debilitating jeopardy, when Christ intends us to rejoice in the glorious good news, steals from us the pleasure to be found in His service. No true understanding of salvation can include the idea of our contributing to our own salvation. Paul's appeal to work out our salvation with fear and trembling never suggests more than carrying through to completion our commitment to Jesus, falling at the foot of the cross, then rising to newness of life. Our works of obedience have no merit in themselves; they only show our sincerity in His service.

Actually, the New Testament speaks of both justification and sanctification as works already accomplished. After reviewing the unsavory past of some of the Corinthian believers, Paul writes, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11).

At times the two terms, justification and sanctification, carry virtually the same meaning. In the biblical teaching there is a shade of distinction, however. As justification changes our status from sin to holiness, so sanctification describes a change from sinfulness to holiness. Notice the same course of direction in both. Notice also the enabling act of God, and Him alone, in both.

Equally important is the core meaning of the major Greek term, *hagiasmos*, meaning holiness or consecrated for holy use, derived from *hagiazō*, to make holy, to set apart. In the Old Testament the parallel word is *qadash*, meaning to separate from the ordinary, to set apart, to sanctify, or to dedicate to a unique purpose. In the meanings of these words, the idea of a lengthy time, while not banished, recedes into the background, displaced by the idea of special setting aside, dedication to sacred use, or distinction from the ordinary. So vessels may be sanctified for use in the sacred services, and likewise the priest who officiates at the altar in the tabernacle must be sanctified, or set aside for that explicit purpose. Wherever it occurs in the biblical teaching, however, such setting apart always takes place in an environment dealing with holiness.

When the Scriptures speak of God's justifying act, the usual pattern is to follow it with His sanctifying act. The gospel, enveloping both God's justifying and sanctifying acts, presents the transformed life as the end product.

Paul's discussion in Romans offers an impressive example. It is Paul's most developed treatise on how Christ brings us salvation. He is writing to believers who are unclear about

how one's works relate to the salvation God grants, hence the extended discussion of faith and works. His first exposition of justification by faith comes in Romans 3. He speaks of "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe" (Rom 3:22), followed by his first premise, "For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law" (Rom 3:28). In Romans 4 he illustrates his lesson with the experience of Abraham.

In Romans 5 the apostle extends what he began in chapter 3 by stating that Christ's death opens the doors of salvation to every believer. Climaxing his message on justification, Paul turns to what happens when we yield self to Christ as our Redeemer. Notice the transition from justification to sanctification: "[that] grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 5:21). "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" (Rom 6:1, 2). Then falls a cascading description of the elements in the life of a born-again Christian. We are "no longer . . . enslaved to sin" (Rom 6:6). "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies" (Rom 6:12). "Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness" (Rom 6:13). This is followed by the victorious cry, "sin will have no dominion over you" (Rom 6:14). Paul follows a similar theme in Romans 8 as well.

This pattern appears repeatedly in Paul's letters. In Ephesians, his tribute to Christ's delivering act marches for eight verses to its climax, so familiar to Christian ears, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph 2:8, 9). In the next verse follows his leap to God's purpose in all this, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:10).

Here, as elsewhere, we face the question: What is the purpose of the whole Christian experience? Is the end goal the joy of deliverance as Christ frees us from sin, or is there something beyond? Indeed, from that wonderful beginning it stretches beyond. With the new birth comes God's sanctifying power that turns upside down our whole value system. As Paul writes to Titus, "He saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). The indwelling Spirit acts as the divine agent who transforms our lives so we are in harmony with Christ.

One more great truth from the Word is the message of victory. John especially addresses the reality of the Christian who is in, but not of, the world. This is by design. As Jesus said to the Father, "I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that



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thou shouldst keep them from the evil one. . . . Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth” (John 17:15, 17).

The key to the sanctified Christian life lies in the victory of Jesus. At the fateful last supper, Jesus assured the disciples with “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). And from that victory flows a river of delivering power. Our Seventh-day Adventist interest in victory over sin rests on a solid biblical foundation, first on Jesus Christ the overcomer who shares with His followers His mighty power. “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

Now that we have touched the great truth of what happens to the person walking in Jesus, we have to ask the question, “What difference does it make?” Are we talking dry theory—theological rambling that never seems to find a point? I must respond with another question, “Difference to whom?” Is my response to freedom visible or theoretical? Ask the demoniacs who were delivered from devilish power by our Saviour. Falling at His feet, they bore witness to the wondrous change in their lives.

Not everyone showered with Christ’s protection and providence responds with gratitude. In fact, it is common to the human temperament to grab the good for its own sake, returning little by way of thanks. But Christ’s rain falls on both the obedient and the rebellious. It is unchallenged evidence of His lavish generosity and the quality of the love that inspires it. Can we imagine the anguish that tears His heart when men and women turn from Him in cold disregard, or jettison Him as unnecessary?

Real sanctification comes as God’s gift of empowering grace, the work of the Spirit in hearts dedicated to Jesus. Watch as He turns over our natural selfishness, transforming our lives. Can we know sanctified Christians when we see them? Yes, indeed. It is not a case of obscure theology, but rather something practical.

What are the evidences? Homes where peace reigns, where tender compassion mediates between spouses, even when differences of opinion seek to divide; children who run to fling trusting arms around the necks of fathers and mothers; individuals who show genuine concern for neighbors and friends, and for strangers in need of help. Look for blossoming gifts of the Spirit, for patient and thoughtful people. The Spirit snuffs out gossip and self-satisfying criticism. He builds generosity on the ruins of former greed, promotes honesty in business. Christ’s sanctifying power leads us to take initiative to seek reconciliation with those whom we may have hurt, and to become living examples of what it means to represent Christ.

We may ask, is such living possible for mortals? In human power, no; but in the power of the cross, yes. To fall into the hands of Jesus is the ultimate joy of all eternity. And all this He gives us despite our fragile humanness. Let us claim Him now, today, tomorrow, and until His appearance fills the eastern sky and at last our pilgrimage is over.

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### USING THE GIFTS: A TEST CASE - MESSAGE AND MISSION PRESENTATION

Jo Ann Davidson, Assistant Professor of Theology at the Andrews University Theological Seminary, made a presentation entitled "Using the Gifts: A Test Case." Scripture quotations that do not list a specific version are the speaker's own translation from the original language.

There are different spiritual gifts. Scriptures portray them and their purpose for service. Both the Old and New Testaments contain narratives that illuminate. The diverse authors of various books in the Bible exhibit differing gifts. The apostle Paul helpfully itemizes some of the gifts in the New Testament (see 1 Corinthians 12). Various possibilities could be examined using the principles of narrative analysis. During this hour we will focus on one Old Testament individual whom God enlisted for service.

"Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah" (Jonah 1:1, RSV). This initial verse begins with the standard scriptural expression of God communicating with a messenger. You are familiar with how Hosea, Joel, Micah, Zephaniah, and Jonah all open with, "The Word of the Lord that came unto . . . ." Yet this formula varies just a bit here. Perhaps it already suggests that what we will find is more a focus on Jonah than on his oracles.

However, more importantly, this formula immediately establishes that the ensuing verses originate with God Himself—"The Word of the Lord." This is a holy introduction. It has an awesome aura about it, and it should remind us each time we find it in Scripture that we need to bow before the God of Heaven with a prayer for the Holy Spirit to open our minds as we study. Thus, please pray with me now.

[Prayer followed.]

"Now the Word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai" (Jonah 1:1, RSV). Consider how God calls people by name. He knows our parentage and background. He knew

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Jonah was the son of Amittai. God referred to this explicitly through Isaiah, "O Israel, 'Fear not, I have redeemed you, I have called you by your name'" (Isa 43:1, NKJV). When God summons people, He does not just say, "Hey, you." He calls them by name.

When Jesus was traveling through Jericho and looked up into the sycamore tree, he did not just say, "Hey you, up there in the tree." He called out, "Zaccheus, I want to go to your house today" (see Luke 19:5). This businessman was hoping to just catch a glimpse of the famous teacher, but Jesus already knew His name! God even knows seemingly insignificant details, such as the number of hairs on each head (Matt 10:30).

A belief in the God of Scripture gives us personhood and authenticity. The modern philosophical movement of "existentialism" says that there is no ultimate purpose to life. Existentialists insist that human life is meaningless and absurd. But biblical Christians think differently. We believe that the Lord of heaven and earth has given each of us life and a destiny, and that He even knows us by name!

God calls Jonah and says, "Arise, Go to Nineveh."<sup>1</sup> "Among the cities of the ancient world in the days of divided Israel one of the greatest was Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian realm" (PK 265). To obey God's commission, Jonah would have to make a tremendous journey across the desert—about 750 miles on foot. But such travel was not what seemed to be distressing him.

Instead, Jonah seems to have gasped, "Nineveh? The capital of Israel's worst enemy?" For Jonah, Nineveh meant the center of Assyrian power, and Assyria loomed as a menacing threat to Israel's survival. The city of Nineveh itself was the epitome of everything Jonah hated about the Gentiles. He knew its reputation as an idolatrous, sin-ridden city, and nothing was more repulsive, repugnant, or distressing than going there to preach repentance.

God knows all people and all places by name—and we can never assume to know what God is going to do next. Who would have thought that God had any plan but judgment for the wicked city of Nineveh? This should remind us that we cannot always predict who God is going to convert next. The next person on God's list may surprise us.

Who in the early church would have thought that the next person to be converted would be Saul of Tarsus? Every Christian at that time was trying to hide from him. And I suspect that when different congregations had prayer lists of those they were praying for, they did not even consider praying for Saul. Even the prophet Ananias trembled at God's instructions to visit Saul.<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes we look at a particular person and think that person will never be saved, or we think how hard it would be for God to reach that individual. But God can surprise us. He surely surprised Jonah! For He sent Jonah to a Gentile city—one of the most renowned cities of heathendom then on the face of the earth.

And on top of that, God was sending him on a precedent-breaking mission. Jonah alone, of all God's messengers, had ever received such a commission. The Lord did a new thing by Jonah—a startling and marvelous new thing upon the earth. He violated all current Israelite expectations by manifesting His care for people outside the seed of Abraham. He was sending His first apostle to the Gentiles!

However, Jonah seems to prefer a funnel of God's providence, targeted exclusively on the Israelites. The drama of the situation is profound. And a contest of wills between Jonah and Yahweh begins with God's command, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me" (Jonah 1:2, NJKV). Archaeologists have excavated numerous ancient Assyrian inscriptions. And from these, we are reminded that God was accurate in His particular concern over their self-confident pride<sup>3</sup> and their cruelty.<sup>4</sup> God subsequently sent the prophet Nahum to Nineveh. See how much God invested in this pagan city!

Examine God's pronouncement: "Their wickedness has come up before me." This is formal legal language. The Lord is seated in His court. We are ushered before God the Judge. A case is to be called and judged. We are reminded that all nations come under His rule. Regardless of some modern voices that seek to soothe our consciences with an exclusive "God is Love," we observe here (and all through Scripture) that God notices human wickedness. Thus, this is a very serious situation.

But there comes another surprise, for this announcement is also an indication of God's mercy. Yes, the people of Nineveh were notoriously wicked and Jonah was commissioned to bring Nineveh a judgment message. However, the Assyrians could be grateful for that.

The greatest curse that can ever be brought against a nation or a people is for God to turn away, as He had announced through Hosea, "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone" (Hosea 4:17, NKJV). Notice the similarity in Romans 1, when God finally has to give up those who refuse to retain God in their knowledge. He gives them over to a reprobate mind—a depraved mind, a mind that cannot grasp truth. Judgment is serious business for heaven. Thus it was a critical time for Nineveh. But it would have been even worse if God had turned away. We can thank God for confronting us with our disobedience. It is a great source of hope for us to know that He will not let us continue forever in our personal brand of rebellion. It would be the worst possible situation if God were not concerned when we run from Him.

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But this present mercy granted to Nineveh is just the beginning of God's astonishing attention to details. We have noted God calling a person by name and commissioning him. This is a frequent Old Testament pattern.<sup>5</sup> What happens next is far from routine.

"But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD" (Jonah 1:3, NKJV). The shocking surprise is Jonah's stark refusal to shoulder his task. Moses and Jeremiah also initially shrank from their divine assignments,<sup>6</sup> but Jonah's blunt defiance goes far beyond their hesitation. As a result, what now ensues is an accumulation of hair-raising phenomena, one after the other, as God pursues Jonah. The violent sea storm, the fish Jonah survives in, the mass conversion of a great pagan city—these are not routine.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Notice in verse 3 how, in just one verse, we are informed twice that Jonah fled "from the presence of the Lord."<sup>7</sup> One time would be shocking enough. However, this duplication in a single verse compels attention to the irony of anyone, let alone a prophet, thinking he can escape from the presence of the Lord! Notice, too, how Jonah did not just depart—he fled!

Furthermore, three times in this same verse we are notified that Jonah is going "to Tarshish," which punctuates the fact that Jonah is traveling in a diametrically opposite direction from God's instructions! Nineveh is northeast. Tarshish is west. See how this verse emphasizes three times the magnitude of Jonah's rebellion.

Perhaps he thought that if he left Canaan, the Promised Land, he might escape the task God had given him, getting away from the stage on which God "normally" directed His sacred purposes. Jonah may have thought that by taking a Mediterranean cruise, God might even forget about His intentions concerning Nineveh.

As Jonah "thought of the difficulties and seeming impossibilities of this commission, he was tempted to question the wisdom of the call. . . . It seemed as if nothing could be gained by proclaiming such a message in that proud city" (PK 266). Maybe, if he just ignored these divine instructions, doom would come to the despised Gentiles, for they surely would not think of repentance on their own. Jonah may have thought that if God had a little more time to think about the situation He might change His mind.

There are some people today who are of the opinion that God actually matures. This contemporary theory is termed "process theology." The understanding is that God's thinking ripens through experience just as ours does—God's mind improves as it processes what happens in His creation, for God becomes wiser by watching what transpires. He then discovers better ways of administering His kingdom. This theory claims that God can speak in conflicting terms, even contradicting His earlier declarations as He continually learns better

methods to manage His universe. However, this type of thinking includes serious implications, such as there are no absolute or eternal principles, for God continually develops.

The account of Jonah, and of all Scripture, strongly contradicts this perspective. For it reveals to us just how diligent God was in getting His message to Nineveh. God did not learn from Jonah. But you need not feel sorry for Him. It is because He already knows. Nor does God make mistakes. See how Jonah remains His chosen messenger even though Jonah refuses the assignment and tries to escape. Nor did God change His mind about Nineveh.

When Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord, that might have changed everything. When Jonah paid the fare to Tarshish, God might have decided to move in another direction. But God stayed with Jonah. "Not for long was he permitted to go on undisturbed in his mad flight" (PK 267).

"But the LORD sent out a great wind on the sea" (Jonah 1:4, NKJV). For Jonah's sake a tempest is unleashed. Verse 4 teaches us that this storm, whose physical causes would be the same as those of any storm, is there only for Jonah and because of Jonah. Yes, it has other obvious effects. It whips up the ocean and causes ships to founder. But its purpose is to smash inflexible Jonah. The elements of nature and many innocent sailors are engaged in the adventure of Jonah, with him and because of him.

This storm should not astonish us. Holy Scripture, when speaking of natural events, is remarkable for the consistent and continual ascription of them to God, just as we find here in the book of Jonah, "Behold, the tempest of Yahweh: wrath has appeared, a whirling tempest which bursts over the heads of the wicked. Yahweh's anger will not turn back until He has accomplished and carried out the purpose of his mind."—Jer 23:19, 20

"Those who go down to the sea in ships, Who do business on great waters, They see the works of the LORD, And His wonders in the deep. For he commands and raises the stormy wind, Which lifts up the waves of the sea. They mount up to the heavens, They go down again to the depths; Their soul melts because of trouble. . . . He calms the storm, So that its waves are still."—Ps 107:23-26, 29, NKJV<sup>8</sup>

The extensive confession of both the Old Testament and New Testament is that the functioning of all nature is dependent on God's action. Scriptural testimony opposes some contemporary views in which the universe is considered a closed and secular system, allowing no place for the action of God.

Right here, in the book of Jonah, the wind begins to blow. A tempest is stirring—God is acting. This is God's way of going to extreme measures to show Jonah how much He loves

him—and Nineveh. This is a sign of His special grace. The fact that God would go to such great pains with Jonah is a sign that He loves him deeply. “For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives” (Heb 12:6, NKJV). The word “scourge” means “to whip with thongs.” It is not pleasant at the time.

We can begin to see the seriousness of a God-given commission. God thinks His message so important, and the person He elected so consequential, that He brings nature into play to help this chosen person fulfill his task. As God wrestled with Jacob at the Brook Jabbok, so now He begins to wrestle with Jonah. One of the major underlying themes of this book is the dogged persistence of God.

No, God did not take Jonah’s initial response indifferently. But note also that Jonah is not forsaken by God. Jonah has disobeyed and is trying to escape God, but God pursues him relentlessly. “Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god” (Jonah 1:5, NKJV). To their credit, these pagan sailors can see that this is no ordinary storm, but it discloses a divine action.

“But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship” (Jonah 1:5, NKJV). As we noted initially, twice the text mentions that Jonah tried to “flee from the presence of the Lord,” emphasizing the futility of what Jonah was trying to do. Now we are informed for the third time that Jonah “went down.” The first two times are in verse 3 when Jonah, trying to escape God’s command, “went down” to Joppa, and “went down” into the ship. In verse 5 we see that he “went down into the lowest parts of the ship.” Jonah just kept going down and down and down in his miscalculated attempts to escape his divine commission.

The storm rages dangerously, and the captain of the ship, “distressed beyond measure” (PK 267), checks the ship from stem to stern and finds Jonah asleep.

“Arise.” Note the close similarity of the captain’s exclamation and Jonah’s original summons from God in verse 2, “Arise.” The word must have mocked Jonah. This was the very word with which God had disturbed his pleasant life a few days before.

“Arise, call your God.” The captain is perceptive too. He also realizes that this storm is unusual. He is sensitive to the possibility of some god being responsible. Note the irony of a heathen skipper pleading with a Hebrew prophet to pray to his God.

“And they said to one another, ‘Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us.’ So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, ‘Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are

you?' And he said to them, 'I am a Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.'"—Jonah 1:7-9, NKJV

"And the lot fell on Jonah!" Notice how Jonah responds. He evades all the questions about his town, country, and occupation. He responds only to the fourth inquiry: "I am a Hebrew," and "I fear the Lord, the God of heaven." Again what delicious irony: Jonah did not want to carry salvation to Nineveh. But now he is forced to speak of God to pagan sailors on the ship.

Jonah acknowledges that the God he worships is not merely a nationalistic deity, but that He is Yahweh, the God of heaven and earth, the Creator Himself. Jonah can glibly make this dramatic declaration at a time when he is in full flight from God and a rebel against His will. He thinks that he can turn a deaf ear to God's bidding and yet count himself a true believer. Notice, too, how he mentions that he fears Yahweh, but not that he is fleeing from Yahweh.<sup>9</sup>

Does that remind you of what we sometimes do? We declare our allegiance to the God of heaven and His remnant church, while covering up that we too are "fleeing" from some direct instruction that God has given us.

"What is this you have done? Why have you done this?" the mariners implore. This should have evoked from Jonah an immediate confession of wrong and a prayer to God for forgiveness, as well as a petition for deliverance from the storm. But Jonah was still not willing to be obedient. While the pagans express concern for him, he as a servant of God does not care for them. Jonah has faith without love; knowledge without obedience.

"What is this you have done? Why have you not obeyed so great a God, and how did you think to escape the hand of the Creator Himself?" These are words of amazement and wonder, an exclamation of horror at Jonah's flight from the God of heaven and earth. The frightening storm preached the omnipotence of God to the mariners more powerfully than words could possibly have done. When they learned Jonah's God was over land and sea, they were afraid.

What impressed the sailors took place despite Jonah. They certainly saw nothing particularly good or virtuous in Jonah. In fact, what moved them was that they saw he was a disobedient man. But behind all this, they saw that there is a real God out there, a God who was in control! God broke through an amazing situation in spite of His recalcitrant messenger.



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In Jonah 1:10, we see how Jonah's proclamation causes the sailors to be "exceedingly afraid." The sailors were already afraid of the storm (Jonah 1:5); now the text discloses that they were greatly afraid of the God of heaven. They react more fearfully to Jonah's confession about God than they had initially reacted to the perilous storm.

Notice again the striking contrast between the pagan sailors and Jonah. While Jonah dares to act contrary to the God whom he fears, the mere mention of the Almighty God of heaven causes great fear in the sailors' hearts. They seem to recognize that the person who tangles with this God is lost.

"What shall we do to you?" (Jonah 1:12). They had acknowledged the God Jonah worshiped. Now they ask him what attitude they should take. The sailors confess their fear and they ask him the remedy. "What can we do that God should not be angered? You tell us and we will obey."

"And he said to them, 'Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest is because of me'" (Jonah 1:12, NKJV). Does Jonah's solution appear magnanimous and courageous? Instead it masks continuing disobedience. If neither flight nor sleep has saved Jonah from the divine imperatives, then at least drowning will.

What might have happened if Jonah had repented of his defection right there and called for God to save him, the crew, and the ship? Contrast Jonah's response in this terrible storm with the response of the apostle Paul when he experienced a storm on this same body of water! Consider how Paul courageously declared that God would save all those on board. He announced, "Do not despair. . . . Last night there was standing beside me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, and He said, 'do not be afraid Paul. You are destined to appear before Caesar, and for this reason God grants you the safety of all who are sailing with you.' So take courage, friends; I trust in God that things will turn out just as I was told."—Acts 27:21-25 What an opportunity Jonah missed to witness.

In Jonah 1:12 Jonah replies, "Take me and throw me into the sea, and then it will grow calm for you. For I can see it is my fault this violent storm has happened to you." Jonah was no pious martyr. He knew he deserved death for his profound disobedience. He knew the Hebrew Scriptures and their teaching that the wicked will die. He knew his ignoble disobedience had put everyone in jeopardy, but he stubbornly chose to drown rather than repent.

In Jonah 1:13 we are told, "Nevertheless the sailors rowed hard in an effort to reach the shore." Jonah had pronounced sentence against himself, but the sailors still would not lay

hands upon him, striving hard to steer back to land and escape the risk of bloodshed. They were willing to risk losing their lives rather than cause Jonah's death.

After struggling valiantly to row to shore, it was they, not Jonah, who prayed to Yahweh, "Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring the ship to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them. Therefore they cried out to the Lord and said"—and consider this amazing prayer of confession and contrition to the Lord—"Please do not let us perish for taking this man's life and do not charge us with innocent blood; for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you." Here, Gentiles, face to face with a rebellious Israelite minister, pray to his God that they should not acquire guilt through Jonah's death. These pagan mariners fear to put a man to death. They call upon Jonah's God to witness that they are not criminals, and they ask that Jonah's blood not fall on their heads.

"And taking hold of Jonah they threw him into the sea; and the sea grew calm again. At this the men feared the Lord exceedingly; they offered a sacrifice to Yahweh and made vows" (Jonah 1:15, 16, NKJV). "The men feared the Lord exceedingly"—they realized that the God of Israel was all-powerful and universal. Sturdy seamen, who earlier had worshiped a collection of false gods, now acknowledged Yahweh and made vows to Him. Strange twist. Jonah would not go to Nineveh to preach to the Gentiles there, but he winds up in a situation where his attempted escape brings pagan sailors to believe in God.

And with the immediate change in the storm, the arm of the holy God was so suddenly manifested that the sailors "feared Jehovah with great fear." The text indicates how they had feared the storm greatly, but now they fear the God of the storm exceedingly.

Such a stark contrast between Jonah and the sailors; the pagan mariners had been willing to do everything in their power to save Jonah's life. Jonah was unwilling to make any such effort for the pagan Ninevites. Jonah, although orthodox in his beliefs, responds to God in disobedience. He claims to fear God, but his actions contradict his confession.

Notice what happens to Jonah. "Yahweh appointed a great fish." The Hebrew word does not mean to create, but to determine, direct, and appoint. God ordains this great fish to swallow Jonah. God, who has already sent a storm and who has maneuvered the lots of the mariners, now commands a great fish to do His will. Again we see the Lord of nature directly involved throughout this world in carrying out His purposes. No one can presume to limit His activity or frustrate His saving purposes. Only humans try. Only Jonah says "No." The wind, the storm, and the fish obey.

"From the belly of the fish Jonah prayed to Yahweh." Jonah apparently did not have a clue that he was in the belly of the great fish. Notice that there is no mention of the fish in

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Jonah's prayer in chapter 2. He can hardly have known what caused the change from drowning in wet, choking darkness to an even greater, smelly, absolute darkness. When he regained consciousness, it would have taken some time to realize that the all-enveloping darkness was not that of Sheol but of a mysterious safety. When Jonah found that he was preserved alive, he regarded this as a pledge of his deliverance. For that, he praised the Lord.

Nowhere in his prayer, however, did he mention his rebelliousness and sin. Jonah recognized that his troubles were great, but he never acknowledged why all this had happened to him.

This prayer of Jonah should remind us that we can pray in the midst of failure, when our distress has been caused by our own disobedience. Often that is when it is the most difficult to pray. Our self-condemnation makes us think that either we have no right to call on God or, if we do, we surely do not deserve His help. But Jonah discovers God's grace at the precise moment that his situation seems hopeless, when to all appearances nothing should be expected from God. "At last Jonah had learned that 'salvation belongeth unto the Lord' Ps 3:8" (PK 269).

But what happens to Jonah? "And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land" (Jonah 2:10, NIV). Scripture explicitly informs us that this great fish is not just nauseous or sick with the flu. Rather this huge marine creature, already under divine direction, is again impelled by God and obeys. Jonah is deposited on the beach. There Yahweh still awaits him.

"Now the Word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time" (Jonah 3:1, NKJV). Hug those words! Surely these are some of the most encouraging words in Scripture! Jonah has deliberately and stubbornly rebelled against God. But marvel how even his disobedience is not enough to make God turn His back on him. The wonder is that despite his disobedience, God calls him. He is the God of the "second time"—Abraham's, Jacob's, David's, and Peter's!<sup>10</sup>

"Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you.' So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent. And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!'" —  
Jonah 3:1-4, NKJV

"Yet forty days, and Nineveh will be overthrown [overturned]" — Jonah is again commanded to proclaim the startling and alarming message. Jonah was not sent to preach monotheism or the knowledge of the God of Israel, or to bring a higher ethic to the people of

Nineveh. Jonah's proclamation was that of judgment. The response of the Ninevites is unbelievable. From high society to the hovel, no class or section of Ninevite society felt exempt from the need to humble itself before God.

"And the people of Nineveh believed in God; they proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least. The news reached the king of Nineveh, who rose from his throne, took off his robe, put on sackcloth and sat down in ashes."—Jonah 3:5-7 The text alerts us that the Ninevites believed God! They did not just believe Jonah, they believed God. Who could have expected that Jonah should meet with such incredible results from a heathen, violent, profligate population like that of Nineveh? His gift of preaching must have been stirring.<sup>11</sup>

Even the king himself acknowledged the seriousness of the situation, "A proclamation was then promulgated throughout Nineveh, by the decree of the king and his ministers, as follows: "All are to put on sackcloth and call on God with all their might; and let everyone renounce his evil behavior and the wicked things he has done"<sup>12</sup> (Jonah 3:7, 8). This monarch includes himself in the supplication before God. This ruler does not avail himself of our modern techniques of deniability. He has been wrong, and he is man enough to accept the consequences. He does not doubt that God is right to be angry with Nineveh. See how he, too, repents before the King of Kings.

It is remarkable how much more trouble God has with one of His own people than with the worst of the heathen world! How intriguing is this pagan inclination to listen to the message from God and to willingly turn and forsake their evil ways.<sup>13</sup>

Nineveh was a secular culture. Jonah was not wrestling or tangling with the physical or intellectual idols of that society. He was delivering a stark message of judgment from the God of Heaven.

"God saw their efforts to renounce their evil behavior. And God relented: He did not inflict on them the disaster which he had threatened" (Jonah 3:10). The Ninevites did more than perform proper deeds of penance. They changed inwardly. They were "overturned," though not as Jonah intended. "They turned away from the way of their evil." Thus, paradoxically, Jonah's prediction was true.<sup>14</sup> Nineveh was overturned! Yet another surprise awaits us.

"And Jonah was very indignant at this; he fell into a rage" (Jonah 4:1). The overturning of the Ninevites affected the turning away of God's wrath (Jonah 3:10), but this caused an adverse effect upon Jonah (Jonah 4:1). The Hebrew reads: "it burned to him." His reaction stops us in our tracks. It is a very strong expression.

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The issue for Jonah is not so much that God repents, but for whom He repents, His indiscriminate extension of divine compassion to notoriously wicked people. Sharing His mercy with the corrupt Ninevites (Jonah 1:2; 3:13; Isa 10:5-10)? I mean, anybody knew their reputation. God should be more strict with His benevolence. He is much too free with His mercy. The Ninevites should be allowed to suffer the consequences of their vile behavior. Jonah is furious at God's slowness to anger!

"He prayed to Yahweh and said, 'Ah! Yahweh, is not this just as I said would happen when I was still at home? That was why I went and fled to Tarshish: I know that you are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness. One who relents from doing harm.'"<sup>15</sup>—Jonah 4:2 For the first time Jonah openly reveals the reason he tried to evade his call to Nineveh.

The description he uses of God's attributes is almost an exact duplicate of the words of God Himself when He conversed with Moses (Ex 34:6). Jonah knew his Bible. He is here, however, highly critical of these divine qualities. He knows God is prone to forgive wicked people. But Jonah thinks God should reserve His salvation for the righteous; judgment should be the destiny of the sinner. And what about his own reputation if God does not come through with the judgment? Jonah presumes he could govern God's world better than God Himself!

However, the wicked Ninevites were really no different than Jonah. All of them were rebellious sinners deserving only punishment. Yet God had graciously decided to show mercy to both. Jonah was willing to accept this mercy in his own case, but not for Nineveh. And so he begs God, "So now Yahweh, please take away my life, for I might as well be dead as go on living" (Jonah 4:3). It was thus that Moses once prayed<sup>16</sup> and Elijah,<sup>17</sup> but both with better cause and in nobler spirit than that of Jonah. Jonah just couldn't appreciate how God had been exalted in the pagan world,<sup>18</sup> or comprehend why God had extended their probation.<sup>19</sup> Jonah apparently was a gifted preacher—the numbers who respond are impressive, yet he did not love those to whom he preached.<sup>20</sup> He did not want to live if God could forgive the wicked Assyrians. Jonah's anger is telling God that he cannot bear a full religious commitment. He cannot put the living love of God for himself on evil Gentiles.

"Yahweh replies, 'Are you right to be angry?'" (Jonah 4:4). God's response is mild. He would like Jonah to come to his senses and see the childishness of his behavior. The Lord could not be more gentle with Jonah. Helping this person become a more mature believer seems to be a goal second only to the salvation of Nineveh. He is challenging Jonah to think again about his reaction, to analyze the way he has set his mind.

God was not rebuking Jonah. God was not even asking him what right he had to criticize. Rather God was suggesting that Jonah might not be correct in his estimate of the situation.

Scripture includes the records of various people—Job, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel—who experienced deep agony as they tried to understand the ways of God. In the process they used language that sounds irreverent (Jer 15:15-18; 20:7-18; Ezekiel's bitterness of soul). But God shows amazing respect towards all of these, Jonah included. Perhaps God appreciates honest prayer. He reads our innermost hidden thoughts anyway and must rejoice when we are finally honest with ourselves!

What is God's response to Jonah's anger? He acts out a parable. "Then the LORD said, 'Is it right for you to be angry?' So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city. And the LORD God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant. But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered. And it happened, when the sun rose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, 'It is better for me to die than to live.'"—Jonah 4:4-8, NKJV

Like the great fish, the worm is now God's instrument and, like the great fish, it obeys.

Jonah's attitude demands of God that He destroy. So God does just that, to see how Jonah likes his theology coming true in his own life. God sends a weevil and a hot wind, and the shade plant withers and Jonah is miserable and wants to die. He is more passionate about punishing Nineveh's disobedience than obeying the Lord himself.

"Then he wished death for himself, and said, 'It is better for me to die than to live'" (Jonah 4:8, NKJV). These are Jonah's last words in the narrative. They end, as did his actions in the beginning, opposing God.<sup>21</sup>

But Jonah does not have the last word. Yahweh poses another question. Divine questions keep the pressure on Jonah, to expose Jonah's anger.

Jonah 4:9: "Do you well to be angry?" God inquires. "Let us analyze this anger of yours, Jonah," God proposes. "It suggests your concern over this plant, but what did it really mean to you? Your attachment to it could not be very deep, for it was here one day and gone the next. Your concern was dictated by self interest, not by a genuine love. You never had

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for it the devotion of the gardener. If you feel as badly as you do, what would you expect a gardener to feel like, who carefully tends a garden and watches it grow, only to see it wither and die. This is how I feel about Nineveh, Jonah, only much more so. All those people, even all those animals—I made them. I have cherished them all these years. Nineveh has cost me no end of effort, and they mean the world to me. Your pain is nothing to mine when I contemplate their destruction.” (See Jonah 4:9-11.)

Nowhere in the Bible do the personhood of God and His entanglement in our human situation stand more clearly revealed than here. A person’s troubles are dwarfed by God’s own hurt.

Jonah 4:11: “Should I not spare Nineveh?” God does not even mention the profound repentance of Nineveh. He speaks instead of those He pities. He instructs Jonah, “Shall I not provide for the salvation of the Gentiles who are in ignorance and error? I defer impending judgment not for the sake of righteous, but for the lost.” See God’s heart yearn for even the wicked. He gave the “same message to the apostle Paul in wicked Corinth: ‘Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee . . . for I have much people in this city.’”—PK 277

How much greater the mercy of God than even that of His chosen people. Earlier King David urged the same sentiment, “Let us fall now into the hand of the Lord; for His mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man” (2 Sam 24:14, KJV).

God let Jonah experience His judgment in the sea so that he might know first-hand what judgment is like. Then He delivered Jonah quite apart from the question of whether such a disobedient person deserves to be delivered. Therefore Jonah becomes a recipient of God’s grace in a way no different from what would be the case for Nineveh. If Jonah was spared, why not Nineveh? God delivered Jonah quite apart from the question of justice. This is one of the major themes of this narrative. And this is at the very center of the argument between God and Jonah.

All this brings us to the very heart of God’s love. In reality God abhors sin, but He cannot bear the loss of any person. He detests evil because it destroys life and plunges a child of His into suffering and death. But God endures the sinner. He just cannot simply blot him out. It began with Adam and continues even to this day with me and you.

God concludes, again not focusing on the exceptional repentance of Nineveh, but rather focusing on His pitying love. “Am I not to feel sorry for Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, to say nothing of all the animals?” (Jonah 4:11). This is a most surprising

final phrase, "and the animals." Many of us get so wrapped up in our busy routines that we forget how important the natural world is to the Creator. However, even the animals are within the sphere of His regard. We humans have been slow to come to this coupling of morality with ecology. We are blind to this significant theological connection until the pollution and poisoning of it all affects us personally. But right here in God's final appeal to Jonah, God Himself includes the animal kingdom.

"And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left, and also much livestock?" (Jonah 4:11, NKJV). What about this final question for the conclusion to the narrative?

Other significant verses in Scripture end like this, in terms of a question answered. For example: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36, KJV). How do you answer that? Or, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" (Heb 2:3, NKJV). How can you answer that? This is one way Scripture expresses profound truths. Thus comes God's final question to Jonah, "I saved you and you did not deserve it. Why should I not save somebody else who does not deserve it? And Jonah, what about all the innocent animals?" And the book ends.

Some feel that the book ends abruptly. But in this manner the sharpest blow is struck. The deepest point of contradiction in Jonah's attitude is exposed. What an amazing account of our brother Jonah. But what is it really all about? Surely it is not just about the great fish. That impressive creature is mentioned in only three verses. Perhaps God intends the book of Jonah as an instruction manual for the Church. God told Jonah "Go," and Jonah said "No." So God said, "Jonah, I have some lessons for you." And Jonah, as a messenger of God's Old Testament church, finally learned that God's instructions are not to be taken lightly.

In contrast to Jonah, one is reminded of the apostle Paul. He could rightly "herald" his gifts and training.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, his response to his divine assignment to Rome, another great capital city, is notable. He makes three strong personal statements: "I am bound" (Rom 1:14), "I am eager" (Rom 1:15), "I am not ashamed" (Rom 1:16). These are especially striking today for they are in direct antithesis to the attitude of many in the Church who tend to regard evangelism as an optional extra, considering that they are conferring a favor on God if they engage in it—perchance even smugly assuming that soon our church growth projects will at last usher in His kingdom.

Paul instead speaks of his urgent obligation. Nor was his message a "warm fuzzy." The first issue he develops in his argument to the Romans is the wrath of God against sin.<sup>23</sup>



God has given this Church instructions too. God has told us “Go,” and we must discern through Jonah’s experience that God’s commands are not to be taken lightly. “Men boast of the wonderful progress and enlightenment of the age in which we are now living; but God sees the earth filled with iniquity and violence” (PK 275). God has commissioned the Seventh-day Adventist Church to proclaim the final judgment message, “the great things of God’s law—the principles of justice, mercy, and love therein set forth” (PK 275). He is serious about it. God is determined indeed, as He was with Jonah, that the Great Commission shall be carried out. According to Scripture, the reason the spiritual gifts are given to us is for this very purpose.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps we, like Jonah, are hesitant to proclaim such a startling judgment message. Maybe we are embarrassed, as Jonah was, that God’s mercy has postponed the judgment we have preached for so long. Now it seems that we do not know what we are talking about. And like Jonah, jealous of our reputation, we have lost sight of the infinitely greater value of people. (See PK 271.)

Consequently, this “test case” of Jonah is a look in the mirror. Have we, too, run away from God or His explicit guidance? A potential Jonah lurks in every heart. What is the command from God we find difficult to hear? What instructions from God annoy us? What prompts us to say, “Anything but that, Lord?” What divine assignment causes us to dig in our heels? Most of us have our own Nineveh and Tarshish, our cities of escape and evasion. Perhaps our Ninevehs are some of the clear revelations of God’s will for us.

Nineveh might be the Lord’s urging that we change our behavior to do some action that demands more than we are ready to give. How many of us hear the word of the Lord and go the opposite way until we finally find out, like Saul of Tarsus, that it is “hard to kick against the pricks?”

Our running off to Tarshish can happen in our souls long before we physically board a ship. Some run away from God without ever leaving their geographical location. We can run away by so filling our lives with noble activities that time for God is squeezed out. We can be running off in all directions, but not under God’s direction.

Possibly God called Jonah for the Nineveh commission because of his gift of preaching.<sup>25</sup> I am reminded of Moses, another gifted person. Ellen White informs us that “His intellectual greatness distinguishes him above the great men of all ages. As historian, poet, philosopher, general of armies, and legislator, he stands without a peer” (PP 246). But “Moses was not prepared for his great work. He had yet to learn the same lesson of faith that Abraham and Jacob had been taught—not to rely upon human strength or wisdom, but upon the power of God for the fulfillment of His promises. And there were other lessons that, amid

the solitude of the mountains, Moses was to receive. In the school of self-denial and hardship he was to learn patience, to temper his passions. Before he could govern wisely, he must be trained to obey. His own heart must be fully in harmony with God before he could teach the knowledge of His will to Israel.”—PP 247 “All who are fitted for usefulness must be trained by the severest mental and moral discipline, and God will assist them by uniting divine power with human effort” (PP 248). God was willing to work for 40 years with Moses to accomplish His purpose.

So God would employ our gifts; but apparently He wants, as we notice in the lives of Moses and Jonah, to create our hearts in His image too. “Every individual is striving to become a center of influence; and until God works for His people, they will not see that subordination to God is the only safety for any soul. His transforming grace upon human hearts will lead to unity that has not yet been realized.”—EGW, *Home Missionary*, Nov 1, 1893

We readily notice others in the Church who blur the message, but may God hasten the hour when we finally begin to accuse ourselves before God. The fact is, even the finest of us is “poor, miserable, blind, and naked.” And in spite of all the good things we do for this Church, we must finally realize with Jonah that the words of the great spiritual apply to us, “Not my brother, nor my sister, but it’s me, O Lord, standin’ in the need of prayer.” From the very beginning, we all have been problem children.

Ultimately, the book of Jonah must be about a magnificent God and His elevated compassion. The greatness of the mercy of God is especially enhanced against Jonah’s self-centeredness. Jonah had never learned to look out at the world and its many people, and to see it through God’s eyes. He needed to let this divine perspective overcome his natural selfishness. We, too, need to let this divine compassion wash and cleanse our own hearts.

## ENDNOTES

1. Nineveh, the ancient city on the fertile banks of the Tigris, was founded by Asshur who went forth from the land of Shinar about the time of Babel’s dispersion (RH 10/18/06).
2. “Then Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.’”—Acts 9:13, 14, NKJV

3. "Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Lord has performed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, that He will say, 'I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his haughty looks.' For he says: 'By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent; also I have removed the boundaries of the people, and have robbed their treasuries; so I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man.'—Isa 10:12, 13, NKJV

4. "Woe to the bloody city! It is all full of lies and robbery. Its victim never departs. . . . Your injury has no healing, your wound is severe. All who hear news of you will clap their hands over you, for upon whom has not your wickedness passed continually?"—Nah 3:1, 19, NKJV

5. For example, Yahweh commands Elijah to "'arise, go to Zarepath. . . . So he 'arose and went'" (1 Kings 17:9, 10).

6. Moses said, "'But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, 'the Lord has not appeared to you.' . . . O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue. . . . O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send.'"—Ex 4:1, 10, 13, NKJV

Jeremiah: "Then said I: 'Ah, Lord God! Behold I cannot speak, for I am a youth'" (Jer 1:64).

7. "But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD."—Jonah 1:3, NKJV

8. The Lord of heaven and earth controls and sustains earth's geology, according to the Bible. He can form the mountains (Amos 4:13) or remove them (Job 9:5; Amos 1:2; Micah 1:3, 4). At His presence the mountains quake (Judges 5:5; Ps 18:7; 68:8; 114:4-6; Isa 64:3; Hab 3:6, 10; Eze 3:12, RSV). The heavenly bodies are often instruments of God. In one of Amos's oracles, God uses His control of the rain and the resulting famine as a means of discipline: "'I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cites, and lack of bread in all your places, yet you did not return to me,' says the LORD. 'And I also withheld the rain from you when there were yet three months to the harvest; I would send rain upon one city, and send no rain upon another city; one field would be rained upon, and the field on which it did not rain withered; so two or three cities wandered to one city to drink water, and were not satisfied; yet you did not return to me,' says the LORD."—Amos 4:6-8, RSV cf. Hag 2:17

The litanies of Leviticus 25 and Deuteronomy 28 also confess God's rewards and punishments as wrought by means of the natural world (Ex 23:25, 26; Lev 25:18, 19; Deut 30:8-10; 33:13-16; 2 Chron 31:9, 10; Isa 58:9, 11; Hag 1:9-11). (From *Nature, God and Pulpit* by Elizabeth Achtemeier. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992, pp 78-81.)

"The time is at hand when there will be sorrow in the world that no human balm can heal. The Spirit of God is being withdrawn. Disasters by sea and by land follow one another in quick succession. How frequently we hear of earthquakes and tornadoes, of destruction by fire and flood, with great loss of life and property! Apparently these calamities are capricious outbreaks of disorganized, unregulated forces of nature, wholly beyond the control of man; but in them all, God's purpose may be read. They are among the agencies by which He seeks to arouse men and women to a sense of their danger."—PK 277

"Ruin and desolation marked the path of the destroying angel. The land of Goshen alone was spared. It was demonstrated to the Egyptians that the earth is under the control of the living God, that the elements obey His voice, and that the only safety is in obedience to Him."—PP 269

9. "However much he is at odds with the Lord, in revolt against the will of the biblical God for himself, he never doubts the existence or power of the Lord. Implied in this confession of faith is the corollary that, should the Lord choose to stir the seas into a storm, He need only speak the word. All natural events come about at the behest of the Lord, by the divine fiat. Jonah is no modern, preoccupied with secondary causes. He sees the events of nature and history as flowing immediately from the will of the Creator. If there is a storm, the Lord has willed it. The key question, therefore, is not who is responsible for this tempest but why." (*Corn and Ivy*, by D L Carmody and J T Carmody. Valley Forge, PA, Trinity Press International, 1995, p 99.)

10. "And the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.'"—Luke 22:31, 32, NKJV

11. Ellen White informs us that "The Spirit of God pressed the message home to every heart and caused multitudes to tremble because of their sins and to repent in deep humiliation" (PK 270).

12. Out of the whole catalogue of their sins, conscience singled out violence. This incidental notice, contained in the one word, exactly corresponds in substance with the fuller description in Nahum: "The lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his holes with prey, and his dens with ravin. . . . Woe to the bloody

city; it is all full of lies and robbery; the prey departeth not. . . . Upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?"—Nah 2:12; 3:1, 19, KJV

13. This readiness with which the Ninevites responded reveals that though they were involved in appalling wickedness, they were not yet ripe for final judgment at that time. The deserved punishment was therefore deferred, by the long-suffering of God, until later when this great heathen city finally filled up the measure of its sins and became ripe for destruction.

"Yet Nineveh, wicked though it had become, was not wholly given over to evil. He who 'beholdeth all the sons of men,' (Ps 33:13) and 'seeth every precious thing,' (Job 28:10) perceived in that city many who were reaching out after something better and higher, and who, if granted opportunity to learn of the living God, would put away their evil deeds and worship Him. And so in His wisdom God revealed Himself to them in an unmistakable manner, to lead them, if possible, to repentance."—PK 265, 266

"The forbearance of God has been very great—so great that when we consider the continuous insult to His holy commandments, we marvel. The Omnipotent One has been exerting a restraining power over His own attributes. But He will certainly arise to punish the wicked, who so boldly defy the just claims of the Decalogue."—PK 276

14. "Their doom was averted, the God of Israel was exalted and honored throughout the heathen world, and His law was revered. Not until many years later was Nineveh to fall a prey to the surrounding nations through forgetfulness of God and through boastful pride."—PK 271.

15. "'The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it.'"—Jer 18:7,8, NKJV

"How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zeboiim? My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred. I will not execute the fierceness of My anger."—Hosea 11:8, 9, NKJV

16. "'I am not able to bear all these people alone, because the burden is too heavy for me. If you treat me like this, please kill me here and now—if I have found favor in Your sight—and do not let me see my wretchedness!'"—Num 11:14, 15, NKJV

17. "But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, 'It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!'"—1 Kings 19:4, NKJV

18. PK 271; see endnote 12 above.

19. "Nineveh repented, and called upon God, and God accepted their acknowledgment of Him. Forty years of probation was granted them in which to reveal the genuineness of their repentance and to turn from sin. But Nineveh turned again to the worship of images; her iniquity became deeper and more desperate than before, because the light had come and had not been heeded."—2SM 149

20. Jesus even comments on Jonah's preaching: "'The men of Nineveh will rise in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here'" (Matt 12:41, NKJV).

21. Martin Luther on Jonah: "Because Jonah was sorry that God was so kind, he would rather not preach, yea, would rather die, than that the grace of God, which was to be the peculiar privilege of the people of Israel, should be communicated to the Gentiles, also." (Cited by *Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol 10.)

"Even the heart constant in its disobedience, its bold insistence on autonomy, its crazy anger that it cannot force God to do its will for the world does not vanish in a puff of smoke, vaporized by the divine anger. God is patient and long-suffering with us difficult human beings. God puts up with insult after insult; bad manners, adulteries, whining, amnesia. Just as Hosea opens to our view the depths of God's covenantal commitments, so Jonah shows us a glimpse of the divine patience. God never wavers from the lesson he would have the prophet learn, but neither does God force Jonah to swallow it. To the end the lesson remains an offer, a glad tidings that the prophet, the sinner, the everyman can refuse." (*Corn and Ivy*, by D L Carmody and J T Carmody. Valley Forge, PA: Trinity International Press, 1995, p 156.)

22. "And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers" (Gal 1:14, NKJV).

"I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today" (Acts 22:3, NKJV).

"'But in whatever anyone is bold—I speak foolishly—I am bold also. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant,'"—2 Cor 11:21-23, NKJV

“ . . . though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.”—Phil 3:4-6, NKJV

23. The very next sermon Peter preaches after the climactic pouring out of the Holy Spirit is not “Do I have a God for You!” Rather it is “This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross” (Acts 2:23, NIV). Even the wonder of Pentecost was explained as the empowerment of the people of God for their task of proclaiming that “God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36, NIV).

24. The book of Jonah is one of the most relevant books for the modern church. It parallels the situation at this present time. Like Jonah, the church has been in rebellion to the revealed will of God . . . The church at the present time is like Jonah, asleep in the sides of the ship while the world is tossed in unprecedented bewilderment. (from *Jonah: An Exposition, Sermons Preached at Westminster Chapel, London*, by R T Kendall. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978.)

25. “In the charge given him, Jonah had been entrusted with a heavy responsibility; . . . Had the prophet obeyed unquestioningly, he would have been spared many bitter experiences, and would have been blessed abundantly” (PK 266).

“Confused, humiliated, and unable to understand God’s purpose in sparing Nineveh, Jonah nevertheless had fulfilled the commission given him to warn that great city; and though the event predicted did not come to pass, yet the message of warning was nonetheless from God. And it accomplished the purpose God designed it should. The glory of His grace was revealed among the heathen.”—PK 272, 273

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THE ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY AND ASSURANCE OF BIBLICAL  
HOPE - MESSAGE AND MISSION PRESENTATION

The presentation entitled "The Absolute Certainty and Assurance of Biblical Hope" was made by Peter J Colquhoun, President of the North New South Wales Conference. Scripture texts are taken from the King James Version, unless noted otherwise.

There is one text of Scripture that is almost impossible for me to comprehend: Jesus "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). From the moment man sinned, hope existed. The divine initiative was there. God Himself threw down the gauntlet to the enemy: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen 3:15). There was a promise that by the seed of the woman the enemy would ultimately be crushed.

The ringing optimism of hope in Genesis 3:15 gave birth to the theology of hope, the Christology of hope, the Holy Spirit of hope, and the eschatology of hope.

In the theology of hope, we learn that hope exists because God exists. See father Abraham leave behind the squalor of Ur and, with the God-given covenant, set out on a pilgrimage loaded with hope. Words of promise were running through his mind—through "thy Seed" will come undreamed of, almost unbelievable, fantastic hope. In the words of the writer of the Hebrews: "he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb 11:10).

All this and much more was encapsulated, guaranteed, locked into the solemn, oft-repeated covenant, and couched again and again in deep personal, touching, yearning, terms of love, faith and hope: "I will be your God and ye shall be my people." "Through thy seed all nations will be blessed." This was a covenant of hope. Since that time, the patriarchs, prophets, and saints have lived with "a hope that putteth not to shame."

In the experience of Moses, there was a renewal of the covenant of hope. God told Moses, "Go down and lead my people out of Egypt. Tell them I Am Who I Am. Remember the covenants I had with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Tell the people I have sent you to renew the covenant of hope."



In the words of the poet, Francis Thompson, God is portrayed as the blessed "Hound of Heaven," pursuing Israel with relentless, unashamed love and with an overwhelming message of hope in spite of their terrible, embarrassing, cyclical apostasies.

In the story as recorded in Hosea, God cried out, "You have played the harlot but how can I give you up? How can I abandon you? The adversary will never outbid me! I am willing to pay the highest price imaginable." (See Hosea 11:8.) There we see already the anguished, broken heart on the cross. He was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

In Isaiah, God argues in a compellingly irrefutable manner that our hope rests secure in God's faithfulness to His promises. We might have been unfaithful, but He is faithful.

In Lamentations 3:23, Jeremiah cries out in response: "Great is thy faithfulness, thy mercies are new every morning; because of thy committed love we are not consumed."

Ezekiel argues cogently and powerfully that our hope is bound up in God's concern for His own honor, reputation, and name's sake. Our hope is founded in His vast creative power. He is well able to bring it to pass.

Man would need the capability to destroy the omnipotent God before he could destroy hope. The songs of the prophets are therefore songs of hope and renewal. A newness is coming.

There is hope in a new David—the seed who will crush the enemy; hope in a new Jerusalem—where God will dwell with His people; hope for a new Israel; hope in a new heaven and a new earth; hope in a universal new beginning; hope in a radical new era characterized by joy, peace, and security where the wolf will dwell with the lamb and a little child shall lead them; hope in a new rule of righteousness where redeemed hearts will beat with one pulse of harmony.

The Christology of hope is foretold by Zechariah: "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion; for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee" (Zech 2:10). God was now committing Himself to history in chronological events of time moving resolutely and determinedly toward the goal of hope. In the fullness of time the Messiah, "the Seed," would come in condescending love, bearing God's wonderful new covenant name, "Emmanuel—God with us."

The doctrine of the incarnation, "God with us," is one enormous, comprehensive statement of hope and love. It means that God has come right into the midst of the tumult and

shouting of this world. He became the Son of Man that we might become the sons and daughters of God.

Come with me to the upper room and let me read something wonderful to you. Jesus had already disclosed the enemy's plan to the disciples. "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament [covenant], which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'" —Matt 26:26-29

See the profound strategy of God. The covenant is a promise of hope. It was given first in the context of eating the forbidden fruit, the result of which was the blight of sin. We have all eaten forbidden fruit and have come under its curse. Jesus invites us to eat the bread that represents His body and drink the wine that represents His blood, as a symbol of forgiveness.

Forgiveness! Profound, is it not? And with that He gave us the pledge of hope, the covenant of hope in the forgiveness of Christ. Again and again Satan had tempted Israel to break the covenant with God, and he planned to destroy the covenant forever by nailing Jesus to the cross. But he underestimated the power of God. For by the shedding of His blood, Jesus made sure the covenant of hope. He was the Lamb, slain in order to save the world. On the cross He triumphantly cried out, "It is finished," or as one paraphrase suggests, "I have won."

Paul was entirely right when, with magnificent daring, he pictured Christ as the One who wielded the hammer at Calvary and nailed the bond of sin to the cross. (See Col 2:24, 25.) Christ disarmed the principalities and powers and made a mockery of them, triumphing over them at the cross, and bringing one great glorious result. It was now the final days for the enemy, sin, and this old world order. It was the beginning of a new age with absolute certainty and hope.

Of all the thousands who have been crucified, Jesus alone was able to take the cross of the enemy—a symbol of shame and defeat—and transform it into a symbol of victory and hope for all mankind. When Jesus cried out, "It is finished," all the covenant promises were focused on that moment. No wonder there was silence in heaven. Thank God He did the brave thing, the strong thing. He sealed the covenant with His own blood. The covenant is now dated AD 31, and it is unalterable. It is legal, it cannot be tampered with. Christ dared to enter the prison house of Satan and there He met Apollyon with all the terrifying powers of hell face to face. He conquered him and smashed forever the iron gates of the tomb.

Christ's resurrection day was not just a personal victory of Christ over Satan—of life over death—bringing immortality to light; it was a cosmic victory. The very power which took Jesus from the grave would open a million graves and remake a darkened world. His resurrection day corresponds with the first day of the old creation, heralding the beginning of a new creation. From henceforth it is newness of life.

Jesus masters the whirlwind and rides upon the storm. The devils we meet are foredoomed and foredoomed forever, along with Satan whom Jesus defeated that day. As the Second Adam, He victoriously crossed the ground of the first Adam. As the new David, He recaptured the kingdom and irrevocably locked hope into eternity.

The alternative is unthinkable. What if Jesus had never been born? Suppose the terrible desolation and genocide we see around us occurred in a world where Jesus never existed? Suppose your souls and mine were to stand accused at the bar of conscience and we could not cry out, "Christ has died to save me"? Suppose there was no Lamb who had asked His Father to forgive those who crucified Him? Suppose every mistake you ever made was irreparable and there was no new beginning? Suppose when you lost a loved one and followed the procession to the grave, you had never heard of the empty tomb, or the resurrection, or that death has been swallowed up in victory? There would be no hope. But the life and death of Jesus changed all of that.

Something wonderful has happened in our world. The darkness has been routed; God is with us. Rejoice, O Jerusalem! This is a new era of hope that God launched when He gave us Jesus. Once sin, sorrow, corruption, and death were the last word. But now we have the Rock of Ages, Jesus, the greatest of all God's gifts.

As the Second Adam, unblemished and sinless, He would personally deal with the evil spirit forces and their malignant grip on the souls of mankind. As the new David, He would take personal responsibility for reclaiming the kingdom from the wicked pretender, the imposter.

Paul so masterfully and comprehensively put it to the Corinthians: "Now in Jesus every one of God's promises is a yes" (2 Cor 1:20).

His death, burial, resurrection, glorification, and ascension are the guarantee of our own resurrection, glorification, and ascension to heaven. He ascended "as us," forever bearing our new humanity into the Father's presence. Every time the Father looked to the Son He knew He was bound to us in the person of Jesus by a tie of love that can never be broken. The Father received the Son as us. As He embraced the Son, He embraced us. There is now a heaven-born urgency to unite the family.

To say it another way, our future hope has already occurred in Jesus. Jesus is God's great yes to all His promises. All His promises are yes in Jesus. "Every man in His own order" [sequence]. Christ the first fruits and they that are Christ's at His coming." Just as in Christ sin has no more dominion over you, so death will have no more dominion over you.

In Hebrews 6:20, we learn that Jesus was made our forerunner, entering the Father's presence as God's yes for everyone of us. What is a forerunner? The apostle is borrowing a term from the ancient royal processions. The forerunner always rode ahead of the royal procession. Think of it. Jesus as our forerunner entered heaven, He swung the gates ajar for the royal procession. We are the royal procession, every one of us—made royal by the blood of the Lamb. The only way you can destroy the assurance of advent hope is to deny Jesus. You would have to take Him out of heaven's sanctuary and cast Him to the ground, but that is utterly impossible. Paul adds another great powerful yes of personal assurance from God: Jesus, as the forerunner, is God's wonderful yes to the Father for each one of us.

In the third person of the Godhead we find the Holy Spirit of hope, God's wonderful envoy coming personally to each one of us. "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory."—Eph 1:13, 14

The Holy Spirit is the earnest, the down payment, the first installment of our inheritance to come. Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). To say it in a positive way, every person who is born of water and the Spirit will enter the kingdom of God.

In Genesis 1, we first read of the water and the Spirit. The Spirit brooded across the face of the waters bringing forth new life and a new man made in the image of God. This was when the triune God in concert created new life and a new world. Baptism by water and the Spirit is reflective of a new creation—a new life.

Think of it. In John 14 and 16 we learn that the same creative triune God has come to us in the person of His Holy Spirit in the here and now—bearing witness to Jesus the mighty Creator who became the world's Redeemer. He has come across the chaotic, troubled, hopeless landscape of our lives. Is it not true that He has come to you? How do you explain yourself except that God in Christ, through the Spirit, has come to you in very personal terms? Do you recall the glad moment when He first had His way with you?

Every time my conscience stirs me, that is the covenant experience working in me; that is the pursuit of the love of the Father for the Son. It is the Lord's doing, it is His initiative.

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Is it not true He breathed into us the breath of life? We look out from our new creation, our new birth, and by His Spirit cry out passionately, "Father! Father!" Redeemed believers can only say Jesus is Lord through the Holy Spirit! And He replies, "I will be your God."

This is the unmistakable seal, or down payment of the Spirit, on our inheritance to come. From henceforth we are joint heirs with Christ. The Holy Spirit is God's great continual yes to you and me, here and now.

Now let us consider the eschatology of hope through the close of probation and the seven last plagues of God's wrath. In Revelation, chapters 6, 14, 15, and 16 declare the wrath of God manifested in the seven last plagues marking the end of Christ's mediatorial judgment ministry—the close of human probation. In Revelation 6:17, the fearful question is asked: "The great day of His wrath is come and who shall be able to stand?"

This is where some Seventh-day Adventists become weak in the knees. Some give up in discouragement. Some even ask, "What if I sin after the close of probation?" That is not even a biblical question. If we have an eschatology that conflicts with the assurance of hope, then it is a false eschatology. What is the biblical answer to the question, "Who shall be able to stand?" The answer is that those who are sealed will be able to stand in the last days. (See Rev 7:1-3.)

Notice it is Jesus who gives the instruction to seal the saints. It is His final act in His mediatorial judgment work. Dr Strong, in his systematic theology, makes the point that the seal, in the original Greek, "signifies a stamp for security and preservation." At this point of our journey to glory, I believe in "once saved, always saved," or "once sealed, always sealed." The saints are absolutely secure in Jesus. They are untouchable.

Ellen G White once wrote, "Just before we entered the time of trouble we all received the seal of the living God. . . . Then I saw the four angels cease to hold the four winds."—*Day Star*, March 14, 1846 Speaking further of the seal, she stated: "The indelible mark of God is upon them. God can plead that His own name is written there. The Lord has shut them in. Their destination is inscribed—'GOD, NEW JERUSALEM.' They are God's property, His possession."—TM 446.

No wonder there is a constant refrain of worship and joy bursting forth in Revelation in response to our great Redeemer as He does His final work. We do not stand alone during the seven last plagues. Revelation 3:12 says: "I will write upon him my new name."

Listen to the promises. "Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him" (Rom 5:9). "And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom

he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come”  
(1 Thess 1:10).

The closer we are to our future hope, the more we need to go back to the cross. Let me now take you to one of the great texts of the New Testament. “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins”  
(1 John 4:10).

What is propitiation? In Scripture, propitiation is always used in the context of the wrath and the judgment of God. Propitiation is the work of God Himself. The doctrine of propitiation means that God the Father and Christ the Son so loved the objects of His wrath that Jesus covenanted to, voluntarily, by His blood remove the wrath of God’s justice from the “children of wrath” so we might become “children of the Heavenly King.” He was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

That which God must pronounce upon the culprit He pronounces upon Himself. Propitiation shows at once the wrath of God (what it did to Jesus) and the love of God (what it did for us). The justice of God shows His righteous reaction against sin, and the mercy and grace of God for the sinner. No wonder John says, “herein is love.” He set Him forth to be a propitiation for our sin. Grace here is God’s infinite riches at Christ’s expense.

Do you understand what this means?

It means that the wrath of God against us—both present and to come—has been quenched, turned aside through the sacrificial death of Jesus at the cross. That has to be good news for you and for me. Who then can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus? Certainly not the plagues of wrath. The propitiation of the cross works today, tomorrow, and into eternity. It does not stop at the close of probation. It is the everlasting gospel of good news.

However, there is a dark side to hope. Those who refuse the everlasting gospel of hope shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God poured from the seven wine cups and shall endure the wine press of His wrath (see Rev 14:10, 18-20; and chapters 15 and 16). The cup of God’s wrath is well established in the Old Testament as a symbol of divine judgment (Job 21:20; Ps 60:3; 75:8; Isa 51:17, 22; Jer 25:15-38). To be handed the cup means to be singled out for punishment from the Almighty and portrays agony and terror. The same cup of the wrath of God is used to describe the plagues of God’s wrath.

Let me remind you that 2,000 years ago Jesus drank that bitter cup at Gethsemane, and Calvary was the wine press of His agony. There at the cross we see God’s final endtime

judicial reaction to all human sin. There at the cross we see mirrored the final fate of the wicked. Jesus is the truth about the wrath of God and the seven last plagues of judgment. The good news is that the cross of Calvary stands between us sinners and the thunder clouds of divine wrath. Jesus cried out on the cross the triumphant, "It is finished." "I have won." This is the bright side of hope.

But on the dark side of the cross, Jesus cried out that terrifying cry for help, "Father! Father!" And there was no response from the Father, except for thunderings and lightnings, as if all nature was rejecting her Creator. The heavens were as total brass—the message of heaven seemed to be total withdrawal.

It was as if God in the eloquence of His silence was saying, "Jesus, my Son, I can have nothing to do with You. You have been made sin." He was left alone in that crucial hour so that in the final hour of God's wrath we might never be left alone.

But now as Michael, the mighty Prince who made propitiation at the cross and who has declared His justifying righteousness on our behalf, steps forward as the protector of His people, the wicked in their terror will cry out to God. But the heavens will be as brass—there will be no response other than the thunderings and lightnings of God's wrath. But the cry of the righteous will be precious to His ears, because One who is the mighty Prince, Michael, standeth for His people.

He who is the Water of Life cried out on the cross, "I thirst." They gave Him only bitter gall to drink. In the final hour of God's wrath, the wicked will cry out for water, but their water is turned to blood. Our substitute has shared His blood by paying in full the wages of our sin so we might never thirst again. Propitiation means the efficacy of the cross is ever present.

At Calvary, a terrible supernatural darkness covered the land, and the cross was at the center of it. For Jesus there was no ray of hope or light to pierce the gloom. He who is the Light of the World had no light. Likewise, the wicked in the final hour of God's wrath will gnaw their tongues in the darkness of the plagues, and all the dark demons of hell will be let loose. But the righteous, those who are sealed with the stamp of preservation, will look up in the darkness and see Jesus, the Star of Hope.

A great earthquake rocked the hill of Calvary. The rocks were rent, and the Rock of Ages was helpless to stay the fury. It seemed there was no hiding place or shelter for Jesus. Then suddenly the piercing rays of the sun burst through the darkness and, while bathed in the sun's dazzling brightness, Jesus died. The seventh plague of God's wrath is a great earthquake. It will rock the world like it rocked the hill of Calvary.

But Michael, the Mighty Prince, the Rock of Ages, will shelter the righteous from the stormy blast, because at Calvary He took the blast in full. Herein is love! God sent His Son forth to be a propitiation!

The wicked will cry out in terror. Suddenly, amidst the earthquake, the darkness will give way to the unveiled dazzling brightness of the glory of Jesus, the Son of Righteousness, accompanied by millions of angels. The wicked will be destroyed by His brightness, but the saints will not die. Their substitute died the second death of damnation for them, and saved them from the wrath to come! This is the great message of the cross, the covenant of hope. This is the blessed hope indeed!

I can see the redeemed standing on the Sea of Glass, arrayed in white robes. I can hear some angels talking. They are surveying those who have come through the tribulation. "Who are these arrayed in white?" one asks. Another replies, "Don't you know this is a special group? They were able by their own sinlessness [perfection] to make it. The plagues could not hurt them."

Is this true? No, it is not true! The propitiation of the cross is ever present and eternal. Those who have come through the tribulation are those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

What I actually hear is the sound of many waters—the great doxology of the saints of all ages from every nation and kindred and tongue and people singing songs of love, adoration, and worship. "Unto him that loveth us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."—Rev 1:5, 6

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#### A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING AND EXPERIENCE OF CHRISTIAN JOY - MESSAGE AND MISSION PRESENTATION

The presentation entitled "A Biblical Understanding and Experience of Christian Joy," was made by Peter J Colquhoun, President of the North New South Wales Conference. Scripture texts are from the King James Version, unless noted otherwise.

According to an old Greek legend, "Mad men are always serious, they go mad through lack of humor." I would like to place beside this quotation a passage of Scripture, "A merry



heart doeth good like a medicine." This leads me to the theme of my assigned subject "Christian Joy." Joy is the second fruit of the Spirit. Paul refers to joy as a "fruit of righteousness," something that all Christians can experience together.

As we think about the New Testament understanding of joy, one quickly gets the picture that joy expresses itself in a number of ways. Recently I conducted a wedding. The handsome bridegroom stood there tall, with a smile on his face eleven miles wide. Standing beside him was his serene little bride. She was happy too, but she was actually crying. That is how joy manifests itself sometimes. Tears sometimes reflect the deepest emotion of joy that comes from the human heart.

In the New Testament Jesus frequently referred to the experience of joy. His was a ministry of glad tidings and great joy. Jesus said, "I am come that your joy might be full."

As I survey the Scriptures, I am attracted to several books that portray joy more than others. These include the books of Luke, Acts, Philippians, and Revelation in the New Testament and the books of Leviticus, Psalms, and Isaiah in the Old Testament. The word "joy" occurs most in Isaiah and the Psalms in the Old Testament.

The book of Leviticus portrays Israel's relationship to the sanctuary, to the Shekinah glory above the mercy seat which reflects the justice and the grace of God. God was in their midst providing for them daily forgiveness. The following words appear often: "Your sins are forgiven you," "Your sins shall be forgiven you." Another reoccurring word is "atonement." God in His marvelous grace provides atonement—turning aside the wrath of God from the sinner. This is justice and grace at work. Righteousness by faith is the heart message of this book. It is also the well spring of all Christian joy.

It is interesting to look at the word "grace." Linguistically, in Scripture, "joy" and "grace" are almost the same word. That is very significant. All our joy flows from the grace of God. No wonder God commanded Israel to "rejoice in your feasts" (Deut 16:14, NKJV). When Israel enjoyed a close relationship with God through the sanctuary, it was a time of great prosperity and joy for the nation. They were to rejoice together with the God of their salvation. In the book of Revelation, we see exactly the same pattern theologically and experientially. There we see the songs of praise and joy constantly flowing from worshiping hearts as they respond to the Lamb that was slain and now ministers for them in the sanctuary. Revelation is a book that overflows with joy.

Two dominant words in the Psalms that are very closely linked together are "joy" and "praise." In fact, praise is the song of joy, and this song of joy for Israel reached its highest moment when they had their closest relationship to God through the sanctuary. This suggests

to me that Seventh-day Adventists, with their understanding of the sanctuary, should be the most joyful people in the world.

Of the four gospels, Luke's gospel is known as the gospel of joy. It vibrates with joy. Of the 326 instances of the words for joy in the New Testament, 53 occur in the book of Luke and 26 occur in Luke's other book, the book of Acts. The joyful elements of the Christian message are set forth in such matchless literary art that one commentator described Luke as "the most beautiful book in the world." Chapter 15, the central gem of the gospel, describes the joy of finding the lost sheep and the lost coin, and the boundless joy of the father in finding his lost son. This traveling companion of Paul, and the beloved physician in the book of Acts, proclaims that the great joy of the Christian church was that of Christ being preached to the Jews and Gentiles so that thousands were added daily to the church.

The book of Philippians is Paul's most personal letter. It reflects his range of emotional joy in very practical terms. It is a very brief but powerful epistle, a delightfully inspired letter of joy. That brings me to my theme text in Philippians 4:4. There the apostle proclaims the well known words, "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice." Do you know where Paul was when he wrote these words? It is hard to believe that he was actually in prison facing almost certain death. "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice." Had Paul lost touch with reality? The floggings without number, the three shipwrecks, the many stonings, the frequent hunger and thirst, the danger of false brethren, and now the second imprisonment—had all this affected his touch with reality?

It is as though he is saying, to be sure we do not misunderstand, "Look, I have thought it all through; I know what is going to happen to me, and so again I say, rejoice." Let us try to catch the spirit of this great Christian warrior in a brief synopsis of his letter to the Philippians. I believe we will discover the cause of Christian joy.

In Philippians 1:4, Paul refers to the joy of intercessory prayer—the joy of being partners with Jesus through intercessory prayer. What is intercessory prayer? This is the kind of prayer that Paul often requested of the Christian believers. Intercessory prayer is two loves working together. Our love and God's love meet together on behalf of another. It almost seems that God wants to be helpless without us. Nevertheless, when we link our petitions together with His, like a heavenly conduit we can focus the grace of God to another. Can you imagine the power and joy that would be generated by a whole church engaged in daily intercession for each other? Through this kind of ministry I have seen some wonderful things happen. I believe there is a power and a wonderful joy yet to be discovered by God's Church as it participates in intercessory prayer. I have seen it change difficult churches and have a positive impact on a whole conference.

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The next cause of joy is registered in Philippians 1:18. It is the joy that results when Christ is preached in every place. There is joy in the mission of the Church.

I can well remember the first and only General Conference Session I ever attended in 1985. We had come to the climax of the Thousand Days of Reaping. Night after night, as the reports came flooding in from the various divisions around the world, and as the baptismal figures continued to grow, the expectation mounted that we might reach one million baptisms. Would we? We did! We even went beyond our highest expectations. I will never forget the emotion and the joy of that huge congregation. After the final report, I looked around me and saw that people were wiping the tears from their eyes; people were smiling, and there was clapping and applause. It was a marvelous experience—the joy of Christ being preached in every place.

Following the 1990 General Conference Session, the Church planned the challenge of Global Mission. I believe God providentially led the Church to this idea. I am sure that when the leaders of our Church coined the phrase, Global Mission, they never envisioned that suddenly hundreds of doors would open in Eastern Europe, Russia, and other parts of the world. They could not have foreseen it; it just did not seem possible. It would seem that God was responding to the faith vision of the Church.

Let me tell you something. There is no committee smart enough to run this Church. All the intelligence and all the committees—and we have plenty of committees—and even all the wealth of the Church, could never have brought these momentous events to pass. It is, in fact, none other than the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous before our eyes. It is the beginning of a mighty harvest of joy, and the countdown to our Lord's return. When I think of God working through His Church to open doors and reach people around the globe, I am filled with a tremendous feeling of joy.

Paul, in writing to the Philippians, now links the joy of Christ being preached in every place to another joy, the joy of giving. I am thrilled to participate in a mission that is so successful, aren't you? I can well remember presenting the challenge of Global Mission to the members in my previous conference. Many began to personally participate in generous giving. As we visited around the conference and shared with members what was happening in Russia, Eastern Europe, and other lands, hundreds of thousands of dollars came in. I recall the tears of joy and emotion that came down people's faces, reflecting the inward joy that Christ was being preached in every place and that they could personally participate with their giving. I do not know of any joy or emotion that I have ever witnessed that was as intense as the joy which I have seen during the last few years in response to the challenge God has given us.

One other joy that the apostle links with the joy of Christ being preached in every place is the joy of personally winning a soul. We read this in Philippians 4:1, namely, the joy of participating in the mission of the Church, of actually helping to share the good news. Occasionally someone comes along and tries to take that joy away from us with the criticism, "Yes, but what about all the apostasies?" Have you heard that?

The Church is concerned about apostasies. We do not try to hide the statistics. The Secretary's Reports always highlight them. But let us put apostasy in its proper context for a moment. The New Testament church had its apostasies. Paul said, "many no longer walk . . . ." Look at the Old Testament theocracy. Israel—the entire nation—rejected the theocracy of God. Look at Adam and Eve and Lucifer. Who are the critics going to blame now? Neither Paul nor we should allow the barbarous criticism to take away the joy of Christ being preached in every place. That is our mission. At the same time, let us search for the missing members. Let us engage in intercessory prayer for them by name.

Recently I visited with a member, an angry person—angry with the church, angry with the pastor. This person had not been to church for ages. I quietly listened to the anger, and then it was my turn to talk. I said, "sometimes I feel a little bit like that too. I am sure Jesus feels concerned about His Church, but the Church is you and me. As Jesus looks at His endtime Church, He wants it to be rich in faith and love. He wants you to be rich in faith and love. Let me tell you about Him."

I began to talk about Jesus, the wonderful Saviour, and His marvelous forgiveness. I told him about Someone up there who is "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh" who loves us. Tears began to flow. The next Sabbath the whole family was at church. Oh, how our people need the joy of Jesus. That is the message we need to take—the joy of preaching and sharing Christ.

Let us go a little deeper into this letter of Christian joy. In Philippians 1:25 the apostle speaks of the joy of faith. Here we have a word picture of confident optimism and joyful trust in our all sufficient Redeemer. As we begin each day, we can lay all our plans at His feet and trust His providences to direct the way we should go. The God who had only one Son spared Him not, that through Him He might freely give us all things. A lot of things may happen to me, a lot of things I do not understand. But one thing I do know, I can trust a God who loves me like that. Can you? As Paul says, "for me to live is Christ." We can trust Him with our very lives. That is the joy of faith, is it not?

This joy of faith is further described in Revelation 14:12. "Here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." They keep the teachings of Jesus. There is something very solid and reassuring about that. The joy of faith includes doctrinal certainty.

All truth is founded in Jesus. Jesus said, "I am the truth." We do not have to trust in the vain philosophy of human wisdom.

Jesus is the truth about God, creation, man, marriage, the Ten Commandments, the Sabbath, sin and salvation, baptism, death, resurrection, glorification, ascension, the close of probation, judgment, the second advent, the new heaven and the new earth. We talk about Adventist distinctives; they are Jesus' distinctives. All this is the faith of Jesus. It gives me a profound sense of joy and absolute certainty knowing I can appeal to Jesus for everything I believe as a Christian. I do not have to go to this one or to that one—only to Jesus, the word and wisdom of God made flesh.

If Jesus were to come to earth today, many would not recognize Him because they think differently. They do not keep the faith of Jesus. They do not have the joy of faith, the faith of Jesus. When difficult times come for us, what a wonderful thing it will be to appeal to Jesus for what we believe. This gives me a great sense of certainty and joy. There is nothing better or more reassuring for the Christian.

The next joy is found in Philippians 2:17. It is the joy of Christian fellowship and unity. Here we have joy in the context of the church, joy in the body of Christ. This is not a separationist picture, not a picture of the false brethren criticizing the church, or of brethren who came down from Jerusalem and bothered Paul and the church. No, here is the fruit of righteousness as it welds the church together in the bond of fellowship and unity.

Next we come to Philippians 2:28, where is mentioned the joy of news of loved ones. Here the writer introduces joy in the family context. In verse 29 we come to the joy of Christian hospitality, that is the Church's joy as found in the social context—the sharing of our lives and the extending of the family circle. I well remember Pastor Jim Harris, who some years ago was our division youth leader, and how he brought the challenge to me personally while I was Dean of Students at Avondale College. "Peter," he said, "when dealing with young people, remember the words, 'Socials to save.'" I liked that. Here we have the social aspect of the Church, the extended family circle, where we gather others into an atmosphere of Christian hospitality. Socials to save. I perceive that many are missing out on this joy of Christian service and experience. But this is part of the joy of commitment to Christ. It may be that if this part of our ministry was alive and vital, there would be fewer apostasies in our Church.

We now come to the high point of joy as found in Philippians 3:8, 9, the joy of a man in Christ. Clearly this is a high point for Paul. All the other preceding joys flowed from the fact that he was a man in Christ. Jesus said, "I am come that your joy might be full." (See John 15:11.) Now the opposite of this experience is a spirit of murmuring and criticism, of

negativism, as displayed by the accusers of the brethren. But this is not the Spirit of Christ. Jesus said, "by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt 7:20, KJV).

The joy of a man in Christ! Let us go a little deeper and see what Paul is really saying here. He says, "And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, . . . but that which is through faith in Christ" (Phil 3:9). Be found in Him. I never found Jesus. Jesus found me. Was not that true for you too? Paul never found Jesus. Jesus found Paul, and even though this man lived a blameless exemplary life, he still needed Jesus. If honors for religious performance were being handed out back then, year after year Paul would have won the Man of the Year Award for Religious Performance. If you had gone into his lounge room, you would have seen the trophies on the shelves, plaques on the wall, and even a filing cabinet bulging with glowing testimonials, enough to give any man a glow of joy.

But it is hard to stay on top. You have to keep working harder. You are never sure if you have enough self righteousness. You have to keep comparing yourself with yourself and with others. Your spirit becomes narrow and mean and critical. You will even imprison people to stay on top, and you will kill them. Ask Paul. It does not have to be literally, of course. But you have to keep moving fast to stay on top. For Paul, the next stop was Damascus. On the way he met Jesus and heard the words, "I am Jesus." I discovered when I heard those words that Jesus has a beauty that makes me look ugly, but He gives beauty in place of my ugliness.

Suddenly all of Paul's righteousness became bankrupt. On that day, and ever after, he received a massive credit of sinless righteousness to his account. He experienced the forgiveness of the Saviour, and that brought joy which was boundless. Forgiveness! How does God forgive? How could God forgive a man like Paul? When Jesus comes He does not want any of us to be embarrassed or ashamed of ourselves as we stand in our own righteousness. He doesn't merely forgive us, He forgets the sin.

All of us at some time or another have done something wrong or stupid or foolish. And we feel ashamed. Even if we are told we are forgiven, we cannot forget what we have done. God's forgiveness is different.

God's forgiveness is creative. It is dynamic, it is restorative. When He comes to you and me, He says, "John, Margaret, I forgive you your sins. Because you trust in My Son Jesus, I forgive you your sins." But God knows we need a whole lot more than that. He knows there is a relationship to be healed. Therefore He adds, "Look, not only will I forgive your sins, but I will think of you as having never sinned." I say blessed be the Saviour for that. "But more, I will even regard you as if you have never had a sinful past at all, because at the cross Jesus completely erased that past." The handwriting of ordinances that was

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against us was nailed to the cross by Jesus. It evaporated, it was erased, it was taken away completely.

When Jesus comes, I will not have to be like the wicked, ashamed and embarrassed, calling for the hills and rocks to fall on me and hide me from His face. When Jesus comes, I will not have to stand incomplete. There is no bad past anymore. I will stand tall and blameless in His righteousness. That is the joy of a believer in Christ, is it not?

What about all those trophies and plaques Paul has back home in the lounge room? I can see him hurrying home, scooping them off the shelf, pulling them off the wall, and depositing them into the big garbage can at the front door. I see him looking at one plaque, and a smile goes across his face. The words engraved on the plaque read, "Pharisee of the Pharisees." Let the garbage collector look after that one too, it counts for nothing! That's the joy of a man in Christ!

Yet even while Paul and the churches are celebrating and rejoicing in Jesus as Lord and King, as the mighty Saviour, the false brethren from Jerusalem, the perfectionists turn up. It is amazing how they get around. They followed Paul and the apostles everywhere. I want to suggest that if they were living today they would have their video tapes, their audio cassettes, and their photocopied material. The perfectionists in Paul's day caused terrible division in the churches. They were highly critical of Paul. They said to him, "Paul, you are a man pleaser. You are preaching a soft gospel." And I can almost hear them add, "And do not forget the close of probation—you will need to have reached a state of sinless perfection by then, or at least by the time you die!" You know, I doubt that such ideas would ever have occurred to the apostle Paul.

I hear this great saint of God, who was facing the end of his life, say in this letter of joy: "I have got news for you, and the news is very simple. Already we are citizens of the heavenly kingdom." That is what he says in this letter of joy. Already we are members of the family of heaven. Already our names are written in the Lamb's book of life; already written down as the church of the first born in heaven; already translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son. And furthermore, by the grace of God my conduct as a Christian will match my citizenship. "Ever looking unto Jesus, the author and the finisher of my faith." The word "finisher" has the idea of "completer" of my faith. Paul was actually confessing, "I have some way to go yet. To be frank, I am not already perfect. I have not yet attained, the executioner's sword notwithstanding!"

I find something very wonderful about this. It is easy for a man in Christ to be honest about himself, is it not? Being in Christ takes all the pressure away. You can be honest with God knowing that He will not think any less of you. You do not have to keep thinking about

yourself or comparing yourself with yourself or others, but you are free to courageously press on, ever seeking to be more like Jesus. Knowing my life is hid in Christ, I press on "towards the mark of the prize of the high calling," ever confident that "He who has begun a good work in me, will finish it." The word "finish" has the idea of perfection—finished to perfection.

The important thing is, when did Paul say this would happen? At the close of probation? Before we die? No. At the day of Christ, when He comes in glory. That is the joy of a believer in Christ, is it not? I like to think of the Romans 7 and 8 experience. We should never read Romans 7 without reading Romans 8, for the frustrations of Romans 7 carry over into Romans 8 where you hear Paul rejoicing in the Lord. He even uses the word "frustration" in Romans 8. The frustration or futility occurred when man fell into sin and received a sinful body. Paul utters the words in anticipation: "I wait for my change to come, I groan to be delivered, just as all creation groaned under the curse, to be delivered at that day." (See Rom 8:22, 23.)

And so it is that a person with joy in Christ can cry out, as did this man of God in the Philippian letter to his accusers, that "at that day this vile body of mine will be made like unto His glorious body." (See Phil 3:21.) My Jesus will see to that.

Paul wrote one of his last letters to the apostle Timothy. In it he said that God will give him a crown of righteousness. (See 2 Tim 4:8.) This would be an incorruptible crown of righteousness which would never fade away, righteousness that would be his very own. In the book of Revelation we see the saints standing on the sea of glass dressed in white raiment. The question is asked, "who are these, and what is the white raiment?" The answer rings out, "The white raiment is the righteousness of the saints," something that is now theirs by nature, that has been given to them by God—a righteousness that will never fade away. It is a beautiful picture. John says, "We will see his unveiled glory and we will be like Him." Righteousness by faith includes the day of joyful glorification when the whole universe will confess that Jesus is Lord. To the saints, however, it will be a very special moment of blessing. Thus Paul pictures our final predestination in Christ when the image of God is fully restored and we are made like unto His glorious body.

Paul says that we shall bear the image of the first Adam, but then we shall become like the Second Adam. (See 1 Cor 15:45.) Only glorified saints can see a glorified Lord. Only sinless beings can enter into the presence of God. Not even Moses when on earth could see the face of God and live. But that is the joy of a believer in Christ! We shall enter joyfully into His presence. This is Paul's theology of joy.

Recently I read the title of a book, *The Applause of God*. I tried to find the book, but was unsuccessful. So I began to imagine what the author might have written in a book titled,



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*The Applause of God.* I imagined the author would write about the joy in heaven over one sinner who repented. I imagined the author would write about the great preparations going on in heaven in anticipation of the day when God will begin the process of welcoming home all the saints of all the ages from every corner of the earth. I do not believe heaven will be silent and somber at that time. I believe it will be a time of great joy when the applause of God welcomes His children home.

I also said to myself, "I don't think God has much reason to applaud me." But He definitely thinks He does. This is the joy of a man in Christ, is it not?

I don't know how it affects you, but often when I stand up to worship in church, to sing some of those beautiful hymns of praise and glory, I find that tears come to my eyes and I have to stop singing as the emotion and joy suddenly grip me. Every time I hear a beautiful song like this one, "There is a Saviour, what joy He brings," it moves me to the very depths of my being. It is the joy of a believer in Christ. It is the joy of a person in Christ who can sing in confident, certain anticipation, with deep emotion, with unspeakable joy,

"Face to face with Christ my Saviour, Face to face what will it be,  
When with rapture I behold Him, Jesus Christ who died for me.  
Face to face with my Redeemer, Face to face to see and know,  
When with rapture I behold Him, Jesus Christ who loves me so."

Boundless joy. Think of it. And again I say, Rejoice.

Adjourned.

Jan Paulsen, Chairman  
Harold W Baptiste, Secretary  
D Ronald Watts, Editorial Secretary  
Rowena J Moore, Recording Secretary

ANNUAL COUNCIL  
GENERAL CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

October 4, 1996, 8:00 a.m.

DEVOTIONAL MESSAGE

The devotional message entitled "Joy in the Holy Spirit" was presented by William G. Johnsson, Editor of the *Adventist Review*. The scripture studied was Acts 16:22-34. All Scripture texts are taken from the New International Version.

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, and joy in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

"About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them" (Acts 16:25). What sort of people sing at midnight? Have you ever sung at midnight? Can you sing at midnight?

It was not because Paul and Silas had had a good day. This was a day that started out bad and went downhill from there.

They were in Philippi, on Paul's second missionary journey. They had been making their way west and had come to the town of Troas, where they were undecided what to do. Then Paul had a vision in the night. He saw a man from Macedonia saying: "Come over to Macedonia and help us" (Acts 16:9). And immediately, the Scripture says, they packed up, got on a boat, and sailed to Macedonia. When they arrived, Paul sought out the largest city in the area. That was Paul's strategy: he bypassed the small towns and concentrated on the large commercial centers.

So they came to Philippi. It was a Roman colony, a prominent city. Apparently it had no synagogue, because on the Sabbath Paul sought out a place where there might be some followers of the living God. He had heard about a prayer meeting down by the river, and so they gathered there. It was a small group, but Paul preached to them the Word of God and people were won to Christ.

One convert was a businesswoman by the name of Lydia. She was a seller of purple cloth, and she had come from the city of Thyatira. She and her household were baptized, and then she said, "Please come and stay with us." So that is where they lodged.

Thus the work in Philippi was begun. As Paul was going about his work one day, the devil tried to derail him. A demon-possessed girl, probably a teenager, came up behind Paul and Silas and taunted them, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved" (Acts 16:17). She said it in a way that mocked Paul and his work. Day by day, as they came to the city, this girl would follow them, taunting and mocking. Then one day Paul turned and rebuked the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" (Acts 16:18), and she was freed.

That should have been a day of rejoicing. But this woman was owned by evil men—she was a slave to them. The evil spirit apparently enabled her to make predictions. She was like a fortune-teller. People would come to her, she would make predictions, and the evil men would receive money. Now they realized that their source of income was cut off.

They were angry. They seized Paul and Silas, dragged them before the magistrates, called together a crowd, and began to shout out against them. "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice" (Acts 16:20, 21).

The magistrates, seeing the way the crowd was reacting, became angry also and immediately said, "Strip these men, beat them, and throw them into jail." And to the jailer they said, "Make sure these men don't get away!"

At midnight, Paul and Silas found themselves in a damp, stinking dungeon. Their feet were fastened in the stocks, their bodies were aching, their backs were lacerated from the severe flogging. They could not even move to try to get relief. They had been hours without food or drink. How easy it would have been to say, "Lord, where are you? Lord, what's wrong! Lord, why did you let this happen?" But at midnight they sang, and the other prisoners heard them.

What sort of people sing songs at midnight? Sometimes people sing when they are afraid. Our very first job for the Church was in India. My wife and I graduated from Avondale College in Australia, were married straight after graduation, and immediately went out to India. We were posted at a little school up in the mountains, seven thousand feet up in the Himalayas looking down over the plains. Tall mountains behind us reached up to 22,000 feet and the eternal snows.

Everything was up or down at that school. I was dean of boys and Bible teacher, and Noelene looked after the little boys. We had boys aged 8 to 18—missionaries' children for the most part. It was a wonderful place, a wild place. You only got to it by walking, or on the back of a mule, or by coolies carrying you in. During the monsoon, the clouds would come

down, the storms would rage, there would be an enormous clap of thunder, the lights would go out, and everything would turn to pitch darkness.

The boys' dormitory was located at the bottom part of the property. The girls were five hundred feet higher where a level place had been cut from the hillside. As the storm raged, and then there would be a little respite, we would hear singing floating down through the inky darkness. The girls' dean would gather together her girls—some of them only 10 or 11 years old—to try to still their fears. They would start singing, and the music would come wafting down the mountainside through the darkness and the storm.

Songs at midnight! God's people can sing at midnight. They sing, not to drive away their fears, but because God has put a song in their hearts.

Their experience does not depend upon what happens. In the Bible, you do not read very much about happiness, but you read a great deal about joy. There is a big difference. Happiness depends upon what happens. We get up, the sun is shining, and the birds are singing. We feel fine. Someone says, "That is a nice tie," or "I like your dress." We feel great! But then by the afternoon the clouds come up, maybe somebody makes a negative remark, and we say, "This is a terrible day." That is not joy! Joy does not depend on the circumstances. Joy can sing at midnight!

This is why the same Paul can write: "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body."—2 Cor 4:8-10

Christians have sung at midnight since the earliest years of our faith. Martyrs went to their death—to the flames, to the wild beasts—with songs of praise on their lips. They were not crazy people. Even death itself could not take away their joy.

James and Ellen White could sing at midnight. When times would get rough in the early days of our movement, they would say, "Let us sing," and they would sing in the face of perplexity and discouragement and problems. God's people sing at midnight!

Some of you have been through the midnight of loss and grief, when your hearts have been breaking, and you felt as though you would never laugh again. But God put within you a fountain of joy that began to well up again and again. And the dark clouds eventually lifted and you could sing again—songs at midnight!

Some of you have found yourselves in the dungeon of disease. Your feet have been fixed in the stocks of cancer or some other terrible ailment, but God gave you a fountain of joy bubbling up.

And all of us, as we work for the Lord, at times find the way hard. The work is heavy, the decisions are weighty. We seek to do the best for the Lord and His people, but often we do not know what to do. It is as though there is no perfect answer—we can only do the best under the circumstances. Sometime the hours are very long. The people of God are wonderful, but some of them are very difficult at times. It is easy for us to think: Is it worth it all? But God gives us songs at midnight.

Like Paul, we are beaten down, but never forsaken. We hang on because God has given us a fountain of joy within our lives—bubbling up, irrepressible. Jesus said: “I give you My joy so that your joy might be complete, might be full” (John 15:11). And again: “No one will take away your joy” (John 16:22). Neither life nor death, neither devil nor human being, no circumstances in heaven or earth can take away the joy that Jesus gives us—no person and no thing can stop the fountain of joy.

Joy—what a precious word it is! How many people are seeking it! Joy is the great quest of this secular age. People spend enormous amounts of money trying to find it. Some seek it through alcohol and chemicals, or by seeking new, exotic, wild experiences through new sexual partners, travel, or daring feats.

Some months ago in the United States, we saw an amazing example of this. There was a little girl, only seven years old, named Jessica. Her parents encouraged her to do something new—to be the youngest person ever to fly an aircraft across the United States and back again. She would have an instructor alongside her, but she would be the pilot on take-off and landing. So she took off from California and landed in Wyoming. The weather was bad, but the instructor said, “Let’s go for it.” The plane fell to the earth and Jessica died at the controls—she was seven years old!

*Time* magazine put her picture on the cover, this little pug-nosed girl in a baseball cap, with the caption, “Who Killed Jessica?” They reported that she said, “I fly for joy.” Somebody must have told her to say that—she didn’t look at all happy. At the funeral her mother refused to weep. She said: “I would want all my children to die in a state of joy. I would prefer it was not at the age of seven.” What a perversion of the idea of joy, that you can only find joy by doing something strange and daring and new, by establishing a new record!

The world seeks after joy, but if you want to find joy, go to the Bible. The Bible is the Book of joy. Our God is the God of joy. Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. This is the only place where joy can be found.

At the very beginning of history, at creation, the sons of God sang for joy. When Israel was delivered from Egypt, they sang for joy. When David was crowned, the people sang. When the Temple was dedicated, God's people sang for joy. "When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy" (Ps 126:1, 2). "You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at Your right hand" (Ps 16:11). "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation" (Isa 12:3). "The ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away" (Isa 35:10).

In the New Testament, the fountain leaps up and overflows—because the Joygiver has come! "The Spirit of the Lord is on me," He said, "therefore He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."—Luke 4:18, 19

So at Jesus' birth, the word comes to shepherds out in the fields, "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people" (Luke 2:10). Then the heavenly choir bursts into song: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests" (Luke 2:14).

The New Testament has three words for joy. One word is used often, the others less frequently, but altogether we find these words at least 160 times. The New Testament is a book of joy. We find joy in heaven (Luke 15:7), and joy in the city (Acts 8:8). We find joy in the good times and in the bad times, even when the early Christians lost their possessions and were thrown into jail (Heb 10:34). "Though you have not seen him, you love him; even though you do not see him now, you believe in him, and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."—1 Peter 1:8, 9

Now what does the Holy Spirit have to do with joy? Throughout the Scriptures, just as joy is a fountain within the life, so the Spirit of God is the agent of the Godhead—God Himself who brings us joy. God the Father is the seeker. It is He who loved us with an everlasting love, who did not leave us in our terrible aloneness, who came seeking. God the Son came to us, taking our humanity upon Himself, walking in our footsteps, and going to our

death on the cross that we might live with Him forever. But it is God the Holy Spirit who now glorifies the Son, who is God with us, individually, no matter where we are, God bringing us joy.

Thus, in Acts 16, the story begins with the Spirit and ends with joy. That is always the order in the Bible.

When Paul and Silas were on their way west, before they ever turned toward Philippi, they had first thought of preaching in Asia, but the Spirit kept them from doing so (Acts 16:6). Then they wanted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of God would not let them do so (verse 7). Then the Spirit gave Paul a vision in the night, and he knew what he had to do. When they began the work in Philippi, and Lydia and her household were converted, how did that come about? Was it because Paul was such a great preacher? No, it was because the Spirit of God touched hearts. The only way souls are won is by the Spirit of God. And the Lord opened her heart and she took them into her home. The Spirit of God brings hospitality, changes people, and makes them wonderful people.

On that fateful day when Paul turned and rebuked the demon in the slave girl, was it his own energy that drove out the spirit? No, it was the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God runs throughout Acts 16. The Spirit of God enabled Paul and Silas to sing at midnight. The same Spirit brought the earthquake. The jail was shaken, the bonds were loosed, the prisoners were freed. Then the jailer cried out, “Men, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). Where did that cry come from? The Spirit of God. And Paul’s answer came from the Spirit of God. “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31).

Often in the Bible, we find joy and the Spirit linked together. In David’s penitential, Psalm 51, he cries out: “Do not . . . take your Holy Spirit from me.” And then he pleads, “Restore to me the joy of Your salvation” (Ps 51:11, 12).

We read that Jesus was full of joy in the Spirit (Luke 10:21), and that the kingdom of God is joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17). And finally we read, “The fruit of the Spirit is . . . joy” (Gal 5:22).

Do we Seventh-day Adventists appreciate the Holy Spirit as we should? Have we received this blessing that Jesus promised: “On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.’ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.”—John 7:37-39

Before Jesus came, the Spirit was active in the world. But since the victory of Jesus on the cross, sealed by the resurrection, we live in the age of the Holy Spirit. It is your privilege and mine that the Spirit of God shall indwell us, that out of our lives will flow a fountain, a wellspring of the Spirit, living water, a spring of joy, and all the other good things that the Spirit brings us.

I think we have reservations about the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is mysterious, as Ellen White says. His nature is a mystery. Sometimes, because of the Pentecostals, we are wary even about talking of the Spirit. Do we deprive ourselves of a blessing? I commend to you the chapter, "The Gift of the Spirit," in the book *Acts of the Apostles*, by Ellen White. There she tells us that when the Spirit comes, every other blessing comes with Him, and that daily every worker of God should be pouring out his or her heart for the blessing of the Spirit.

In four years Adventists will meet in Toronto, the Lord willing, for the General Conference Session. There will be a blessing there, but another term is being associated with Toronto called the "Toronto Blessing." A couple years ago, in a little church by the airport, strange things began to happen. People suddenly fell to the floor and began to laugh uncontrollably. Some would bark like dogs, some would go around on all fours pecking the floor as though they were chickens. News of these happenings spread across the United States and Canada, over the Atlantic to Europe, and down to the South Pacific. People began flocking to that little church to receive a blessing, and it became the main source of tourism for the city of Toronto. The church had to move to a larger facility. When we go to Toronto, there will be a blessing, but not like that!

The blessing of the Spirit is not something wild and uncontrollable. The blessing of the Spirit is quiet, it is not something strange. And the blessing of the Spirit is for you and for me. Let me try to help you to welcome the Spirit, and not be afraid of Him.

Think of the Spirit as Jesus coming to you. This is the way Jesus described the Spirit's coming: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, the Spirit of Truth, to be with you forever. The world cannot accept this Counselor, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you, and will be in you." Then Jesus says: "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:16-18).

We cannot see Him, but He is the Spirit of Jesus. His office is to glorify Jesus, to bring the words of Jesus back to our remembrance. We have a friend by our side. We have a counselor, we have a guide, a source of power for our personal living and our ministry. He is God the Holy Spirit. Do not ask me to explain this. Tell this to secular people and they will say this is nonsense. But we who believe know that this is real. We know, as Paul said, that we are crucified with Christ, nevertheless we live, that Christ now lives in us and the life we



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live is by faith in the Son of God (see Gal 2:20). In saying that, we are talking about the Spirit of God guiding us and living within us. So day by day, let us acknowledge Him, let us open ourselves to being led by the Spirit of God!

And now, a final word. It is Friday and the Sabbath is coming. Tomorrow we will gather over in the Sports Palace to worship. There will be an overflow in the University Church where thousands of Seventh-day Adventists will gather to sing and rejoice. While we are worshipping, another group of believers will gather in a little church that is not so far from here but in some ways is hundreds of years away.

Last Sunday the video crew invited me to go on a trip to a little Adventist church out in the forest. It took us nine and a half hours to get there. We drove further and further south until the paved roads gave out. We stopped at last on the bank of a river, under a little thatched shelter, and waited for the boats—which turned out to be dugout canoes with outboard motors. We got into those canoes and set off upstream along the river that divides Costa Rica from Panama. We went upstream for two and a half hours. The river became shallow in places, and we had to get out and drag the canoes across the rocks. It was afternoon before we arrived. Then we walked into the forest for maybe a kilometer and there we found a Seventh-day Adventist church.

The church members are the Bri Bri people. They gathered in the Adventist chapel and we had a little worship service. They looked better dressed than we did, because we were so hot and grimy after dragging the boats, and it was very hot. But we sang the songs of Zion. I could not understand the language, but I recognized the tunes. We read from the Word, and the same Spirit who is here was there! And tonight and tomorrow when we worship and they worship, the same Spirit will be present.

For there is one God, the Father, who loves us with an everlasting love, who seeks us and never stops seeking us. There is one God, the Son, who gave Himself for us. And there is one God, the Holy Spirit, and with Him we have joy and all things.

All praise to our God!

A season of prayer by small groups followed.

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Maurice T Battle, Associate Secretary of the General Conference, opened the business session with prayer.

Calvin B Rock called the second business session of the 1996 Annual Council to order.

PRE/96AC to RSF

## GLOBAL MISSION REPORTS

### Trans-European Division

Bertil Wiklander, President of the Trans-European Division, reported as follows:

I wish to thank all the donors and the General Conference for supporting our work to meet the great challenges of our division. Your support has helped us build churches and hold numerous campaigns in Pakistan, the Baltic countries, Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Croatia/Slovenia. You have helped us get into Net '96 in just a few months. And we are grateful to the many, many visiting evangelists. By God's grace we have made some bold plans for the future expansion of His work in the Trans-European Division.

We are now looking forward to establishing the first Polish church in Vilnius, Lithuania; to projects in the Middle East Union that will reach Muslims; to ten church projects in Pakistan which will continue until the year 2000; to the first Seventh-day Adventist Gypsy church in the world which will soon be organized in Macedonia; to continuing outreach to 700,000 Russian Jews in Israel; to continuing efforts in the Baltic Union, Poland, Hungary, and the former Yugoslavia; to a Net '96 campaign that will continue in stages until Net '97 and eventually involve 400 churches; and to a special project designed to reach the secular mind in Western Europe—"Adventist Churches for the Unreached Strategy." The Trans-European Division has a plan to plant five new churches for unchurched or secular people.

We will present a new strategy and philosophy of mission at our yearend meeting. The proposal contains four values: spiritual growth, evangelistic outreach, efficient organization, and supportive and sustainable units.

The two basic elements of this strategy are to make the Church more mission-driven and to make every believer a minister. We think that releasing the tremendous spiritual power and energy in the laity of the Church will increase church growth.

We will launch these new concepts through advisories and conferences taking place between now and May 1997. One of the major efforts will be the European Mission Conference in the Netherlands, January 8 to 12, 1997, which we call "Revisioning Adventist Missions in Europe." This is a joint effort with the Euro-Africa Division.

The Trans-European Division has 38 countries, 12 unions, and five attached conferences/missions. Some Muslim countries are still unreached. As of June 30, 1996, there are 1,257 churches, and a membership of 91,983. From July 1, 1995 to June 30, 1996, there were 3,656 baptisms. This is on target for our baptismal goal for this quinquennium which is 20 percent of our current membership.

Let me share a wonderful experience from Lithuania in the Baltic Union, where our membership has gone up from about 50 when the iron curtain fell, to 1,066 today. It is there that we propose to build the first Seventh-day Adventist Church from the proceeds of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering in 1997—the Kaunas Project.

Vilma, a young woman writes, "In our family there was my mother, my father, my brother, and me. We were not a happy family. My parents used to fight, breaking plates and having big quarrels. My father was a heavy smoker and our home was always filled with terrible cigarette smoke. Four years ago, something happened that totally changed everything.

"One morning my father could not get up from his bed. He suffered from a terrible pain in his stomach. After one week, he was sent to the hospital for surgery. It turned out to be a rare case. One intestine had grown into another. After surgery, he felt better and came home. But because of complications he had to stay in bed for two months.

"At this time, Elder Ben Liebelt from the United States was holding an evangelistic campaign in the town. My mother and I went to see what was going on. The meetings were wonderful and we were there every night. My father was not used to us going out at night, and he protested. During the meetings we received lessons called 'The Bible Says,' and my father began to read them, although he had been very angry with us for attending the meetings. The time came when Elder Liebelt was calling for those who wanted to be baptized, and we decided that we wanted to follow Jesus. Father at first laughed at us, and when he saw that we were serious he did not want to let us go. But what could he do when he was in bed? His illness helped God to work out His plan with us. In order to prove that we were wrong in our Adventist faith, he took two Lithuanian Bible versions and a Russian Bible and started looking for weaknesses in our new faith, but the more he studied the clearer he saw that we had found the truth. Six months later, he invited our pastor to come and visit him. He had so many questions at first, but gradually he began to think about making a decision.

"God had stepped into our lives and was working with each one of us. He planned it perfectly. He knew that it would be hard for my father to quit smoking, and for that reason he would never have accepted the message and been baptized. So He allowed him to become sick and, because of this disease, my father could not smoke any more. Since God kept our father in bed, we were able to go and listen to the good news. After we were baptized, my father's attempt to prove us wrong finally led him to baptism.

"Now my father is baptized and is a very active church member. God has brought peace to our home. The sound of quarreling voices and breaking plates has ended. In my home, Jesus' own words have become reality: 'Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.'"

Another good thing is that Vilma, who wrote this, served as the translator for numerous evangelists, assisting in bringing hundreds into the church! I praise God for this and many, many other similar experiences where God is working miracles.

#### Africa-Indian Ocean Division

Luka T Daniel, President of the Africa-Indian Ocean Division, reported as follows:

Let me begin with the Global Mission activities of the women in our division. At Butembo in the East Zaire Union Mission, women built a church that can seat about 500 members. Last month they invited Mrs Akissi Metenou, the Africa-Indian Ocean Division Women's Ministries Director, to the dedication of the church. According to a report from Nigeria, women have led 1,500 to baptism this year.

Other Global Mission activities include Ghana's campaign to "Win Ghana for Christ," and child evangelism and Sabbath School action units

The Africa-Indian Ocean Division faces two major Global Mission evangelism challenges, namely work for the Muslims and evangelism in large cities.

For the first challenge, let us consider the Muslim Republic of Mauritania. This is a country where it is illegal for anyone to change his/her religion. Friday is a day of worship and/or rest for both Muslims and Christians. In the capital city, Naukchott, all Christian religious activities are confined to one compound. Christian religious activities are not allowed outside this compound. With the help of the General Conference Office of Global Mission and ADRA, we have sent a courageous missionary family into Mauritania. This family has made contacts with government and community leaders, asking for permission to

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build a clinic and to dig wells. Our goal, by God's grace, is to be able to plant at least one house church by the end of this quinquennium.

There are many projects in a dozen other countries in our division to which the Office of Global Mission at the General Conference has committed a total of \$199,500. May I say thank you to the officials of Global Mission.

Kinshasa, the capital of Zaire, is one example of the challenge of large city evangelism. In the two unions within Zaire, we now have a total membership of over 300,000. This is the largest membership in any country in our division. Most of the capital city of Kinshasa remains unentered. At the end of June this year, there were approximately 800 members in Kinshasa, which has a population of about 8,000,000—the largest city in Africa south of the Sahara. In response to a request from the West Zaire Union, three evangelists (two departmental directors and the Nigeria Union Evangelist) were sent to Kinshasa for the months of July and August. At the end of the six-week campaign, 907 souls were baptized, doubling the membership of the one church in Kinshasa.

Now we have a problem. The Lord has helped us to bring in the sheep, but there are no church buildings for them. Members are forced to worship in the open air, exposed to the hot sun and constant rainfall. Please join us in prayer to the Lord of the harvest to help us provide shelter for the sheep. Meanwhile, rejoice with us that, in spite of the challenges, Global Mission is on course in the Africa-Indian Ocean Division. Maranatha!

#### Asia-Pacific Division

P D Chun, President of the Asia-Pacific Division, reported as follows:

Two young women, Miss Kim from South Korea and another woman from the Philippines, joined the 1,000 Missionary Movement, and were assigned to Talim Island in the middle of Lake Laguna de Bay in the Luzon Island of the Philippines to establish a new Adventist congregation. After a few months of diligent missionary and community service activities, they were able to gather about 20 people for Bible study and worship.

When the Associate Director of the 1,000 Missionary Movement visited them, he found that they had not cooked the morning meal. They were fasting in order to save some money to build a chapel. They were given less than \$100 every month as a stipend and for missionary activities. What a sacrifice they were making for the progress of the work! There was great joy and celebration after they finished building a chapel made from bamboo poles with a thatched roof.

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To their great discouragement, one month after the celebration, a strong typhoon destroyed the chapel. The volunteer missionaries and believers wept bitterly over the disaster. But they were not totally discouraged.

Miss Kim appealed to her parents and to her home church in South Korea to sponsor the construction of a new chapel. Today there stands a representative chapel with cement block walls and a tin sheet roof. Almost 100 believers gather every Sabbath to worship and fellowship. An extraordinary degree of commitment and sacrifice brings forth extraordinary results for Global Mission.

#### Euro-Asia Division

C Lee Huff, President of the Euro-Asia Division, reported as follows:

We are very excited about Global Mission activities in the Euro-Asia Division. For the twelve-month period from June 30, 1995 to June 30, 1996, there were 19,701 baptisms. In that time period, 113 new churches were organized. There was a tithe increase of 83.39 percent. The Global Mission program is growing and making progress in the Euro-Asia Division.

The most exciting part of Global Mission is what each member, pastor, and administrator is doing to reach people for Jesus! This is where the rubber meets the road—this is Global Mission. People come to Jesus one person at a time! The nearly 20,000 new members who were baptized during the past year came to Jesus one at a time.

Let me tell you about one Global Mission worker. In 1992, Valentine was baptized in Mark Finley's Kremlin evangelistic meetings. She felt the need and desire to share with her friends the Jesus she had come to know. So she told her husband, "You will have to get your own food and care for yourself, for I must have time alone to read the Bible." During the next 48 hours, she slept for only three hours as she read and studied the Bible. She felt she had to preach about her Jesus, so she invited friends and neighbors to her home. Within three months, she was sharing the message with 70 other people. This was only four months after her baptism.

Two months later, her husband and son were baptized. By then she was holding three meetings a week telling others about Jesus, her friend. But this was not enough. She worked full time and held three studies a week in her home with over 70 people attending. But she wanted to do more. She went to her work supervisor and said, "You know I am a Christian and I love Jesus. I want to have two hours a day during work time to share the love of Jesus with these workers." He gave her the time and paid her for it!

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By now she had reached her 55th birthday, the normal retirement age for women. She said to her husband, "You are the head of the house, and the Bible says you should support your family. I am going to retire so I can preach and tell others about Jesus on a full-time basis." That year, 1993, about a year after her baptism, Mark Finley came back to Moscow where she had 41 people ready for baptism.

In 1994 she continued her studies and preaching. In addition, she spent another seven hours a day, five days a week in public schools telling boys and girls about Jesus.

During 1994 a church with 12 members was organized in her village on the outskirts of Moscow. Today, two years later, 120 are members of that church, and 80 of these look to Valentine as the one who introduced them to Jesus.

This is Global Mission in the Euro-Asia Division, bringing people to Jesus one at a time.

96AC to GRT

## SECRETARY'S REPORT

G Ralph Thompson, Secretary of the General Conference, introduced the Secretariat staff and then presented the Secretary's Report, as follows:

Here we are, brothers and sisters, meeting in this beautiful country of Costa Rica in the first Annual Council of this quinquennium to be held outside of the United States. We choose to meet outside the United States twice each quinquennium because we are an international Church, with a worldwide membership of over nine million. Even though our world headquarters is located in the United States of America, we are not an American church. We are, indeed, a world Church.

So here we are in Costa Rica, this beautiful Central American Republic, which is bounded on the north by Nicaragua, on the northeast by the Caribbean Sea, on the southeast by Panama, and on the southwest and west by the Pacific Ocean. Costa Rica occupies an area of 19,647 square miles, and has a population of 3.3 million people. The inhabitants of Costa Rica are predominantly of Spanish ancestry, blended with Indian lineage. A few Indians, combined with those of African heritage, are found along the Atlantic Coast, and some Indians live in the highlands. The chief exports are coffee, timber, and cocoa. The official state religion is Roman Catholicism, but there are thousands of Protestants belonging to various denominations.

As far as Seventh-day Adventist history goes, the territory of Costa Rica constitutes the Costa Rica Mission, organized in 1927, which is part of the Central American Union Mission. The most recent *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* statistics show that there are 69 churches in Costa Rica, with a membership of almost 20,000. The Central American Union Mission headquarters is located in Alajuela, Costa Rica. Also in Alajuela is the Central American Adventist University, known as Universidad Adventista de Centro America. The Costa Rica Secondary School is located in Limon, Costa Rica; and another secondary school is located here in San Jose. There is also an active Bible Correspondence School in San Jose. In addition, Adventist World Radio operates in Costa Rica, and we shall hear more about that later.

For several years around the turn of the century, F J Hutchins, pioneer Seventh-day Adventist missionary to Central America, made frequent visits to Costa Rica in the missionary schooner, *The Herald*, and he began work in Puerto Limon. About 1902, H L Mignott, C N Moulton, and two other colporteurs named Horton and Brooks worked here in Costa Rica. I G Knight, who succeeded Hutchins, reported in the December 3, 1903 *Review and Herald* that there had been a baptism of ten and that a church had been organized with a membership of 26—presumably at Bacuarito, some distance from Puerto Limon. The reports in the *Review and Herald* indicated that by 1906 there were several churches in the country, and that a worker named T M Brown was doing evangelistic work in San Jose. The first primary school was established at Puerto Limon in 1921, with D P Abbott as teacher. A secondary school, which later developed into the college, was opened in October 1927 with G S Ray as the first principal.

Also in 1927, the Seventh-day Adventist work in the Republics of Costa Rica and Nicaragua (until then included in the West Caribbean Conference) was organized as the Costa Rica-Nicaragua Mission, part of the Central American Union Mission, with the officers of the union serving as administrators. There were eight churches and 216 members in the mission by the end of that year. In 1928 the work in Costa Rica became a separate mission with four churches and 148 members.

It was in 1973 that a seven-acre tract was obtained in Hatillo, a suburb of the capital, and construction was begun on an elementary school and an evangelistic center complex. In 1974 the first buildings were started for a youth camp, located on a 45-acre site in Mayortina. Since then the work has grown rapidly here in Costa Rica, where loyal and dedicated members are not afraid to share their faith. Although Roman Catholicism is the state religion, religious freedom exists for other churches and groups to preach the gospel as they understand it.



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Throughout the entire territory of the Central American Union Mission that now comprises not only Costa Rica, but Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama, there are now approximately 840 churches, and a membership of 280,000.

This is a union where evangelism takes precedence over everything else. Administrators, departmental directors, pastors, educators, and church members are all involved in the great task of spreading the Advent Message to every village and town in their territory. This is a story that can be duplicated in every union of this great Inter-American Division in whose territory we are now meeting. I am sure that you will catch some of this spirit when the Inter-American Division gives its report.

As you can see from the program, each of the world divisions will be rendering an evening report, as will the attached Southern Africa Union. All of them have fascinating and interesting stories to tell of God's providence and His leadership in the work in their part of the world.

The year 1996 has been important for the work of the General Conference and its divisions. This year we established guidelines to clarify the relationship of the Church to supporting ministries. The General Conference believes in working harmoniously with all the supporting ministries. Some of us have been attending the meetings of the Adventist-Laymen's Services and Industries (ASI). We are impressed with the tremendous work that ASI is doing, and we would hope that their spirit of cooperation with the Church, their dedication and service, and their financial support would indeed influence all the divisions of the world.

While we applaud the support of those who are members of the ASI group, we certainly deplore the misrepresentation and attacks on leadership by other independent ministries who are bent on causing embarrassment and misrepresentation, and who level their attacks on the constituted leadership of the Church. They cause confusion and disarray in the minds and ranks of many church members and church organizations around the world. While there are scores of supporting ministries who help to spread the gospel and support the work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, there are those few nonsupporting ministries—vocal in their denunciation of Church leadership and the appellation of the Church as being in apostasy and Babylon—that we certainly denounce and repudiate.

Another action taken early in the year was to assign to the North American Division the full responsibility for the Adventist Media Center, Incorporated. We join together in expressing appreciation to the Adventist Media Center and its component ministries for their invaluable contribution to the ministry of the world Church. This includes the work of Net '95, and the tremendous undertaking of Net '96, which begins tomorrow night, October 5, in

Orlando, Florida. This program will be transmitted by satellite to over 5,000 Seventh-day Adventist churches in many parts of the world. This will be the greatest evangelistic undertaking ever in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We need to be in earnest prayer for the success of this tremendous worldwide outreach through the power of the electronic media.

This year the Church approved a statement to the governments of industrialized countries regarding the dangers of climate change which is brought about as the result of human activity. Seventh-day Adventists went on record declaring their advocacy of a simple, wholesome lifestyle, where people do not step on the treadmill of unbridled consumerism and production of waste. We called for respect of creation, restraint in the use of the world's resources, and reevaluation of our needs as individuals. This was an historic step on the part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

One of the points of interest that needs to be reported on is the fact that the General Conference, in addition to all the monies given in appropriations, supported members of its staff who, in response to requests from the world divisions, agreed to conduct evangelistic meetings this year in such places as the Philippines, Latvia, Grand Cayman, Bucharest, Toronto, London, Yugoslavia, Ukraine, and Indonesia, to the tune of \$100,000. This is in addition to every other appropriation that was made to the divisions.

In the area of communications, several interesting things happened earlier this year. We voted to approve the connection of the General Conference headquarters to Internet. We also set up equipment in one of the committee rooms at the General Conference so that a conference call can be made to traveling Administrative or General Conference Executive Committee Members when their input and votes are required at a particular meeting.

Recently the General Conference approved a statement entitled "Affirmation of Marriage." The statement says in part: "Issues related to marriage can be seen in their true light only as they are viewed against the background of the divine ideal for marriage. Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus Christ to be both monogamous and heterosexual, a lifelong union of loving companionship between a man and a woman. In the culmination of His creative activity, God fashioned humankind as male and female in His own image; and He instituted marriage, as a covenant-based union of the two genders physically, emotionally, and spiritually, spoken of in Scripture as 'one flesh.'

"Arising from the diversity of the two human genders, the oneness of marriage images in a singular way the unity within diversity of the Godhead. Throughout Scripture, the heterosexual union in marriage is elevated as a symbol of the bond between Deity and humanity. It is a human witness to God's self-giving love and covenant with His people. The

harmonious affiliation of a man and a woman in marriage provides a microcosm of social unity that is time-honored as a core ingredient of stable societies. Further, the Creator intended married sexuality not only to serve a unitive purpose, but to provide for the propagation and perpetuation of the human family. . . .”

The last paragraph states, “To this biblical view of marriage the Seventh-day Adventist Church adheres without reservation, believing that any lowering of this high view is to that extent a lowering of the heavenly ideal.”

You will be interested to know that Rajmund Dabrowski, General Conference Communication Director, is producing a compilation of statements made by General Conference leadership and committees, over the past 16 years or so, on various social, moral, and ethical topics which impact on public issues. I would urge you to secure a copy when the book becomes available some time in November.

#### World Church Statistics

It is thrilling to see how the Lord is blessing the growth of the Advent Movement around the world. At the close of December 31, 1995, the world membership stood at 8,812,555. There were 659,899 baptisms and professions of faith in 1995. And we say, Praise the Lord! Every soul won to this message and to Jesus Christ is a tremendous miracle.

But let me share a burden with you. The members in our churches need to be taught to reach out, accept, and love these new members. The record shows that 175,000 persons were reported as apostasies and missing—approximately one out of every five baptized. The Church spends a lot of money in evangelism and outreach to bring in new converts. After we have done all of that, there is such coldness, indifference, and lack of love in some of our churches that it takes a tremendous amount of courage for a number of members to remain. However, statistics show that it is not the newly converted people that we are losing. It is people who have been in the church for five years and more who leave us. These members should have been stable, active members of the church by then. So we cannot blame the evangelists and say that these people were not fully grounded in the faith before they were baptized. That is not the fact as shown statistically. The issue is the state of the church which they join, the community of the saints which they become a part of. What a challenge to our people to put their arms of love and acceptance around these new converts and cement them in the faith and in the community of the saints. We are losing too many people through our indifference, and through the coldness of our churches. This ought to stop. We not only ought to gain members, but we ought to retain them by the grace of God.

But here is good news! In the second quarter of 1996, we passed the nine million mark in Church membership. As of June 30, 1996, Church membership stood at 9,055,495, with a year-to-date baptism and profession of faith total of 363,185. So, brothers and sisters, we now have over nine million fellow believers in our world Church for which we say, "Thank God!" We congratulate all of you, presidents, departmental directors, pastors, evangelists, and lay people who, in a concerted effort, have shared the good news with others so that our church can have the satisfaction of seeing souls won to Jesus Christ.

In the agenda book you will find the statistics to which I now refer regarding interdivision employees and appointees.

As of September 1, 1996, the total of current calls for interdivision employees for the world field is 168, and the total of volunteer calls is 666.

In 1995 there was a total of 824 departures for interdivision service around the world. Of these, 376 were new and 448 were returning. (You can look at the numbers for each of the divisions and see where these went, or where they are serving.) This figure includes intradivision employees also, except in the case of the North American Division. Intradivision employees include those sent from areas like the South Pacific Division, where employees are sent from the mainland to the island fields.

Take a look now at the Summary of Interdivision Personnel Departures. This includes both inter- and intradivision employees, as well as Adventist Youth Service, Adventist Volunteer Service, and nationals returning plus, of course, the appointees and furlougees. So this gives a grand total of 2,149.

Take a look at the Division Source for Interdivision Personnel. It tells us from which division personnel have come, or from which division they have gone to other divisions. Notice that from the North American Division have come 662 individuals, or 54.75% of the total number which is 1,209.

The second largest number, 129, went from the Asia-Pacific Division to other divisions. The third largest number, 111, went from the South American Division to other divisions. It is a growing picture of interest in going from everywhere to everywhere, and I am glad to see the figures growing. Quite a few of the divisions have now become home bases, sending missionaries out to all parts of the world.

Let us look at the current interdivision employees from divisions other than North America. You will note that, as of December 31, 1995, there were 546 interdivision

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employees working within those divisions listed who had come from divisions outside of North America.

### The Center for Volunteerism

We have just established the Center for Volunteerism which will be operating under the leadership of D Ronald Watts. We expect to have hundreds, and eventually thousands, of young people who will volunteer to engage in front-line, soul-winning activities, planting the gospel in areas still unreached. I believe there are thousands of people who will be willing to take on the challenge of sharing Jesus Christ with people who do not know Him. Support for them will come from their families and from their churches, as they respond to calls for volunteer service in all parts of the world. These will not be paid employees, but they will be men and women, young and old, who hear the call of God and are willing to invest in the challenge of sharing their faith. You will be hearing more about this in the weeks and months to come, and I believe that an army of our members will respond. These are thrilling, challenging times to which we have come.

God has blessed us mightily in our soul-winning outreach for Him, but there are millions, yea billions, on earth who still need to hear the message of the Third Angel. In the 10-40 window of our mission enterprise, it will take the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon His people, because the work there cannot be finished by ordinary means. These are tremendous times, and we need extraordinary power from God to accompany us as we go out to witness for Him. We must pray for God's Spirit to be upon each one of us in our witness and our outreach. As Seventh-day Adventists, we can be optimistic. God has a thousand ways in which to finish His work of which we know nothing. When we, as human beings, sit down to discuss the unfinished task, it baffles us as to how it will end. But we know that this is not a challenge or an unsolvable mystery for God, for Christ our leader goes before us and His message is still the same. The marching order He gave His Church is still, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel, . . . and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."—Matt 28:19, 10

The everlasting gospel that we preach is not going to disappear on the rocks of oblivion, but be finished by a massive display of heavenly power and glory. The work of the gospel will come to a great climactic end. So let us continue to plan big and set big goals, knowing that it cannot be done in our own power. "It is not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord." What a joy to know that He has made Himself surety for the success of His own work. You and I are called upon to cooperate with Him. So the future for the Advent Message is as bright as the promises of God. Let us **KEEP GOING ON, KEEP LOOKING UP—GOING FORWARD IN FAITH, for VICTORY WILL BE ATTAINED THROUGH CHRIST.**

96AC to GRT

## STATISTICAL REPORT

R William Cash, Director of the Office of Archives and Statistics, presented the statistical report. A slide show illustrated the growth and distribution of church membership. Through God's blessing, there has been an exponential growth in church membership, so there are now more than nine million members worldwide. Every division has experienced growth, and there has been an increase in per capita giving.

PRE/96AC to RSF

## *TOTAL COMMITMENT TO GOD* DOCUMENT

Robert S Folkenberg introduced the document *Total Commitment to God*. Because the document has not yet been translated into other languages, the Chairman requested the Secretary to read the document so it could be verbally translated for the committee members. The continued reading of the document and any subsequent action will take place in the afternoon session.

Adjourned.

Calvin B Rock, Chairman  
D Ronald Watts, Secretary  
Mario Veloso, Editorial Secretary  
Carol E Rasmussen, Recording Secretary

ANNUAL COUNCIL  
GENERAL CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

San Jose, Costa Rica

October 4, 1996, 2:30 p.m.

Ulrich Frikart, President of the Euro-Asia Division, offered the opening prayer for the business session.

Calvin B Rock called the third business session of the 1996 Annual Council to order.

96AC to RSF

*ADVENTIST REVIEW*—WORLD EDITION

The *Adventist Review* staff has been working with the world divisions to prepare a monthly world edition of the *Adventist Review*. This will be available on the second Sabbath of each month, in full color, and in five languages (English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, and German). The divisions will be encouraged to provide the *Adventist Review* with their most important news features to share with the world field. The completed magazine will be shipped to the divisions, and each division will then decide how many copies to print for its readership and how to distribute the copies. Beginning in November, 1996, it will be possible to access the *Adventist Review* in full color on CompuServe.

William G Johnsson, editor of the *Adventist Review*, presented the committee members with the October world edition.

PRE/ADCOM/GCDO96AC/96AC to RSF

199-96Ga "TOTAL COMMITMENT TO GOD" DOCUMENT

Robert S Folkenberg presented the document entitled "Total Commitment to God" and explained the philosophy behind it. After a thorough discussion, it was

VOTED, To approve the wording of the "Total Commitment to God" document, with the understanding that further attention to the document will be given during the ensuing year, as follows:

## *Total Commitment to God*

### *A Declaration of Spiritual Accountability in the Family of Faith*

The history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is filled with examples of individuals and institutions who have been, and are, vibrant witnesses to their faith. Because of their passionate commitment to their Lord and appreciation of His unbounded love, they all have the same goal: to share the Good News with others. One key Bible text has motivated them. It is a text that fires the souls of Seventh-day Adventists everywhere. It is what is called the Gospel Commission, the mandate from the Lord Himself, as recorded in Matthew 28:19,20, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." The New International Version says: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...."

This mandate, from the Lord Himself, is simple, beautiful, and binding. It is for every follower, whether member, pastor, or administrator—**Go ... teach ... baptize ... make disciples**. This principle ignites the mission of the Church and sets the standard for any measuring, any assessment, of success. It touches all, whatever their responsibility, whether they are laypersons or church employees. It spans all the elements of church life, from the local church to the General Conference, in schools and colleges, publishing houses, health-care institutions, and health food organizations. The promise is encapsulated in the baptismal vows, in mission statements, in aims and objectives, in policies, and in constitutions and bylaws "to witness to His loving salvation," "to facilitate the proclamation of the everlasting gospel," "to supply the multitudes with the bread of life," and "to nurture them in preparation for His soon return." The four-fold command to **go ... teach ... baptize ... make disciples** sounds wherever Seventh-day Adventists work or come together.

As the Church has grown in size and complexity, more and more members, pastors, and administrators have asked serious questions about how the Church relates to the Gospel Commission. Do the wheels and the gears of the Church just turn out above average products and services that cannot be readily distinguished from their secular counterparts? Or does the Church make sure its basic products and services reveal to the world the way to eternal life? Nothing should be excluded from these questions, whether it be church worship services or organizational or institutional programs and products.

The time has come for the Church as a whole to ask and answer the hard questions about how the Church is relating to the guiding principle of the Gospel Commission. How can the guiding principle be actualized in the lives of members, pastors and congregations? How can they

measure their progress in fulfilling the Gospel Commission? How can the Church's universities, colleges and academies, health-food factories, high-tech health-care institutions, clinics, publishing houses, and media centers develop accountability based on the Gospel Commission?

This challenge calls for a frank and analytical approach in determining where the Church is in relationship to the Lord's command. It is not enough to measure success by secular standards, not enough to give those standards priority. Total commitment to God involves, primarily, total acceptance of the principles of Christianity as outlined in the Bible and as supported by the Spirit of Prophecy. Congregations, institutions, individual church employees and church members can easily find satisfaction in goals reached, funds raised, buildings completed, budgets balanced, accreditation achieved or renewed, and yet fail to be accountable before God to the Gospel Commission. The first and continuing priority for the Church must be this directive from the Lord: **Go ... teach ... baptize ... make disciples**.

While the Gospel Commission does not change, its fulfillment is demonstrated in different ways. A pastor works within a different context than that of a classroom teacher, a physician, or an institutional administrator. Whatever the personal or institutional role, each one is accountable to God's command. Among the great benefits resulting from an assessment of their effectiveness will be the increasing trust that develops as each member, each pastor, each administrator, and each church institution addresses this priority and gives it proper attention.

The family of God acknowledges that each person is individually accountable to God. At the same time, believers are admonished to examine themselves (see 2 Corinthians 13:5). A spiritual assessment process has its place in the personal life. Just as surely it has its place in organizational life.

Spiritual assessment, while appropriate, is also a very delicate matter. For humankind sees only in part. The earthly frame of reference is always limited to that which is visible and to a brief span of time surrounding the present. Nevertheless, there is much to be gained from careful and thoughtful evaluation of personal and organizational life.

It is possible to identify several principles which can guide such an assessment. While any attempt will be incomplete, the following areas of specific assessment will heighten awareness of and accountability to God and to the mission which is an integral part of the Christian's relationship and commitment to Him. The list is not



comprehensive of those identified for attention, but the principles outlined here are applicable also to other individuals, organizations, and institutions.

#### **What "Total Commitment to God" involves for each church member.**

Each Seventh-day Adventist, whether denominational employee or layperson, is promised the gift of the Holy Spirit which will enable spiritual growth in the grace of the Lord and which will empower the development and use of spiritual gifts in witness and service. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is demonstrated by ...

- maintaining, where possible, a Christian home where the standards and principles of Christ are both taught and exemplified,
- experiencing a life that rejoices in the assurance of salvation, is moved by the Holy Spirit to effective personal witness to others, and which experiences in Christ a gracious character that is consistent with God's will as revealed in His Word,
- using the spiritual gifts God has promised each one,
- dedicating time, spiritual gifts, and resources, prayerfully and systematically, in Gospel proclamation and, individually as well as part of a church family, becoming the Lord's salt and light through sharing His love in family life and community service, always motivated by the sense of the soon return of the Lord and His command to preach His Gospel both at home and afar, and
- participating in a plan for systematic spiritual growth and assessment of one's personal walk with God by forming mutually accountable spiritual partnerships where the primary objective is to prayerfully mentor one another.

#### **What "Total Commitment to God" involves for a church pastor.**

A Seventh-day Adventist pastor, called and empowered by the Holy Spirit, driven by love for souls, points sinners to Christ as Creator and Redeemer, and teaches them how to share their faith and become effective disciples. He or she regularly shares a balanced spiritual diet fresh from communion with God and His Word. The pastor shows the saving grace and transforming power of the gospel by ...

- striving to make his or her family a model of what the Lord expects in marriage and families,
- preaching Bible-based, Christ-centered sermons that nurture the members and support the world Church, and teaching the fundamental beliefs with a sense of urgency rooted in the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of prophecy,
- appealing for all to submit to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit so that the Gospel may be validated in the compassionate life of the faith-directed believer,

- leading the local congregation in a strong evangelistic outreach that both increases membership and establishes new congregations, while maintaining strong support for the local and worldwide work of the Church,
- evidencing effectiveness in ministry as the family of God increases numerically and grows in spiritual experience and worship, thus hastening the return of the Lord, and
- affirming the prioritization of personal spiritual growth and mission effectiveness by regularly participating in a spiritual outcome assessment process. The division will facilitate the development of an assessment model, to be implemented by each union/local conference, which includes a self-assessment module as well as elements addressing the pastor's responsibility to the congregation(s) and the world Church organization.

#### **What "Total Commitment to God" involves for a congregation.**

A Seventh-day Adventist congregation creatively and self-critically functions as a witnessing and nurturing community, facilitating Gospel proclamation, both locally, regionally, and globally. It lives in the world as "the body of Christ" showing the same concern and positive action for those which it touches as the Lord did in His earthly ministry by ...

- demonstrating an abiding assurance in the saving grace of Christ and a commitment to the distinctive teachings of the Word,
- understanding and accepting its role as part of an end-time movement with a local, regional, and global responsibility for the spreading of the Gospel,
- developing strategic plans for sharing the Good News in its community, with the goal of ensuring that all persons understand how Jesus can change their lives and preparing them for His soon coming, and by helping establish new congregations,
- nurturing the lives of members and their families so that they will grow spiritually and will continue confidently in the mission and truths expressed through God's last-day Church,
- acknowledging the privileges of being a Seventh-day Adventist congregation and the concurrent accountability to the world family of Seventh-day Adventist congregations, as outlined in the *Church Manual*, by accepting and implementing broad plans that empower the spread of the Gospel in wider contexts, and by participating in the organizational, financial, and representative system designed to facilitate a global outreach, and
- participating in an assessment plan that leads the congregation to awareness of its strengths and

weaknesses and the progress it has made in its mission to teach, baptize, and make disciples. The assessment plan will normally be a self-assessment program conducted annually by the entire congregation meeting as a group; but, periodically, it should include an assessment of the congregation's participation in, and responsibility to, the broader organization. Each division will facilitate the development of the assessment process, in association with the unions and local conferences/missions, that will be used within its territory.

#### **What "Total Commitment to God" involves for the elementary schools and academies.**

A Seventh-day Adventist elementary school/academy creates a climate that nurtures the student spiritually, mentally, physically, and socially, and instills confidence in the relevance, role, message, and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The schools provide excellence in Adventist education by ...

- developing, for the institution, a comprehensive spiritual master plan and curricula for all subjects that, in addition to academic excellence, support the Seventh-day Adventist world view and integrate faith with learning,
- employing fully committed, professionally competent Seventh-day Adventist teachers, who are actively involved in their local church, and who integrate faith and learning as they nurture their students in being good members and citizens of both church and society,
- working with parents and local congregations to ensure that each student is presented with the claims of Christ and is given opportunity to decide for Him and be baptized,
- transmitting to students an understanding of the biblical role of the last-day people of God and how they can participate in fulfilling the mission of the Church.
- involving staff and students in outreach initiatives in ways appropriate to student age and planning community opportunities for witness, and
- participating systematically in a division-developed, and a union- and conference-implemented, spiritual assessment process which provides annual reports to the school board and its various constituencies.

#### **What "Total Commitment to God" involves for the colleges and universities.**

A Seventh-day Adventist college/university offers academically sound, tertiary and/or post-graduate education to Seventh-day Adventists and to students of nearby communities, who welcome the opportunity to study in an Adventist environment, by ...

- developing a comprehensive spiritual master plan, proposed by the faculty and approved by the board, that identifies the spiritual truths and values, both cognitive and relational, which the institution is committed to share with its students and to comprehensively identify the opportunities through which those values will be communicated during a given period of time in campus life,
- maintaining a classroom and overall campus environment which ensures opportunities for both academic instruction and Gospel encounters that produce graduates who are recognized by both the Church and society for their excellence in both the academic and spiritual aspects of their lives; men and women who are well-balanced spiritually, mentally, physically, and socially; men and women who love their Lord, who hold high His standards in their daily lives, who will help build strong, thriving local congregations, and who will be salt and light to their communities both as laypersons and as church employees,
- affirming unambiguously in classroom and campus life the beliefs, practices, and world view of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, sharing the joy of the Gospel, demonstrating confidence in the divinely established role of the Advent movement and its continuing significance in God's plan for these last days, facilitating activities for faculty, staff, and students to engage in Gospel witness and Christian service, and encouraging the faculty and staff to a consistency of life-style which is manifested in nurturing, compassionate faculty/staff relationships with students.
- employing fully committed, professionally competent Seventh-day Adventist teachers, who are actively involved in their local church, and who integrate faith and learning in the context of nurturing their students to be productive members of both society and of the Lord's Church, and who interact with parents and other constituents in order to understand and to fulfil their high academic and spiritual expectations for educational programs serving the youth,
- evaluating the achievement of the objectives outlined in the spiritual master plan by a faculty-developed, board-approved, comprehensive assessment program, designed with sufficient specificity to evaluate each element of campus life, to guide the college/university administration in taking affirming or corrective measures, and to serve as the basis for annual reports of the spiritual health of the institution to the governing board and various constituencies, and
- submitting the proposed spiritual master plan and assessment program to a General Conference-

appointed, international panel of highly qualified educators who will provide the college/university board with a written evaluation of the spiritual master plan and the assessment program.

**What "Total Commitment to God" involves for the hospitals and health care institutions.**

A Seventh-day Adventist hospital/health care institution provides the highest quality, whole-person, health care to the community it serves by developing a comprehensive spiritual assessment plan that includes ...

- creating a well-planned, positive atmosphere that focuses on the healing presence of the Lord,
- developing a professionally competent, mission-oriented, and compassionate staff who sensitively minister to patients from the context of their Christian faith as well as distinctive Seventh-day Adventist beliefs,
- ensuring that all those within the institution's sphere of influence are aware that the health care facility is affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church by developing staff-orientation and community-witnessing programs that portray positively both the hospital and the Church to those it serves,
- sensitively stimulating spiritual inquiry and responding to it systematically,
- allocating such financial and personnel resources as may be possible to the local, regional, and global soul-winning, educational, and/or health care mission of the Church, and
- demonstrating accountability for fulfillment of mission through participation, at least triennially, in a comprehensive evaluation process developed, planned, and overseen by the respective division executive committee to assess progress toward achieving specific, measurable, mission outcomes.

**What "Total Commitment to God" involves for the institutions of mass communication: publishing houses, media centers, Adventist Book Centers, and radio stations.**

A Seventh-day Adventist institution of mass communication provides quality productions that enhance the mission of the Church and the commitment of its members to mission by ...

- encouraging initiatives and the distribution only of that which contributes to Gospel proclamation and the nurturing of church members within the context of the last-day message,
- planning or supporting evangelistic activities which may lead to personal contact and involving the local congregation, wherever possible,
- using technology and media in a way that is sensitive to available funds, so that resources are maximized for

the mission of the Church,

- coordinating initiatives with other church entities to ensure interaction with and support of related programs and projects,
- providing such staff as may be possible or appropriate to assist pastors and congregations in the follow-up of those responding to outreach initiatives, and operating a feedback system for product development or modification, and
- establishing, under direction of governing bodies, systems for periodic review of materials and programs, both for members and for the general public, thus providing management and governing bodies with an analysis of effectiveness in meeting mission goals, ensuring concurrence with Seventh-day Adventist beliefs and practices, and preparing reports for presentation to each regular meeting of the constituency and annually to the board.

**What "Total Commitment to God" involves for the food industries.**

A Seventh-day Adventist food industry develops products that contribute positively to health, and provides a resource to assist the giving of the Gospel in these last days by ...

- manufacturing and selling only those products which are consistent with the divine principles of diet and health,
- training personnel to inform the public on sound health practices and assisting the Church in developing increasingly better health among the members,
- providing low cost vegetarian food to the world's developing countries,
- implementing programs under which those influenced by the health message may receive further information about the Church,
- budgeting financial assistance for the mission of the Church on a basis established by the division executive committee, and
- periodically evaluating performance in terms of efficiency, return on investment, and contribution to the mission of the Church, based on a system administered by the board and established by the division committee, in consultation with the International Health Food Association.

**What "Total Commitment to God" involves for a Conference/Mission, or Union.**

A Seventh-day Adventist conference/mission or union, with leadership that has a personal relationship with Jesus and is submitted to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, motivates members, pastors, teachers, and all other denominational employees to present to their neighbors and communities the saving truth as it is in these last days,

and oversees and prioritizes its plans, initiatives, and finances to give first place to continuous soul-winning and nurturing ministries by ...

- identifying and promoting the spiritual objectives, both evangelistic and nurturing, of the conference/mission or union and, through a strategic planning and financing process, involving the collective participation of its membership and organizations,
- showing, through the personal example of leadership, that the Church is continuing, without wavering, its divinely appointed role as a witness to this dying and needy world,
- nurturing and supporting pastors, members, and congregations so that they may grow as disciples and experience ways of fulfilling the Gospel Commission,
- exercising administrative leadership in institutions and entities under its direction to ensure that the mission of the Church is kept clearly in focus, and developing and implementing initiatives to establish new congregations in communities and areas where needed,
- assuring that budgetary provisions for local, national, and global evangelistic endeavors are carefully balanced against the resources allocated to the nurture of the believers, and that both are demonstrated to be of the highest priority, and
- cooperating with the division in developing and implementing assessment processes, which may be evaluated by a committee designated by the General Conference, by which members, pastors, congregations, institutions, and the conference/mission or union itself may ascertain their commitment to and effectiveness in carrying out the Gospel Commission and reporting their findings to the respective constituencies.

#### **What "Total Commitment to God" involves for the General Conference/Divisions.**

The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and its divisions, with leadership that has a personal relationship with Jesus and is submitted to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, provide overall global direction to the spiritual life and mission of the Church, develop strategic plans and policies, generate initiatives and programs, and allocate financial and human resources in ways that demonstrate urgency in completing the mission of the Church and subordination to the command to **Go ... teach ... baptize ... make disciples** by ...

- giving priority at Annual Councils and Spring Meetings of the General Conference and division executive committees to the nurture of the spiritual life of a growing Church with a clear mission to carry the eternal gospel, in the time of the end setting of the

Three Angels' Messages, to all the world,

- appointing small committees with international representation as may be necessary to evaluate and make recommendations to appropriate boards or executive committees concerning assessment programs being developed,
- ensuring that administrations and boards of institutions and agencies under their direction establish spiritual accountability processes that give evidence of their commitment to the last-day mission of the Church, and demonstrate their effectiveness in accomplishing it,
- requiring that initiatives and activities of limited focus, while having some merit of their own, are, in fact, subordinated to the broader, coordinated mission goals of the Church, and governing the disbursement of budgets to promote the promulgation of the Gospel to all the world,
- ensuring the mission of the Church is clearly understood and implemented through assessment processes that review progress in meeting mission objectives involving both nurture of members and evangelistic outreach, and
- developing a spiritual master plan and assessment program, to be monitored by a committee appointed at each level by the General Conference/Division Executive Committee, for the purpose of evaluating the effectiveness of the General Conference/Division in terms of the mission of the Church and assisting all levels of church organization and all institutions to assess the effectiveness of their spiritual master plans and assessment programs.

Truly, the spiritual mandate is simple. **Go ... teach ... baptize ... make disciples.** Responsible Seventh-day Adventist Church members and all church employees must remember that each one will be held accountable before God for this principle. Someday, at the great judgment bar, the Lord will ask, "What have you done, relying on My grace, with the gifts, talents, and opportunities I gave you?"

As He did 2,000 years ago, the Lord commands His Church today: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." **Go ... teach ... baptize ... make disciples.** Total commitment to God mandates the fulfillment of this commission, which is still the only and true measure of success.

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October 4, 1996, p.m.  
GCC Annual Council

Adjourned.

Calvin B Rock, Chairman  
Maurice T Battle, Secretary  
Lowell C Cooper, Editorial Secretary  
Rowena J Moore, Recording Secretary