

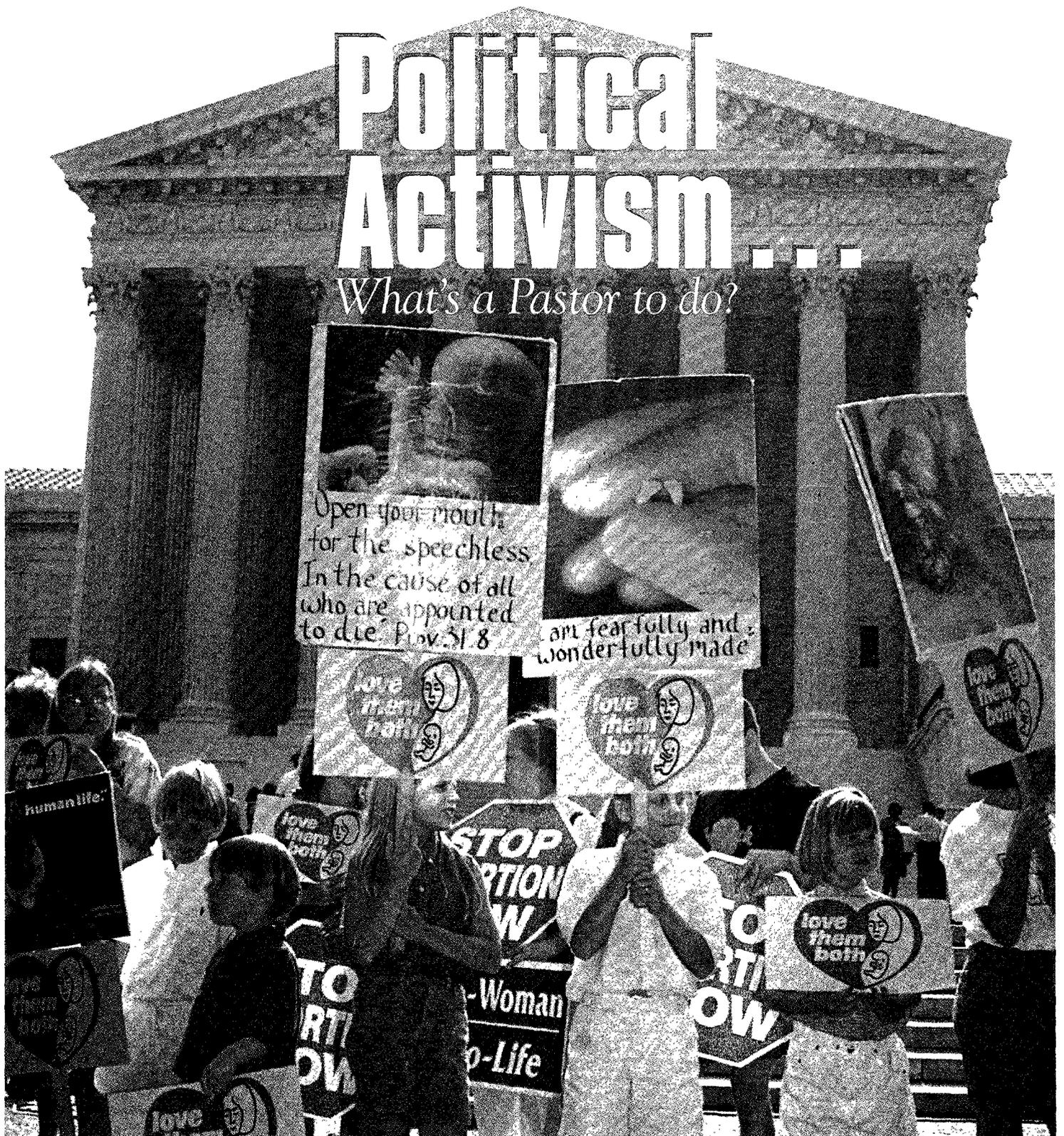
Ministry

International Journal for Pastors

December 1997

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Ministry

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Unity in diversity

Walter Douglas (August 1997) says that the ordination of women "need not lead to disruption of the church's unity." That's only wishful thinking. Just take a look at the disastrous results experienced here in the United States by those Christian denominations that have introduced that unbiblical practice. Ask the Lutherans, the Baptists, the Christian Reformers, etc., if they like the devastation brought by this issue upon their beloved churches. Such experiences of those denominations should keep us silent on this topic.

Will the ordination of women "create new possibilities for mission"? Who said that a person needs to be ordained in order to do missionary work? The ordination gives no power to win souls. It is the Holy Spirit who gives the power, whether a person is ordained or not.

To say that unity can be maintained in the church with a diversity of contradictory beliefs and practices makes no sense. The Bible says: "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10). —Antonio Arteaga, Th.D., Riverside, California.

Pastor persecutors

Wow! What an issue of *Ministry*! What made the August (1997) issue so great? Not the theological articles, not even the "how-to" articles. The great part was the reprint of G. Lloyd Rediger's article "Pastor Persecutors." I read the article in its original printing and was encouraged. I am glad that *Ministry* was able to reprint it.—Sherman McCormick, Ph.D., Thief River Falls, Minnesota.

● The article "Pastor Persecutors" really caught my attention. I have watched for more than 20 years how these people have caused tremendous havoc in God's church. When I became a committed Christian, I never dreamed that I would see persecution—a better word is terrorism—among God's people. Yet after working in Europe, Africa, and North America, I must say that we have almost developed a culture in which "Christian terrorism" can thrive. We must respond to this destructive force in our midst, and we must respond forcefully.

Terrorism is not too harsh a word to use in connection with the tactics used to control the faithful in the church. Power and control are at the root of all pastor persecutors' activities. They will do whatever it takes to maintain control. Gossip and cruel lies, nasty insinuations, and harsh criticism are tools used to bring down anyone who opposes them. Terrorists are adept at working behind the scenes to create chaos. "Christian terrorists" often appear to be loyal supporters of the church while at the same time spreading poison about anyone who is in their way.

The most serious result of this terrorism is that it cripples the church. Fear of being the next victim paralyzes the members from becoming active in the church. It is dangerous to do anything that displeases the power and control group. No one wants to suffer humiliation and rejection. The safest thing is to do nothing. The members chafe under the harsh rule of the terrorists, but they have been taught to "bear all things" and to respond in "Christian love." The church doesn't grow, and there is little joy and unity among the members, since there is a spirit of fear and distrust generated by those who are in control.

If we want to see a change, we cannot continue to do what we have been doing. Conciliation and patience do not impress a terrorist. They empower him or her. We must not tolerate terrorism in the church. It is sinful for us to allow the church to be controlled by those who are not striving to be fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. Jesus said that pastors and the church leader are responsible for the sheep. Why do we allow the wolves to be in the sheepfold?—Beat Odermat, British Columbia, Canada.

● It is true that there are some people in the church who, for reasons justifiable or not, do persecute their pastor. It may be seen as justifiable in some cases in which the motives are a desire to hear sermons that are inspiring and biblical, to see a life reflect what is being preached, or to better the pastor's style of dealing with issues affecting the church.

Pastors who come to work in a church as a result of a sense of calling and genuine love for people will win respect, although at times there may be misunderstanding and nonrecognition.

Respect and love are earned through loving service, patience, and a forgiving heart. A pastor who does not possess these characteristics will not be happy working in the church environment. Being a pastor is not a profession but a calling to service.—Romuald Varzonek, (retired) pastor who worked for 47 years in Poland and Australia.

February 1997 issue

Ministry has never been more on track than in the February issue. Many readers will salute you for recasting the original reasons for our existence as a church. Our divine beginnings assure our ultimate triumph.—Roy R. Henneberg, Hayden, Idaho. ■

Free Subscription

If you're receiving *Ministry* bimonthly and haven't paid for a subscription, it's not a mistake. Since 1928 *Ministry* has been published for Seventh-day Adventist ministers. We believe, however, that the time has come for clergy everywhere to experience a resurgence of faith in the authority of Scripture and in the great truths that reveal the gospel of our salvation by grace, through faith alone in Jesus Christ. We want to share our aspirations and faith in a way that will provide inspiration and help to you as clergy. We hope you will accept this journal as our outstretched hand to you. Look over our shoulder, take what you want and find helpful, and discard what you can't use. Bimonthly gift subscriptions are available to all licensed and/or ordained clergy. Requests should be on church letterhead and addressed to the editorial office.



Recently I visited three inspiring World Ministers' Councils representing nine union conferences and fields in Africa

and Inter-America. In total, these councils hosted about 1,500 Adventist ministers and their spouses. At all three venues a particular question was asked in one form or another. It is a question that possesses underlying presuppositions and desired responses. It is freighted with important implications for this publication even if it is not asked in places like Kenya, Zimbabwe, or Colombia. Succinctly stated, the question was "Does *Ministry* represent the official voice of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?"

From a number of points of view this question is significant. I must admit that for me, right or wrong, it is omnipresent. After all, our editorial office is located in the world headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and as such, this magazine clearly represents much more than the thinking of any one person, place, or time. Besides this, *Ministry* has an illustrious and rather definitive history with this church of ours and its ministers. Along with these realities, any medium of communication that targets the thought leaders of a given organization obviously needs to responsibly and accurately reflect the outlook of that organization. We definitely try to keep the contents of each issue of the journal consistent with this reality.

No thoughtful person would deny, however, that *Ministry*, in order to be of any substantive value to the church, has to play a broader part than that of simply reiterating the official positions of the church. In fact, for the magazine to exist simply for this purpose would,

Ministry: official word of the church?

W I L L E V A

by its nature, create a predictable, sterile periodical.

Ministry's original charter—and significantly, its ensuing history—demands a broader character and purpose. In targeting the thought leaders of the church, the journal must endeavor not only to be consistent with denominational belief, but to be on the cutting edge of thought and study. It must provide a medium by which the best thought and study of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is pooled and responsibly exposed to a world readership. Because the magazine embraces more than one role, with some of the roles being by their nature in tension with one another, it is almost inevitable that it will at times raise questions in some minds as to whether or not its treatment is exactly as it ought to be. Let me explain what I mean from a historical point of view.

In a fascinating article to appear next month, Bert Haloviak will touch on some of the controversial aspects of the magazine's history. In doing so, light will be thrown on the potentially conflicting roles of *Ministry* as both an expressor of the church's collective voice and a judicious articulator of fresh positions that may seem to some to be risky or worrisome in the life of the church.

Bert will point out how the first editor of *Ministry*, L. E. Froom,

addressed traditional yet questionable theological positions in the church. The August 1928 issue of the magazine, its eighth, declared a preference for the Revised Version rendition of Revelation 22:14 over the KJV, and so proliferated a decade-long debate. More significant than this controversy was one surrounding the question "To Creedalize or Not to Creedalize," in which Froom expressed positions considerably different from some of his brethren.

Probably because of such editorial positioning, in 1931 the magazine was aligned more directly with the administrative leadership of the church, when C. H. Watson succeeded A. G. Daniells as chair of the Ministerial Association and vice president I. H. Evans became, as association secretary, joint editor of *Ministry* with L. E. Froom. In conjunction with these adjustments, it was declared that the work of the Ministerial Association was to be done in close relationship with the executive staff of the General Conference.

This history opens our eyes to the tension that exists to this day between faithfully declaring the official positions of the church and exposing with fidelity some positions or perspectives that are challenging and even debatable. It also exposes the fact that *Ministry's* involvement in such discussions is not new.

Above everything, as we at the editorial office strive to maintain humility, prudence, delicacy, and disciplined integrity, I pray that our readers everywhere will open themselves to deeper prayer and study and the spirit not only of conserving truth, but the prospect of uncovering so much more yet to be discovered.

Above all else, I want *Ministry* to be true to all of the roles God has called it to fulfill, however contradictory these may sometimes appear. ■



A few months ago I participated in a two-day seminar on open systems. When I received the seminar

materials, I wondered just what was involved. What would I learn? Would this be time well spent? While listening to the principal presenter and later participating in four of the small groups that were part of the seminar assignment, I realized that most of us experienced the same feelings—the need for better communication, for really listening to each other, and for showing an interest in the needs and desires of others.

We talked about new ways of working together and new ways of leading. Rather than just telling people what to do, we focused on what we want to achieve and how best it can be done. We got a new concept of leadership, which I would like to share here. Nothing listed below is new, but neither is any of it unessential.

Develop an adequate mission statement.

No organization can even begin to function without a clearly defined statement of its mission. This is especially true of a church, however small it may be. Encourage the group as a whole to be involved in developing the mission statement. Such group involvement brings group commitment with mutual respect and trust, leading each person to affirm, "We're in this together."

Keep the end vision in view.

Short-range perspectives have their place, but the end vision is important. Challenge your members as individuals to develop their own skills and aptitudes. Tap their energy, ideas, and initiative so that the group can reach its objective.

We're in this together

JULIA W. NORCOTT

Treat members with respect and care.

This is particularly important in times of change and moments of challenge. We live on the information superhighway. Every day we experience change. Computers are updated so fast and programs are changed so quickly that we don't have opportunity to learn even a part of the old program before new ones hit us. Such an atmosphere of change is not only challenging but stressful and calls upon leaders to be supportive of their members and help them to meet the demands of change smoothly. People are individuals with feelings—not pawns on a chessboard.

Cultivate effective communication with people.

Communicating in ways that may have served well in the past may not work in today's global village. Experiment with new ways of getting your message across. Cultivate understanding with each member of the group. Promote interpersonal relationships. Listen to their feelings. Give importance to their opinions. The critical thing is not what you do *to* people, but what you do *with* them. Do you help them grow? Are they partners in achieving your group mission and vision? If they feel they are, they will respect you and continue to appreciate your leadership.

Be authentic and relevant.

No one believes the message if they cannot believe the messenger. Leaders must use their own voice and act on what they say. Posturing and pretending

are shallow partners in leading others.

Avoid cynicism. One study shows that 48 percent of American workers no longer believe in their companies. They do only enough work to keep from being fired. They can be motivated to do more only through incentives that are significantly more than mere money.

For example, in Cincinnati, Precision Lens Crafters revamped their mission along the lines of "we are helping the world to see." Most workers at Lens Crafters felt some real connection between their job and the business of helping others improve their lives by improving their sight. They not only help their neighbors to see better, but also travel to developing nations, where the donation of their time, talent, and materials provides eyewear for thousands of people with impaired vision. The people in this company know they make a difference.

Provide foresight and focus.

Foresight means conveying the big picture—the process of looking out and into the future. Focus means gaining clarity on the real issues. Poor leaders juggle dozens of messages, clogging the airwaves. Successful leaders clear the air by communicating few key messages with foresight and focus.

Cultivate interdependence.

This means having a vision that connects everyone. We are dependent upon the interdependence of all members of our churches. Communicate our message about God's great love and that He is coming again in such a way that it will really appeal to them. Learn from each other. Treat them as equals.*

That's the Jesus way of leadership. ■

* Laurie Beth Jones, *Jesus, CEO* (New York: Hyperion Pub., 1995).

THE PASTOR AND POLITICS

An Adventist pastor receives a letter from a Christian political organization imploring him in the name of the Lord to attend—with his flock—an anti-abortion rally. Another impassioned letter, occasionally underlined in red, wants him to fight a “gay rights” initiative in the state legislature.



Clifford Goldstein is the editor of Liberty, a journal devoted to religious freedom.

The minister also gets a phone call from a fellow preacher of a different denomination who seeks his support in a boycott of a hotel chain that offers pornographic movies. More mail comes, this time urging his church to help pressure the local school board in removing from the junior high library books that the pastor, quite frankly, would never want his own preteens to read.

No doubt, a majority of Adventist ministers would agree with most, perhaps all, of these causes. But agreeing is not the same as committing themselves or their church resources to fighting for them. Political advocacy for a layperson can often be fraught with unforeseen hazards; how much more so for pastors and their churches? This does not mean that Adventist pastors or congregations should *never* join forces with other Christians in advocating political change. The question is Under what conditions—and what are the risks if they do?

“Only a God can save us”

Whatever decisions we make, as humans we inevitably start from premises that influence where we wind up. As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, our starting point, our premise, should be the fundamental fact of our faith, which is that “while we

were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). At the cross the Lord did for us what we could never do for ourselves, and that is to atone for sin. “Only a God,” wrote Hegel, “can save us,” and the only God who can is the one who “hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13).

Thus Calvary proves that humanity’s hope cannot be centered in the human—their philosophies, their institutions, and their own government. Christ’s death was a spiritual answer to spiritual needs, not a political answer to political needs. And at the core level humanity’s problems are spiritual, not political. Of course, the cross doesn’t negate the need for human endeavors, for human institutions; what the cross does, however, is help place them in their proper perspective.

Yet even more than His death, Christ’s life should caution those contemplating political activism. Despite rampant political and social evils (the Roman occupation wasn’t exactly a liberal utopia), Jesus remained manifestly apolitical. Critics often question Christ’s silence on the most evil of ills: slavery. No doubt, Jesus cared about these problems, but He sought to change people, who in turn would change the institutions, not vice versa. This principle

CLIFFORD GOLDSTEIN

stands out in Christ's words, though spoken in a different context: "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight" (John 18:36).

The question of witness

Liberty recently ran an article by Edward G. Dobson, a senior editor of *Christianity Today*. Dobson explained why he refused to succumb to the pressures to involve his church in politics. He stressed that individual believers should exercise their rights as citizens. They should vote, lobby, and even run for office. But the church as an institution, he wrote, should not allow itself to be dominated by political activism. "As a former board member of the Moral Majority, I know the potential danger of this kind of political activity—the possible jettisoning of the gospel for a political agenda."

Dobson's point is well made. How much time, energy, and money should be spent on attempting political reform (at best only temporary solutions) as opposed to spreading the gospel, which alone can bring the kind of reforms a country needs? Every penny spent on fighting against "gay rights," or every hour spent picketing an abortion clinic, is one less penny and one less hour that can be used for ministry. Also, a gay who has just been shouted down by a group of Christians, or a woman who was jeered by Christian picketers in front of an abortion clinic, isn't likely to listen to those same Christians (or maybe others as well) who, in another circumstance, witness about the love and forgiveness of God. Christ wouldn't have had as much success in reaching out to prostitutes and sinners if He had been busy trying to drive them out of town.

Again, this doesn't mean that ministers should never get involved in political and social reform; instead, it means only that they should give careful thought before they do so.

Legislating morality

Though it's often said that "you can't legislate morality," the truth is that you *can*. In fact, law is nothing but legislated morality. Pat Buchanan, Madonna, and Dennis Rodman all want legislated morality;

they just have different views of which morality to legislate.

Also, because morality is inevitably tied to religion, in a democratic and predominantly "Christian" country like the U.S., it's only natural that churches, pastors, and Christians in general should be involved in formulating law. Separation of church and state means, says legal scholar Ronald Dworkin, that "no group is deemed clever enough or numerous enough to decide essentially religious matters for everyone else." It doesn't mean that moral values, even those tied to religion, have no role in shaping public policy.

What course
*should an Adventist minister
take in regard to political
activism? Do we avoid all
involvement? . . . Do we risk
compromising the gospel by
getting involved? Or could
we unknowingly become part
of something that could
indeed go too far?*

Unlike previous centuries, the battle, at least in the public arena, isn't over religious forms (dogma, doctrine, liturgy), but over religious values. What is their place in the public square? Some, like philosophers Peter Singer and Helga Kushe, argue that because the principle stressing the equality of all human life (which underlies the debate regarding the death penalty, abortion, and euthanasia) is based on Christian theology, it should therefore not be allowed to influence public policy decisions, an extreme

position at best. In contrast, most Adventists would agree with former U.S. Supreme Court justice Earl Warren, who argued that a law forbidding murder isn't invalidated just because it happens to agree "with the dictates of the Judeo-Christian religions while it may disagree with others." (Before agreeing too readily, we should realize that Warren wrote this as part of his rationale in a decision upholding the validity of Sunday closing laws.)

A fine, wavy, even broken, line

What course, then, should an Adventist minister take in regard to political activism? Do we avoid all involvement, particularly because of our eschatology? Do we refuse to support any legislation that might have a religious underpinning because we're afraid it might lead to persecution? Do we risk compromising the gospel by getting involved? Or could we unknowingly become part of something that could indeed go too far?

Unfortunately, no simple formula gives an absolute yes or no answer. After all, Adventists are not adverse to lobbying for or against laws that affect their interests. Why then shouldn't we help legislate other reforms as well? Ellen White, for instance, was so adamant in her desire to restrict the right of adults to drink liquor that she encouraged Adventists to load up their anti-liquor neighbors on wagons and cart them to the polling booth—even on Sabbath!

The bottom line: Adventist ministers need to make their own choices. Of course, they should counsel, not only with the board of elders, but with the conference and even with someone in the General Conference Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department, because whatever the potential spiritual pitfalls, too much involvement can lead to loss of tax-exempt status as well.

Political activism for a pastor has potential rewards and potential hazards. The choice is rarely clear-cut, but usually involves staying on the right side of what is often a fine, wavy, even broken, line. More than anything, the pastor needs wisdom from on high in deciding how to respond to the next letter, underlined in red, urging involvement on a moral issue that, more often than not, the gentle nudging of the Spirit tells is right. ■

THE RISK OF CHRISTMAS

Close to a million people lined up on the winding roads of Calcutta to catch a glimpse of Mother Teresa's body on the way to its final resting place. The journey was emotional to some, spiritual to others, disturbing to a few, and a wonder to all. The wonder rose from the question "why."



John M. Fowler, Ed.D., is associate secretary in the General Conference Department of Education and a consulting editor for Ministry.

Why was this frail little woman honored and mourned throughout the world? Why did the small and the great, the street dwellers and the statesmen, the agnostic and the religious take a bow toward Calcutta? Was it because she became a legend in her own time and earned such titles as the "saint of the gutters," the mother of the dying, the friend of the lonely, the servant of the poor, and Nobel Laureate for peace?

I think not. These titles and honors do not impress me the most. What impresses me is the risk she took as a young girl when she left the safety of her home and friends in Albania to undertake a journey of faith and service to the unknown world of Calcutta. There she prospered, so to speak, as a teacher and then as the principal of St. Mary's Girls' School, a prestigious institution known for its academic excellence and upper echelons of society. But the young sojourner was not satisfied. Something was missing in her ministry, and she prayed and sought for what that was. And it was all the time before her eyes, and she had not seen it. But when prayer opens one's heart and eyes, the vision of what should be done comes rather easily.

She saw the vision—of the poor, of the dying, of the sick, of thousands in Calcutta's streets who live and die without the basic dignity that the Creator has installed in and desires for every human being. So she started in a small way a home for the destitute. The home grew both in size and in love until it embraced scores of countries and thousands of people around the world. One of the first persons she carried to her home was a woman on a street corner—a poor, destitute woman whose toes were already half eaten up by rodents. In the face of that suffering woman, she said, she saw the face of Christ. That changed her world. That became the philosophy of her service.

To see in every hurting human face the reflection of the suffering and the saving Jesus is what the mystery of Christmas is all about. After all, why did God have to incarnate Himself in the form of a helpless baby? Why should that baby lie in a manger? Amidst the angelic chorus of glory to God and good will to humanity, why should there be the distant shadow of the cross?

To ask why is not given to us. To affirm it did is the good news and the challenge.

J O H N M . F O W L E R

The good news

Christmas is good news that the Creator has stepped into human history in the most dynamic form imaginable to offer to every human being the possibility of becoming what He wanted them to be at Creation. To restore in humans the image of their Maker, to bring them back to the perfection in which they were created, to break the bond of sin and suffering, and to open the kingdom of God to whoever will enter—that's what Christmas is all about.

So when Jesus on His journey from Christmas to the cross healed a man blind from birth, transformed a woman shattered by the violations of Magdala, asked a lonely, helpless man at Bethesda to take up his bed and walk on a Sabbath day, changed the demoniacs to be ambassadors of God's redemptive grace, embraced the leper here and raised the dead there, and challenged a noted clergyman that he was of no use unless he was born again. Jesus thrust upon history the challenge of Christmas: it's time to see in ev-

ery human face the image of God, marred, but transformable.

The challenge of Christmas

Christmas—that mystery of identifying with the lowly, the suffering, the dying—is not easy. Incarnational ministry involves risks—of rejection, of loneliness, of being doubted, and ultimately of the cross. Without that mystery and without the readiness to accept that risk, Christmas becomes just a festivity: indeed a pagan festivity that recognizes neither God nor humanity, but only self. The festivity is easy and can include everything and everyone. It has a Santa Claus, it sets up hot soup kitchens, it distributes food and fruit packages, and it gives toys. Each act, good as it may be, brings some happiness for a moment and like the dew of the morning vanishes a while later. The festivity has no permanency.

But Christmas is a permanent event: God with us, now and forever. When that permanency takes over us, we see God's face reflected in every hurting child of His

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creation. We may not be saints of the gutter or winners of Nobel Prizes, but we can certainly be risking whatever we have for the message and mission of Christmas: to bring glory to God and goodwill to men and women everywhere. ■

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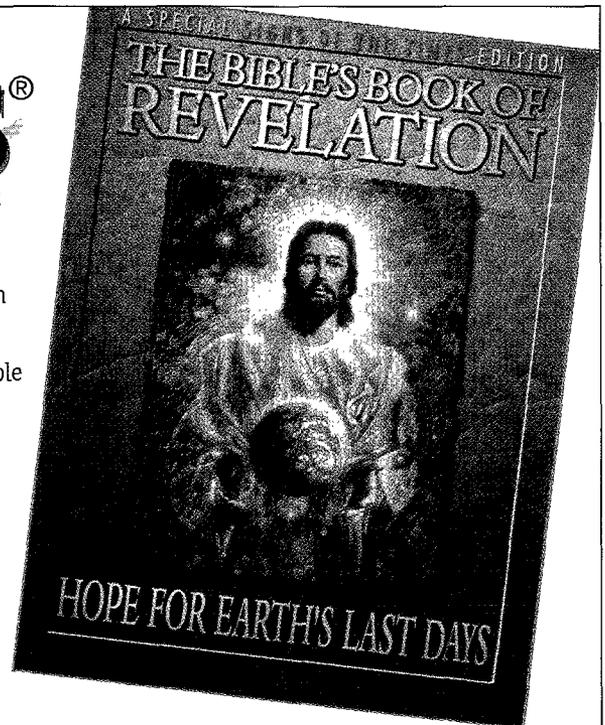
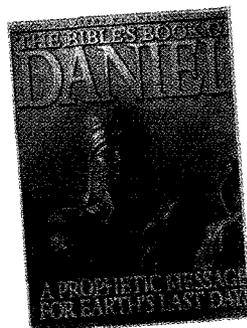
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JOURNEY THROUGH THE CRISIS OF SPIRITUALITY

In one of my favorite cartoon strips the first panel shows Garfield the cat standing in the shadows on one side of bright sunlight that is beaming through the window. He contemplates the warmth of the sunlight.



Gordon Bietz, Ph.D., is president of Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, Tennessee.

The balloon above his head contains the words “I wonder if I can get across this time.”

The second panel of the cartoon shows him making a tremendous leap, seeking to get through the warmth of the light to the other side. The final panel shows him collapsed in a heap in the midst of the warm sunbeam. He had fallen asleep in the warmth and comfort of the sun.

That cartoon is a picture of my journey into my office each morning. On the far side of my office is a chair in which I am committed to having my personal devotions. My Bible, devotional book, and reading material are there. But on the way to that chair I must pass the nearly irresistible draw of my desk and computer. The desk is piled high with work, and the computer beckons for sermons, E-mail, Internet, and maybe a game or two. It is as if there is a black hole of busyness that irresistibly draws me into it.

From pastor to conference president to

university president, the ongoing nemesis of my life is to resist my activist personality—the desire to do things and please people instead of taking time to be with God in personal spiritual development. I have stood when calls were made to spend one hour a day in prayer. I have stood when appeals were made to spend 15 minutes a day in Bible study and prayer. I have made appeals to others at the close of impassioned sermons and then had to live with the guilt of personal lack of performance. With Paul I say, “I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.”¹

I have rationalized my weakness, but I find that my human nature goads me to please people, not God. When I answer mail, write letters, organize events, write bulletins, send thank-you notes, call people up, and visit in the hospital, I receive many rewards. The rewards of spending quiet time with God are not as immediate. God doesn’t send me thank-you notes for sermons or give me

accolades for visitation.

My ministerial career started out right. My first job was as a ministerial intern in northern California at the East Oakland church. I didn't really know much of what to do except visit some interests and plan some youth programs, and so I spent a lot of time studying. When I went as chaplain to Rio Lindo Academy, in northern California, I spent an hour or so every morning reading through the Conflict of the Ages Series and the scriptural passages that went along with it. I even started reading all of the *Review and Herald* articles that Ellen White wrote in those large green bound volumes and began my own index of those articles.² But that kind of reflective spiritual growth and study tended to wane with the increase of responsibilities and the pressure of sermon preparation.³

When I would read books by Henri Nouwen,⁴ who gave up a tenured Harvard professorship and successful career for a simpler life of spiritual pursuits, I would think that maybe I should leave the hectic life of ministerial administrative activism. Maybe I should sign up for an overseas mission experience where I could work in a leper colony. As I compared my spiritual depth to his, I would feel as though I was playing spiritual Trivial Pursuit and would resonate with Gordon MacDonald's phrase "running on empty."⁵

In 1994, after 13 years of pastoring the Collegedale SDA Church, I was called to be president of the Georgia-Cumberland Conference. I felt that it was time for a change in my church and accepted the opportunity to minister at the conference office. I had heard the stories of conference presidents who used yellowed notes as they gave the same sermon over and over throughout the conference.⁶ I didn't want that to happen to me and went to the conference office with the best of intentions.

I soon found that the administrative pressures had increased to where a people pleaser like me would have no time at all; I also chose to make the 45-minute commute from my home in Collegedale, Tennessee, to the office in Calhoun, Georgia. The combination of administra-

tive pressure and the 400 sermons that I had accumulated on a computer in 13 years of preaching at Collegedale made the temptation to use old sermons too great. I would not be using any yellowed notes, however; I would just print out a new copy.

In the midst of my busyness at the Georgia-Cumberland Conference I was asked to do this article for *Ministry* on "pastors journeying through the crisis of spirituality." *Why did they ask me?* I thought. *Was someone watching my life?* I accepted the assignment as a challenge to help me get my study life in order. I figured

I have never identified with the person who simply has an ever-present "spiritual glow." In fact, some of those people make me nervous. Do I have to manifest my spirituality in the same way as they do to be considered spiritual?

if I was going to write about the answers, I should have some. Well, before the due date on the article, I had another change in my life. The board of trustees of Southern Adventist University asked me to serve as the president. One thing that was in the back of my mind when I accepted this new responsibility was that maybe with no more commuting and less general travel I might get a handle on my study life.

In my new job I have established a place to study and pray every morning. I have begun a journey through the Bible, and the responsibility of this new job has brought me to my knees on more than

one occasion, but the struggle is far from over. The daily battle to get past my desk and computer to my personal devotional location is very real.

As I reflect on this issue, I wonder if part of my problem is compartmentalizing my life, legalistically measuring the spiritual and nonspiritual by community expectations. Each personality responds to God in a different way. To be on the right track spiritually doesn't mean we should all wear sackcloth and ashes and move overseas to work for lepers, or that each of us should feel elevated to some mystical plane of existence. To be honest, I have never identified with the person who simply has an ever-present "spiritual glow." They talk to Jesus all the time, say "Praise the Lord" at every opportunity, and will spontaneously drop to their knees at almost any occasion. In fact, to be perfectly honest, some of those people make me nervous. Am I not spiritual? Do I have to manifest my spirituality in the same way as they do to be considered spiritual?

There is a dangerous tendency to look around and measure our spirituality by the externals that Jesus condemned, be it fasting twice a day or praying out loud on the street corner, or even spending one hour a day in Bible study and prayer.

I want spiritual power in my life like Paul had. He said to the Corinthians, "My message and my preaching were . . . with a demonstration of the Spirit's power."⁷ What is it to preach with "a demonstration of the Spirit's power"? If you were told by someone who was visiting your church, "I am here to listen to you preach and I want to have 'a demonstration of the Spirit's power,' " what would you do?

Eliot Wigginton reports on a power-filled religious service: "Each of us [who participated in the worship] found this a church of incredible strengths, tremendous energy and honesty, and of total commitment to God and to the congregation. It is not a church of talk, but of action so dynamic that beside it, more conventional forms of worship seem stale and lifeless."⁸ Is that a description of your worship service? A service with action, not talk? A dynamic service with tremendous energy? I hope those adjectives truly do describe

your worship service, but I also hope that you don't do what this church did to get that dynamic energy. This was a report given about a snake-handling service. All energy is not the Spirit's, and all power isn't from God.

It is possible to create an artificial crisis of spirituality in our own lives by using standards of comparison grown in hotbeds of Pentecostal emotionalism. There is a false spirituality in the world today that reflects more New Age mysticism than biblical spirituality. We need to go to the Scriptures and find what is at the core of the spiritual life.

Paul in Galatians describes spirituality when he exposes the fruit of the Spirit: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."⁹ Developing a Spirit-filled life is growing the fruit of the Spirit in the life. My approach to spiritual crises is not to add another legalistic load of guilt on my shoulders that I am not able to bear. It is not to measure my experience by another's. I find the answer in growing the fruit of the Spirit in my life.¹⁰

Growing love

There is a way of living that seeks to influence others through manipulation. Seeking to mold people's opinions without melting them with love first. Rather than loving people for Jesus, such living pummels people in areas of our personal insecurity.

There are those whose religion is "let the chips fall where they may," "separate the sheep from the goats," "cry aloud and spare not," and "point out the sins of the people." It is true that the Spirit-filled life needs "men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole."¹¹ But such communication doesn't use the needle on the people. The Spirit-filled life portrays the unconditional love of the Father.

Growing joy

When the gospel has been experienced, there is joy in the life. We share "good news"! Do the children enjoy church? They may not be able to understand all

that you say, but they know if there is joy there. "When the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw . . . the children shouting in the temple area, 'Hosanna to the Son of David,' they were indignant."¹²

The preachers were indignant. "What's going on here?" "Let's have a little reverence!" "Quiet down!" "Get these kids out of here!" They couldn't tolerate a little joy. We can have church services with detailed exegesis about the text and fill the air and mind with the complexities of

There is a false spirituality in the world today that reflects more New Age mysticism than biblical spirituality. We need to go to the Scriptures and find what is at the core of the spiritual life.

Middle Eastern life, and explain why in this circumstance this doctrine is true—but *no one is made happy*. The gospel is joyful news.

Growing peace

A major ministry of the Christian is the "nonanxious presence." In the middle of the catatonic turmoil of society and the emotional roller coaster of people's personal lives the pastor is the Rock of Gibraltar. He or she is a nonanxious presence that gives everyone a sense that God is trustworthy, so relax and be at peace.

Growing patience

Do people change as quickly as you'd like? Do you change as quickly as you would like? Most spiritual crises could use a large dose of patience. Many theological crises have crossed my path in my

ministry. I could have jumped quickly on a passing bandwagon that purported to have all the answers, but I have a growing patience. When inexplicable problems confront me that I don't have an answer for, I place the question on a shelf in the library of my mind. After a time I will review that issue again, and answers will come over time. True spirituality is patient.

Growing goodness

There is a false goodness that Christians fall for. Goodness developed in the lab of people's expectations. Doing things to keep up appearances. True goodness is a natural kind that grows from the genuine heart and is not worn like a Halloween costume. The goodness of the Spirit is not a goodness of avoidance, or artificial separation from the world. When our children were young we didn't own a television. People would say to me, "Did you see such and such a TV program last night?" I would respond to them, dripping with righteousness, "No; we don't own a television." Broadcasting such external goodness is like the hypocrites standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by passersby.¹³

As we grow in goodness may it not be just in avoiding evil. "The easiest sermon to preach is on why the world is going to hell."¹⁴ It doesn't take creativity to point to the sins of the world. It doesn't take sacrifice to lift our skirts out of our morally toxic world. When avoidance is the focus of our goodness, when escape is the point of our purity, and when shunning the world is the manifestation of our piety, then it will appear pale and stifling. It will not inspire people, and it will do no more than bore the next generation.

The testimony of one converted to the goodness of avoidance lists all the things they don't do anymore. They don't dance. They don't drink. They don't swear. They don't, they don't, and they don't . . . That is hardly a testimony that appeals. This artificial goodness is useful for stained glass people—people who are full of lead. Spirit-filled people go beyond the piety of avoidance. Piety of avoidance is monkish separation from that which is not holy rather than Christlike involvement with

that which is unholy. It is piety of exclusion rather than piety of inclusion. We avoid the evil, thinking mistakenly that therefore we are good. Growing goodness is more than avoiding evil.

Growing faithfulness

Oftentimes a spiritual crisis confronts us because we are being faithful to the wrong things. God asks me to be faithful to my gifts, not to yours. He asks me to follow the vision He gives me, not the one He gives you. How often is a crisis precipitated in our lives when I compare myself with your life, with your vision, with your ministry, and with your success. In the parable of the servants who used their talents, Jesus commended or condemned them for their use of the talents He gave them, not the talents He gave others.

Let us not be like Peter, who was so focused on others that Jesus said to him as he questioned what would happen to John, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me."¹⁵ We are to follow Jesus, not worry about how others follow.

Growing gentleness

There is a religious imperialism that presents truth in ways that coerce people. We create crises of spirituality in ourselves and in others when we are not gentle with the truth and with people. There is witnessing that is the verbal equivalent of rape. An attempt to plant seeds in the mind without caring for the soil. "Christ's method alone will give 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.'"¹⁶

Growing self-control

Many of life's crises could be resolved with self-control: thinking before we speak, listening before we judge, reflecting before we leap into action. The spiritual life is a controlled life.

The person who has never experienced a crisis of spirituality has never thought

deeply about life. The most practical way through the crises, I have found, is to focus on the clear manifestations of the Spirit's leading as outlined by Paul: love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. ■

¹ Rom. 7:18. Texts in this article are from the New International Version.

² Such indexing was useful before the advent of the CD-ROM.

³ I am not one who believes that sermon preparation and reflective spiritual growth are mutually exclusive. My salvation through the years has been the demands of a regular preaching schedule. In a desire to please the people I serve, I spent many hours in study as I prepared sermons. I believe a good sermon is one that grows from the heart of a person's personal spiritual pilgrimage, and so I wouldn't downplay the personal spiritual significance of sermon study.

⁴ I would recommend most any of Henri Nouwen's books. Though a bit mystical, they do cause one to think about one's spiritual commitment. Another author that is inspiring is Eugene Peterson, particularly *Under the Unpredictable Plant* and *Working the Angles*.

⁵ "Running on Empty" is the title of chapter 4 of his book *Renewing Your Spiritual Passion*. Other books by Gordon MacDonald: *Ordering Your Private World*, *The Life God Blesses*, and *Weathering the Storms of Life That Threaten the Soul* are recommended.

⁶ When my father went as president to the Southern California Conference, he said the best advice ever given him was by M. L. Andreasen, who told him to continue to prepare new sermon material. Of course, he discovered there in the geographically small conference that people who heard him one week would come and listen the next week at another church, and so he was forced to prepare new material regularly.

⁷ 1 Cor. 2:1-5.

⁸ *Foxfire* 7, p. 371.

⁹ Gal. 5:22.

¹⁰ Notice I said "growing the fruit," not "attaching the fruit."

¹¹ Ellen White, *Education* (Boise: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1903), p. 57.

¹² Matt. 21:15.

¹³ Matt. 6:5

¹⁴ Steven Mosely, *Christianity Today*, Nov. 19, 1990, p. 29.

¹⁵ John 21:19, 22.

¹⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Boise: Pacific Press Pub. Assn.), p. 143.

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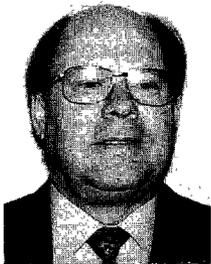
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CONTEXTUALIZING THE GOSPEL—OPTION OR IMPERATIVE?

The term *contextualization* is not universally accepted. In evangelical circles the word remains somewhat suspect because of its alleged liberal and sociopolitical overtones, and because it supposedly carries the smell of process thinking.¹



Reinder Bruinsma, Ph.D., is the secretary of the Trans-European Division, St. Albans, Hertfordshire, England.

Many Roman Catholic missiologists would rather speak of *inculturation*, while many conservative Protestants prefer the term *indigenization*.

The word *contextualization* was first introduced in 1972 in a report of the Third Mandate of the Theological Education Fund, an agency of the World Council of Churches. Whereas *indigenization* was seen as a rather static concept, the term *contextualization* was coined to express a more dynamic relationship to cultures, suggesting that cultures are in a constant flux, that necessitates an ongoing process of relating to them.²

Contextualization is biblical

Biblical revelation was given within a given historical context. Old Testament students are aware of the parallels between the Old Testament and certain aspects of other cultures. The fact that Israel was allowed to share in many of the forms and elements of other cultures suggests that the deeper

meaning of rites, ceremonies, architectural designs, etc., is primary, while the *form*, if not accidental, is of secondary importance.

Signs of contextualization are also apparent in the New Testament. The events that occurred in Palestine were soon reported to a non-Jewish audience, and their meaning was expressed in Greek terms. Paul deliberately strove for contextualization. He did not ask his non-Jewish hearers to become like him. He says, "I have become all things to all men" (1 Cor. 9:22, NIV).

And does not Incarnation itself stand out as proof that contextualization is essential to God's method of communication? Christ became man. He fully participated in the culture in which He allowed Himself to be born. "It is nothing short of amazing that the God of all the universe would choose our familiar turf, our way of life, our language, our total frame of reference rather than His own to be the context within which He interacts with us."³

The Bible leaves no doubt about God's

communication strategy. His concern is not just to push a set of propositions, but rather to establish a relationship with human beings. He reaches out to us, to elicit a response upon which the whole relationship is based. He wants to be understood. Hence He chose to become one of us and to love us where we are.

"To love," states Kraft, "is to seek the best for the recipient at whatever expense to the source. To love communicatively is to put oneself to whatever inconvenience to assure that the receptors understand."²⁴ Too often church leaders forget this principle and demand that the persons they seek to reach learn their language and their customs, appreciate their kind of music, come to their places of worship at their appointed times, and associate with their kind of people.

In Ellen White's days contextualization had not emerged in its present form. However, she repeatedly stressed the need for cultural adaptation in missionary work. Two statements will suffice:

"The servants of Christ should accommodate themselves to the varied conditions of the people. They cannot carry out exact rules if they meet the cases of all. Labor will have to be varied to meet the people where they are."²⁵

"The people of every country have their own peculiar, distinctive characteristics, and it is necessary that men should be wise in order that they may know how to adapt themselves to the peculiar ideas of the people, and so introduce the truth that they may do them good. They must be able to understand and meet their wants."²⁶

Contextualization is indispensable

We must appreciate the cultural diversity in the world as God's gift rather than see it as a problem to be solved! "In a globalized world, no particular expression of the church has the privilege of locking the gospel into one cultural expression and calling it biblical mission."²⁷

Church history is full of examples of sincere, and often successful, attempts at contextualization. Where this was neglected, disaster was often the result. One good example is the early history of Catholicism along the West African coast, in particular in the sixteenth-century kingdom of Congo. The early successes were not sustained,

Christianity was not indigenized; it remained a foreign element and almost totally disappeared until in the nineteenth century a new beginning was made.⁸

The recent explosive growth of independent churches in Africa must, at least in part, be understood as an attempt to make "Christianity relevant to the totality of the African experience of life" and as a rejection of noncontextualized forms of Christianity.⁹

From about 1800 the belief of most missionaries in the superiority of Western culture led to a diminished emphasis on the need of adaptation. The 1800-1950 period

A *dv*entists to a

large degree have shared (and continue to share) in the evangelical approach to missions, which regrettably is often very ethnocentric, or, more specifically, American.

has been referred to as the era of *noncontextualization*.¹⁰ In the past few decades, however, the situation has changed dramatically, even though there is still much to be desired. This is particularly true for many evangelical mission organizations that continue to operate as if the missionary's culture is "good," "advanced," and normative; whereas other cultures are "bad," "backward," and "distorted."¹¹

Adventists and contextualization

The Adventist pioneers described their message as *present truth*; that is, a truth given for a particular time and relevant to people living in a particular historical context. "In some areas of the world that 'particular situation' still prevails. . . . In other areas, however, different situations have developed, and new contexts have emerged in which the same message in its traditional form has less

appeal. It is still the truth, but not 'present truth,' that is, not relevant to the people's innermost longings and urgent needs."¹²

Adventists to a large degree have shared (and continue to share) in the evangelical approach to missions, which regrettably is often very ethnocentric, or, more specifically, American. The Adventist missionary endeavor will have to take contextualization more seriously than it has done in the past if it wants to see more success in difficult fields and wants to ensure that the believers in non-Western countries will feel ownership and find relevance in their church.¹³

Contextualization—difficult but possible

Contextualization is, in fact, translation. Concepts, expressed in particular words, symbols, rites, etc., first in the culture of the Bible, and second, in the culture of the missionary, must be translated into *dynamic equivalents* in the culture of the evangelized. Words have different meanings and connotations in various cultures. In Nigeria only the very young and the insane tend sheep. Picturing Christ as the good shepherd may send the wrong message. The Sawis in Papua New Guinea admire treachery, a fact that needs to be kept in mind when speaking about Judas. The dragon is a much more positive symbol in the Chinese world than it is in the West. Many other examples could be added.

Having stated that contextualization requires a translation of words and customs, we should immediately add a *caution*. All cultures are imperfect, and some are even hostile to the essence of Christianity. Yes, the gospel must be contextualized, but it must also remain prophetic—it must stand in judgment on what is evil in the culture of the recipient of the message.¹⁴ It can press into its service only those themes, values, institutions, and behavioral patterns that are consistent with the will of God.

Contextualization goes beyond a culturally sensitive translation of the Bible. It has an enormous bearing upon worship forms, rites, and ceremonies. It greatly affects theology. Most Christian theology, Adventist theology included, is decidedly Western. The Western way of thinking about the Christian faith and the doctrinal statements of the church betray a Greek rather than a biblical mode of thinking. If in the construction of Western theology we allow a Greek frame-

work, why should we view with suspicion if others want to do theology within the framework of their culture?

This aspect takes on added significance when we think of Christianity in its encounter with other religions. For example, much of the Christian terminology is unacceptable to Muslims. In a contextualized approach to the Bible and to the missionary task, these terms are not sacrosanct and the challenge ought to be accepted to find forms and symbols that will serve as (more) acceptable vehicles for the truth that needs to be conveyed.¹⁵

Contextualization demands great care. There is always the danger of syncretism, which occurs when basic elements of the gospel are lost and replaced by religious elements of the receiving culture. Contextualization must always be *critical contextualization*.

Contextualization: safeguarding principles

Jon Dybdahl lists six principles that may guide us to safeguard contextualization from syncretism:¹⁶

1. *Maintain close connection with the Scriptures.*

2. *Pray for and trust in God's leading.*

3. *Check our motives and attitudes.* Are we truly trying to give the gospel as clearly as possible, or are we merely following a missiological fashion?

4. *Consult the community of believers.* The church is a corporate entity; there is wisdom in hearing what the Spirit says to the whole body. Believers in the receivers' culture should lead in the process of contextualization. But they must, on the other hand, be willing to learn from church history and from the contemporary church elsewhere. The danger of syncretism will be greatly reduced if many thinking and praying minds cooperate.

5. *Realize that over time, truth surfaces.* Wrong decisions can be rectified if we allow the Spirit to work.

6. *Maintain concern for the weak.* The Pauline principle in 1 Corinthians 9 still stands. The opinions and feelings of brothers and sisters who have fears and doubts about the exercise of contextualization must be considered.

Because it is rooted in the example of the Lord, who entered a totally foreign culture and communicated His truth within that foreign context, critical contextualization is not an *option*, but an *imperative*. Contextualization is not without risk: imperfect as we are, we are bound to make mistakes, but a refusal to contextualize will have much more serious consequences. In the immediate future it will almost certainly reduce our evangelistic success, while in the longer term it carries the grave danger that the church in non-Western countries will remain a *Western* institution in which the believers will never be really *at home*. ■

¹ Donald R. Jacobs, "Contextualization in Mission," in James M. Phillips and Robert T. Coot, eds., *Toward the 21st Century in Christian Mission* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1993), p. 238.

² Tite Tiénou, "Forming Indigenous Theologies," in Phillips and Coot, p. 247.

³ Charles H. Kraft, *Communication Theory for Christian Witness* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), p. 14.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁵ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 2, p. 673.

⁶ ———, *Testimonies to Ministers* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1962), p. 213.

⁷ Craig van Gelder, "Finding the Boundaries: The Challenge of Re-visioning the Church in North America for the Twenty-First Century," *Missiology* 22, No. 3 (July 1994): 321.

⁸ J. Herbert Kane, *A Concise History of the Christian World Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), pp. 69, 70.

⁹ Peter B. Clarke, *West Africa and Christianity* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1986), p. 163.

¹⁰ Paul G. Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, July 1987, p. 104.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹² Gottfried Oosterwal, "The Seventh-day Adventist Church in the World Today," in G. Oosterwal et al., eds., *Servants for Christ: The Adventist Church Facing the '80s* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1980), pp. 12, 13.

¹³ Interestingly enough, Ellen G. White warned against duplicating American methods in the mission fields. In *Life Sketches* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1943) she wrote about Avondale College in Australia, "God designs that this place shall be a center, an object lesson. Our school is not to pattern after any school that has been established in America" (p. 374). While in Europe she observed, "I have been shown that we need to move with the greatest wisdom that we shall not in any thing create prejudice by giving the impression that Americans feel themselves superior to people of other nations" (*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 8, p. 106).

¹⁴ Hiebert, p. 109.

¹⁵ See Phil Pashall, *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism: Evangelical Approaches to Contextualization* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992).

¹⁶ Jon Dybdahl, "Crosscultural Adaptation: How to Contextualize the Gospel," *Ministry*, November 1992, p. 16.

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Associate Speaker, La Voz de
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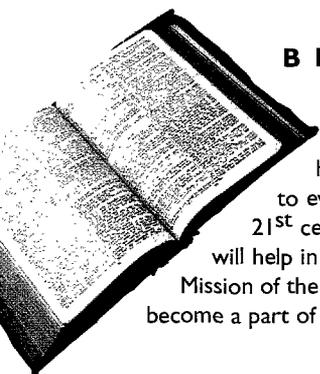


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Seated from left is Robert Folkenberg, President General Conference of SDA, Carlos Pardeiro, President of SAFE TV, and standing from left is Cyril Miller, Vice-president for Evangelism NAD, and Dr. Gail Richardson, President of Private Networks.

In a recent e-mail released by Elder Robert S. Folkenberg to the world field, he said: "The urgency of the [Three Angels'] message calls for every method and resource to be placed in service. Just as Pentecost resulted when His [Jesus'] followers came together in one accord, even so today, similar circumstances can and will occur." As we all participate and subscribe to this unprecedented opportunity, we will expedite the propagation of the Gospel in the secular world.

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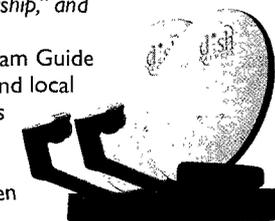
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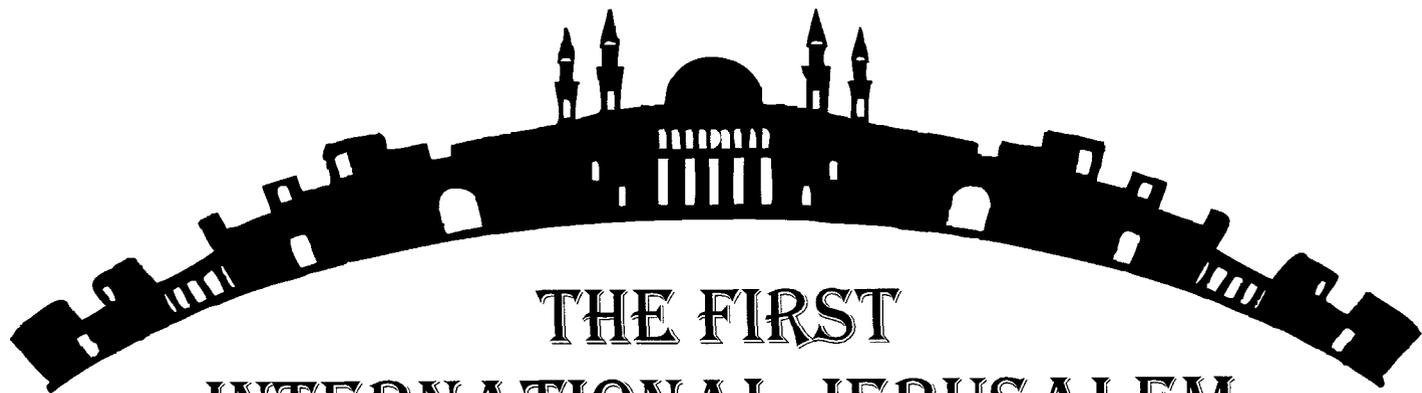
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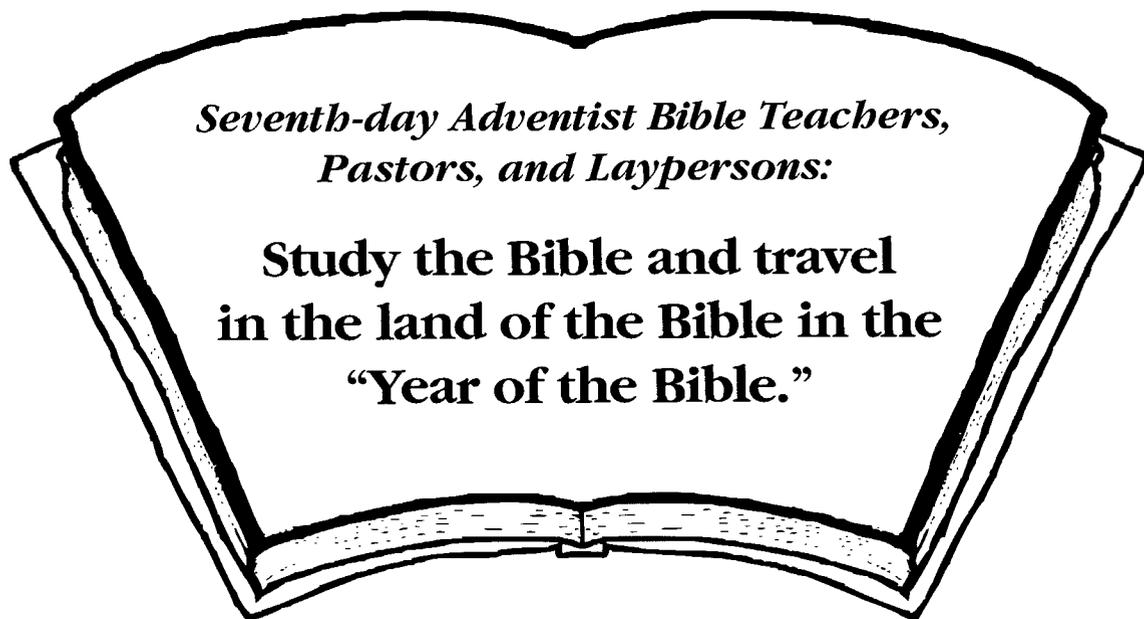


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SABBATH SCHOOL ACTION UNITS

The Sabbath school should be one of the greatest instrumentalities, and the most effectual, in bringing souls to Christ.”¹ “Our Sabbath schools are nothing less than Bible societies, and in the sacred work of teaching the truths of God’s Word, they can accomplish far more than they have hitherto accomplished.



J.M.A. Oyinloye is director for children's Sabbath schools in the Nigeria Union Mission, West Africa.

The Sabbath school, when rightly managed, possesses marvelous power, and is adapted to doing a great work. . . . The influence growing out of Sabbath school work should *improve and enlarge* the church. . . . There is a most precious missionary field in the Sabbath school, and if there are now *omens of good*, they are only indications and beginnings of what may be done.”²

In 1983, fresh from the seminary, I was posted to the Maryland church in Lagos, Nigeria. Working with Sabbath school officers and the church elders, I grouped the members into units (undershepherd planning). While inaugurating the units, I charged them with two responsibilities: (1) to increase their units’ membership by inviting their neighbors and friends to Bible studies and prayer meetings; (2) to plant new branch Sabbath schools and churches.

The initiative opened up many new opportunities. I knew more than 90 percent of my members by name, where they worked, and where they lived. I knew the residences of the unit leaders, who, in turn, took me around to the residences of their unit mem-

bers; when the shepherd knows the sheep and the sheep know the shepherd, the sheep also know themselves. The Maryland church today is the fastest-growing church in the Nigeria Union Mission. Last year it sponsored an action unit to another field 500 miles (800 kilometers) away from Lagos.

A silent messenger

A Sabbath school action unit is a silent messenger in a troubled or crisis-ridden society. In a depressed economy it is a useful tool to help an evangelist retain the souls baptized.

A Sabbath school action unit consists of six to eight members. Each unit, living in the same area, studies the Sabbath school lessons together every Sabbath. They meet weekly in their respective areas for Bible study and prayer. They launch action unit crusades that may be planned by the local church, the local field, or the union at least twice a year. They help sponsor church projects. They also support needy members.

The action units meet once or twice a week to plan programs that include

J . M . A . O Y I N L O Y E

children's special songs, memory verses, storytelling, children preaching to unit members, health talks, physical exercises, career talks, educational guidance, premarital and marital counseling, etc.

The materials used are the Bible, Spirit of Prophecy books, *Steps to Life*, *Bible Speaks*, Sabbath school pamphlets, etc. The Sabbath school action unit is not new, but it is dependent on how we allow the Holy Spirit to educate us for its usefulness.

Before He returned to heaven, Jesus made a farewell speech to the apostles. I understand Him to be saying to the Sabbath school action units: "But 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" (verse 8). I can also see the unit members, 120 of them (verse 15), meeting in "an upper room" (verse 13). Action units can meet in sitting rooms, on verandas, under trees, in school classrooms, in offices (during breaktime), in open fields, or in any appropriate setting. They meet for 30 to 45 minutes.

Meeting together in the spirit of Acts 1:11-15, the Sabbath school action units can lead to: (1) a Pentecostal experience of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit; (2) an increase of church membership, with hundreds of people accepting the truth; (3) a caring and sharing church (see Acts 2:1-4, 41-47); and (4) active home fellowships.

From home fellowships to large churches

Home fellowship is the getting together of two or more Sabbath school action units in the same area. When an action unit of eight conducts crusades and Bible studies and successfully converts at least four more souls, they are to divide into two Sabbath school action units of six members each. The two new units work and add more souls to each. This area is growing into a home fellowship. Soon they will need a larger space in order to form a branch Sabbath school, that will eventually grow to become an organized church.

The advantages of these programs cannot be exaggerated. However, I would like to mention a few. 1. These groups help in spiritual growth. Members become mindful of holy living because of the closeness among the few unit members. 2. Units and

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fellowships keep expanding by active outreach programs, making more disciples for Christ. 3. Active, praying fellowships become centers for God's glory. In Acts 12 Peter was miraculously delivered from the dungeon because God heard the prayers of a praying fellowship. In one of the churches in Lagos, Satan had chained a family through a series of problems. With the establishment of a fellowship in this home, a sickness that had gripped this family for more than five years was miraculously removed. Prayer, intercessory prayer, works. Today this home fellowship has become a large church. 4. Such fellowships retain members. With only six or eight members in a unit, any member found wanting is quickly sought out by the remaining. Souls won at public crusades, if organized into action units, will surely remain faithful and loyal. 5. These fellowships minimize the cost of evangelism. Since there is no need to print handbills, posters, etc., there is no cost for advertisement. There are no heavy electric bills, making this one of the least expensive forms of evangelism. 6. Small

groups are less risky. In some non-Christian areas or places where other Christian bodies attack Adventism, Sabbath school action units act as silent preachers. Just inviting a few friends into hundreds of different sitting rooms can bring more fruit than a public crusade and is not open to attack either by fanatics or other opponents.

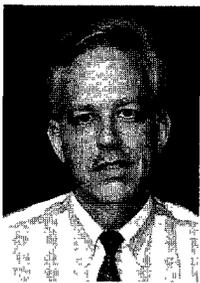
With less than 80 Sabbath school action units at work in a two-month crusade in the Nigeria Union Mission, 3,001 people were baptized. Laity were responsible for all this. If pastors and their churches would practice the Sabbath school action unit system, we would soon lighten the world with truth. We would move from city to city until the last city was reached, from town to town until the last town was reached, from village to village until the last village was reached, from house to house until the last house was reached, from person to person until the last person was reached. ■

¹ Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1938), p. 10

² *Ibid.*, p. 9 (italics supplied).

DRAGONS, BEASTS, PLAGUES, AND TRUMPETS

The book of Revelation is difficult to understand. It confronts us with dragons, beasts, plagues, trumpets, a woman standing in heaven with white garments, the number 666, the mark of the beast, angels flying with books, plagues coming from jars held by angels, a woman sitting on a red beast consuming human blood, a king coming dressed in a garment drenched in blood, and more.



Bruce Norman, Ph.D., is associate professor of New Testament and systematic theology at Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, Tennessee.

These images remind us that not only is the book of Revelation difficult, but it is different. As a result, the book is sometimes abandoned or presented in such a way as to leave its hearers confused.¹ For many, the Apocalypse, which means “unveiling,” has become the Apocrypha, which means “hidden.”²

If the book is so difficult for Christians, how much more so for the “secular” person who has had very little contact with our understanding of Christianity? How can this person, who lives in a scientific and often anti-religious world, be expected to receive any benefit from the maze of images that appear in this book?

This article attempts to show that the book of Revelation has something to say to

secular persons who feel that “science” and “humanism” have failed to assist them in their quest for identity and meaning. Our “age of science” has seen a proliferation of astrologers, seers, mediums, and other latter-day “prophets” who pretend to know the future, but with few satisfying results. This makes understanding the book of Revelation of vital interest to the secular person, as the book itself claims (Rev. 1:1, 10, 19) to deal exclusively with what’s going to happen in the future.

But the task of sharing the message of Revelation is not easy. To make Revelation meaningful to the secular person requires a twofold preparation. First, a familiarity with the foundational message of the book. Sec-

BRUCE NORMAN

ond, an understanding of the culture to which we want to communicate. Then we will suggest some specific ways in which the message of Revelation can be used to meet the needs of the secular person and lead him or her to Christ.

The foundational message of Revelation

The foundational theme of Revelation is the centrality of Christ and His love that redeems, judges, and establishes the kingdom of God. The theme is placed within the perspective of the moral purpose of prophecy.

The centrality of Christ. The person of Christ is of supreme importance to the Apocalypse. Even the chapters in which signs and symbols seem uppermost, in which the cataclysmic judgments of God eclipse all other interests, Christ remains the central focus (see Rev. 4; 5; 14:6-20; 19:11-21). He is the arbiter of the destiny of both the church and the cosmos.³

The structure of the book itself emphasizes the importance of Christ. After the introductory section (Rev. 1:1-8), the very first vision is not an account of the terrifying and destructive forces of evil, but of Christ standing in the middle of the lampstands, watching over His church (Rev. 1:9-20). Everything that follows Revelation 1:9-20 is related in one way or another to the first vision of Christ.

The reference to the sanctuary should not be missed. The presence of God there assures salvation to His people. That Christ is walking in the middle of these lampstands indicates His constant vigilance for the purity and safety of His people. Nothing takes place in regard to His people that Christ does not know of or control. There is an assurance that this world is not out of control and moving disconsolately to chaos. We need not fear the future, because Christ has us in His hand (verses 16, 20), and God is in charge of the future.

Three great themes. From the centrality of Christ flows three great themes of Revelation. The first is *redemption*.⁴ Redemption reminds one that God really does care. He sent His Son to die that we might have life. On the cross we find our value; it does matter whether we live or die (verses 5, 6).

The second theme, equally important, is that of judgment. Regardless of how it appears at the moment, men and women will

have to be responsible for their actions. But this is not a time to fear, because it is during this time that Christ, because of His love for us, gives His saints their inheritance, covering them with His life while at the same time destroying those who are attempting to destroy God's people (Rev. 11:18). God does provide the ability and power for all to have permanent character change, since there will be no immoral people in His kingdom (Rev. 21:6-8). In other words, all the injustices that life can dish out here in this world will ultimately be made right by God (see Rev. 18:6-8; 19:1-3).

The secular
mind grapples with a number
of questions on the existence,
meaning, purpose, and
spirituality of human life.
*Who am I? Does it matter who
I am? Is there anything I can
believe in? What is the
meaning and purpose of life?
What is its goal?*

Closely related to the previous two themes is the establishment of His kingdom. This means a new earth in which relationships with God, each other, ourselves, and the world are once more in balance (Rev. 21, 22). This kingdom tells us that human life has a goal and purpose.

The moral purpose of prophecy. The fact that Christ is the center of Revelation brings to light in a clearer way the very purpose of prophecy. While it is important to understand that symbols have meaning for the future, Revelation is not simply to tell us about last-day events. It is to provide us with an opportunity for spiritual growth.

Second Peter 1:19-21 tells us that prophecy is given to make us ready for the dawn of the new day, when the Morning Star will arise. The Morning Star is none other than Christ Himself (Rev. 22:16). Thus the main focus of prophecy is not to foretell the future (although that is a part of the process), but rather to have the character of Christ regenerated in our hearts so that we will be like Him when He appears.

This is the moral purpose of prophecy.⁵ In other words, studying and understanding prophecy should lead one to live an ethical life, during which permanent character change is not only possible but accomplishable through the changes that God's power can bring. The saints, as represented in the apocalyptic prophecy, are moral, ethical people who are changed by Christ to be like Him and who inherit the kingdom prepared for them because they have had God's name (character) written on them (verses 1-5).

With this understanding of the basic message of Revelation, let us turn to the second part of our task: understanding the secular culture we are trying to reach.

Understanding the secular mind

The secular mind grapples with a number of questions on the existence, meaning, purpose, and spirituality of human life. Who am I? Does it matter who I am? Is there anything I can believe in? If I die, would anyone really miss me or even care? Is my day meant to work and make money to spend on things that cannot help me identify my true self? What is the meaning and purpose of life? What is its goal?

These questions deal with personal identity, existence, and survival. The secular mind is disillusioned because it cannot find adequate answers in scientific achievements or in humanistic laurels. The Christian has the opportunity to answer these questions and speak effectively to such a mind. The answers, however, cannot come in the context of a sterile scientific formula or an intellectual emphasis upon the meaning of symbolic language. These are the very things that the contemporary mind rejects as irrelevant answers to questions that are not being asked.

Rather, these concerns must be answered within the context of spirituality and the ethical emphasis upon character development and the corresponding power to accomplish

this. When sharing from the book of Revelation, one must be cognizant of the deep needs of the secular person. It must be shared so as to meet the felt needs of that person. What is shared must change lives permanently and give personal identity. The secular person needs to see the relevancy of prophecy for the individual life and how to live it now, transformed by the power of Christ.

Revelation and the secular mind

The book of Revelation is more than adequate to deal with the foundational questions raised by the contemporary mind. Those questions can be grouped into three basic categories: knowledge of absolute truth, meaning of and in life, identity and purpose.

Truth. Knowledge of absolute truth is not possible, according to the secular mind, and hence the question "Is there anything I can believe in?" However, the book of Revelation points to God as one in whom we can place our absolute confidence. He is the alpha and the omega (Rev. 1:8; 21:6), the beginning and the end, and encompasses everything in between. He is the one who was, is, and is to come (Rev. 1:8). He is the one who holds the keys of history—past, present, and future. A study of history will confirm the great prophecies given in this book, showing that there is absolute truth in God. What He says does come true.

Life. The Apocalypse is interested in life—not so much the social and the economic, but the spiritual, one of the primary quests of the contemporary person.⁶ Revelation presents the two acts of God that give meaning to human existence: Creation and redemption, with an overwhelming emphasis on the absolute truth of the latter.⁷ If God does not exist as absolute truth, then one must acknowledge that all is lost because this world does seem abandoned to the destructive forces of evil. But God has not deserted us. In order to eradicate evil, however, He must provide a way of stopping men and women from endlessly producing the means of their own destruction. He must provide a way to release them from the tyranny of demonic forces (see Rev. 15; 16; 19-22).⁸ And this is precisely the truth that the book of Revelation is attempting to get across. God will end evil. We can fully believe this because He sent His Son to deal with sin and die for us that we might have life.

The emphasis upon the creation of the world by a personal omnipotent God who also superintends the cosmos explains the order and design in the universe. It also gives us insight into the answer to the question "Who am I?" This Creator-God reminds us that we mean something to someone. Creation gives us personal identity, as opposed to the modern worldview that perceives the human being as a biological organism struggling for survival. The book of Revelation reminds us that we are the crowning act of Creation and that as such we have intrinsic value.

The secular world also sees us as the pawn of circumstances, and as such we have no responsibility for our acts of violence against each other. We crush anyone who stands in our way in order that we might make our mark on the world. This leads us to view each other as things to be conquered rather than human beings with value. Someone is good only as long as we can use them. But Revelation reminds us that we are ethical beings, initiators of our own actions, with full accountability for the results of their actions. Because God created us in His image, we should treat others as God treats us. We are not to use or abuse people to get our own way; we are to relate to them as they really are—created by God and valuable no matter what.

The Apocalypse also teaches us that in order to be independent we must be dependent. Autonomy is not the noble characteristic the secular thinker may see it to be. We live in connection with each other and with God. God meets our needs. He provides for us. We are valuable because we are God's. His character is the norm. Thus the apocalyptic worldview accords great meaning to human existence, great worth to human life, great responsibility for human choice, and great importance to human character.¹⁰

Identity and purpose. Personal identity and purpose in life are interrelated. The former is confirmed by the fact that the Lamb who holds the scroll in His hand is the Lamb who was slain for us from the beginning of the world (Rev. 5:6-14). The cross underscores our value and worth. Does it matter if we die? For the book of Revelation, the answer is an overwhelming yes. Does anybody care? Again, yes. Christ cared enough not only to die for us but also to

minister for us in heaven. He cared enough to warn us of His approaching judgment so that we may be ready (Rev. 18:1-4).

He gives us purpose in life by making us priests in His kingdom with the express purpose of sharing His love not only here but also forever. Ultimately, we will go where He goes and live where He lives. We are here for a purpose, and we must fulfill that purpose. The ultimate goal of life is to see God face-to-face (Rev. 22:4). And we will have become like Him not because of who we are, but of who He is. That can give a person real hope—hope for something better, hope for permanent change, hope for the future.

Conclusion

Dragons, beasts, plagues, 666, and trumpets can be and are relevant to the secular mind, and can be shared with evangelistic fervor and power. But this must be done from a felt needs approach that takes into account both the message of the book of Revelation and the cultural milieu of the secular world.

The emphasis should be upon Christ, the center of the Apocalypse. We need to stress the moral purpose of prophecy. Our preaching should not be limited to dealing with the symbols, although that is certainly part of the message. Preaching should deal with the change in ethical behavior that Christ brings to every believer. Studying the prophecies should lead to character formation, not intellectual stimulation. To reach the secular mind, we should stress not just the mechanics of prophecy, but its life-changing message. ■

¹ William Barclay, *The Revelation of John* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), vol. 1, p. 20.

² Henry Morris, *The Revelation Record* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1983), p. 20.

³ Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 29, 117.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 29, 30.

⁵ This term was coined by Louis Were in his book *The Moral Purpose of Prophecy* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: First Impressions, 1981).

⁶ Tenney, p. 23.

⁷ Beatrice Neall, *The Concept of Character in the Apocalypse With Implications for Character Education* (Washington, D.C.: University of America Press, 1983), p. 203.

⁸ G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. 295, 296.

⁹ Neall, pp. 196, 197.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 184, 205, 206.

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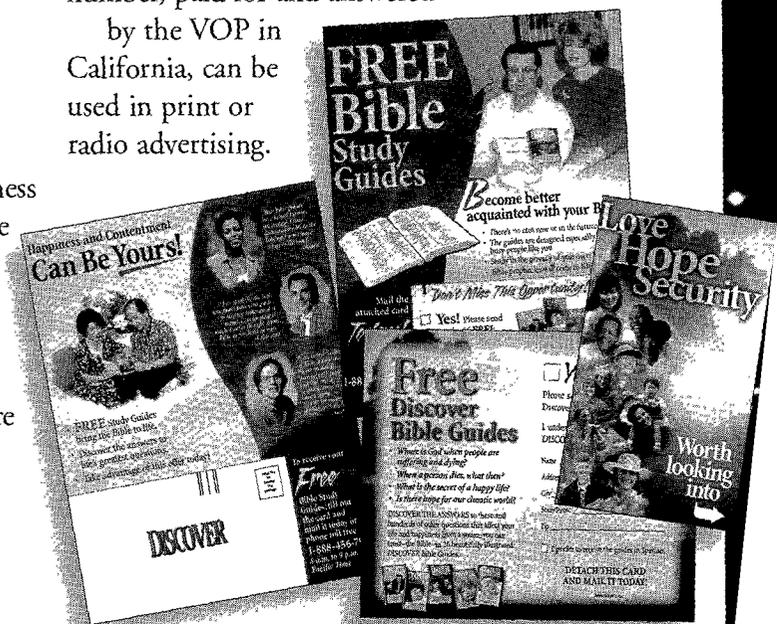
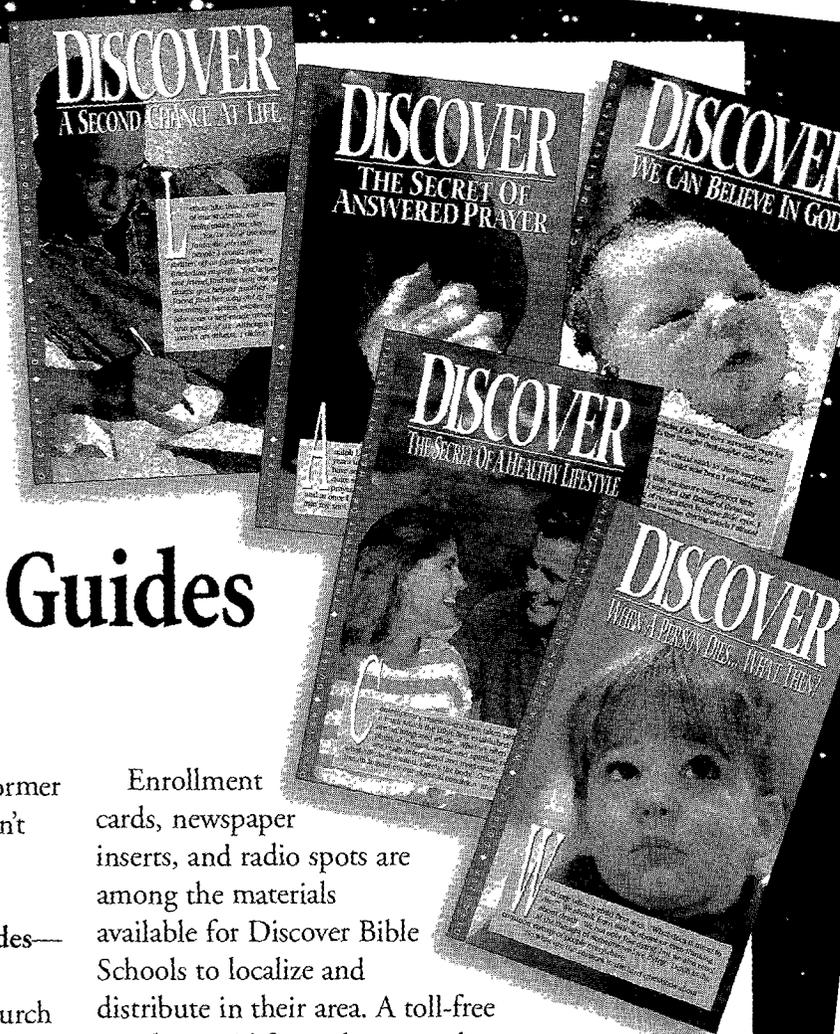
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BUILDING WITHOUT STRESS

So your church wants to construct a new facility, or perhaps build an extension. That's good news. That shows your congregation is growing. It's time to rejoice. God is blessing your congregation.



John Davidson is president of Church Facility Consultants in Florida.

But one thing pastors don't realize is that ahead of them is one of the most stressful and trying undertakings of their ministerial career.

Surveys reveal that a majority of pastors leave their parishes shortly after major building efforts. "I'm burned out"; "The pressure from all sides became unbearable"; "I thought we were a unified church when we started, but we didn't end up that way"; "I almost worked myself to death trying to finish the church"; "Nothing stayed on budget, everything cost more than we had planned."

These are some comments pastors express after completing "successful" building programs. Yet it need not be that way. Here are some ways to build without stress.

Plan your finances well

Before launching a project, build a realistic budget and hold to it. Anticipate every possible expense. Check from more than one source that cost projections are realistic and plan for them. Don't leave things unplanned. One pastor expressed his great surprise and dismay that the budget the church had initially agreed upon with the contractor didn't include the parking lot and landscaping.

Because of this, they had to raise an additional \$50,000 before they could move into the new church. In addition, the volunteer labor that they had expected would save them at least 30 percent ended up saving them less than 5 percent. "That really hurt us financially," confided the pastor. "It was extremely embarrassing going back to our lending institution twice to ask for more money to finish the church." And what's more, no congregation likes to hear every three months that more money is needed.

The point cannot be overemphasized. Adequate space/financial planning at the earliest stages of the process coupled with sufficient financial control and management during the design phases of the project are absolutely essential for a smooth stress-free construction operation.

Be familiar with construction phases

It is possible that at least one person on the church building committee may be a builder or an architect. We generally assume that construction industry professionals on the church building committee will guarantee a "successful" building program. That is not always so.

JOHN DAVIDSON

It is important, therefore, for you and your building committee to become familiar with the design and construction industry standards and methods that are used for proper and cost-efficient planning, accurate design, cost control, and the construction process itself.

A building program has four major phases: feasibility studies, program, formal design, and construction. Each phase is a foundation and stepping-stone for the next phase. If the first phase is not properly prepared, the second phase will not have clear direction and will be doomed to cost-control failure. Likewise, if the third phase has no foundation and no proper cost control, the fourth will be primed for unanticipated construction cost overruns.

Each phase, in and of itself, is an important element of the building program. However, to ensure a stress-free project, the first two phases are the most important. The proper implementation of these phases will ultimately determine overall project success.

But before going into detail over these

construction phases, let us look at the construction costs.

Understand construction costs

Three separate costs are involved in a building program: bid cost, construction cost, and capital cost. Each cost builds upon the previous until the capital cost is reached. Capital costs are the total moneys that your congregation will spend to finish the project. This is an extremely important point to remember. The total amount of money that you and your congregation will spend on the overall turnkey project is found in the capital cost.

Let's briefly examine what is included in each cost.

Bid cost. The bid cost is the "bid" amount a general contractor gives to construct the fixed building and prepare the surrounding site. Typically the following are included: excavations; foundations; structure; exterior skin; vertical movement; interior finishes; fittings and fixtures; plumbing; heating and air conditioning; fire protection; electrical; sitework and parking; landscaping; and the

general contractor's general conditions, overhead, and profit.

If you are receiving budget numbers from a construction industry professional, generally these are bid cost numbers. This is where you can utilize the building and construction industry professionals in your congregation. Bid cost numbers are their specialty. These are the numbers they deal with on a daily basis. These professionals can render a real and much-needed service for identifying bid costs.

Construction cost. The construction cost incorporates the bid cost plus the following typical items: escalation (inflation) costs; professional design and consultant fees; and construction change-order contingencies.

Capital cost. The capital cost includes all the money that will be spent on the building project. It includes the bid cost, the construction cost, and the following items: land costs; impact fees; sanctuary seating; sound systems; special sanctuary lighting; surveys; testing and inspections; signs and graphics; musical instruments; classroom and office furniture; kitchen equipment; computers;

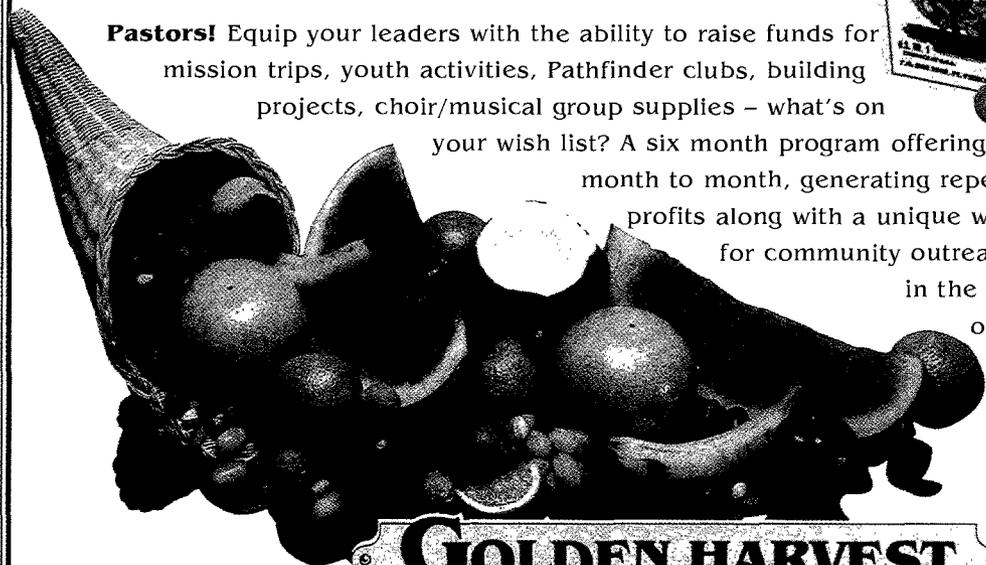
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telephone equipment; models and renderings; start-up costs; fund-raising costs; and building loan financing fees.

The key to a stress- and problem-free project is identifying and accurately budgeting all costs for the complete project.

Let us now examine the four major phases of a building program.

Undertake feasibility study

Feasibility studies are important for accurate financial planning and cost control. Most capital cost savings are realized in this phase. This phase enables your congregation to receive adequate information and insight into its needs and capabilities with the least amount of money expended. Without properly completing this phase, your building plans will be like a ship without a rudder.

The feasibility study is the vehicle your congregation will use to make timely, cost-effective decisions about its future plans. This study brings into clear focus the growth needs of the church as well as financial stability and the congregation's capabilities.

Solid overall information is needed to make the decisions of how or whether to proceed further into a building program. Five categories of information make up a proper feasibility study: future membership growth; financial resource capabilities; growth potential within the surrounding community; preliminary space programming and capital cost budgeting; and site or existing facility growth potential.

Determine the program

The program phase is most important and yet it is the least understood and utilized. This is the phase that determines the "space" for your new facility.

The program is the foundation on which all design is based. It allows your congregation the opportunity to explore thoroughly its space needs and to discuss and finalize the project cost limit (capital cost). It is in the program phase that program affordability is determined and where the majority of all potential capital cost savings opportunities are realized.

The program is the design of your building project in written narrative form. It describes the overall function of the building, the square footage requirements needed for

each space, the quality of the interior and exterior finishes, and any special items that may be required to fit your particular congregation's needs.

Using a well-prepared program document can help you achieve a whole realistic and accurate costing of the building project (the capital cost). It is the program document that the architect and his/her consultants and "the design team" use to translate, in drawing form, the needs and desires of your congregation.

Usually a facility/cost consultant prepares the program document. However, if one is not available, you will need to hire an architect for space programming and a cost consultant for the costing and budgeting of the space program.

Only after the congregation has prepared and voted to approve the program and program budget, should an architect and design team be selected and hired.

As you might have concluded, the completed feasibility studies and program phases are ideal checkpoints to determine whether or not the church will proceed into the next phase. In this manner, money will not be needlessly spent.

Understand the formal design

The formal design phase typically begins when an architect and consultants are hired. At least four consultants will be working with the architect: civil, structural, mechanical, and electrical. Other areas in which consultants might be necessary because of the size and complexity of the project would be: lighting, landscaping, elevator, acoustics, seating, signage and graphics, handicap accessibility, and parking. Consultants are necessary to assist the architect in designing a complete and fully functional facility. As the number of consultants needed on a project increases, design fees will also increase.

I strongly recommend that after the capital cost is determined, all design and consultants fees be fixed. This dissuades the notion that the design team is pushing for a more expensive building, thereby increasing their fees.

Three subphases make up the formal design phase: schematic design, design development, and construction documents.

Schematic design. The schematic design

translates the written program document into drawings by the design team. The basic layout of the overall project site, the shape of the building, and the preliminary exterior elevations and building sections are drawn.

A schematic design is sometimes modified or redrawn several times. Redrawing usually is required because of the plans not reflecting agreed-upon program areas and, in the opinion of the facility/cost consultant, budget limits. It is the task of the consultant to work creatively with the design team to bring the design back into compliance with the program and project cost limit.

At the end of the schematic design phase, a schematic design cost plan is prepared by the cost consultant. This cost plan itemizes, for the first time, the building budget into an "elemental format." This type of format is a design system organization of costs rather than trade costs. The design team utilizes the cost plan to understand the building cost better.

Design development. The design development phase advances the development of the schematic design. Cost studies on the use of different materials and systems are continuously made to ensure the building's design remains on budget. The drawings now contain all floor plans, elevations, and sections necessary to finalize the building design. Preliminary structural, mechanical, and electrical drawings are now included along with preliminary details and specifications.

A detailed elemental design development cost check is prepared and issued by the facility/cost consultant. This cost check is reviewed by the entire design team and the congregation's building committee to establish conformation to the building project budget. Any overages to the budget are discussed, and cost-saving strategies are proposed, approved, and implemented.

Once again your congregation has the opportunity to approve the design and costing work that has been completed. Proceeding to the construction documents' phase can now take place.

Construction documents. The contractor uses the construction documents (drawings, details, and specifications) first to bid and then construct the building. Taking every-

thing that has been decided upon in the previous phases, the design team goes about preparing the construction documents. The cost consultant monitors the progress of these drawings to ensure compliance to the project budget.

The construction documents are to include completely dimensioned floor plans, along with structural, mechanical, and electrical drawings. Complete specifications are also included.

Because the construction documents are to be used in the bidding process by the contractors, these documents must be as complete as possible. To make changes to the drawings after the bid will increase the bid cost by 5 to 10 percent. Your congregation would be well served to delay the bid until the drawings are in a more complete form, say at least 98 percent.

A final pre-bid cost check is prepared at this time by the facility/cost consultant. This cost check performs two important functions. One, it ensures that the construction documents reflect the project budget and

that there will be no surprises when the project is bid. Two, it continues to unify your congregation by allowing them to approve of the overall project one last time. This step-by-step involvement by your congregation will greatly decrease the anxiety of some members.

The formal design phase is now over. The time has come to proceed to bid the project and negotiate the necessary contracts, which proceeds into the construction phase.

Going into the construction phase

The construction phase is the culmination of countless hours of careful, detailed planning. Because the design and construction industry standards and methods were used for proper, cost-efficient planning, and because accurate design cost control was implemented, the actual construction of the building will be largely free of problems, especially financial ones.

Yet during construction there will be minor design changes and unanticipated construction problems that will have cost

implications. It is for these items that the change-order contingency was established and included in the capital cost. The use and drawdown of contingency funds will rescue and help ensure a successful construction phase.

Conclusion

The advantages of following the aforementioned phases are numerous. The congregation has been informed throughout the planning and design of the building. The real needs and wishes of the congregation have been thoroughly explored, and the drawings reflect these needs and wishes.

Most significantly, the critical subject of money has been accurately addressed throughout. Proper space/financial planning at the earliest stages of the planning process coupled with financial control and management during the design phases of the project will enable pastors and their congregations to be relieved of the perpetual financial pressure and stress during the construction period. ■

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During 1997 my collection of Noah's arks has grown and continues to be a favorite stop on tours of the General Conference headquarters. My quotation collection has also expanded, and I share a number of my favorites with you at this year's end.

"You will have found Christ when you are concerned with other people's sufferings and not your own."—Flannery O'Connor.

"It's better to be known by six people for something you're proud of than by 60 million for something you're not."—Albert Brooks.

"If the average preacher would listen to some other preacher twice each day for two weeks, he would go home and abbreviate his messages."—Baptist Standard.

"You have achieved excellence as a leader when people will follow you anywhere, if only out of curiosity."—Colin L. Powell.

"Half the world is composed of people who have something to say and can't, and the other half have nothing to say and keep on saying it."—Robert Frost.

I'm glad they said that!

JAMES A. CRESS

"If you're treading water, you're losing ground."—Stephen W. Comiskey.

"The best day of my life is when I manage a winning [baseball] game. The second-best day of my life is when I manage a losing game."—Tommy Lasorda.

"If we insist on being as sure as is conceivable, we must be content to creep along the ground, and can never soar."—John Henry Cardinal Newman.

"The reason we criticize and condemn other people is that their methods of sinning are different from ours."—George E. Taylor.

"You can get by on charm for about 15 minutes. After that, you'd better know something."—H. Jackson Brown.

"If you will go to work as Christ designs that His disciples shall, and win souls for Him, you will feel the need of a deeper experience and a greater knowledge in divine things, and will hunger and thirst after righteousness."—Ellen White.

"One of the secrets of a happy life is continuous small treats."—Iris Murdoch.

"If man has any greatness in him, it comes to light—not in one flamboyant hour, but in the ledger of his daily work."—Beryl Markham.

"Where principle is involved, be deaf to expediency."—James Webb.

"I can't think of anything more important to teach young people today than this: that ordinary people working together can change history. They can look for a new Martin Luther King or Rosa Parks or Malcolm X to tell them how to make a difference—but they can also look in the mirror."—Rosa Parks.

"Joy is peace dancing and peace is joy at rest."—F. B. Meyer.

"Our Lord's first obedience was to the will of His Father, not the needs of men; the saving of men was the natural outcome of His obedience to the Father."—Oswald Chambers.

"In a sense, management is prose; leadership is poetry."—Richard M. Nixon.

"My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Saviour."—John Newton.

"I dream for a living!"—Steven Spielberg.

"No matter where you work, seek out the janitor. . . . They know everything and they know everybody. Don't ever think that you know more than someone who is mopping the floor."—Bill Cosby.



"Soft soap in the pulpit will not cleanse the sinner in the pew."—Notes from a Bible.

"Hell hath no fury like a vested interest masquerading as a moral principle."—Barber Conable.

"Leadership is the ability to hide your panic from others."—*Anonymous*.

"Some luck lies in not getting what you thought you wanted but getting what you have, which once you have got it you may be smart enough to see is what you would have wanted had you known."—Garrison Keillor.

"Never insult an alligator until after you have crossed the river."—Cordell Hull.

"We will either find a way, or we will make one."—Hannibal.

"Necessity is the mother of taking chances."—Mark Twain.

"We should all be concerned about the future because we will have to spend the rest of our lives there."—Charles F. Kettering.

"Once more let us stress that the end to be attained in working for the purity of the visible church is loving relationship, first to God and then to our brothers. We must not forget that the final end is not what we are against, but what we are for."—Francis Schaeffer.

"God doesn't always smooth the path, but sometimes He puts springs in the wagon."—Marshall Lucas.

"The gospel must be repeatedly forwarded to a new address because the recipient is repeatedly changing places of residence."—Helmut Thielicke.

"Outside of a dog, a book is a man's best friend. Inside of a dog, it is too dark to read!"—Groucho Marx.

"Most bureaucracies operate on the premise that a Japanese computer did when translating phrases. 'Out of sight, out of mind' reemerged after much data-crunching as 'Invisible, insane.'"—William E. Rapfogel.

"We cannot then take a position that the unity of the church consists in viewing every text of Scripture in the very same light. The church may pass resolution upon resolution to put down all disagreement of opinions, but we cannot force the mind and will, and root out disagreement. These resolutions may conceal the discord, but they cannot quench it and establish perfect agreement. Nothing can perfect unity in the church but the spirit of Christlike forbearance."—Ellen White. ■

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BOOKS

Receiving the Word: How New Approaches to the Bible Impact Our Biblical Faith and Lifestyle. Samuel Koranteng-Pipim. Berrien Springs, Mich.: Berean Books, 1996.

● Many had hoped that *Receiving the Word* would responsibly and adequately address some of the major issues presently facing the Adventist Church.

The volume's strongest point is that it raises significant issues regarding inspiration, and that it does so in the context of the current Adventist struggle for identity and theological understanding. Many are rightly concerned with what seems to be a lack of understanding in areas of biblical inspiration and Christian authority, especially in light of the erosion of basic Adventist and even Christian beliefs in some sectors of the church. Koranteng-Pipim is to be congratulated for having raised the issues. His book also has the virtue of being written clearly and with conviction.

Unfortunately, the volume is less than adequate. Its primary methodological flaws run from its first chapter to its last. The book's argument is built on a well-known debater's technique. At one extreme it sets up the "right" position, which is very, very right, while at the other extreme is the "wrong" position, which is very, very wrong.

A common tactic used by skilled debaters is to make one position look as good as possible and the other as bad as possible, with little or no presentation of middle-of-the-road options. Since the one extreme is obviously evil, the *only* "Christian" choice is to accept uncritically the debater's preferred extreme without reservation. While there are definitely times when decisive lines need to be drawn about critical issues facing the church, the methodology used in *Receiving the Word* makes it unnecessarily divisive.

Receiving the Word demonstrates a masterful use of debater's techniques. It allows for no moderation as it hammers

home the traditionally non-Adventist positions of verbal inspiration and inerrancy, even in details, asides, and nonessential matters. Altogether too much of the volume's basic data rests upon subjectively based slogans, loose and often inaccurate generalizations, frequently idiosyncratic definitions, and most serious of all, references to authors that at times impute to them the opposite meaning from what they clearly wrote. Upon such basic data, the book builds a logical chain, based upon *human reason*, to argue its primary conclusions. Unfortunately, the conclusions in such a logical chain are only as valid as the original presuppositions and evidence.

One of the tragedies of the volume is that in its desire to protect the Bible and Ellen White it shuts out both Jesus and Mrs. White from the camp of the faithful. For example, *Receiving the Word* argues consistently against a principle-based approach, yet that is exactly what Jesus argues for in Matthew 5:21-48 and other places. The same can be said for Ellen White, as I have demonstrated in the books *Reading Ellen White* and *Myths in Adventism*.

Again, Koranteng-Pipim argues for "a plain reading of Scripture," but fails himself to abide by the plain words of the Bible on such topics as slavery, polygamy, levirate marriage, and women speaking in church. Why is he against the first three and for the fourth in that list when a "plain reading of Scripture" opposes him evenly in all of the cases? This is a particular difficulty since Koranteng-Pipim condemns contextualization in the understanding of Bible passages. A reading of this volume leaves one with the impression that its hermeneutic allows its author to reach whatever conclusions he might already have brought to the Bible.

Receiving the Word has raised important issues, but has not done so in a particularly enlightening fashion. Again, while it provides readers with material for sloganeering, it does little to help the church understand the nature of inspiration or even how to receive, understand, and apply the Word.

Mr. Koranteng-Pipim is to be commended for having the courage to raise important issues in the present lively atmosphere, but it is still up to either him or someone else to treat responsibly from a genuinely conservative Adventist perspective the issues he has raised. That task must not be avoided or neglected.—*George R. Knight, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.*

● Seldom do reference notes in a book attract as much attention as the text itself. *Receiving the Word* fits that unique exception. The fact that its author is an articulate scholar from West Africa, in the final stages of a doctoral program in the seminary at Andrews University, both shatters a series of stereotypes and confers credibility. Here is someone from a non-Western culture, who now measures a trademark phenomenon of a sophisticated society. He proves himself a prescient and articulate writer well able to function within Western parameters. Many will take issue with positions he takes, but his work cannot be subjected to the ultimate indignity of being ignored. Although distributed outside routine publication channels, this book already exerts substantial influence in Adventist circles.

Koranteng-Pipim's work is controversial, to say the least. Its announced purpose is to review the scope of choices in methods of biblical interpretation. He pursues that goal, but from a premise which presupposes that serious difficulties are present in what Adventists now are doing. Predictably, it has produced its bevy of critics, some viciously opposed. He is denounced as a "fundamentalist," a "verbal inspirationist," "character assassin," and accuser of innocent people.

Another audience pays homage to him as a courageous scholar willing to speak up. His greatest contribution—for some his "unforgivable sin"—consists in laying boldly on the public table the fact that Adventist theological academics are seriously divided, a situation for years known among all of them and often

discussed in private, but not in public. And he attempts to enable the reader to see just which position specific writers defend.

Methodically, Koranteng-Pipim moves with the aid of voluminous footnotes to build a case that something utterly vital is in jeopardy, and provides evidence from primary sources that some in Adventist theological circles plainly are distancing themselves from longstanding Adventist understandings about the nature of the Bible and what has been regarded as sound hermeneutical method. By raising a series of penetrating questions about just what Adventists have said with respect to the Bible and its interpretation, he asks the disturbing question whether change is taking place. If so, is the change in a direction that builds confidence or undermines it?

With a work of this nature, we need to ask two basic questions: Does the author have his facts straight? Does he treat the facts fairly? Footnote citations largely care for the former. As for the latter, does the selection of data represent an honest description of a person's position? And does the discussion descend to ad hominem attack? With great care Koranteng-Pipim tries to avoid mentioning persons by name, leaving such information to be found in citations from published writings. Often his analysis of the issues leaves the reader to determine whether the citation represents a sound position or possibly a deviant one. By this means, although there is no direct naming of names, the reader is not left unaware.

Receiving the Word may not represent perfection in either category, but it is difficult to fault the author's factual base. Some will fault his interpretation.

Does the author of this book take a fundamentalist position? It depends upon how one defines the term fundamentalist. If the term is being used in the sense of the modern media, an epithet to describe extremism, we have arrived at labeling. Quite clearly *Receiving the Word* shares none of that. If the term is used to define a clear apologetic, that is another matter.

Has the author given offense by telling too much? To be sure, that is the case for some. Has he benefitted the cause by setting all this in the open? Those who favor openness in the church should welcome this effort, whether or not they agree with his conclusions.

Receiving the Word is not an unflawed product. In places we have redundancy. His points could have been achieved in a book perhaps a third shorter, with minimal abridgement of discussion. Perhaps a bit less attention could have been paid to the question of women's ordination, although he uses it as a case study to show how new biblical approaches may lead to predictable results unwarranted by the actual teaching of the Scriptures. The book is highly informative and not to be missed. It will introduce the reader to crucial issues at stake in the ongoing discussion of how to treat the Word of God.—George W. Reid, director, Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

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