

# Ministry

International Journal for Clergy

October 1993

ADVENTISTS  
AND  
CHANGE:  
The Dynamic  
Nature  
of Present  
Truth



## Spirit-filled marketing

The article "Spirit-filled Marketing," by Kermit Netteburg and George Powell (February 1993), contains some excellent material but misses the mark entirely concerning the archaeological approach, possibly because the authors are relying more on hearsay than actual evidence. May I, as one mentioned in the article, be permitted to make some observations concerning the archaeological approach, which I consider is the finest and most successful tool available in the church today?

John Coltheart developed the archaeological approach in a professional way during the 1960s. His innovative and creative methods attracted vast crowds of middle- to upper-class citizens in Australia and New Zealand. Later he drew large crowds throughout Europe, and silenced the skeptics both inside and outside the church. Consistent and abundant fruitage was always characteristic of his evangelistic methods.

The archaeological method was further developed by successful evangelists like Pastors Burnside, Ratcliffe, Cherry, and Cook, all from the South Pacific Division. While this method made a huge impact around the world, it has never been accepted by many church leaders in North America, who have continued to foster more traditional and dated approaches. The archaeological method does work, however, in North America when it is professionally used.

The *Ministry* article says that I attracted "more than 2,000" to my Los Angeles crusade, using archaeology. While it is true that "more than 2,000" attended (23,500, to be exact, for the opening meeting), the follow-up meetings of the campaign were packed with interested upper-class Californians. More than 3,000 precious souls made decisions (recorded on cards) for Jesus and the three angels' messages. All this took place at the Shrine Auditorium in downtown Los Angeles, in an area infamous for crime and jammed freeways. Handbills and 30-second TV commercials resulted in 100,000 telephone reservations in just 10 days.

Tragically, for reasons that would be inappropriate to reveal here, there was virtually no follow-up of the 3,000 souls who had made decisions for Jesus and His message. It is incorrect to condemn the archaeological approach when the real problem may be our own spiritual and professional inabilities as a church to reap the harvest.—John J. Carter, Newbury Park, California.

## The pastor is a trainer

I really appreciated reading Miguel Angel Cerna's editorial "The Pastor Is a Trainer" (April 1993). I agree wholeheartedly with his concept of the real work of the pastor. My only question is What would the conference administration say if I sent my monthly report showing that no sermons were preached, no Bible studies were given, and no visits were made during the month? What would the congregation say if I announced that as of this week I would no longer be preaching, giving Bible studies, and making visits to their homes? Maybe one way to know what would happen is to try it.—John Beausoleil, Thunder Bay, Ontario.

■ I was thrilled to see Cerna's editorial. At last, this concept is making some modest inroads into the Adventist ministry. Pastor Cerna could not be more correct than when he lays blame for the mathematics of ministerial work at the feet of a system that encourages "heroic" pastors rather than working congregations. The net effect of these high production expectations from the pastorate is a company of pastors who are "codependent." That is, they contribute to the inactivity of their churches because they believe they must control everything that goes on in the church.

It is my conviction that pastors do this out of honest motives—they really believe that this is what they are to do. Meanwhile, the members become increasingly unhappy with the pastors and with themselves and nobody can figure out why the church is dying. The typical talk of "unity" in such a church is their way of covering up a dysfunctional situation in which the

pastor has become the "addict" and the members his/her addiction facilitators.

In the church, as in families, there is church growth (both in quantity and quality—and these are equally important) only where there is honest conflict. Differences of opinion are a sign that people are in real contact one with the other. Pastors need to be taught to let go of control and acquire a pedagogical role that will enable members and make them independent as well as interdependent rather than just "dependent" on a fatherly/motherly figure.—Lourdes E. Morales Gudmundsson, North Haven, Connecticut.

## Lifting the cross, corporate repentance, etc.

In your editorial on corporate repentance (February 1993), you state: "We must be careful that we do not get bogged down over the details of the message that Jones and Waggoner preached." I can speak only for myself and from my own study. Despite all the work God still has to do in my life, the only gospel that has been strong enough and that uplifted Christ enough to keep me in the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been the gospel contained in the 1888 message.

Along with many of my friends I was about done with Adventism, in order to pursue my own agenda in life, when I began to study the 1888 message of righteousness by faith. That opened my eyes to the beauty of Christ's character as nothing else did in my 20 years in Adventist churches and schools. There's a hymn that says "Two wonders I confess: the wonders of redeeming love and my unworthiness." This has been brought home to me more and more as I've studied the 1888 message and have more clearly seen my own spiritual need. As I look at my own life, and also the lives of my fellow students and friends, I sense a spiritual bankruptcy that saddens me. I am sure that you are not unaware of the spiritual condition on our campuses, and I know that it is a concern to you as it is to many. While

*(Continued on page 29)*

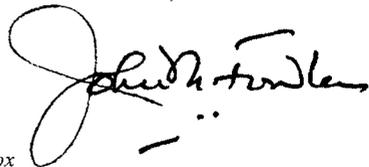
**Time has a way of** adding descriptive labels to once easily understood and accepted concepts and beliefs. Adventism, as a shortened form of expressing the joy and privilege of belonging to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, has gained a wide spectrum of modifiers during its course of 150 years. So we have historic Adventism, conservative Adventism, liberal Adventism, cultural Adventism, structural Adventism, global Adventism, institutional Adventism, and so on. To which one do you belong?

**Adventism is dynamic**, argues George Knight as he draws upon the development of early Adventist theology to stress the point that change is not necessarily detrimental to truth. Knight's article "Adventist Beliefs and Change" (p. 10) is not only intellectually stimulating but also theologically challenging in that it asks Adventists today to reflect only the pioneers' claim that "the Bible is our only creed." No more, no less.

**What is historic Adventism?** Woodrow Whidden examines the issue in the light of some who claim exclusive monopoly in being faithful to historic roots of Adventism. Whidden's refreshing study (p. 5) calls for a spiritual maturity that would distinguish between the essential and the peripheral.

**While these two articles** deal with the nature of Adventism, Mark Finley's approach to the secular mind (p. 16) keeps the Adventist focus where it belongs: the saving power of the gospel.

**In the final analysis**, Adventism is belonging to Jesus, who was, who is, and who is to come. Even so, come Lord Jesus.



Cover illustration by Gregory Fox

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# Rejoicing despite apostasy

Martin Weber

**A**postasy lurks within the church. Trusted spiritual leadership is betraying the faith. Others are playing political power games. Some want to sleep when they should pray.

Confronted with that time of trouble such as never was, what was Christ's reaction en route to Gethsemane? "His voice was heard, not in the strains of some mournful lament, but in the joyful notes of the Passover Hallel: 'O praise the Lord, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people. For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the Lord endureth for ever. Praise ye the Lord' (Ps. 117, KJV)."<sup>1</sup>

I'm wondering whether we can learn from the example of Jesus about praising God in joyful worship during times of trouble. Yes, the Adventist Church has its problems. Though millions of members remain faithful, liberalism and legalism have made inroads. Many live in lukewarm Laodicea. Political games are played. In such a time as this, what should be the spirit of our worship? Notice what Jesus said shortly before going into the garden of Gethsemane: "In the world you will have tribulation [worldliness, apostasy, heresy, persecution]; but *be of good cheer, I have overcome the world*" (John 16:33).\*

Let me quickly clarify that we ought to be concerned—and we must speak out—about doctrinal compromise and any lowering of lifestyle standards. We should also confront racism, gossip, intolerance, and any other sin that destroys

the loving unity through which Christ will someday reveal Himself to the world. Meanwhile, though we "sigh and cry" (Eze. 9:4) about these abominations, must we let them suffocate our joy in the Lord? No, our witness for Christ should not become primarily an angry testimony against sin. To my own shame, I confess it has taken me a long time to learn this lesson. Now I rejoice that where sin abounds, grace *much more* abounds (see Rom. 5:20).

Our church has its shortcomings, being comprised of imperfect people like me and like you. But God still reigns on His sovereign throne. Christ has won the victory! So let us rejoice in the Lord. When we get together for worship, let us glory in the God of our salvation! Not just during Sabbath services, but all week long we should be praising Him: "From the rising of the sun to its going down the Lord's name is to be praised" (Ps. 113:3). So we can put down that dismal, critical gossip sheet. We also can turn off that meaningless sportscast. Instead, let's turn up the stereo with some praise music. Some songs express quiet admiration, while others have a heartbeat of joyous exultation. The Bible says: "Oh, clap your hands, all you peoples! Shout to God with the voice of triumph!" (Ps. 47:1).

How much of that rejoicing goes on in your heart, your home, your church? Of course, anything good can go to extremes. Fire needed in a furnace can destroy the house unless it's contained. So with worship; it must stay within the bounds of order, but let it also be kindled with praise to God.

## The day of atonement

I confess that I used to be reluctant to really, truly, praise the Lord. I reasoned, *There is a judgment going on in this anti-typical day of atonement. How dare we delight in the Lord in such a time as this?* I pictured myself among the old covenant worshippers as they waited in silence while their high priest ventured into the Holy of Holies. I respected God's law, as we all must, but I failed to rejoice that "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

Then the light of the gospel dawned on me. Under the new covenant, God does not keep us waiting outside the sanctuary. Through Christ He has brought us within the veil, which was torn open at the cross. Now, with the mystery of the gospel fully revealed, we worship joyfully at the throne of grace. In former times, at any moment the Levitical priest could be struck dead, so the faithful had to listen quietly for the pomegranate bells. But our Priest is the living Saviour who triumphed over sin, death, and hell! And something wonderful is happening in heaven since the 1844 pre-Advent judgment began. As the enemy raises accusations against us, we triumph over them through the blood of the Lamb and our joyful testimony (see Rev. 12:11).

Are your members still listening for the pomegranate bells? Does your music reflect medieval uncertainty masked under the guise of reverence? Then lead your people out of the shadows to bask in the sunshine of the cross. Boldly take them into heaven's Most Holy Place so they can rejoice at the celestial mercy  
*(Continued on page 23)*

# Essential Adventism or historic Adventism?

Woodrow Whidden

**Not everything historic is essential. A plea for theological understanding and clarity.**



Woodrow Whidden, Ph.D., is associate professor of religion, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

**I**n recent years, certain individuals and groups who have reacted strongly to issues facing the Seventh-day Adventist Church have used the term *historic Adventism* to identify their particular understanding of those issues. They imply that their interpretation is the “orthodox” and “traditional” brand of Adventism.<sup>1</sup> The issues in question include the atonement, the humanity of Christ,<sup>2</sup> the emphasis on justification by faith, 1888 and its meaning, the Desmond Ford crisis and threats to the sanctuary doctrine, Walter Rea and challenges to the authority and integrity of Ellen White, worship styles, and Adventist lifestyle concerns.

The term *historic Adventism* has become so loaded and pejorative that we need new terms and a more inclusive theological framework and atmosphere if we are to find some resolution to the present divisive impasse. I would urge that such expressions as *historic Adventist*, *traditional Adventism*, and *new theology*<sup>3</sup> be laid aside as divisive buzzwords and needless red flags that bring neither constructive doctrinal resolution nor accurate historical insight. I would suggest instead the following terms: *Christian verities*, or *eternal verities* for basic doctrines embraced by Adventists and held by most other Christians,<sup>4</sup> *essential Adventism* for that which is distinctively Adventist, *processive Adventism* for those issues that are important but still unsettled, and *nonessential Adventism*<sup>5</sup> for that which is interesting but not central to Adventist self-understanding.

In addition to divisive and polemical

connotations, there are some “historical” reasons why the term *historical Adventism* is of questionable value in Adventist theological discussion.

One need not go very far back into Adventist history before discovering numerous theological wrecks lying on the Adventist doctrinal highway. They certainly qualify as “historic,” but they have not stood the test of time and theological scrutiny.<sup>6</sup> The semi-Arianism of many of our prominent pioneers<sup>7</sup> is one good example. I have not met an Arian Adventist in my lifetime! Yet Arianism is part of Adventist history and could qualify historically as “historic Adventism”! The same could be said of early understandings of when Sabbath should begin, “systematic benevolence,” the personhood of the Holy Spirit, and the “shut door.”

Such issues as the human nature of Christ, the interpretation of 1888, and the meaning of Christian perfection have always had differing interpretations in the Adventist doctrinal tradition. It is becoming clearer to this writer, a self-confessed former “post-Fall perfectionist,” that with advancing research the so-called historic Adventists have no monopoly on any orthodox understanding of these issues.

Take the issue of Christ’s human nature. While Ralph Larson has demonstrated that there was a rather strong consensus on a post-Fall view until the middle 1950s,<sup>8</sup> George Knight has shown that there was provocative opposition to the post-Fall view of A. T. Jones in the mid-1890s.<sup>9</sup>

I would also submit that the interpretation that holds that the key emphases generated by the 1888 crisis were the

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## Theological essentials consist of doctrines and practices that a tradition just could not do without and still retain its peculiar identity.

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post-Fall view of Christ's humanity and the issue of perfection is becoming more suspect with advancing research.<sup>10</sup> While it is true that Jones and Waggoner were strong proponents of the post-Fall view of Christ's humanity and perfection, one searches the 1888 comments of Ellen White in vain for statements that emphasize the humanity of Christ and perfection as major Minneapolis issues.<sup>11</sup> To the contrary, 1888 represented a theological crisis and was, in the thinking of Ellen White, *primarily* a crisis brought on by a misunderstanding of justification by faith and a lack of charity in theological discourse.

### Why an inclusive approach?

As mentioned earlier, I am proposing the term *essential Adventism*<sup>12</sup> as a more inclusive, workable term in seeking to resolve what we mean by *distinctive Adventism*. I am suggesting that the term *essential* would include doctrines and issues that have (1) achieved wide consensus and (2) given Adventism its distinctive theological and practical flavor, as opposed to what I would call processive issues.

Why opt for a more inclusive approach? Consider two historical precedents and some of the implications they suggest:

1. *Adventism has always taken a rather dim view of creeds*, and it seems that the persons who use such expressions as *historic Adventism* would very much like to see Adventism go a strongly creedal route—the implication being that if you don't see it our way, you are just not a sound Adventist and are opening up a way to compromise, sin, and apostasy. Such an attitude does not seem to fit the anticreedal, broader Adventist theological framework.

2. *Adventism has always lived with a tension between the "pillars" of "present truth" and "new light."* There is an essential conservatism in Adventist theological formation that has always pulled back when "new light" has been proposed, but there has also been a clear understanding that "we have many lessons to learn, and many, many to unlearn."<sup>13</sup>

So while we have things to conserve, we also have things to let go of and new things to pick up on. If we get too tight and too specific, we may frustrate the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing forth fresh insights from the Word of God.

### The essential framework

What should be the Christian and essential framework of Adventist theological discourse?

First, the broadly Christian beliefs. Adventism is primarily Christian in the sense of affirming the great verities of the faith. We strongly affirm such doctrines as the full deity of Christ, the Trinity, the personhood of the Holy Spirit, the bodily resurrection of Christ, and the Lord's Supper.

In a more focused way, we are thoroughly Protestant in that we take biblical authority as the "court of last resort" in matters of faith and practice (as opposed to tradition, ecclesiastical authority, and even postbiblical prophets or "revelations") and emphasize justification by faith, not by works, as the basis of salvation.

Further, we have appropriated important strands from (1) Wesleyanism/Arminianism, especially in our form of church governance, God's respect for the integrity of human choice, and an emphasis on the importance of sanctification; (2) "restorationism" with its emphasis on seeking the primitive simplicity of the New Testament church, the building of "the old waste places," repairing "the breach," and restoring "paths to dwell in" (Isa. 58:12); and (3) the Baptist tradition with its emphasis on immersion baptism and religious freedom.

We are thus broadly in agreement with the basic orthodoxy of the Christian tradition and we are thoroughly Protestant. All of this is certainly essential to our Christian self-understanding. Adventism, however, has a more distinctive, essential cast that goes beyond these great Christian and Protestant verities.

Before we venture a suggestion as to what those distinctive essentials of Adventism might be, we should first ask, What constitutes the theological essentials of a given tradition? Theological essentials consist of doctrines and practices that a tradition just could not do without and still retain its peculiar identity. Such a tradition might share numerous theological commonalities with other traditions, but these distinctive essentials are what give it its special identity.

This distinctiveness is best illustrated by a brief comparison of Adventism with confessional Lutheranism.

Adventists want to affirm justification by faith and the "presence" of Jesus in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Adventism, however, has not been comfortable with the confessional Lutheran emphasis on "faith alone" that has tended to blur an emphasis on sanctification. Neither have we been comfortable with the liturgical, literalistic understanding of "presence" in the Lord's Supper; we have tended to see the elements as more symbolic, while affirming the spiritual efficacy of the ceremony. Yet it is this more rigorous understanding of justification and of the literal presence of Jesus in the Supper that gives Lutheranism its distinctiveness.<sup>14</sup>

What gives Adventism its special, distinctive flavor? What are those essentials that if one took them away would leave Adventism theologically emasculated? What are those doctrines that, taken together, have given us our theological identity?

I would suggest the following: the second coming of Jesus as literal, visible, cataclysmic, imminent, post-tribulational, and premillennial; the millennium as a distinct period coming between the Second Coming and the final executionary judgment of the wicked and the setting up of the everlasting kingdom on earth; the application of historicist, as opposed to preterist and futurist principles of prophetic interpretation (especially in the study of the books of Daniel and Revelation); the eternal and universal authority of the law of God; the seventh-day Sabbath as a moral requirement for New Testament Christians and the eschatological sign of trusting and obedient Christians in the last days; the sanctuary and pre-Advent judgment teaching, with its emphasis on Christ as our high priestly advocate, judge, justifier, and sanctifier; the un-

derstanding of human nature, especially as this interpretation points to the importance of physical health, the conditional nature of immortality, and the utter annihilation of the wicked; and the formative<sup>15</sup> theological influence of Ellen White as a messenger of God. These, I would suggest, are the distinctive essentials of Adventism.

Are we being too reductionistic in our enumeration of essential Adventism? I would contend that these are the truths that have stood the test of time. I would further suggest that Ellen White supported these listed essentials, and advocated a rather limited listing of the essentials.

In the crisis-laden atmosphere of 1888, facing the charge that the new emphasis on justification by faith would do away with the landmarks, Ellen White gave a rather terse definition of distinctive Adventism. Referring to "the cleansing of the sanctuary . . . in heaven," its "decided relation to God's people upon the earth," and the three angels' messages, she declared: "One of the landmarks under this message was the temple of God, seen by His truth-loving people in heaven, and the ark containing the law of God. The light of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment flashed its strong rays in the pathway of the transgressors of God's law. The nonimmortality of the wicked is an old landmark. I can call to mind nothing more that can come under the head of the old landmarks. All this cry about changing the old landmarks is all imaginary."<sup>16</sup>

I find Ellen White's position on landmarks instructive, particularly while she was facing charges that the emphasis on justification by faith was endangering the pillars and the landmarks. We would do well to remind ourselves that when we get into disagreements about righteousness by faith, we need to be cautious about questioning the Adventist credentials of those who might have a differing perspective.

Taken as a whole, these essentials have given Adventism a clearly identifiable theological cast that is uniquely our own. Some of these essentials we share with others, and some of them are quite uniquely our own, but taken together they make Seventh-day Adventism essentially Adventist!

Is it asking too much to agree that all who affirm these essentials are Adventist, despite differing perspectives on is-

ues related to righteousness by faith? Within such a framework, we have plenty of room to move and develop theologically without having to engage in greatly divisive doctrinal jousts.

### Processive issues

If one affirms the essentials, there ought to be room enough to discuss, even vigorously dialogue about, controverted processive issues.

For starters, let's take two such issues—the humanity of Christ and perfection. How should Adventists approach these? Before offering some questions about, and tentative solutions to, the issues of Christology and perfection, let us remind ourselves of some simple procedural methods suggested by Ellen White that should prove helpful in resolving theological disagreements.<sup>17</sup>

First, we need to cultivate a prayerful, humble, teachable spirit, and be willing to give up a cherished opinion, esteeming others better than oneself, and having a spirit of openness to God's unfolding light.

Second, we should listen carefully and charitably to what our partners in theological dialogue are saying.

Third, we should state any position clearly but humbly, seeking to give partners in dialogue every respect for their position.

And last, as partners in theological dialogue we should seek agreement on as many points as possible. Seek the common ground before moving into controverted quicksand.

What I am suggesting in the following paragraphs is a preliminary theological agenda for earnest dialogue aimed at reconciling some of the divisions within Adventism. It is not meant to be an exhaustive or final treatment of the issues addressed.

*Christology:* Essential Adventists of every hue should exalt the humanity of Jesus and His profound identity with fallen sinners. Those who call themselves historic Adventists are correct in giving this aspect of Christology an emphasis it so richly deserves. Both the Bible and Ellen White give this theme due attention, attention that has often been sadly lacking in the Christian tradition. We can heartily affirm that Jesus has an identity with His fallen children and has certainly experienced our infirmities.

In the zeal to emphasize His identity

## If one affirms the essentials, there ought to be room enough to discuss processive issues.

with us, however, has there not been a tendency to seek simplistic and dogmatic expressions of mysteries that have challenged Christian thinkers for 2,000 years? Has there not been a tendency to neglect the understanding that from birth Jesus had to be sinless in nature as well as actions if He is to be both a victorious helper and a fully sinless and effective substitute? Can Jesus really be our justifying substitute if He is just like us in nature? Could Jesus, who never sinned once, be exactly like us when we have engaged in all sorts of habitual sin? Does not repetitive sin deepen its hold on us to a greater extent than sin does over a person who has never once indulged?<sup>18</sup>

Could it be that the view of sin espoused by the post-Fall advocates is too superficial? Is not sin more than just bad actions and poor choices? Isn't it also the fruit of a profoundly deranged nature steeped in a "selfishness [that] is inwrought in our very being" and that has come to us as an inheritance?<sup>19</sup> If Jesus were just like us, are we prepared to declare that He was "naturally depraved," "born with inherent propensities of disobedience," expressions Ellen White applies to sinners but never to Jesus?<sup>20</sup> Again I ask, Could Jesus really be just like us in nature and still be our sinless substitute?

What of the epochal Baker letter? Are we really to believe that when Ellen White says that we are never to "leave the slightest impression upon human minds that a taint of, or inclination to, corruption rested upon Christ,"<sup>21</sup> she means only that He did not give in to temptation? What does she mean when she admonishes "every human being" to "be warned from the ground of making Christ altogether human, such an one as ourselves; for it cannot be"?<sup>22</sup> Has there not been a tendency to ignore, even twist, the obvious meaning of contrary evidence on Christ's nature from the

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## We should not needlessly take a course that will create dissension.

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writings of Ellen White?

In the light of contrary evidence, from the Bible and the writings of Ellen White, that appears problematic to the post-Fall position, would it be possible for one to hold a post-Fall view as a matter of processive opinion and not absolutely essential orthodoxy? God and heaven alone are infallible. Those who think that they will never have to give up a cherished view, never have occasion to change an opinion, will be disappointed. As long as we hold to our own ideas and opinions with determined persistency, we cannot have the unity for which Christ prayed.<sup>23</sup> Nobody is coercing anyone to give up any views, but could they be held as sincere personal opinion without their being divisive and judgmental?

Would it be enough to profess the following? *Jesus was sufficiently like us in nature (a deep identity) to really be able to identify with our struggles in temptation and give us every victory needed to make it through to the kingdom, and yet He was also sufficiently unlike us (a profound uniqueness) to be able to be sinless in nature and performance and be our fully satisfactory, sinless substitute.*

*Perfection:* Here also we need to commend those Adventists who with tenacity hold on to the standard of total victory over sin. Sin is never innocent and must always be taken seriously. Both the Bible and the writings of Ellen White say a great deal about victory over sin. We can never excuse or tolerate sin.

However, what does Ellen White mean by "perfection"? What do we mean by "totally victorious" perfection this side of glorification? Just how perfect is perfect in realistic terms?

Let's assume for a moment that the faithful can reach some state of sinless perfection this side of glorification. Would they ever have an awareness of it?

What about the time of trouble? Do we find in Ellen White any hint that the saints will be conscious of a sinless perfection after the close of probation? The saints, of course, will not be conscious of any unconfessed sins, but they will still have the burden of a sinful nature and have to have further "earthliness" consumed. I would go so far as to acknowledge that it is quite probable that the saints will be "sinless" in some attitudinal and behavioristic sense during this time, but what does that have to do with us now? Is anyone willing to claim such a sinless state today? Would it not be better to take the following stance?

We will do our best trusting Jesus in the present distress, distrusting self, experiencing penitence as our daily meat and drink, not excusing sin, constantly claiming victory in Jesus, growing in grace, and knowing that if we have practiced "stepping off the back porch" in probationary time, we will be able to "go skydiving" when probationary time is no more.<sup>24</sup>

Could it be that in sincere zeal to uphold victory over sin and avoid cheap grace, and easy-come-easy-go attitudes to sinning, one can unwittingly downgrade the priority of forgiveness and the constant acceptance of penitent sinners by the continuously applied merits of Jesus' intercession?

Will our nature and performance ever become so sinless this side of glorification (even after the close of probation) that we will cease to need the constant justifying merits of Jesus? Do we really take Ellen White seriously when she says the believers' "unavoidable deficiencies" are made up for them by the "imputed" righteousness of Christ and that "Jesus loves His children, even if they err"? And that "He keeps His eye upon them, and when they do their best, calling upon God for His help, be assured the service will be accepted, although imperfect"?<sup>25</sup>

Isn't perfection primarily an attitude rather than a performance? If my attitude to Jesus, sin, fellow Christians, the lost, and Christian duty is right, doesn't it then seem likely that my performance will be headed in the right direction and that Jesus can then make me perfect by making up for my "unavoidable deficiencies"? Isn't the key to all victory over sin the acceptance of Christ's grace for us? Isn't it that grace—the unmerited

favor—that frees us from guilt and uncertainty and enables us to walk in the light of His favor and the power of His Spirit?

Is perfection just constant victory over known sin? Perfection is at least this, but are we not all humbled to know that it is often not our known defects that are the most shocking, but the ones that we do not, cannot, or will not know in our Christian immaturity? Does God reveal all our defects to us at once? I think not! If He did, it would destroy us. Does He not, however, cover all our defects if we faithfully follow His leadings day by day?

What about the following definition for Christian perfection? *Perfection is to follow Jesus, trust His merits, and be transformed by His empowering Spirit; to be inspired by His example and do the known duties that lie nearest at hand, not excusing or cherishing sin; and to be open to God's providence in the conviction of sin, new duties, and joyous service and witness to others.*

Is this a view of perfection that takes victory over sin seriously enough and avoids a cheap-grace attitude?

Is it possible that the total victory emphasis of the so-called historic Adventists could be open to the strong rebuke that Ellen White gave in 1890 to Elder Edwin R. Jones? "You will take passages in the Testimonies that speak of the close of probation, of the shaking among God's people, and you will talk of a coming out from this people of a purer, holier people that will arise. Now all this pleases the enemy. We should not needlessly take a course that will make differences or create dissension. We should not give the impression that if our particular ideas are not followed, it is because the ministers are lacking in comprehension and in faith, and are walking in darkness."<sup>26</sup>

### Toward a dialogue

I have not attempted to be thorough, or comprehensive, in addressing these issues, but this is the type of dialogue that could help us out of the present impasse.

Could we lay aside our pejorative red-flag expressions, seek the common ground of essential Adventism, and proceed with humility, charity, and honesty to a dialogue on processive Adventism? One of my deepest longings is that those who call themselves historic Adventists

will answer my appeal affirmatively and that believers who do not share their particular burdens will be open, charitable, accepting, and patient in Christian respect. In the grace of Jesus this impasse can be broken and the Advent movement can more efficiently and unitedly get on with its mission! ■

<sup>1</sup> For a recent example of the use of such terminology, see *Our Firm Foundation* (Eatonville, WA: Hope International) vol. 7, No. 3, (1992), pp. 4-7.

<sup>2</sup> These persons especially see the treatment of these issues in the publication *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1957) as taking a tragically sinister and compromising direction.

<sup>3</sup> A quick scan of the published writings of Ellen White on compact disc failed to locate a single instance where she employed these terms.

<sup>4</sup> *Questions on Doctrine*, pp. 21-25.

<sup>5</sup> Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), vol. 1, pp. 169-175. This article will not discuss the nonessential category because of space limitation and its relative lack of importance.

<sup>6</sup> For more background on Adventist doctrinal development, see Richard W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1979), especially pp. 166-182.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 167, 168, 395, and 396. C. Mervyn Maxwell also has an excellent discussion of Adventist Arianism in A. V. Wallenkampf and W. Richard Leshner, eds., *The Sanctuary and the Atonement* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1981), pp. 530-533.

<sup>8</sup> Ralph Larson, *The Word Was Made Flesh: One Hundred Years of Seventh-day Adventist Christology, 1852-1952* (Cherry Valley, Calif.: Cherrystone Press, 1986).

<sup>9</sup> See George R. Knight, *From 1888 to Apostasy: The Case of A. T. Jones* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1987), pp. 132-150.

<sup>10</sup> I would urge a careful reading of Knight, pp. 36ff., and my own dissertation, "The Soteriology of Ellen G. White: The Persistent Path to Perfection, 1836-1902" (Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 1989), pp. 240-257, 284-312.

<sup>11</sup> See Ellen White's comments on 1888 in *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials* (Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1987).

<sup>12</sup> I am indebted to Richard Schwarz for these terms. See his discussion in *Light Bearers*, pp. 393-407.

<sup>13</sup> Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1946), p. 37. Also see Schwarz, pp. 393, 394.

<sup>14</sup> See Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston, eds., *The Variety of American Evangelicalism* (Knoxville, Tenn.: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), pp. 222-244.

<sup>15</sup> I am using the expression *formative* quite technically in relationship to the more final and authoritative expression *normative*. Adventism has always held to the Bible and the Bible alone as the ultimate normative standard of faith and practice, but it has also affirmed that Ellen White's counsels and theological insights have pointed

the way and confirmed biblical truth. Yet her definitions must ultimately be subject to biblical evidence. This use of Ellen White is in marked contrast to the Mormon attitude to the writings of Joseph Smith or Christian Science's use of Mary Baker Eddy.

<sup>16</sup> White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, pp. 30, 31.

<sup>17</sup> See White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, pp. 29-54 for the basic source of the suggestions that follow.

<sup>18</sup> Questions raised by Eric C. Webster, *Crosscurrents in Adventist Christology* (New York: Peter Lang Pub., 1984), pp. 419, 420.

<sup>19</sup> Ellen G. White, in *Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of the Seventh-day Adventists*

(Basel, Switzerland: Imprimerie Polyglotte, 1886), pp. 138, 139.

<sup>20</sup> ———, in *Heavenly Places* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1967), p. 163; *Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1980), vol. 5, p. 1128.

<sup>21</sup> *Questions on Doctrine*, p. 652.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 37.

<sup>24</sup> I am indebted to Morris Venden for this back porch/skydiving metaphor.

<sup>25</sup> White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, pp. 195, 196.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, book 1, p. 179.

# Where are your former colleagues?



The General Conference Ministerial Association is looking for names and addresses of former Adventist pastors. We plan to send a gracious letter and establish a friendly contact with those who have left the pastorate for whatever reason—career change, discouragement or disenfranchisement.

**If you know a former Adventist pastor,  
please send name and address to:**



James A. Cress, Secretary  
Ministerial Association  
General Conference  
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# Adventists and change

George R. Knight

**By saying that the Bible is our only creed, Adventism's founders revealed a profound understanding of the dynamic nature of present truth.**



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ost of the founders of Seventh-day Adventism would not be able to join the church today if they had to subscribe to the denomination's

Fundamental Beliefs.<sup>1</sup>

More specifically, most would not be able to agree to belief number 2, which deals with the doctrine of the Trinity. For Joseph Bates the Trinity was an unscriptural doctrine, for James White it was that "old Trinitarian absurdity," and for M. E. Cornell it was a fruit of the great apostasy, along with such false doctrines as Sundaykeeping and the immortality of the soul.<sup>2</sup>

In like manner, most of the founders of Seventh-day Adventism would have trouble with fundamental belief number 4, which holds that Jesus is both eternal and truly God. For J. N. Andrews "the Son of God . . . had God for His Father, and did, at some point in the eternity of the past, have beginning of days." And E. J. Waggoner, of Minneapolis 1888 fame, penned in 1890 that "there was a time when Christ proceeded forth and came from God, . . . but that time was so far back in the days of eternity that to finite comprehension it is practically without beginning."<sup>3</sup>

Neither could most of the leading Adventists have agreed with fundamental belief number 5, which implies the personhood of the Holy Spirit. Uriah Smith, for example, not only was anti-Trinitarian and semi-Arian, like so many of his colleagues, but also like them

pictured the Holy Spirit as "that divine, mysterious emanation through which They [the Father and the Son] carry forward their great and infinite work." On another occasion, Smith pictured the Holy Spirit as a "divine influence" and not a "person like the Father and the Son."<sup>4</sup>

Such misconceptions during the 1890s—a decade in which the work of the Holy Spirit and the indwelling power of Christ were being emphasized by such writers as Ellen White, E. J. Waggoner, and W. W. Prescott—helped pave the way for the pantheism that Waggoner and J. H. Kellogg taught around the turn of the century. Those misconceptions also probably helped set some Adventists up for the holy flesh heresy by the end of the 1890s.<sup>5</sup>

## Theological change

The decade of the 1890s, fortunately, also witnessed a positive shift in Adventist theological focus in areas related to the Godhead. That shift found its roots in the Minneapolis General Conference session of 1888. The 1888 meetings had reemphasized Jesus and His saving righteousness—areas of theological thought that Adventists had tended to downplay between the late 1840s and 1888.

The renewed emphasis on Jesus and His saving righteousness, however, called for views of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, and the divine nature of Christ adequate to serve as a theological basis for the new soteriology. It was Ellen White whose writings led the way in the theological shift. Unlike her experience

in the post-1844 period, during which she followed the lead of her husband and Bates in the formulation of the distinctively Adventist doctrines, in the 1890s she was at the forefront of the action, related to theological reformulation, through her major writings on Christ and His teachings.

Whereas before the Minneapolis meetings she had not been explicit in setting forth her views on the Trinity, the personhood of the Holy Spirit, and the divine nature of Christ, during the next two decades she would speak with great clarity on those topics. Thus she would uplift the "three living persons of the heavenly trio," stipulate that "the Holy Spirit . . . is as much a person as God [the Father] is a person," and repeatedly indicate that "Christ is the preexistent, self-existent Son of God."<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps her most famous or infamous statement on the divine nature of Christ was published in *The Desire of Ages* in 1898. "In Christ," she penned, "is life, original, unborrowed, underived."<sup>7</sup>

That same year also saw the publication of *Looking Unto Jesus*, by Uriah Smith. According to Smith, "God [the Father] alone is without beginning. At the earliest epoch when a beginning could be—a period so remote that to finite minds it is essentially eternity—appeared the Word." Thus on this topic Smith was in harmony with one of his archrivals, E. J. Waggoner, who had published the exact sentiments earlier in the decade.<sup>8</sup>

Not only was Ellen White out of step with Adventist theology, but her newly crystallized ideas shook up some of the brethren. One of those was young M. L. Andreasen, who later recalled "how astonished we were when *Desire of Ages* was first published, for it contained some things that we considered unbelievable; among others the doctrine of the Trinity, which was not generally accepted by the Adventists then."

Being suspicious that perhaps someone had been taking undue license in "editing" her writings, Andreasen later read nearly all Ellen White's handwritten material. "I was particularly interested," he recalled, "in the statement in *Desire of Ages* which at one time caused great concern to the denomination theologically: 'In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived' (p. 530). That statement may not seem very revolu-

tionary to you, but to us it was. We could hardly believe it. . . . I was sure Sister White had never written, 'In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived.' But now I found it in her own handwriting just as it had been published."<sup>9</sup>

Theological change generally brings pain to those involved, but various individuals respond to it in different ways. Some, such as Andreasen, were able eventually to accommodate to the "new theology."

Others, however, found accommodation impossible. One such was J. S. Washburn, a retired minister who in 1939 published a pamphlet in which he noted that the doctrine of the Trinity was "a cruel heathen monstrosity," "an impossible, absurd invention," "a blasphemous burlesque," and "a bungling, absurd, irreverent caricature." Beyond that, it was a "Roman doctrine" that was "seeking to intrude its evil presence into the teachings of the third angel's message." Washburn also claimed that W. W. Prescott could not be a Seventh-day Adventist because he believed in the Trinity.<sup>10</sup>

One conference president was so impressed with the Washburn pamphlet that he ordered 32 copies to distribute to his ministers. Meanwhile, the Arian views set forth in Uriah Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation* were not removed until the mid-1940s.<sup>11</sup>

### Ellen White and change

By now it should be obvious to our readers that Adventism has experienced major theological change across the course of its history and that Ellen White had a role in that change. That brings us to this question: Did Ellen White as an individual experience changes in her teachings and/or beliefs across the seven decades of her ministry?

Claims on both sides of that question are seemingly aired with increasing frequency, probably in reaction to the alternative positions. I would like to suggest that both sides of the dialogue capture a part of the truth, but that neither has all of it.

Before looking at the question itself, we must first acknowledge that Mrs. White left herself open to the possibility of change. For example, in 1906 she wrote: "For sixty years I have been in communication with heavenly messengers, and I have been constantly learning in reference to divine things."<sup>12</sup> The

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## Theological change generally brings pain to those involved, but various individuals respond to it in different ways.

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truth of that statement seems to be reflected in the increasing complexity and sophistication set forth in the various stages of the Conflict of the Ages story as she wrote and rewrote it from the late 1850s up through the time of her death in 1915.

Beyond her willingness to grow, even in theological truth, Ellen White several times admits that she made definite mistakes in giving counsel at various times. These generally seem to be on occasions when she, so to speak, "ran ahead of the angel."

One example of such an admission of error is found in *Testimonies for the Church*, where she flatly states: "In this I did wrong." That confession was stimulated by the fact that she allowed herself to be pressured, against her better judgment, into publishing *Testimony* No. 11 in 1867 in spite of the fact that she had not had the time to write out all she had seen. The result was less than satisfactory.<sup>13</sup>

Again, in 1903 she noted that at a council held in her house she "spoke words which gave liberty for certain things to be done in a certain place." For that, she added, "I was reproved by the Lord. . . . As soon as possible I wrote a letter saying I had been wrong in sanctioning these plans, that God did not endorse them." A similar situation can be found in counsel, relating to the Southern Publishing Association, that she had to retract.<sup>14</sup>

At the very least, this information indicates not only that Ellen White was open to change, but that in her day-to-day advice to people she made mistakes and had to revise her counsel as God revealed those mistakes to her.

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## God is leading out a people, not a few separate individuals here and there.

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But, you may be asking, did Mrs. White change any of her ideas related to doctrine and lifestyle? The answer is yes, but that answer needs to reflect the various nuances of the word "change" if we are to understand its implications. It is all too easy to overlook those nuances. The result of such oversight is less than satisfactory in terms of understanding change in Ellen White's writings. Such change needs to be viewed as being of at least three distinct types: (1) clarification, (2) progressive development, and (3) contradiction or reversal.

### Change as clarification

Change as clarification may be illustrated by Ellen White's treatment of the divine nature of Christ in her various presentations of the Conflict of the Ages story. For example, there is a vagueness, in her explanation of the authority of Christ in *Spiritual Gifts* (1858) and *The Spirit of Prophecy* (1870), that permits a reader to read her position as being either in harmony with her semi-Arian ministerial colleagues or in terms of Christ's always having had full equality with the Father,<sup>15</sup> even though that equality had been lost sight of by many of the heavenly hosts. Unlike other Adventist writers of the time, however, her statements could not be interpreted as being unquestionably semi-Arian.

That vagueness would change in 1890 with the publication of *Patriarchs and Prophets*. In that volume she clarifies what may have been implicit in her earlier statements by noting that "there had been no change in the position or authority of Christ"; Christ's equality with the Father "had been the same from the beginning."<sup>16</sup> The change in the above sequence is a change from ambiguity to clarity.

### Change as progressive development

A second type of change that we find in Ellen White's ideas across time is that of progressive development. An illustration of that dynamic can be seen in her approach to the topic of unclean foods.

From at least as early as 1850, some of the Sabbatarian Adventists had been raising the question as to whether it was appropriate to eat swine's flesh. James White hoped to settle the issue once and for all in November 1850 by publishing a powerful argument based on Acts 10 and other passages by which he sought to prove that the use of swine's flesh in the Christian era was quite appropriate.<sup>17</sup>

In spite of James's forceful argument, however, the issue refused to die a peaceful death. S. N. Haskell agitated the issue among the Sabbatarians in the late 1850s. Ellen White, in responding to Haskell, urged him not to press his views to the point where they would cause division in the developing church. "I saw," she wrote, "that your views concerning swine's flesh would prove no injury if you have them to yourselves; but in your judgment and opinion you have made this question a test. . . . If it is the duty of the church to abstain from swine's flesh, God will discover it to more than two or three. He will teach His church their duty. God is leading out a people, not a few separate individuals here and there, one believing this thing, another that. . . . Some run ahead of the angels that are leading this people. . . . I saw that the angels of God would lead His people no faster than they could receive and act upon the important truths that are communicated to them." To preach the swine's flesh issue at that time, she asserted, would be rushing on "without divine guidance, and thus bring confusion and discord into the ranks."<sup>18</sup>

It should be noted that the Whites, along with most other Adventists in the late 1850s, were still using swine's flesh in their diet. As proof of the fact, James scribbled a note on the back of a letter from Ellen in which she was advising a sister to cook swine's flesh for her husband if he desired it. James's note read: "That you may know how we stand on this question, I would say that we have just put down a two-hundred-pound porker."<sup>19</sup>

By 1863, however, Ellen White's writings had taken a new position on the swine's flesh issue. "Pork," she penned,

"although one of the most common articles of diet, is one of the most injurious. God did not prohibit the Hebrews from eating swine's flesh merely to show His authority, but because it was not a proper article of food for man. . . . God never designed the swine to be eaten under any circumstances."<sup>20</sup>

Thus in a few short years Mrs. White had moved from tolerance on the use of pork to a position in which she counseled against its use on the basis of health. She would hold to that position for the rest of her life.

Three things happened that help account for the shift in Ellen White's teaching on this subject. First, a "new disease" (trichinosis) was discovered in hog flesh in the early 1860s and was receiving widespread publicity. Second, the long battle among Adventists over organization was finally concluded with the formation of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in May 1863. With the extensive efforts to develop Adventist doctrine out of the way (1844-1850) and the rigorous drive for organization accomplished (1850-1863), Adventism was ready for its next progressive step—lifestyle and institutional development (1863-1880s).<sup>21</sup>

The time, therefore, was ripe for the third element in the new equation in the Adventist approach to the use of swine's flesh—Ellen White's health reform vision of June 6, 1863, which took place less than three weeks after the organization of the General Conference. That vision set forth a broad-based view of health reform that led to new emphases in later Adventism and Mrs. White's writings.

In other words, the changing times had led to changing emphases. Present truth, as the early Adventists saw it, was progressive. (We will have more to say on that topic later in this article.) Ellen White had implied that perspective in her counsel to Haskell in 1858. "God," she wrote, "is leading out a people, not a few separate individuals here and there, one believing this thing, another that. . . . The third angel is leading out and purifying a people. . . . I saw that the angels of God would lead His people no faster than they could receive and act upon the important truths that are communicated to them."<sup>22</sup>

By 1863 the time had come for the forward move in the area of health reform, including the use of swine's flesh.

Ellen White's counsel modified accordingly.

Meanwhile, her husband and others would be claiming by 1872 that the eating of swine's flesh was a sin. Ellen, on the other hand, never took her husband's extreme position. In 1889 she wrote that "swine's flesh was prohibited by Jesus Christ enshrouded in the billowy cloud." But, she added, in agreement with her 1858 counsel to Haskell, "this is not a test question." For her, as the 1889 passage goes on to indicate, the issue was one of health.<sup>23</sup>

The difference in the treatment of the use of swine's flesh between the Whites is informative. They both changed their positions, but James took the polar extremes from arguing from the New Testament for the use of swine's flesh in 1850 to condemning it as a sin in 1872. Ellen, on the other hand, avoided both polar positions. Her counsel in 1858 was not one of advocacy for the use of swine's flesh, but that Haskell should not make his views prominent because the church was not ready for that step. Meanwhile, although it appears that she may not have recognized the full implications at the time, her 1858 statement definitely implied that God would lead in the direction of the prohibition of pork from the diet. The way, therefore, was left open for progressive change. On the other hand, her counsel that pork eating was not a test question remained constant across time.

Thus we find two different types of change in the teachings of the Whites on the pork question. James's treatment illustrates contradictory change, while Ellen's illustrates progressive change against the background of the ongoing development of present truth.

Does that mean, we might ask, that Ellen White never experienced contradictory change in her thinking on religious topics? No, but, as the following illustrations demonstrate, it does mean that not all changes found in her writings were contradictory, or reversals. Some were clarifying changes, while others were progressive.

### Change as reversal

A third type of change in the writings of Ellen White is that of contradiction, or reversal, of her earlier positions. The number of these in doctrinal areas is not numerous, but three come to mind.

The first has to do with October 22,

1844, being the termination date for the 2300 day/year prophecy of Daniel 8:14. By December 1844 she had given up the view that anything had transpired on October 22. The significance of her first vision must be seen in the face of that disbelief. What she had concluded before the vision to be darkness she came to see as a "bright light set up behind" the Advent people as they moved forward toward the kingdom.<sup>24</sup>

Another example of contradictory change, or reversal, has to do with Ellen White's understanding of the shut door. William Miller had taught that at the end of the 2300 days the door of mercy would be shut, human probation would be closed, and the work of warning sinners would be over.<sup>25</sup> All Adventists (including Ellen White) who held that a fulfillment of prophecy had taken place on October 22 also believed that human probation had closed. Only gradually could they disentangle error from truth in this aspect of their theology.

Ellen White's changing belief in the shut door had both progressive/clarifying aspects and contradictory aspects. The first of those aspects has to do with her progressive shift in understanding from the shut door being the close of probation to it being the reality that "Jesus had shut the door of the holy place, and no man can open it; and that He had opened the door into the most holy, and no man can shut it."<sup>26</sup> The progressive aspect, of course, had to do with the developing Sabbatarian understanding of the heavenly sanctuary.

But the shut door issue cannot be cleared up merely by calling on progressive/clarifying change. Here we also have an example of contradictory change, or reversal. On this point Ellen White admits to having held theological error. In 1874 she wrote: "With my brethren and sisters, after the time passed in forty-four I did believe no more sinners would be converted. But," she hastened to add, "I never had a vision that no more sinners would be converted."<sup>27</sup>

Her later understanding contradicted that of her earliest years in the post-1844 period. That new understanding gradually came about through comprehending the implications of the Sabbath and sanctuary doctrines for world mission in the context of Revelation 14:6-12 and through her early visions. As with her fellow believers, the shut door misunderstanding took time to resolve

## Ellen White was capable of both believing error and growing in her understanding.

itself in her mind.

A third example of contradictory change in the belief system of Ellen White has to do with the time to begin the Sabbath. Early Sabbatarian Adventists were quite divided on this issue, with some holding for sunset, while others believed Sabbath should begin at 6:00 p.m., sunrise, or midnight.

J. N. Andrews was commissioned to study the issue. He read his paper to a conference at Battle Creek in November 1855. His biblical arguments on the sunset position convinced all but a few. Then, at the close of Andrews' presentation, Ellen White was given a vision that confirmed the Bible truth and brought unity among the believers. The vision, penned James White in 1868, "settled the matter with Brother Bates and others, and general harmony has since prevailed among us upon this point."<sup>28</sup>

In case some of the enemies of the Seventh-day Adventists were tempted to suggest that that experience was just Ellen White's method of manipulating the believers through her visions, Uriah Smith was careful to point out that the vision's sunset conclusion "was contrary to her own sentiment at the time the vision was given." In other words, she changed from the 6:00 p.m. position to that of sunset because of the vision.<sup>29</sup> Thus she was among the "others," mentioned by her husband in 1868, who needed to be brought into harmony with the body of believers.

These examples indicate that Ellen White was capable of both believing error and growing in her understanding. She knew whereof she spoke in 1906 when she remarked that for the past 60 years she had been "constantly learning in reference to divine things."<sup>30</sup>

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## What is present truth for one generation might not be present truth, or a “test,” for other generations.

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### Present truth: a dynamic concept

Joseph Bates and James and Ellen White—the founders of Seventh-day Adventism—each had a dynamic concept of what they called “present truth.” Bates used the phrase as early as 1846 in relation to the Sabbath. At other times he expanded the concept to include the entire message of Revelation 14:6-12. Present truth was the Sabbath, the sanctuary, and related truths.<sup>31</sup>

James White in 1849, after quoting 2 Peter 1:12 with its use of “present truth,” wrote that “in Peter’s time there was present truth, or truth applicable to that present time. The Church have [sic] ever had a present truth. The present truth now,” he continued, “is that which shows present duty, and the right position for us who are about to witness the time of trouble.” He was in definite agreement with Bates as to the content of present truth. The first two angels of Revelation 14 had sounded; now it was time for the third.<sup>32</sup>

Arguing in 1857 that some believers were “of a disposition to draw off from the great truths connected with the third message, to points of no vital importance,” White remonstrated that “it has been impossible to make some see that present truth is *present* truth, and not future truth, and that the Word as a lamp shines brightly where we *stand*, and not so plainly on the path in the distance.”<sup>33</sup> Thus White left the way open for further development of Adventist doctrine.

Ellen White was in harmony with her husband’s flexible position. Therefore, while she could categorically claim in 1850 that “we have the truth, we know it; praise the Lord,” she could also claim 53

years later that “there will be a development of the understanding, for the truth is capable of constant expansion. . . . Our exploration of truth is yet incomplete. We have gathered up only a few rays of light.” She had earlier noted that what is present truth for one generation might not be present truth, or a “test,” for other generations.<sup>34</sup>

Both Ellen and James White were open to further developments in the search for truth. Thus she was not shocked by the progressive light on the use of swine’s flesh or by the revolutionary developments in Adventist theology in the late 1880s and 1890s. Of course, she was quite adamant that new present truth must not negate the central doctrinal pillars that were developed in the 1840s and that give Adventism its unique place in Christian history.

### The Bible, our only creed

The possibility of further developments in present truth was one reason that James White and the other early Adventist believers were opposed to creeds. After all, hadn’t many of the Adventist believers in the mid-1840s been cast out of the existing denominations because they had discovered new truth in their Bibles and could not remain quiet about it? Because of such experiences, the early Sabbatarian Adventists held that their only creed should be the Bible.

In 1861 at the meeting at which the Sabbatarians organized their first state conference, John Loughborough highlighted the problem that early Adventists saw in creeds. According to Loughborough, “the first step of apostasy is to get up a creed, telling us what we shall believe. The second is to make that creed a test of fellowship. The third is to try members by that creed. The fourth to denounce as heretics those who do not believe that creed. And, fifth, to commence persecution against such.”<sup>35</sup>

James White then spoke, noting that “making a creed is setting the stakes, and barring up the way to all future advancement.” He complained of some people who through their creed had “marked out a course for the Almighty. They say virtually that the Lord must not do anything further than what has been marked out in the creed. . . . The Bible,” he concluded, “is our creed. We reject everything in the form of a human creed.”<sup>36</sup>

Following an animated discussion,

the conference unanimously voted to adopt a “church covenant” that contained a short statement of fundamental beliefs, on the basis that a church has a responsibility to say something about what it believes to both its members and outsiders, even though it should avoid an inflexible creed.

Since the development of the first conference organization in 1861, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has had only three point-by-point declarations of belief that have achieved any degree of official acceptance, and only one has been voted by a General Conference session. The first was Uriah Smith’s 1872 declaration of belief, the second was the 1931 statement of beliefs, and the third is the statement of fundamental beliefs adopted by the General Conference in session in 1980.<sup>37</sup>

There have been, however, progressively stronger moves to set Adventist beliefs in “creedal cement,” but so far those initiatives have been successfully resisted. From the early 1930s through 1980 the 1931 statement of beliefs appeared in the denominational yearbooks and church manuals, thereby giving it some official status in spite of the fact that it was formulated somewhat casually. In 1946 the General Conference in session voted “that no revision of this Statement of Fundamental Beliefs, as it now appears in the *Manual*, shall be made at any time except at a General Conference session.”<sup>38</sup> That vote set the stage for the need for official action of the General Conference in accepting the new statement in 1980. The 1980 action made the statement much more official than anything the church had had previously.

But perhaps the most astounding thing about the 1980 statement of fundamental beliefs is its preamble. The preamble not only begins with the historic Adventist statement that “Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures,” but also leaves the way open for further revision.

In the spirit of the dynamic nature of the early Adventist concept of present truth, the preamble closes with the following sentence: “Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better

language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word."

That is truly a remarkable statement. As I understand it, however, provision for the possibility of revision was resisted by some—I suppose in fear of losing the content of "historic" Adventism. That fear, however, merely highlights misconceptions over the nature of historic Adventism. At its core that phrase includes the distinctive landmark doctrines that formed the foundation of Adventism's uniqueness in the 1840s, and the great gospel truths, recovered in the 1888 period, that the denomination shares with other evangelical Christians. The problem, of course, is that there are always some who want to multiply the number of landmark doctrines.

Along that line, some argued at Minneapolis and in the 1890s that Adventists needed a creed to protect the "true" position on the law in Galatians and the 10 horns of Daniel. Ellen and W. C. White, after much effort, successfully blocked the creedal drive at that time.<sup>39</sup> Yet there are undoubtedly many today who feel that the denomination should have hard-and-fast creedal statements on such varied topics as the human nature of Christ and biblical hermeneutics.

Such movements, should they succeed, might be founded on the best of motives as their proponents seek to protect historic Adventism, but one suspects that in the process of preserving Adventism's historic content they might actually kill its living spirit. Adventism's founders expressed a great deal of wisdom in their understanding of the dynamic nature of present truth and in their claim that "the Bible is our only creed." ■

*Christ and His Righteousness* (Oakland, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1890), pp. 21, 22; see also pp. 9, 19, 20.

<sup>4</sup> Uriah Smith, "The Spirit of Prophecy and Our Relation to It," *General Conference Daily Bulletin*, 1891, p. 146; Uriah Smith, "In the Question Chair," *Review and Herald*, October 28, 1890, p. 664.

<sup>5</sup> See George R. Knight, *Angry Saints: Tensions and Possibilities in the Adventist Struggle Over Righteousness by Faith* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1989), pp. 76, 77; Richard W. Schwarz, John Harvey Kellogg, M.D. (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1970), pp. 184-186; Richard W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1979), pp. 446-448.

<sup>6</sup> See the several references in Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), pp. 615, 616; see also Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1980), vol. 6, p. 1075.

<sup>7</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1940), p. 530.

<sup>8</sup> Uriah Smith, *Looking Unto Jesus* (Battle Creek, Mich.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1898), p. 10; see also note 3 above.

<sup>9</sup> M. L. Andreasen, "The Spirit of Prophecy" (unpublished chapel talk presented at Loma Linda, Calif., November 30, 1948).

<sup>10</sup> J. S. Washburn, "The Trinity" (unpublished pamphlet 1940); Gilbert M. Valentine, *The Shaping of Adventism: The Case of W. W. Prescott* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1992), pp. 279, 280.

<sup>11</sup> Gilbert M. Valentine, "William Warren Prescott: Seventh-day Adventist Educator" (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1982), p. 608; Gane, "Arian or Anti-Trinitarian Views," pp. 26, 27.

<sup>12</sup> Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958-1980), book 3, p. 71.

<sup>13</sup> ———, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 1, p. 563.

<sup>14</sup> Ellen G. White *Manuscript Releases* (Silver Spring, Md.: E. G. White Estate, 1990-1993), vol. 13, p. 121; Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Elmshaven Years* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1981), pp. 187-197.

<sup>15</sup> Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts* (Battle Creek, Mich.: James White, 1858), vol. 1, p. 18; *Spirit of Prophecy* (Battle Creek, Mich.: Seventh-day Adventist Pub. Assn., 1870), vol. 1, pp. 17, 18.

<sup>16</sup> ———, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1958), p. 38. The position in this paper disagrees with that of Alden Thompson, who reads too much into the earlier statements and then implies a reversal on Ellen White's part in 1890. *Reversal* is too strong. Clarification is all that can be demonstrated. See Alden Thompson, "The Theology of Ellen White: The Great Controversy Story," *Adventist Review*, December 31, 1981.

<sup>17</sup> James White, "Swine's Flesh," *The Present Truth*, November 1850, pp. 87, 88.

<sup>18</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 1, pp. 206, 207.

<sup>19</sup> James White, quoted in H. E. Carver, *Mrs. E. G. White's Claim to Divine Inspiration Examined*, 2nd ed. (Marion, Iowa: Advent and Sabbath Ad-

vocate Press, 1877), p. 20; see also Ellen G. White Estate, *A Critique of the Book Prophetess of Health* (Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1976), pp. 44, 45.

<sup>20</sup> Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 417; see also *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4a, pp. 124, 146. Both of these presentations are based on material given during the June 6, 1863, health reform vision.

<sup>21</sup> For a treatment of the progressive, step-by-step development of Adventism, see George R. Knight, *Anticipating the Advent: A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1993), chaps. 2-4.

<sup>22</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 207 (italics supplied).

<sup>23</sup> [James White], "Swine's Flesh," *Health Reformer*, January 1872, p. 18; Ellen G. White *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 1b, p. 173.

<sup>24</sup> See *A Word to the "Little Flock"* (Brunswick, Maine: James White, 1847), p. 22; Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1945), p. 14.

<sup>25</sup> William Miller, *Evidence From Scripture and History of the Second Coming of Christ About the Year 1843* (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1842), p. 237; William Miller, "Letter From Brother Miller," *Advent Herald*, December 11, 1845, p. 142.

<sup>26</sup> Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 42. See pp. 42-45.

<sup>27</sup> ———, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 74.

<sup>28</sup> J. N. Andrews, "Time for Commencing the Sabbath," *Review and Herald*, December 4, 1855, pp. 76-78; James White, "Time to Commence the Sabbath," *Review and Herald*, February 25, 1868, p. 168.

<sup>29</sup> Uriah Smith, "Not Satisfactory," *Review and Herald*, August 30, 1864, p. 109.

<sup>30</sup> Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 71.

<sup>31</sup> Joseph Bates, *The Seventh Day Sabbath a Perpetual Sign* (New Bedford, Mass.: Press of Benjamin Lindsey, 1846), p. 2; *A Seal of the Living God* (New Bedford, Mass.: Press of Benjamin Lindsey, 1849), p. 17.

<sup>32</sup> James White, in *The Present Truth*, July 1849, p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> James White, "A Sketch of the Rise and Progress of the Present Truth," *Review and Herald*, December 31, 1857, p. 61.

<sup>34</sup> Ellen G. White *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 5, p. 201; vol. 3, pp. 258, 259; see Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 693.

<sup>35</sup> "Doings of the Battle Creek Conference, October 5 and 6, 1861," *Review and Herald*, October 8, 1861, p. 148.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> For helpful statements on this important line of development, see Robert W. Olson and Bert Haloviak, compilers, "Who Decides What Adventists Believe: A Chronological Survey of the Sources," (unpublished paper, rev. ed., March 15, 1978); Walter R. L. Scragg, "Doctrinal Statements and the Life and Witness of the Church" (unpublished paper presented to workers' meetings in Sweden and England in 1981). See also note 1 above.

<sup>38</sup> "Revision of Church Manual," *Review and Herald*, June 14, 1946, p. 197.

<sup>39</sup> George R. Knight, *Angry Saints*, pp. 26, 34, 36, 100-104; *From 1888 to Apostasy: The Case of A. T. Jones* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1987), pp. 25, 41, 47, 70.

<sup>1</sup> The fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists may be found in the annual *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* and in the denomination's *Church Manual*.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Bates, *The Autobiography of Elder Joseph Bates* (Battle Creek, Mich.: Seventh-day Adventist Pub. Assn., 1868), pp. 204, 205; James White, "The Faith of Jesus," *Review and Herald*, August 5, 1852, p. 52; M. E. Cornell, *Facts for the Times* (Battle Creek, Mich.: M. E. Cornell, 1858), p. 76. See also Erwin Roy Gane, "The Arian or Anti-Trinitarian Views Presented in Seventh-day Adventist Literature and the Ellen G. White Answer" (M.A. thesis, Andrews University, 1963); Russell Holt, "The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination: Its Rejection and Acceptance" (Term paper, Andrews University, 1969).

<sup>3</sup> J. N. Andrews, "Melchizedec," *Review and Herald*, September 7, 1869, p. 84; E. J. Waggoner,

# Reaching secular people

Mark Finley

**The early church also faced the challenge of secularism.**



Mark Finley is the speaker/director of the *It Is Written* telecast.

**T**he Western world presents a formidable challenge for evangelism today. Traditional approaches have generally produced meager results. It's becoming increasingly more difficult to draw sizable crowds. Methods that once worked are no longer as productive. Advertising that once drew respectable audiences is less effective. This leads to some serious questions: Where is the power of the gospel in this secular age? Is it possible to see entire cities shaken up for God today as they were in New Testament times? How can the gospel penetrate secular culture? What does it take to influence secular minds for Christ and the kingdom?

The problem of secularism, materialism, and lack of interest in spirituality is not new. The first-century world reveals striking parallels with today's godless humanistic pleasure-seeking society. Society was dominated largely by Greek philosophy, Roman materialism, Jewish traditionalism, and pagan superstitions. Nevertheless, imbued with the Spirit's power, consecrated to the task of world evangelism, the disciples moved an entire society with the power of the gospel.

### The first-century society

Let's briefly review secularism in the first century and note how the power of the Spirit penetrated it. In his monumental work *Caesar and Christ*, Will

Durante describes New Testament society as one of moral decay in which prostitution flourished, abortion was commonplace, and homosexuality was rampant. It was a society stimulated by physical pleasures. Seneca, the Roman philosopher, commented, "They vomit to eat and eat to vomit." Packed Roman theaters deified the crowd's favorite actors and actresses. The stars of the stage became the idols of society. Singers and dancers by the thousands entertained the multitudes. Horse races and sporting events mesmerized minds. The hypnotic enchantment of competitive athletics captivated Roman citizens. The Roman population of approximately 1 million regarded human life with an astonishing indifference. When Titus dedicated a temple in Rome he reenacted a major battle with thousands killed in the sporting entertainment. Roman prize fighters, with their 3" thick metal knuckles, not only knocked one another out but barbarically murdered each other.

Possessions became the gods of still others. Acquiring things became life's chief ambition. Philosophical thought patterns dismissed the idea of the reality of God. If secularism pursues materialistic values in life and dismisses God in the process, Rome was certainly secular.

In spite of this hedonistic, humanistic viewpoint, the gospel of Christ penetrated secular society. Honest hearts were won for the kingdom because secularism didn't meet inner heart needs. Secularism was totally powerless to meet people's inner love hunger. Secularism

could not provide meaning and purpose and could not satisfy the inner longing for eternity and assurance for life after death.

### **The triumph of the early church**

Christ promised His disciples unusual spiritual power to meet the unusual challenge of Roman secularism: "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). And today wherever there are unusual challenges, there is unusual power promised. Where there are obstacles to the gospel, the power of God as promised is greater than those obstacles.

Our focus, it appears, is more on the problem of secularism than on the power of the Spirit. I've sat in committees where some expressed the idea that since society is becoming increasingly more secular, evangelism just won't work. It's passé, outmoded. It needs to be retired like the eight-track tape player. What a travesty! The gospel is just as powerful today as it was 2,000 years ago. God's method of reaching the masses is still powerful evangelistic preaching.

Acts 2 describes how Spirit-filled preaching met the needs of secular hearts and resulted in the baptism of 3,000 people.

Acts 4:4 records that "many of them which heard the word believed; and the number . . . was about five thousand." Acts 6 discusses the rapid growth of the church and a reorganization to facilitate growth: "The word of God increased; and the number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (verse 7). In Acts 8, there is cross-cultural growth. Philip, imbued by the Spirit, touches the heart of an Ethiopian traveler. And God opens the door to the continent of Africa. In Acts 10 and 11, cross-cultural growth continues when Peter reaches out to Cornelius—and another door opens for the gospel.

By the time we come to Acts 17, the gospel has penetrated everywhere. It's

touched the hearts and lives of thousands. And the disciples "have turned the world upside down" (verse 6).

Acts 20:20-23 points out that the disciples were so compelled by the Spirit that "they taught publicly, and from house to house." The barriers inhibiting the gospel came tumbling down. The gospel was taken from city to city, from country to country, from continent to continent. According to Acts 21:20, in a few short years thousands of Jews believed. Acts 22:21 testifies that the gospel was taken to the entire Gentile world. Acts ends on this triumphant note: "Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that THEY WILL hear it."

In 30 short years the gospel triumphed. An entire secular society was reached in a relatively short period of time.

natural signs, wonders, and miracles. They believed that God had called them to proclaim His message everywhere, and no power on earth could stop it. They focused on God's power to meet human obstacles.

Without the return of the Pentecost power, there is no way to reach today's men and women. And yet we need to understand the secular society and its mind in order to approach that society intelligently. To understand the secular mind will help us to develop better methods to reach it and apply those methods in actual real-life evangelistic settings.

### **Understanding the secular mind**

To understand the secular mind, let's consider briefly the philosophies that have shaped thinking in the past 200 years. The basic questions of life are threefold: Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? These are questions of origin, purpose, and destiny.

The molders of the modern mind believe that we sprang from an impersonal beginning. Darwin's theory of evolution has permeated all aspects of life today. Jacques Monod, the French Nobel Prize winner, summarized evolution's view of origins in these words: "Chance alone is at the source of every innovation, of all creation in the biosphere. Pure chance, absolutely free but blind, [is] at the very root of the stupendous edifice of

evolution."<sup>1</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, the French philosopher, novelist, and playwright, adds: "Every existence is born without reason, prolongs itself out of weakness, and dies by chance."<sup>2</sup>

Now think this through carefully. If indeed it's true that life is simply the product of fortuitous chance, then human beings are simply enlarged protein molecules. This view dismisses the thought that we are created by an infinite, personal, caring God. A fuzzy view of origins leads to a fuzzy meaning of life. In a society based on evolutionary culture, self-esteem will naturally be low. Is it any wonder that suicide is the number one cause of death among college students? How can existence have

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## **Does Adventism have a message for the millions who have embraced this secular worldview? Do we have anything relevant to say in an age of pessimism steeped in a culture of despair? Can we speak with meaning to those drowning in affluence?**

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### **Reasons for rapid growth**

How should one account for the rapid growth of the early church? First, consider the persons behind the proclamation. The disciples themselves were led to genuine repentance, a spiritual revival, and a corresponding reformation. They had a unified purpose and a single-minded objective to win the lost for Christ. They were constantly aware of the necessity of intercessory prayer. Second, consider how the Holy Spirit enlarged the thinking of the disciples, enabling them to be open to cross-cultural possibilities for evangelism. As a result, they preached the Word in both private and public settings, and their ministry was accompanied by super-

any meaning if I am here simply by a random accident? The breeding ground for secularism is a failure to understand human origins and life's true purpose. For the secularist there is no meaning to life except the here and now. An eternal destiny is nonsense.

#### **A message to meet the secular culture**

Does Adventism have a message for the millions who have embraced this secular worldview? Do we have anything relevant to say in an age of pessimism steeped in a culture of despair? Can we speak with meaning to those drowning in affluence? Seventh-day Adventists believe that God created the world. We understand that order and design indicates a Maker, that randomness is incapable of explaining the complexity of the universe. Beyond this, we affirm that the intelligent personal life on Planet Earth could not have been produced by the unintelligent and impersonal. Therefore, we believe that this world was made by a God who is Himself the ideal of intelligence, the essence of love, and the grand designer—a God who is infinite yet personal. What does this say to men and women filled with despair and hopelessness? It says, "You are worth something because you were made by this God."

Paintings by Leonardo da Vinci and sculptures by Michelangelo are priceless because each of them is one of a kind. Human life is valuable because each man and woman is unique. Just as every snowflake has a unique configuration, so each human life is different from every other. Every human being is precious, valuable, worthwhile. Adventists say to the secular person today, "You are created uniquely in the image of God. You are a person of value—value because you are you, and no one else is like you! You are irreplaceable." Adventists say, "God thought you were so valuable that when human beings fell away from Him, He gave His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for them." The Christian faith is simply not a system of ethical values and moral philosophy. It is the belief that God Himself plunged into the arena of human affairs, dying for men and women, redeeming them.

And further, with our awe-inspiring hopeful doctrine of the Advent, we confidently shout to a hopeless world, "Hope is on the way!" Christ is coming again soon to put an end to sin. Suffering, sickness, and death will surrender to a glorious new tomorrow. So Adventism is distinctly relevant to contemporary society. It speaks to the needs of our time. It answers those three basic questions of life.

Also, consider how the Sabbath meets the basic human need for rest, security, roots, and a home in the arms of God. Or think of how the biblical concept of healthful living meets the secular need for physical, mental, and spiritual wholeness.

#### **From message to action**

Yet how can we translate this needs-fulfilling Adventist message into ac-

certain: you won't win secularists to Christ by trying to out-argue them.

Every human being has felt needs in his life. These felt needs are areas where the individual senses a need for help. They might include better health, help to quit smoking, a low-fat diet, stress reduction, happier marriage, a more satisfying job, friendship, forgiveness, freedom from guilt, or inner peace.

I know this for sure. If church members are sensitive, loving, caring individuals looking for opportunities to help meet the felt needs of their friends, the walls of prejudice will break down. Closed minds will open. Opportunities will present themselves for us to share the gospel.

According to *A Summary of Qualitative Research of the Unchurched*,<sup>3</sup> secular people have four basic negative attitudes toward the church. First, they feel

the church is too materialistic. It's become big business. Money is more important than love. Churches are too much like corporations. Second, they believe the church has become too powerful—it tries to control thought. There's no freedom of expression; there's mind manipulation. People are told how to live.

Third, the church is hypocritical. The gap between what the church teaches and how it lives is

too large to span. There's a discrepancy between words and actions. To many the church is so much like a social club that they don't want to be a part of it.

And fourth, the secularist believes the church is not relevant—it's not kept up with the changing world; it has failed to become a part of real life. Secular people have a feeling of boredom and detachment during religious services.

Surprisingly, this same research indicates that many would consider attending church if they could discuss their religious doubts openly with somebody. If they found that the church was an institution seriously concerned about working for the betterment of society, if they discovered a church where spiritual preaching met their inner needs, they would attend. A good solid religious education program implanting moral values for their youth and children is extremely important. Secular baby

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## **If church members are sensitive, loving, caring individuals looking for opportunities to help meet the felt needs of their friends, the walls of prejudice will break down.**

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tion? What are some possible approaches to the secular mind? I don't pretend to have all the answers to reach secular people, yet there are some principles that we've used in western Europe—in bastions of secularism such as Copenhagen, Stockholm, and London; in Eastern Europe—where Communism and atheism reigned for decades; and in the great metropolitan cities of America.

The principles are not "surefire" methods to reach secular audiences. They are rather approaches that we have wrought out in the crucible of city evangelism over the past 25 years.

Let me begin with the obvious. Personal evangelism is still the best way to win secular people. It takes people to win people. Programs don't win people; loving people who graciously develop relationships win people. Usually people respond to kindness. Genuine friendship breaks down prejudice. One thing is for

boomers are coming back to church by the thousands because they're concerned about their kids.

When you look at Christ's strategy for reaching secular people in His day, you will notice that Jesus began where they were and He didn't begin where He was! Jesus always began by lovingly ministering to the needs of those He met. In fact, the book of John is really a case study in how Jesus met these inner spiritual needs. Early in His ministry Jesus noticed two men following Him, and He asked them this question, "What seek ye?" (John 1:38). It seems to me that Jesus is always asking us that question—What are you seeking? What's deep down within your heart? What are you looking for?

Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus answers this "What seek ye?" question. He attempts to discover what people need and then acts to meet the need. At the wedding feast in Cana, the host of the wedding was about to be embarrassed socially. Jesus met those social needs by turning water to wine. Nicodemus' needs, however, were spiritual. Formal religion was not satisfying the needs of his heart, and Jesus met the need by sharing the necessity of inner spiritual rebirth (John 3).

The woman at the well had emotional needs, and Jesus shared that her love hunger could be met in the Father's love. The man by the pool of Bethesda had a need for physical healing and the hungry multitude had a need for food. And Jesus met those needs.

By meeting their needs, Jesus broke down every prejudice. As barriers of opposition tumble down, hearts and minds open to the gospel. The oft-quoted statement of Ellen White is still true today: "Christ's method alone will bring true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.'"<sup>4</sup>

The church is God's people equipped to serve, lovingly meeting needs everywhere in Jesus' name. The church is the body of Christ, with each member having Spirit-imparted gifts for service. Each member of the body is valuable. And God has given each member gifts to be used in service. When church members sense that, they can reach out in love to minister to the needs of their friends and

neighbors. Then there will be an explosion of interest in the gospel. Sensitivity to the heartaches, longings, and concerns of others will produce positive results. Demonstrating genuine interest in the needs of another is a God-given method of winning hearts. And as church members with the unique gifts that God has given them reach out to their friends and neighbors, there will be guaranteed results.

I have found it particularly helpful simply to share the plan of salvation in the context of my own experience. Sharing His gospel of healing love is disarming. It wins hearts. It changes lives. The cross is the strongest argument in favor of Christianity. Even secular hearts long for the love that the cross reveals.

I have seen the Holy Spirit break hardened humanistic hearts through a simple presentation of the plan of salvation. A debating spirit evokes the spirit of debate. Arguments from the mind meet resistance from skeptical minds. But a message of God's grace from a loving heart will touch hearts.

However, no one approach is singularly designed to reach every individual. There are some secular people who initially respond better to an alternative strategy. There are many who feel that the Bible lacks intellectual substance. They lack confidence in its integrity.

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Sharing some of the great Bible prophecies demonstrating evidence of the truthfulness of the Bible will in time touch hearts. The prophecies of Daniel are especially designed by God to build confidence in the reliability of Scripture. Old Testament prophecies regarding Jesus as the Messiah are especially appealing. His birthplace in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), the virgin birth (Isa. 7:14), the origin of Christ's birth and His family lineage (Gen. 49:10), as well as events surrounding the Crucifixion outlined in Zechariah 13, Psalm 22, and others, bring great confidence to secular people

## **Steps to help your congregation reach secular people**

1. Assist members to discover personally their specific spiritual gifts and areas of service.
2. Train members in materials and methods that would enable them for service.
3. Develop a multifaceted outreach approach committed to reaching people with different felt needs.
4. Consciously weave spiritual thoughts during each felt need presentation.
5. Openly invite those attending felt need programs to spiritual seminars.
6. Teach church members how to "make friends for God" by turning casual conversations into witnessing opportunities. (*The Making Friends for God* videos by HART Research provide excellent resource material.)
7. Freely share appropriate literature with your secular friends.

**Only the Bible can present meaning to the great question of life. The Bible reveals a loving Christ who made us, who personally guides our lives.**

that Jesus is more than a good man, more than an ethical philosopher, but indeed the divine Son of God.

Understanding some of the prophecies regarding the rise and fall of nations throughout the Old Testament is convincing evidence for many a secular mind. Prophecies like those of the Persian king Cyrus, named 150 years before his birth (Isa. 44:28; 45:1, 2), the destruction of Tyre and Sidon (Eze. 26:1-4, 19-21), and the desolation of Egypt (Eze. 19:1-9) all establish reliability in Scripture as a divinely inspired document.

I have seen secular people come to our evangelistic meetings and after hearing the prophecies move from skepticism to belief. A young couple in Chicago, graduates of Illinois State University, were led from secularism to salvation as they attended one of my Daniel seminars. A radiologist in Niles, Michigan, hearing the prophecies of Daniel and archaeological evidence of Scripture's reliability, was touched with the gospel.

#### Countering evolutionary myth

Many secular people believe that evolution is a proven scientific fact. They conclude that a belief in the Scriptures negates the so-called facts of science. It's almost impossible to accept a Christianity that their minds convince them is not true. They reason, "If the Genesis account is wrong, how can I have confidence in any other portions of Scripture? If the human race is evolving to higher states of advancement, why do we need a Saviour? Doesn't religion only produce the neurosis of guilt?" I have found it helpful to approach these

select individuals from a scientific perspective. Evolution is not a proven fact, but a speculative hypothesis. There are three scientific laws that call the entire theory of evolution into question.

Evolution states that given enough time and the right conditions, nonliving things will produce living things. But there is no evidence at all in the natural world that nonliving things can ever produce living things. It is a fundamen-

tal law of science that only life produces life. Science also declares that like produces like. Evolution says there are links in the gaps between kinds and the species of animals. Yet there is no concrete scientific evidence for such assertions of those links. The evolutionist states that when left alone under certain conditions mutations tend to improve. In the natural world, mutations are genetic deformities, not improvements.

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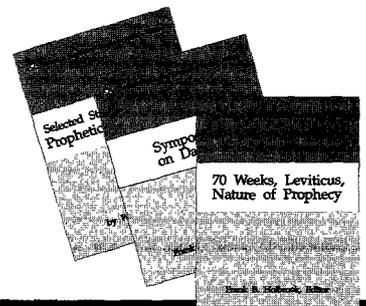
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Secular materialists, when presented with the thought that atheistic evolution is a theory and not a fact—that it takes more faith to be an evolutionist than it does to be a creationist—will begin thinking seriously about evolution's underlying assumptions.

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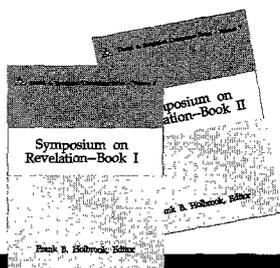
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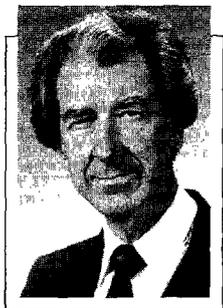
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# No hidden agenda

Rex D. Edwards

**M**artin Luther suggested that the city of Wittenberg ought to be divided into four or five sections, each with a minister and several deacons.

He wanted to charge them with the responsibility of preaching, visiting the sick, and serving the needy. However, he concluded that sufficient spiritual servants were not available and "therefore I do not trust to start it [the ministry program] until our Lord makes Christians."<sup>1</sup>

Christianity advocates the concomitance of words and works. "The religion of Christ is to be interwoven with all that [we] *do* and *say*."<sup>2</sup> Speech and action are partners. As such, the two belong to each other, and yet are independent of each other. Neither is a means to the other, nor even a manifestation of the other. Each is actually an end in itself.

John the apostle wrote: "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:17, 18, NIV). Apparently, love in action springs from a twofold situation: first, *seeing* a brother in need, and second, *having* resources to meet the need. Those who do not relate what they have to what they see cannot claim to be indwelt by the love of God. Further, this principle applies whatever the nature of the recognized need. I may see spiritual

need (sin, guilt, lostness) and have the gospel knowledge to meet it. Or the need I see may be disease or ignorance or bad housing, and I may have the medical, educational, or social connections to relieve it. To see need and to possess the remedy compels love to act, and whether the action will be evangelistic or social depends on what we see and what we have.

While the church need not have a formulated philosophy on the relationship between word and deed, she will meet human need even as Jesus did in His ministry. Unfortunately, there is always the temptation for us to emphasize one thing to the neglect of another. And so the criticism goes: "If the church talks too much, it also does too little. It has a big mouth, but shrunken hands. Let those garrulous clergy climb down from their pulpits, roll up their sleeves, and *do* something!"

In response, the question must be asked: Are deeds above words?

## Deeds and words

The loudest, clearest language that God ever "spoke" was when the Word became flesh and lived among us. Decreasing words and increasing deeds is not the answer.

How does witnessing actually take place? We must realize that the key work in witnessing is not action, but interaction. Therefore, trying to help another person through pantomime is as futile as trying to make the Word known without words.

Donald Lloyd divides Americans into two varieties, the loudmouth and the quietmouth, describing the latter as persons who are friendly, helpful, and even

chatty but never disclose what they really think. "Perhaps it [the practice of keeping one's thoughts and convictions private] has its origin in English religious dissent, when ordinary people kept their Bibles and their thoughts well hidden and met the world with bland and noncommittal faces. Perhaps it began in the American Colonies; as religious sectarians settled and mingled, persons sick of harassment in Europe found peace in common silence. Avoiding touchy issues, one could do business."<sup>3</sup>

Leighton Ford of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association told a congress on evangelism in Minneapolis that "evangelism must be love with flesh on," and pointed to William Wilberforce as an example of a Christian into whose heart God had put a burning passion to abolish the slave trade. "Wilberforce went on a campaign to wipe out the evil, not only by preaching the gospel but by fierce debate and political action." Ford commented that "such activity should not be confused with evangelism, neither should it be separated from it."<sup>4</sup>

Christians disagree about the precise relationship between social service and evangelistic mission. W. A. Visser 't Hooft says: "Unfortunately, the Christian churches have given and are often given the impression that *diakonia* is in fact an auxiliary activity and an incentive for their evangelistic or missionary expansion. A good deal of a great misunderstanding between the church and the modern world has arisen precisely at this point. The world finds it hard to believe that Christians can render truly disinterested service and have a concern about man as man, not merely as potential church members."<sup>5</sup>

Rex D. Edwards, D.Min., is director of ministerial continuing education for the General Conference Ministerial Association.

## Means or manifestation?

The relation between word (evangelism) and deed (social action) has been defined in two ways. First, some regard social action as *a means to evangelism*. In this view, evangelism and the winning of converts is the primary goal, but social action is a useful preliminary, an effective means to the end. In its most blatant form, this makes social work (whether food, medicine, or education) the sugar on the pill, the bait on the hook. While in its best form social action gives to the gospel a credibility it would otherwise lack, the smell of hypocrisy hangs around such philanthropy. The result of having such a frankly ulterior motive is the breeding of so-called rice Christians. We should expect this if we ourselves have been rice evangelists. No wonder Gandhi observed: "I hold that proselytizing under the cloak of humanitarian work is, to say the least, unhealthy. . . . Why should I change my religion because a doctor, who professes Christianity as his religion, has cured me of some disease?"

Second, others regard social action not as a means but as *a manifestation of evangelism*, or at least of the gospel that is being proclaimed. In this case, philanthropy is not attached to evangelism from the outside but grows out of it as its natural expression. One might also say that social action becomes the sacrament of evangelism, for it makes the message significantly visible.

It is argued that medicine and education are a legitimate and necessary means of creating an opportunity for preaching. But when these services are motivated by Christian compassion, they cease to be simply preparation for evangelism and actually become preaching. I concur with this concept so far as it goes; there is a strong precedent for it in the ministry of Jesus. His words and deeds belonged to each other—the words interpreting the deeds and the deeds embodying the words. Not only did He announce the good news of the kingdom but He performed visible signs of the kingdom. And because people would not believe His words, He said, then let them believe Him for the sake of the works themselves (see John 14:11, NKJV).

I am left with some unease with this argument, however, for it makes service a subdivision of evangelism, only an aspect of the preaching. Now, I do not deny that good works of love did have an

evidential value when performed by Jesus, and also do when done by us (see Matt. 5:16). But I cannot accept that this is their only or even major justification.

## Social action a partnership

As already noted, my view is that social action is *a partner of evangelism*. This does not mean that words and works, evangelism and social action are so inseparable that all of us must engage in both all the time. Situations vary, and so do Christian callings. As for situations, there will be times when a person's eternal destiny is the most urgent consideration. We must not forget that people without Christ are perishing. But there will certainly be other times when material needs are so pressing that the victims will not be able to hear the gospel if we shared it with them. The man who fell among robbers needed above all else, at that moment, oil and bandages for his wounds, not evangelistic tracts in his "pockets"! Similarly, in the words of a retired missionary, "a hungry man has no ears." If our enemy is hungry, our biblical mandate is, not to evangelize him, but to feed him (Rom. 12:20)! Then, too, there is a diversity of Christian callings, and every Christian should be faithful to his own calling. A doctor must not neglect the practice of medicine for evangelism, nor should the evangelist be distracted from the ministry of the Word by the ministry of tables, as the apostles quickly discovered (see Acts 6:1-7).

Christians, who live in a dying world with a hope that points forward in confident expectancy, should serve without a hidden agenda. Moreover, evangelism is not primarily a matter of words or deeds but a matter of presence—the presence of the people of God in the midst of humanity and the presence of God in the midst of His people. ■

<sup>1</sup> "Darum traue ich's nicht anzufangen, solange, bis unser Herr Gott Christen macht" (*Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* [1906], i).

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 9, p. 21. (Italics supplied.)

<sup>3</sup> Donald Lloyd, "The Quietmouth American," *The Peace Corp Reader* (Washington, D.C., 1968), p. 121.

<sup>4</sup> Leighton Ford, "The Church and Evangelism in a Day of Revolution," *Gospel Herald*, vol. LXII (Dec. 23, 1969), p. 1091.

<sup>5</sup> W. A. Visser 't Hooft, *The Pressure of Our Common Calling* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), p. 55.

## Rejoicing despite apostasy

From page 4

seat. Let the word go forth in sermon and in song: Worthy is the Lamb!

Long ago King Jehoshaphat faced a time of trouble. His first reaction was fear. Then, realizing that God was fighting his battle, he inspired the people to celebrate God's salvation: "Praise the Lord, for His mercy endures forever." Now when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, . . . and they were defeated" (2 Chron. 20:21, 22).

The lesson is clear: Get that praise choir going! Dispense with melancholy purgatory music and burst forth with joy in the Lord. It's high time we quit fretting about the time of trouble and started trusting God's salvation. No more Waconian images of doomsday—the most glorious days of the church are ahead. We can lift up our heads and our hearts—our redemption is drawing near!

"Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; they will still be praising You" (Ps. 84:4). An economic boycott? Yes, but *we will still be praising Him*. A death decree? Yes, and *we will still be praising Him*. Next comes a small black cloud in the eastern sky. *We will still be praising Him*. The cloud will get brighter and brighter until the loving face of Jesus appears! *We will still be praising Him*. The trumpet will sound and the dead in Christ will rise. *We will still be praising Him*. We who are alive will be changed and caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. *We will still be praising Him*. Evermore we will be with the Lord, *evermore still praising Him!*

My friend, since we will be praising God throughout the ages of eternity, why not enjoy some praise music here and now?<sup>2</sup> ■

\*Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations in this editorial are from the New King James Version.

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1940), p. 672.

<sup>2</sup> If you want an example of praise in worship, you might enjoy a cassette tape of the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir.



# Love wins!

James A. Cress

**L**ove deserves better than the gutter. But there it was right in the filth of the streets.

Last January, Sharon and I received invitations to attend the inauguration of the President of the United States. It was exciting to join the thousands who crowded the streets of the capital in order to get a glimpse of the country's new leader. The day was festive and the mood of the throng was upbeat.

Thousands attended the festivities for the sole purpose of pushing their own agendas, distributing their propaganda. However, most of this "free" material ended up in the gutter. Unfortunately, truth suffered the same fate.

Some discarded books caught my attention because the cover was colorful, attractive, and somewhat familiar. I looked closer in the gutter and discovered copies of *The Great Controversy*. Hundreds of copies of this deeply spiritual book had been tossed into the streets and trash bins.

As I contemplated this sad end to some group's well-intentioned initiative, I concluded that friends sometimes cause more damage to the gospel than enemies. I was dismayed to see this Christian classic ending up as trash. Truth deserves better!

More recently, various billboard advertisements have appeared offering *The Great Controversy* to prove the pope's intentions to change America's constitution. This sensationalized promotion has caused ill-will among thousands of people and deeply divided Adventist churches between those who applaud such methods and those who are appalled. To me, however, the tragedy is greater than confusion among our members. The proclamation of God's love deserves better than this kind of sensationalized commercialization.

*The Great Controversy* provides pro-

found spiritual insights. Its analysis of the apostasy of the church during the dark ages is accurate. Adventists have always stood with the great reformers who saw the medieval church's falling away from truth as a historical fulfillment of Daniel 7, Revelation 13, and 2 Thessalonians 2. But this is not the primary message of the book. The primary theme of *The Great Controversy* is that despite all attacks upon God's truth and His character, love will ultimately triumph! Of course, the historical perspective demonstrates the folly of exalting traditions above Scripture or attempting to substitute ecclesiastical mandates for the commands of God. But note the closing paragraph of the book: "The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. . . . From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love."<sup>1</sup>

How do we appropriately present this message of love? I suggest the following.

## Methods matter

Jesus is as interested in God's character being properly represented as He is in facts being proclaimed. When His own disciples were ready to call fire down upon an unrepentant city, Jesus showed them the alternative of love. Yet in pronouncing the curse upon the fig tree, He also showed the ultimate result of a nation rejecting God's love.

## Truth demands dignity

No promotional efforts should stoop to cheap commercialism. The medium should match the message. It is unfortunate to see the triumph of God's love being hawked as if it were a tabloid. Advertising that misleads potential readers about the central theme of a book is deceptive to the public and unfair to the author.

## Never excite prejudice

Carefully reasoned and historically accurate presentations will be far more persuasive than stirring up ill will or fostering prejudice. Bigotry is not only out of place, it is destructive to the very objectives of those who employ it. Notice the counsel of this very book: "*The French Reformers . . . determined to strike a bold blow against the superstitions of Rome that should arouse the whole nation. Accordingly, placards attacking the mass were in one night posted all over France. Instead of advancing the reform, this zeal-ous but ill-judged movement brought ruin, not only upon its propagators, but upon the friends of the reformed faith throughout France.*"<sup>2</sup>

## Seize the initiative

Those who wish to see better methods must be at the forefront of utilizing acceptable alternatives. For example, my former congregation recently sent out invitations to friends in the community to request a complimentary copy of *The Great Controversy*. Adventists in Carolina sponsored radio and newspaper coupons for a free book. As a result 25,000 copies were hand-delivered along with an invitation to a seminar on last-day events.

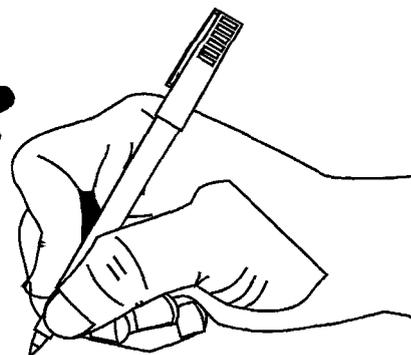
## Read it for yourself

If you've never read this classic account of God moving through history for the benefit of humanity, you may also request a complimentary copy by writing *Ministry*. The book's theme of God's love triumphing over all challengers is a message you deserve to know and I would enjoy sending you a complimentary copy. ■

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn. 1911), p. 678.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 224, 225.

# Preacher, do you write good sermons?



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### Sabbatical institute in California



Last July Pacific Union College hosted the first-ever sabbatical institute for Adventist pastors and their families. Directed by Louis Venden, the month-long institute offered rest, recreation, and fellowship, along with the opportunity for pastors to pursue a study project of their choice. Ample time, resources, and feedback opportunities enabled the completion of these projects. A major benefit of the sabbatical was the strengthening of pastoral marriages.

"Pastors need this kind of rejuvenation," Venden observed.

### Church ministries convention

Enabling members to employ their spiritual gifts was the goal of the recent church ministries convention in the Upper Columbia Conference. More than 1,500 attended one of 30 practical seminars addressing various aspects of local church leadership. Pictured is Pastor Bob Mix of Yakima, Washing-



ton, leading a discussion group in a plenary session that reaffirmed lay members as the ministering force of the Adventist Church.

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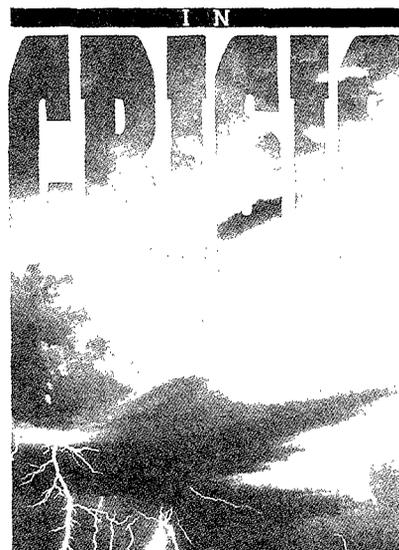
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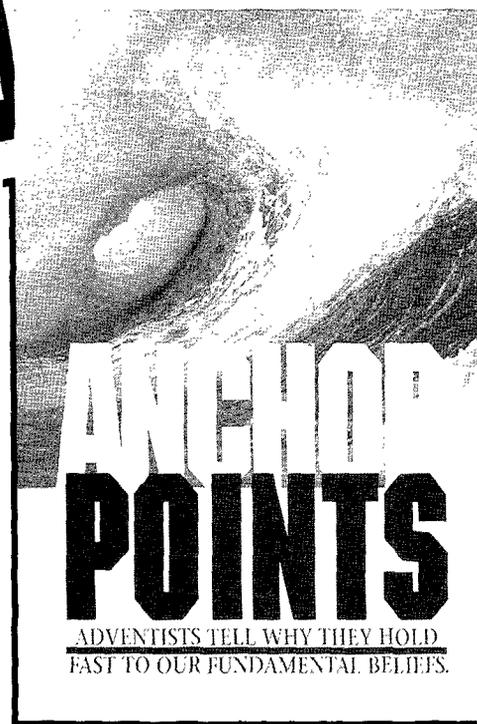
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## ANCHOR POINTS

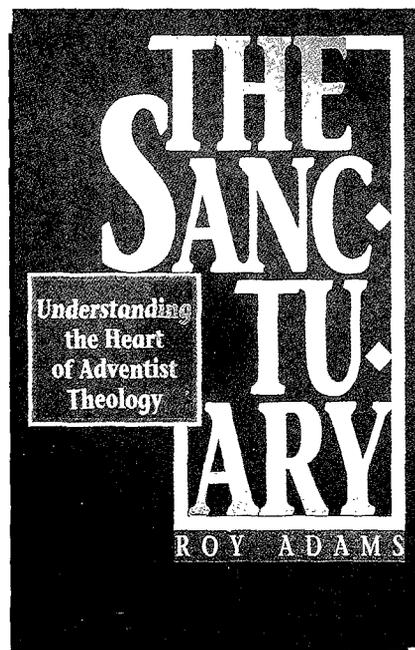
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## Christianity in Crisis

Hank Hanegraaff, *Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, Oregon, 1993, \$16.99, hardcover. Reviewed by David B. Smith, director of public relations and development, It Is Written television broadcast, Newbury Park, California.*

Even as an insider in religious television, I am stunned by this powerful book coming from the president of Christian Research Institute (an organization founded by Dr. Walter Martin). Hanegraaff outlines the clear and present danger of the "faith movement" blanketing America's airwaves.

American televangelism has long been a source of amazement and amusement to secular viewers with its shallow theology, Robert Tilton's \$1,000 harangues, and emphasis on the prosperity gospel—"Name it and claim it." Hanegraaff colorfully calls it "Blab it and grab it." *Christianity in Crisis* exposes how a handful of widely viewed ministers—Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, Frederick Price, and others—undermine the pillars of Christianity, especially the atonement, the Trinity, and the nature of God and Christ, with their own brand of "faith."

Adventist pastors will gain at least two benefits from this well-written book. First, *Christianity in Crisis* (CRI) is an eye-opener about New Age theologies encountered by many of our own members as they idly flip the dial on Sunday morning after a half hour with Finley, Brooks, or Matthews. As Hanegraaff says, "Not everything these [faith] teachers espouse is wrong. If these men and women promoted nothing but error, their audiences would quickly shrink to insignificance. It is sometimes possible to watch 15 minutes of a faith broadcast and wonder what all the fuss is about, since we may see and hear nothing worthy of censure. But it is what occurs on minute 16 that ought to rock us on our heels, for it is the fatal error mixed in with the truth that makes the faith movement so dangerous."

Some sample quotes from these televangelists expose the foundation of this new gospel: "You don't have a god in you, you are one." "God cannot do anything in this earth unless we give Him permission." "Satan conquered Jesus on the cross." "Being poor is a

sin." "There will be no sickness for the saint of God." The speakers dangerously have "faith in faith"—the concept of faith as its own independent power, reducing God to an impotent servant, or gofer, in the service of demanding humans whose haughty words create their own reality.

Second, I found in reading this book a powerful affirmation of the relevance of Adventist teaching. In each of the cardinal tenets defended so compellingly, readers will discover Adventism. Obviously Hanegraaff and CRI would not agree with the Adventist position on every issue. But I found it invigorating to say "Amen!" to each of the "primary doctrines that separate Christianity from the kingdom of the cults."

Hanegraaff, host of the *Bible Answer Man* radiobroadcast, is also a memory expert and lecturer; he shares a good number of acronyms that give the reader a handle on key biblical points and doctrines. There are almost too many of the acronyms.

The book is impeccably researched and written in a hard-hitting but gracious style. His philosophy regarding the need for this critical book: "When it comes to such matters as the fabric of faith, the nature of God, and the atonement of Christ, there must be unity. As Saint Augustine so aptly put it: 'In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; and in all things, charity.'"

## Wrestling With Reality

Martin Weber, *Pacific Press Publishing Association, Boise, Idaho, 1993, 142 pages, \$8.95, paper. Reviewed by Ron Thomsen, Houston, Texas.*

Martin Weber has written extensively about doctrinal issues in the Seventh-day Adventist Church since 1985. This latest book ventures into contemporary social issues.

Weber introduces the book with his thoughts on politics. Some of his comments in this area are on target, but others seem like excessive generalization. He highlights a narrow focus on the Right (linked to a Sunday law scenario), while missing the restrictions from the Left (such as gospel-free zones in Houston).

Several chapters discuss state issues,

including the use of deadly force by the law (police and military). On capital punishment he separates the principles of civil justice from the gospel. On abortion he feels that life should be fully protected, asserting that in most cases women have already exercised choice by participating in the sexual act. He does not defend the recent General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists statement about making decisions about abortion in the context of a fallen world. Weber skillfully points out the extremes to which that might lead. Can we legislate morality? Weber says yes, to a degree. He sees pornography and abortion as legitimate concerns of the state. An exposition on Martin Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms of church and state could have solidified his case.

The chapter on racism, "Our Unsuspected Sin," points out how Adventists have struggled with this immorality. Weber forcefully attacks the evils of racial hatred.

The author supports women in leadership positions, including the ministry, but he weakens his case by not explaining biblical texts used by opponents. While supporting some feminist causes, the author opposes a radical feminist agenda. He contends that many feminists have abandoned women's concerns in the real world.

Weber speaks on other social issues such as the problem of homelessness. He observes an obsession with self-esteem as a cure-all, and how this fixation has frequently undermined responsibility.

The chapter on ecology affirms that Christians need to be good stewards of God's resources, but warns against the pantheistic agenda permeating certain aspects of the environmental movement. He also describes some confusion on exactly what practices actually do help the environment.

Weber expresses many good ideas on how to tie social issues into truths about salvation. Occasionally he misses important elements on some topics, preventing this book from having a definitive word on these subjects. Nonetheless, it is a good first step toward moving out of a narrow Adventist subculture and paying attention to social concerns in the real world.

## Letters

From page 2

I agree that we should never argue over the details of righteousness by faith in order to prove our position right and another's wrong, I would hate for others to miss out on that "most precious message" of Christ-centered details that God gave to Jones and Waggoner.

One quote that frequently comes to mind is from *Testimonies to Ministers*, pages 91, 92: "The Lord in His great mercy sent a most precious message to His people through Elders Waggoner and Jones. *This message was to bring more prominently before the world the uplifted Saviour, the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. It presented justification through faith in the Surety; it invited the people to receive the righteousness of Christ, which is made manifest in obedience to all the commandments of God. . . . It is the third angel's message, which is to be proclaimed with a loud voice, and attended with the outpouring of His Spirit in a large measure*" (italics supplied).

I thank you again for this encouraging series of editorials. I look forward to more.—Robert P. Hunsaker, Loma Linda, California.

■ During a combined meeting on Sabbath, February 13, 1993, in our church in Semarang, Central Java, I discussed the October 1992, April 1993, and January 1993 articles in *Ministry with God's people there*. As a result of that meeting, one of the elders of the Semarang church felt compelled to talk to the West Indonesia Union ministerial secretary to get his approval to hold an all-Java church elders' meeting to discuss openly your letter to the General Conference president (October 1992). We feel that the Global Mission of the church, although perfectly proper as it stands, must be backed up by the church's wholehearted reconciliation with God first. The gospel must be better understood by God's people before they can intelligently share the message with the world and receive power from the Holy Spirit to carry out

the mission to full completion. Otherwise, we shall only linger longer in this sin-sick world with a gigantic task uncompleted.

Your articles serve as an "official" opening wedge to get the discussions started. Without anything "official" from church organization all our attempts at reformation will lead only to a dead end. You have been impressed by God's Spirit. Your articles are very timely. We laypeople hail them as God-sent because now, at

last, we have something from our own publications to give us a firm hold in defending our stand. We praise God and are fully confident that now is the time to act in faith. May there be more pastors and workers who dare to be like Daniel, Jeremiah, and the other faithful servants of God! Christ's honor and Heaven's glory are our jealousy! May God be pleased with what has transpired and will ere long transpire.—Gitoriswojo Kadarman, Java, Indonesia.



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■ I would like to encourage you to continue this mission of emphasizing the cross of Jesus. Two and a half years ago the Lord opened my eyes to the poverty of my prayer life, and since then, what victories, what joy, what peace, what salvation, and what a transformation in my sermons.

May Jesus bless our church. May God help me keep my eyes fixed on Him and Him alone.—Jean Luc Rolland, Toxmac, France.

### Raising or lowering standards?

Just a line to express my appreciation for your article "Raising or Lowering Standards?" (December 1992). It is true that our definition of *standards* is narrow, negative, and external. We condemn a \$10 necklace but drive to church in expensive cars from our luxurious homes. I pray that your article will open eyes and hearts to the heavier things of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness—

which are the "basic" Adventist emphases.—D. Augsburg, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

### Keeping up with *Ministry*

Recently I retired after more than 40 years of ministerial service, most of which was spent in the college classroom. One of my great fears was that I would lose contact with the "growing edge" of Adventist ministry in my retirement. Thanks to *Ministry* that is no longer one of my worries.

When I can read and reflect on the practical theological implications of the Resurrection in the challenging article by Robert Zamora ("The Absence of Easter," April 1993), and then find myself cheering and mumbling to myself "Right on" as Sharon Cress so delightfully makes the point that 1993 is the "Year of the Pastor's Wife, Too" (May 1993), I feel confident that I can still stay "with it" in these "golden years." And who knows, maybe my years of ministry are not over yet. Keep up the good work.—Fred Veltman, Angwin, California.

### The absence of Easter

The point Robert Zamora was making ("The Absence of Easter," April 1993) is not clear to me. I have been a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church all my life—some 70 years—and I can't remember a year when our church did not pay special attention to the resurrection of Christ, especially about the time of the year it occurred.

However, it is only recently that I've heard our pastors speak of "Easter weekend," and even urge our members to take part in the pagan Sunday sunrise services. How can our Lord be honored with such a statement as "Last Easter, after our Resurrection Sabbath service . . ."? Why should the name of a heathen goddess even make an entrance into our vocabulary?

I think we are much too concerned about whether others pat us on the back and call us brethren, instead of holding on to our Saviour's words "Fear not, little flock." Paul didn't mind saying he was a member of the "sect" called Christians, and I would much rather have the Lord's approval than the world's.—Mary Jane Eaklor, Penrose, Colorado.



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## School of evangelism

During November 30 to December 9 of this year, the Adventist Media Center in Newbury Park, California, will host an evangelism training school for pastors. Presenters include media speakers and some of our best evangelists. There is no charge for this intensive program, but only 50 pastors can attend. Enrollment is on a first-come, first-served basis. Call (805) 373-7612.

## Welcome Baby evangelism

Would you like the babies of your community to receive a warm Adventist welcome into the world? Kay Kuzma's "Welcome Baby" program is a new witnessing tool for caring members to establish bonds with parents of newborns. Step one is sending a Welcome Baby greeting card. Step two is delivering a gift and the first Welcome Baby newsletter. Step three is continuing contact with the family every month when delivering additional newsletters. Friendships developed with the family can form a bridge to your church.

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## Witnessing resource manual

Many members would eagerly get involved in outreach if they had the proper tools. Hundreds of books and other training resources are available, but selecting among them isn't easy. *Witnessing Projects and Their Resources*, a 64-

page catalog compiled by a librarian at Andrews University, fills this need. Cost is \$2.50 postpaid in the United States. Order from Wolfhard Touchard, c/o James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI 49103.

## Media invitations

North American pastors planning public evangelism can arrange for Adventist Media Ministries to send letters of invitation to local interests. Six weeks' advance notice is required. Call Karen Hoffman (805) 373-7612.

## Pastoral postcard

As pastor of a relatively small church, I searched for creative ways to communicate with members during the week to offer encouragement, reminders, or whatever. Since I find writing letters to be time-consuming and telephone calls not always convenient, I began sending prestamped postcards. (This was, of course, not in lieu of letters and telephone calls in some cases.) After weekend worship services, possibly during lunch, I take a stack of postcards and jot down personal notes for members. Monday they are mailed. Members really appreciate this personal pastoral touch.—Joseph B. Modica, Madison, New Jersey.

## Cosmic Conflict tracts

The Hart Research Center has just released seven tracts of the new Cosmic Conflict Series, addressing basic principles of Christianity and Bible doctrine. Designed for personal witnessing, the well-written, attractively illustrated color tracts fit into coat pocket or purse.

Titles include "The World's Most Evil Man," "Near-Death Delusions," "Star Man," and "Heaven's Tender Touch." US\$3 for pack of seven, quantity discounts available. To order, call (619) 723-8082 or send check/money order to P.O. Box 2377, Fallbrook, CA 92088.

## Illustrating sermons

A simple idea has transformed the children's story in our worship service. We first used it when a visiting minister punctuated his story by asking questions about the wind. From where does it come? What are its effects? All the while he talked with the children he was making something out of paper. Soon he had a bird. He described how the bird could fly because of air for the wings to beat against. He then gave the colorful bird to an eager child. Then he reached into his paper sack and found a paper bird for each child. The sermon that followed used many ideas proposed in the children's story. The speaker read John 3 and the story of Nicodemus. "The Holy Spirit is like the wind," he remarked. "You can't see Him, but certainly you can see and feel the results of His work."

This concept worked so effectively that even the children recalled sermon points. Adults benefitted too, having watched and listened to the children's story before the sermon.

Not all sermons can be easily illustrated, but many innovative ministers are finding ways to present their sermon first to the children as a story or illustration before they preach it.—George Hoffaker, Muscatine, Iowa.

## Friendship booklet

*About the Seventh-day Adventists*, a booklet of 16 pages, provides inquirers with a brief yet comprehensive introduction to our church. Illustrated throughout with line art, it offers an interesting and accurate description of Adventist history and beliefs, even explaining church structure and SDA global humanitarian outreach. Money-back guarantee; personalized covers possible. Available in quantity for as little as 33 cents. Phone (800) 628-7733, or write: Channing L. Bete Co., 200 State Road, South Deerfield, MA 01373.

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