

# Ministry

International Journal for Pastors December 1998



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## Cosmic signs and the Adventist tradition

*Dr. LaRondelle's September Viewpoint article on cosmic signs has stirred unusual reader reaction. However, almost all respondents seem to have overlooked the fact that the article was published under the Viewpoint heading. Readers should review the function of this column (see the note appearing below every such article) through which Ministry seeks to fulfill one of its declared roles: that of stimulating conscientious thought and study in areas where there is widespread query.*

*Marvin Moore's letter, which follows, reflects the thinking in Dr. LaRondelle's article and presents a helpful approach to the issues raised in it.—Editors.*

● Thank you for publishing Hans LaRondelle's insightful article. I believe Dr. LaRondelle is correct that "some conservative Adventist expositors are now convinced that the traditional Adventist interpretation of these historical phenomena has lost its convincing power." This is understandable. Those events were meaningful to our ancestors *because they occurred within their lifetime*. They simply *cannot* have the same impact on us, because we have not experienced them. We are far more persuaded by events that occur within our lifetime. And God will use today's events to help us understand the truth of His soon coming just as He used events back then to help our great-great-grandparents to understand the same truth.

In light of Dr. LaRondelle's remarks, some Adventists may wonder whether the events of 150 to 250 years ago were actually a fulfillment of Jesus' prediction about cosmic signs. I think there is a better question: Did God use these events to call attention to the prophecies of the end time? The answer to that question is clearly Yes, and all Adventist interpreters agree on that. If the answer to that question is Yes, then in a very real sense,

we must say that the events themselves were a fulfillment of prophecy.

What we do not have to say is that those events were the *only* fulfillment of these prophecies. Or, to put it another way, the prophecies have a further fulfillment. For example, Adventist evangelists frequently cite the increase in earthquakes during the present century as a fulfillment of Jesus' signs of the end, without in the least detracting from our traditional view that the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 was a fulfillment of Bible prophecy. Similarly, why does the star shower of 1966, which admittedly was much more striking than the one in 1833, have to deny the validity of the 1833 event as a fulfillment of prophecy? Why not let *both* be a fulfillment of Jesus' prediction?

Dr. LaRondelle made quite a point of the fact that the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, the dark day of 1780, and the falling of the stars in 1833 "are no longer inexplicable supernatural happenings—but are known to be the results of specific laws and predictable movements in nature." It is true that Adventists in the past viewed these events as inexplicable. In their day perhaps they were. However, I see no reason to be alarmed that we today *can* give rational, scientific explanations for these phenomena. Jesus never said that in order to fulfill His prediction these signs would have to be inexplicable and therefore supernatural. We are the ones who made that assumption.

I suspect that if today's scientists could take their instruments back 5,000 years, they could explain exactly what caused Noah's flood. I'm sure that they could give a valid scientific explanation of the ten plagues of Egypt and of the fire that fell on Sodom and Gomorrah. But the fact that we might be able to explain these events would not in the least minimize the fact that they were divine interventions in human affairs. God controls nature, and He uses nature

to accomplish His purposes. Yet the greatest scientist on earth could not invent an instrument to detect the difference between purely random natural disasters and those that God uses to accomplish His purposes.—Marvin Moore, Caldwell, Idaho.

● LaRondelle claims that the "tribulation" is *not* identical with the "1260 days" and that the "cutting short" of the days of tribulation are connected with the seven last plagues (Rev. 16). Ellen White, speaking of Mark 13:24, refers to "1260 days of papal persecution, concerning which He had promised that the tribulation should be shortened" (GC 306). She then points out how it was shortened: "The 1260 days, or years, terminated in 1798. A quarter of a century earlier, persecution has almost wholly ceased. Following this persecution, according to the words of Christ, the sun was to be darkened. On the nineteenth of May, 1780, this prophecy was fulfilled" (GC 306).

If the above comments are dismissed, then the Spirit of Prophecy is dismissed as well.—Ron Thompson, Ph.D., Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

● As a minister retired after 40 years of service, I am deeply disturbed by the article. Not only does the author question our historic position on cosmic signs but also suggests that Ellen White erred in her interpretation.

As an evangelist who preached the relevancy of cosmic signs from the pulpit and over the air and as one who has profound convictions that Ellen White was right, I believe that these events as signs are valid today. These events came in the exact order and around the cessation of persecution. My great-grandfather saw the stars fall in 1833 and when he, in 1883, heard the Advent message, he with his family joined the

*continued on p. 29*

### 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.*



**M**inistry is looking for articles written by pastors and other readers in countries outside the North American continent. Appreciative as we

continue to be of the traditional and highly meaningful role played by contributors in the United States and Canada, we are committed and eager to publish the thoughts, ideas, and insights of our readers worldwide. It is important for many good reasons to make this magazine more authentically international. I am increasingly aware of how different pastoring is in some countries versus others. I would also say, however, that even articles which may at first appear to be far removed from the conditions and culture of a given situation, may not be as irrelevant as they seem, as long as the article is read with openness, understanding, and intentional adaptation. Exercising this kind of adaptation can in itself be a highly effective and creative way of enriching all of our ministries.

*Ministry* provides a venue for pooling and distributing our best ideas and insights. As such the magazine also creates a sorely needed sense of fellowship and global in-commonness, through which we may all grow in ways that would otherwise be impossible. Increasingly we are pressed by the prevailing attitudes and philosophies of the world around us to define ourselves merely in terms of our own unique differences and national-cultural characteristics, while largely ignoring the fabulous implications of the international community we are "in Christ." *Ministry*, as it is presently conceived, can help us in the church to move away from this limited outlook.

In the first few months of 1999, we would like to mount a formal and informal offensive through which we especially encourage our ministers the

## Needed: Non-North American Writers

W I L L E V A

world over to write for this magazine. As most of our readers know, the disproportionate majority of those subscribing to *Ministry* are from the North American continent. It is natural that this would lead to the same proportions when it comes to those who write for the magazine. At the same time, a number of world fields find it financially challenging to supply this magazine to the ministers in their territory. It is obvious that the language used by *Ministry* is English, and this clearly adds a significant complication to writers whose primary language is not English.

Besides these realities, *Ministry's* editorial office is located in North America, making it simpler for the office to communicate and correspond with potential writers on that continent. Perhaps more significantly, this makes it difficult, though by no means impossible, for non-North American writers to work with the editorial office in proposing and preparing articles for publication. The remoteness of the editorial offices in relation to many parts of the world also seems to create a psychological barrier within both the editors and the potential writers. This can only be overcome through affirmative action on the part of all.

With all this in mind, let's be practical. Realistically, how may we jump these hurdles? How can our international ministerial family make the world ministry of *Ministry* more truly global?

1. By taking the arenas of ministerial

specialization in which you have a special interest, or in which you have had a high degree of success, organizing them in your mind and sitting down to write about them with your world colleagues in mind.

2. By projecting which aspects of your ministerial experience and study may be most helpful to significant sectors of the world field of Seventh-day Adventist clergy.

3. And then by sending your work to the magazine (see below for information on how to send manuscripts).

We are always searching for good articles dealing with topics such as the "how-tos" of successful public or personal evangelism; original, well-researched, balanced articles on all kinds of theological topics; implementable principles for local church administration; pastoral-professional life management; preaching and its preparation; harnessing the gifts of every member for effective ministry; and inspirational, morale-boosting articles on the spiritual life of the pastor, to name a few.

Right now we are especially looking for writers who will tackle such topics as these: pastoring in multicultural-metropolitan settings, how to pastor multiple church districts effectively, dealing with difficult people in the church, living on a pastor's salary in high income areas, dealing with negativity and personal criticism as a pastor, handling conflict in the local church, doing effective pastoral counseling, and managing needed change.

We are deeply aware of the language concerns of many international writers. Unideal as we know it to be, we must urge authors to write in the English language, or to find the best translator possible in the home field, asking them to translate your manuscript before sending it in to *Ministry*. If a writer cannot find such translation services, please do correspond with us

*Continued on p. 21*

# REACHING NEW GENERATIONS

**A**re some Seventh-day Adventist churches successfully winning and holding younger adults from the Baby-Boom and the Baby-Bust generations? If so, what are these churches doing differently?



*Monte Sahlin is vice president for creative ministries at the Columbia Union Conference, Columbia, Maryland.*

The Pacific Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church commissioned the Center for Creative Ministry to study these questions, and it has provided some interesting results.<sup>1</sup>

Five Seventh-day Adventist churches were selected for the study (with input from conference administrations). Each church has a proven, multiyear record of attracting and baptizing people in their 20s to 40s. One of these is a "celebration" church, two are known as "conservative," and two are "middle-of-the-road." All five are known to be committed to the Adventist message and to have had significant sustained growth.

Seven key characteristics emerged as significant in all of these churches—characteristics that can be implemented by any Adventist congregation.

## **A strong ministry with dropouts**

Two out of five members in these churches (38 percent) report that it was specifically "this congregation, or one of its pastors or members," who helped bring them back into active membership. Half the members in the Baby-Boom and Baby-Bust generations said the same.

Two-thirds of the converts baptized in the last five years were church dropouts. In fact, these five churches alone have reclaimed more than one thousand former and inactive members during recent years, many of

whom returned with nonmember spouses. More than a third (37 percent) say that their spouses eventually became Adventists.

## **Acceptance and forgiveness**

The study showed that an inclusive attitude and a church program appealing to both former Adventists and their unchurched spouses are important factors that explain much of the success in reaching and winning Baby Boomers and Baby Busters.

Nine out of ten members give their pastor high affirmation for displaying love, acceptance, and forgiveness. Divorced singles, new converts, and people from low-income households are even more likely to give a positive response when it comes to this question.

Asked to make the same evaluation of the entire congregation, 80 percent of the respondents rate the entire body high on being inclusive and accepting. Many appreciative comments and deeply-felt stories were shared during interviews conducted as part of the study.

Displaying a genuine sense of inclusiveness has become a basic value in these congregations. Asked if there should be more acceptance of different lifestyles, a majority agree. The longer respondents have been church members, the more likely they are to favor greater acceptance of diverse lifestyles.

## A grace orientation and vibrant spirituality

Three out of four members describe their local church as having a strong grace orientation. Nearly all (95 percent) agree that "a right relationship with Jesus Christ is the key to spirituality and salvation." Seven out of eight of the members (87 percent) indicate that they are "very certain" of their "assurance of eternal life," a number that contrasts favorably with the 1981 survey of Adventists across North America where only 68 percent expressed a high level of assurance.<sup>2</sup>

Nearly a third of the members (30 percent) regularly meet with a small group for Bible study, prayer, and spiritual fellowship, significantly more than the 24 percent of Adventist members who reported the same behavior in the baseline 1981 study.

## What is friendship evangelism?

New concepts are sometimes abused. Just as the "caring church" label was painted on every denominational promotional effort by public relations staff in the 1980s, so "friendship evangelism" can come to mean anything or nothing.

Friendship evangelism is defined as unstructured, nonprogrammed, spontaneous sharing of faith at the personal level. It focuses on the believer's established network of relationships (from which most converts come) instead of strangers encountered during travel or on highly structured witnessing offensives, etc.

There are a specific set of skills that church members need to learn in order to be effective in friendship evangelism. There are also specific things that congregational leaders can do to encourage and support friendship evangelism.

For more information, see *Making Friends for God*, by Mark Finley (available from the Hart Resource Center at 800-487-4278) or *Friendship Evangelism*, by Monte Sahlin (available from the Center for Creative Ministry at 800-272-4664, or fax 402-437-9502).

In many ways these churches are more "evangelical" and less "sectarian," which causes some worry that the Adventist Church might lose its unique, identifying characteristics. Yet, encouragingly, according to the study, five out of six members (83 percent) agree that "the standards of the Adventist Church are important to uphold and keep strong among church members."

## An active, practical compassion

These churches demonstrate a commitment to the practical application of Christ's compassion in their communities. Nine out of ten (92 percent) believe "the compassion of Christ is demonstrated in the lives of believers through service to the poor and hurting," and 93 percent would like to see the Adventist Church "do more to meet the needs of the homeless, inner-city children, abused women, the unemployed, and others in crisis situations in their lives." Recent converts are even more likely to agree. In fact, three out of five members (59 percent) volunteer in community service. The norm for Adventists in North America is 41 percent.

## A progressive outlook

The congregations in this study have a distinctly progressive outlook. This contributes to the inclusive, compassionate values of these churches.

Almost every member (94 percent) believes that racism is "un-Christlike and immoral." Four out of five members (79 percent) want the church to teach environmental stewardship. Three out of five (62 percent) say that "more needs to be done to advance equal opportunities" for women and ethnic minorities. Nine out of ten believe that husbands and wives should share responsibility for careers, housekeeping, and child-rearing; and 54 percent disagree with the more traditional view of gender roles in the family. Also, 58 percent agree that it is good for women to have jobs outside the home.

## A relational approach to evangelism

The churches in this study do not use the conventional methods of evangelism. Most members saw that the most productive means of winning converts were nontraditional ones that focused on building relationships with nonmembers.

## Methods of evangelism\*

Friendship evangelism .....	77 percent
Small groups .....	63 percent
Community service .....	58 percent
Recreation and fellowship ...	55 percent
Youth ministries .....	49 percent
Children's ministries .....	47 percent
Revelation Seminar .....	37 percent
Pastor's Bible class .....	35 percent
Public meetings .....	31 percent
Video Bible studies .....	21 percent
Bible lessons .....	21 percent

\* Based on a random sample of church members asked to identify those methods they have observed as resulting in the greatest number of converts joining their local church.

The most effective method is "friendship evangelism," say three out of four respondents (77 percent). The second most effective is small groups (63 percent of the responses). The third is community service (58 percent). Recent converts are even more likely to agree, as are the Boomers and Busters.

Other effective soul-winning methods include recreation and fellowship (55 percent), youth ministries (49 percent), and children's ministries (47 percent). Younger respondents were more likely to indicate this observation than older respondents. Only a third of the members saw conventional evangelistic strategies such as Revelation seminars, a pastor's Bible class, and public meetings to be as effective as the more innovative methodologies. Bible lessons and video Bible studies were reported to be key in winning 21 percent of the converts. Ethnic minorities and older adults were more likely to see these outreach methods as effective.

## Reaching new people groups

From this study, an entirely new profile for the growing evangelistic church seems to emerge. The members are much more likely to feel—at rates greater than the norm in churches across North America—that their congregation is focused on Christ's mission. These churches are reaching groups that have been largely untouched by conventional strategies. This includes not

only new generations but individuals who have a more secular background.

Wade Clark Roof has identified a trend in the Baby-Boom generation of unchurched adults who are returning to church after a permissive childhood, experimentation with nontraditional values and lifestyles, and personal crises that have evidently caused them to reevaluate their behavior and beliefs.<sup>3</sup>

The Adventist churches in this study are winning similar types. This is especially true among individuals raised in an Adventist family who dropped out and have later been won back. A significant difference between these returning Adventists and those surveyed under the Roof study is that the majority of Adventists say that their upbringing was "somewhat" or "very" rigid, while the Roof group identify their upbringing as more permissive. Only one in five of the total Adventist sample (22 percent) report a permissive childhood. Perhaps this is where the Adventist experience differed from the surrounding culture during the Baby-Boom generation.

#### It can be done!

This study demonstrates that an Adventist church can be part of the denomination and have success with innovative approaches that reach the unchurched. In fact, the Center for Creative Ministry has identified about four hundred churches in the North American Division reaching out to new generations and former and inactive members as well as developing other non-traditional ministries.

Healthy innovation is alive and well in the Adventist Church, and it presents a hope for the future of our mission in an increasingly "postdenominational" world. ■

<sup>1</sup> A complete version of the research report by Monte Sahlin, Carole Kilcher, and Paul Richardson (report #3), including information on sample size and data-collection methods, can be obtained from the Center for Creative Ministry at 800-272-4664.

<sup>2</sup> Roger Dudley and Des Cummings, Jr., "Indicators of Seventh-day Adventist Church Growth in North America" (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Institute of Church Ministry, Andrews University, 1981).

<sup>3</sup> Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993).

## Recently Ordained/Commissioned



**Abejero, Ely**, pastor, Central Philippine Union Conf., SSD

**Almanza-Torres, Obed** (Adreana Gil Santamaria), pastor, North Mexico Union Conf., IAD

**Anaba, Uonso Hilary** (Rose), district leader, East Nigeria Conference, AID

**Ango, Amos** (Maryamu), district leader, North West Mission, Nigeria, AID

**Anonaba, Kingsley Chukwuemeka** (Onyinyechi), evangelist, East Nigeria Conference, AID

**Arroyo-Kedney, Agustin Ruben** (Carolina Rovira Reyes), pastor, Northeast Mexican Conf., IAD

**Asaba, Willison** (Eunice), pastor, Western Uganda Field, EAD

**Atgar, Charles** (Francine), pastor and stewardship/family life dir., French Polynesia Mission, SPD

**Ayala-Hernandez, Telesforo** (Susana del la Cruz Luna), pastor, North Mexico Union Conf., IAD

**Ayunwa, Yakuba** (Rifkatu), pastor, North West Mission, Nigeria, AID

**Ayuperm, Keo** (Pranee), pastor, Thailand Mission, SSD

**Bamroong, Peng** (Udom), pastor, Thailand Mission, SSD

**Bernhardt, Osvaldo** (Clelia Utz), pastor, East Puerto Rico Conference, IAD

**Betat, Olaf** (Karen), pastor, Central California Conference, NAD

**Betts, Rollyn** (Angie), pastor, Oregon Conf., NAD

**Black, Willie** (Karen), pastor, South Central Conference, NAD

**Boboro, Sabaea** (Rebecca), pastor, North East Papua Mission, SPD

**Bonev, Bony** (Lydia), pastor, Bulgarian Union, EUD

**Bullock, Richard L** (Donna Jean), Arkansas-Louisiana Conf., NAD

**Callorda, Ricardo** (Nancy), pastor, Austral Union, SAD

**Careaga, Pedro Emmanuel** (Alina), pastor, Oregon Conference, NAD

**Caviglione, Dario Marcelo** (Maria Virginia), pastor, South Argentine Mission, SAD

**Chiroma, Daniel Filimon JNR** (Saratu), district leader, North West Mission, Nigeria, AID

**Chu, Winsleigh** (Ruth), pastor, Thailand Mission, SSD

**Coleman, Kenneth** (Joy), pastor, Chesapeake Conf., NAD

**Corbett, Byron**, pastor, Washington Conf., NAD

**Correa-Mendez, Ismael** (Esther Linda Hernandez Donaire), pastor, Central Mexican Conf., IAD

**Croft, Randy Allen** (Krista), pastor, Oregon Conf., NAD

**Cuadra, Jermias G.** (Marmivilealuz), pastor, Southern Mindanao Mission, SSD

**Cusak, Thomas** (Jean), pastor, Mountain View Conference, NAD

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**DiDomenico, Keith** (Kristy), pastor, Gulf States Conf., NAD

**Dok, James Chanla** (Vandie Kim), pastor, Southern California Conf., NAD

**Egerue, Sylvanus O.** (Dorothy Adanma), district leader, East Nigeria Conf., AID

**Elodo, Kepsi** (Grace), mission sec., North East Papua Mission, SSD

**Escudero-Becerra, Rafael Jose** (Arturo Eneida Susunaga Navarro), pastor, North Mexican Mission, IAD

**Farmer, David** (Kathy), pastor, Gulf States Conf., NAD

**Felkley, Don** (Linda), pastor, British Columbia Conf., NAD

**Ferguson, Kenneth** (Cynthia), pastor, Ohio Conference, NAD

**Ferreira, Gilberto de Souza** (Ana Carla), pastor, Espirito Santo Conf., SAD

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# CHURCH PLANTING: COUNTING THE COST

**E**xcitement filled me as I saw 130 enthusiastic people walk through the open doors into our newly planted church. I couldn't have been happier.



*Douglas Tilstra is pastor of the Burnaby and Coquitlan Seventh-day Adventist Churches in British Columbia, Canada.*

But just two and a half years later, I sat outside the room where the church board was discussing not only the future of the church but my future as well. The door opened, and a board member, sent to appraise me of the Board's progress, said to me, "You might as well go home, Doug. We're a long way from being done."

On the way home, alone in the car, I fumed, I cried, I kicked myself. How could a mission launched with such great hope and greater fulfillment be about to evaporate into thin air? Hidden in the darkness of the long drive home, I wrestled with questions too painful to ask aloud. Some were the wrong questions, some have not yet been answered, and some have led to deep insights and discoveries . . . discoveries, perhaps, that can help other church planters who find themselves in a similar situation.

## There is a cost

Jesus said, "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost? . . . Or suppose a king is about to go to war. . . . Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able?" (Luke 14:28-31).<sup>\*</sup> In anything we do, there is a cost. Church planting is no exception. In one study 80 percent of leaders surveyed in a study of church planters reported a major family crisis (usually marital) within

the first five years of the church plant.<sup>1</sup> More than 50 percent said they would not plant again because of the emotional pressure on themselves and their families.<sup>2</sup> The same study showed that "a significant number of pioneers whose church plants 'failed' have left the full-time pastoral ministry. The planting experience was so personally destructive that these pioneers have entered different careers. Some have resigned their ordination and have little to do with their former sending agency."<sup>3</sup>

Carl George, church growth consultant, said that 50 to 75 percent of new church plants will fail within the first five years.<sup>4</sup>

## Counting the cost

Because, to say the least, this sounds daunting and discouraging, it is important for us to count the cost more thoughtfully. The most significant way to do this is to redefine success and failure. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36) and "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15).

"Society teaches us otherwise," contends Wayne Jacobsen, in *Leadership* magazine. "Our management-conscious culture impresses us with flow charts and agendas. . . . No wonder we fall prey to the

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DOUGLAS A. TILSTRA



notion that our ability to carry out our vision depends on the number of people in the orbit of our voice or under our box in the organizational chart.”<sup>5</sup>

Unwittingly, I fell into this trap. I recoiled and disagreed when a fellow pastor chided me early in my planting venture, “Admit it, Doug, you just want to make a big enough splash to hit the seminar circuit!” But when a visiting well-wisher from a neighboring church predicted that “In three years this is going to be the largest church in the area,” I surprised myself with the secret satisfaction I found in savoring that fantasy.

I was an accident waiting to happen. I had reduced life to a small package. It consisted of performing well as a church planter so that I would succeed at creating a vibrant and rapidly growing congregation. Much of my vision was noble. But gradually the focus shifted. One by one I placed all my “emotional eggs” in the basket of my church-planting success. I desperately needed this project to succeed. I had too much emotionally invested for it to do anything else. And without realizing it, I came to the place where I defined success almost exclusively as the increase of my influence and prestige.

But there is another definition of success. For the church planter, success does not necessarily mean a large, thriving church within two or three years. Success means faithfulness and obedience.

Church planter Richard Erickson said it well: “Jesus is the Lord of the church, not subject to the planter’s plan. The pioneer needs to be willing to work hard and smart, and if the effort does not lead to the establishment of a healthy new church, that is God’s responsibility. The pioneer needs to continually affirm that the future success or failure of the ministry is not a result of the amount of effort he or she invests, but it is a miracle of God’s grace.”<sup>6</sup>

A reality check for the church planter is to ask the simple question, “What if everyone here had my experience?” “A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). It is a sobering thought. What if everyone at this church had the same quality of family life as mine? What if they all had my anxiety level? Or my spiritual life, fatigue level, emotional unrest, or physical health?

Church planters must realize that the most basic tool they bring to the task is wholeness and balance in their own lives. The significance of this factor cannot be overlooked.

### Set clear goals

I tackled my church-planting project with a stack of goals and high expectations. Many of those goals gave excellent focus and direction. Yet I learned there is more to goal-setting than challenging myself or the church with neighborhoods to reach, ministries to start, or deadlines to meet. Here are some points:

*Don’t make church planting number one in your life.* Only God deserves that spot. “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exod. 20:3). “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). Any church work, especially church planting, can grow into a “holy idolatry.” Fight the inclination to build your life around the new church plant.

Make major adjustments? Yes! But make it the center of your life? No way!

*Don’t start until there are “clear mutual expectations.”* Each person involved in the church plant, from the administrative supervisor to the planter’s spouse, needs understanding and ownership of the goals and expectations. Together they can discuss: Why is this church being planted? Who is the target audience? How long might it take? What essential preparation work must be in place before opening Sabbath? What does it mean to be a part of the planting team? What organizational structure will be used? How will leadership roles be determined? Who will decide major expenditures and direction? Are the goals realistic? How will accountability be assessed? What do we do if we don’t agree on some of these expectations?

*Be clear on the why.* I was amazed to discover how many different motives brought our team together. Some wanted a church closer to home. Some wanted a clone of their previous church. Some wanted to be part of anything new and novel. Some wanted to start a church for the unchurched. Some wanted a smaller church family. Some wanted involvement they hadn’t found elsewhere. Each motive carried with it a set of unwritten and largely

unconscious expectations for the church, the pastor, and those who attended. It was months before I even realized the vast difference between our official mission statement and mission statements people carried around in their heads and hearts.

*Set goals for the entirety of your life* (and know how church-planting fits into them). The role of church planter is only one role among many that the pastor will fill. First and foremost, you are a child of God. You are also a neighbor, friend, citizen, son or daughter, and possibly a parent or spouse. A little reflection will likely reveal other roles. During the first two or three years the planting role will need a disproportionate priority. But again, the temptation is to make it the only priority. Goal setting for the other areas of your life will lessen that danger. It might be well to set goals first as an individual then with your spouse and children. Write the goals on paper but not in stone!

### Assigning and attaining goals

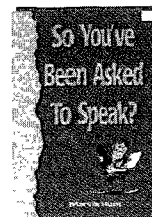
Make sure that the forces assigned can attain the goals. The first “assigned force” is you, the church planter. Prioritizing your own fitness is anything but selfish. Airline attendants instruct parents traveling with small children to always put on their own oxygen masks first in an emergency. Why? You won’t be much help to another if you are unconscious. “What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?” (Matt. 16:26).

For spiritual fitness, church planters need a hunger for God, not just a hunger for God to make them better church planters! Take a fresh look at classic spiritual

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disciplines and decide how you will practice them even while church planting. Perhaps Sabbath rest is one of the most challenging. Allow the planting process to lead you to new riches in listening deeply to God and hearing Him as He searches your heart for attitudes and motives.

For emotional fitness a frequent self-inventory is helpful. Alice Brawand in *Secrets of Your Family Tree* lists seven common denominators of pastors at emotional risk.<sup>7</sup> Here's an adapted version:

1. *Endless living in the fast lane.* Do I often feel pressured and overcommitted?

2. *Harboring hidden anger.* What is my relationship like with my parents and siblings? Have I "forgotten" old hurts or grudges?

3. *Projecting a superstar syndrome.* Do I try to excel at everything and be all things to all people?

4. *Habitually hiding one's own deep needs.* Do I enjoy others' perception of me as a person who has it all together? Do I feel useless when no one needs my help?

5. *Operating without a personal support system.* What two or three people know my deepest feelings, fears, and dreams and love me anyway? How often do I meet and pray with them?

6. *Establishing only superficial relationships with others.* How close am I to my extended family members? What friends, other than church members, does our family enjoy regularly? How does my spouse feel about our emotional closeness?

7. *Allowing expectations to drive life to exhaustion.* How aware am I of the power of unspoken expectations? What motivates me? Do I allow comments and opinions of others to affect me personally?

If you are married, the second "assigned force" is your spouse. The church planter's spouse feels all the trauma and stress of the project and yet often can do nothing directly about it. His or her only access to effect change is probably through you, the church planter. That can be explosive, given certain critical factors! If your spouse will be actively involved in the project, define roles based on your past record. Ask yourselves, Are we easily threatened or defensive when working together? Has one partner built his or her identity around the career and success of the other?

If you are unsure of the answers, it might be well to sort out the issues with a professional counselor or a wise and trusted friend or colleague before you hit a crisis.

An additional proposal may further assist a church planter's spouse: Consider establishing another place to worship, fellowship, and be spiritually fed besides the church you are planting. It could be a small group, a nearby midweek service, or even a church that meets at a different time than yours.

The third "assigned force" is the church-planting team and/or parent church. A church-planting friend once told me, "I'd rather have a handful of loyal soldiers than a whole army shooting me in the back." Nothing could be more vital for the planting team during the first 12 months than developing a clear and mutual vision/mission statement. Find ways to move it from paper to heads and hearts and narrow the team down to those who internalize the vision. Then model the vision in your own life and train the team in the essentials of that vision.

The final "assigned force" is the administrative supervision. Here are nine things a church planter should cover as he or she seeks to clarify crucial issues with church administration:<sup>8</sup>

1. "Please learn enough about church-planting so you can help me with resourcing."

2. "Please be alert to the unique risks to me and my family from church-planting."

3. "Is there any way I could have access to an experienced planter as a mentor?"

4. "Is church-planting a priority for this conference/union? Does budgeting reflect that commitment?"

5. "Can you help me develop a support-network with other church planters?"

6. "How safe is it to talk with you if I feel I'm just not making it?"

7. "What do you expect of my spouse?"

8. "Can we dialogue about job description, lines of accountability, conference expectations, and then meet regularly for accountability and consultation?"

9. "What happens if I really 'hit the wall' or the church does not thrive or even survive? Is there some provision for that?"

### Don't get distracted

Fortunately, despite the ignorance I displayed by not covering these things with my administrators at the outset, they were a step

ahead of me. During a pastoral retreat I approached one of them with a terse message, "I'm in trouble and need help." Glaring distress symptoms had finally broken through my denial. Immediately they made referrals and set in motion the wheels to start a long recovering and regrouping journey for me. I did eventually leave the initial church plant project but have returned to church planting with new energy and vision.

Distraction comes in many forms. For some, it is insufficient focus on the task at hand or inadequate support from administrative headquarters. But perhaps the most ironic distraction is the relentless pursuit of a goal that eventually strangles both the goal and the goal setter.

During my journey back, I have rediscovered power and beauty in words I copied years ago into my Bible flyleaf, "As activity increases and men become successful in doing any work for God, there is danger of trusting to human plans and methods. There is a tendency to pray less and to have less faith. Like the disciples, we are in danger of losing sight of our dependence on God and seeking to make a savior of our activity. We need to look constantly to Jesus, realizing that it is His power which does the work. While we are to labor earnestly for the salvation of the lost, we must also take time for meditation, for prayer, and for the study of the word of God. Only the work accomplished with much prayer, and sanctified by the merit of Christ, will in the end prove to have been efficient for good."<sup>9</sup> ■

\*All Scripture passages in this article are from the New International Version.

<sup>1</sup> Richard A. Erickson, *Protecting, Promoting, and Prospering the Pioneers: Using the Experience of Church Planters to Strengthen Their Support System* (Fuller Theological Seminary, Doctor of Ministry Dissertation, 1992), 36, 135, 270.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>4</sup> Carl George, "Perspective On Winning a Continent" in *How to Plant a Church* syllabus (Pasadena, Calif.: Charles E. Fuller Institute of Evangelism and Church Growth, 1985), 5-9.

<sup>5</sup> Wayne Jacobsen, "A Case of Mistaken Ministerial Identity," *Leadership* (Winter 1992): 93, 94.

<sup>6</sup> Erickson, 307.

<sup>7</sup> In Dave Carder, ed., *Secrets of Your Family Tree* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 117-121.

<sup>8</sup> The majority of these ideas are from Erickson, 352-362.

<sup>9</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1940), 362.

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# SABBATH IN THE CROSSFIRE

**F**ew biblical doctrines have been as much under fire throughout Christian history as has the seventh-day Sabbath.



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In his two-volume bibliographic survey of the Sabbath/Sunday literature from the Reformation to 1860, J. A. Hessey lists about one thousand treatises.<sup>1</sup> In the last century an even greater number of studies on the Sabbath/Sunday question have been published. It can truly be said that the Sabbath has had no rest!

In recent times the controversy has been rekindled by three developments: (1) numerous doctoral dissertations and articles written by Sunday-keeping scholars who argue for the apostolic origin of Sunday and the abrogation of the Sabbath; (2) the abandonment of the Sabbath by former Sabbatarian organizations like the Worldwide Church of God; and (3) Pope John's newly released pastoral letter *Dies Domini*, which calls for a revival of Sunday observance.

This article looks at these recent developments within the larger historical context of the origin and development of the anti-Sabbath theology.

## The anti-Sabbath theology

Anti-Sabbath theology goes back to the time of Roman Emperor Hadrian, who promulgated anti-Jewish legislation in A.D. 135 that categorically prohibited the practice of Judaism in general and Sabbath keeping in particular. His aim was to liquidate Judaism at a time when the Jews were experiencing resurgent Messianic expectations that exploded in violent uprisings in

various parts of the empire, especially Palestine.<sup>2</sup>

At that critical time Roman authors produced a body of antisemitic literature attacking the Jews both ethnically and religiously.<sup>3</sup> Christian authors joined the fray by producing their own anti-Jewish polemics. For example, the author of *The Epistle of Barnabas* (c. 130–138) defames the Jews as “wretched men” (16:1) abandoned by God because of the ancient idolatry (5:14) and rejects any historic validity to their religious practices like Sabbath keeping (15:1–8).

At about the same time Justin Martyr (c. 150) developed a “Christian” theology of Sabbath by showing contempt for the Jews and by making the Sabbath a temporary Mosaic ordinance meant solely for the Jews as “a mark to single them out for punishment they so well deserve for their infidelities.”<sup>4</sup> Justin argues that the New Covenant demands not “refraining from work on one day of the week” but “observing a perpetual Sabbath” by abstaining from sin.<sup>5</sup>

Justin's anti-Sabbath theology has been proposed in different ways throughout the centuries. In recent times dispensationalists and those urging unsubstantiated views of the new covenant maintain essentially the same view: that the Sabbath is a temporary Mosaic ordinance meant only for Jews and thus not binding upon Christians, who observe the day spiritually by accepting the rest of salva-

tion, without any cessation of work on the seventh day.

In the second century, Christians were urged to spend the Sabbath day fasting rather than feasting, a practice probably first introduced by the Gnostic Marcion (c.150), well-known for his anti-Judaic, anti-Sabbath teachings. Sabbath fasting was promoted by papal decrees in order to show, as Pope Sylvester (c. 314–335) said, separation from and “contempt for the Jews.”<sup>6</sup> The Catholic Church enforced this practice for centuries. In fact in the eleventh century, Pope Leo IX attempted to impose Sabbath fasting on the Eastern Greek churches. Their refusal to accept Sabbath fasting contributed to the historic break between the Roman (Latin) and Eastern (Greek) churches in A.D. 1054.<sup>7</sup>

### The Sabbath in the Middle Ages

A new development occurred following Constantine’s Sunday Law of A.D. 321. The absence of any command of Christ or the apostles to observe Sunday made it necessary for church leaders to defend its observance by appealing to the fourth commandment. This was done by arbitrarily and artificially differentiating between moral and ceremonial aspects of the Sabbath commandment. The *moral* aspect was understood to be the Creation ordinance to observe *one-day-in-seven*, while the *ceremonial* was interpreted to be the Mosaic specification of the *seventh day*. Thus, the Sabbath as the principle of *one-day-in-seven* was binding upon Christians, but the Sabbath as the specification of the *seventh day* was represented as being abolished by Christ because it was allegedly designed to aid the Jews in commemorating Creation and in experiencing spiritual rest.

This artificial distinction, articulated especially by Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), became the standard rationale for defending the church’s right to introduce and regulate the observance of Sunday and holy days. This resulted in an elaborate legalistic system of Sunday-keeping akin to that of the rabbinical Sabbath.<sup>8</sup>

### The Reformers and the Sabbath

The sixteenth-century reformers proposed with new qualifications the distinctions between the moral (creational)

and ceremonial (Mosaic) aspects of the Sabbath. Luther upheld a radical distinction between old and new covenants. Like Marcion and Justin, he attacked the Sabbath as a Mosaic institution “specifically given to the Jewish people.”<sup>9</sup> In the *Large Catechism* (1529) Luther explained that the Sabbath is an external matter, like other ordinances of the Old Testament. He attached the Sabbath to particular Jewish customs, persons, and places, from which Christ has set us free.<sup>10</sup>

The Lutheran distinction between the old and new covenants, or the law and the gospel, has been adopted and developed by many contemporary denominations, including the Worldwide Church of God. These churches generally claim that the seventh day Sabbath is a Mosaic institution that Christ fulfilled and abolished. Consequently, new-covenant Christians are free from its actual observance.

Calvin rejected Luther’s antithesis between law and gospel. In his effort to maintain the basic unity of the Old and New Testaments, Calvin Christianized the law, spiritualizing, at least in part, the Sabbath commandment. He accepted the Sabbath as a Creation ordinance for humanity but nevertheless maintained that with “the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, the ceremonial part of the commandment was abolished.”<sup>11</sup> Calvin’s view has been adopted by churches in the Reformed tradition, such as the Pres-

byterians, Congregationalists, Methodists, and Baptists.

The unresolved contradiction between the moral and ceremonial aspects of the fourth commandment has given rise to two main opposing views over the relationship between Sunday observance and the Sabbath commandment. On the one hand, the Catholic and Lutheran traditions emphasize the alleged *ceremonial* aspect of the fourth commandment, which was supposedly abolished by Christ. Consequently, they largely divorce Sunday-keeping from the Sabbath commandment, treating Sunday as an ecclesiastical institution ordained primarily to enable people to attend weekly the church service.

On the other hand, the churches of the Reformed tradition give prominence to the *moral* aspect of the Sabbath commandment, viewing the observance of a day of rest and worship as a Creation ordinance for humankind. Consequently, they promote Sunday keeping as the legitimate substitution and continuation of the Old Testament Sabbath.

### The Sabbath in recent research

These two views are reflected in recent publications. The Lutheran view, abrogating the seventh-day Sabbath, is espoused in the symposium edited by Donald Carson, *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day* (1982) and in

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Willy Rordorf's work, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church* (1968). Both these studies defend the thesis that seventh-day Sabbath keeping is not a Creation ordinance binding upon Christians but a Mosaic institution annulled by Christ. Consequently Sunday is not seen as the Christian Sabbath but a unique Christian creation, introduced to commemorate Christ's resurrection through the Lord's-Supper celebration.

Recently the abrogation view of the Sabbath has been adopted with some modifications by the Worldwide Church of God, whose leaders declared in 1995 that the Sabbath is a Mosaic, old covenant institution terminated at the Cross. The same view is presented in *The Sabbath in Crisis*, authored by Dale Ratzlaff, a former Seventh-day Adventist pastor. Both the Worldwide Church of God and Ratzlaff believe that the new covenant does not mandate the observance of any day. They claim that the Sabbath rest has been fulfilled in Christ, who daily offers the believer His salvation rest.

The Reformed tradition, which views Sunday as the Christian Sabbath, is reflected in the study by Roger T. Beckwith and William Stott, *This is the Day: The Biblical Doctrine of the Christian Sunday* (1978). The authors argue that the apostles used the Sabbath to frame Sunday as their new day of rest and worship.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, they conclude that "in the light of the New Testament as a whole, the Lord's Day can be clearly seen to be a Christian Sabbath—a New Testament fulfillment to which the Old Testament Sabbath pointed."<sup>13</sup> The practical implication of this conclusion is that Sunday should be observed not merely as an hour of worship but as "a whole day, set apart to be a holy festival . . . for worship, rest and works of mercy."<sup>14</sup> The Lord's Day Alliance actively promotes this view through its official magazine, *Sunday*, and its various agencies.

## Papal pastoral letter *Dies Domini*

The preceding survey of the Sabbath/Sunday controversy offers a historical perspective for analyzing Pope John Paul II's recent pastoral letter *Dies Domini*.<sup>15</sup> Two significant aspects of this document are (1) the theological connection between Sabbath and Sunday and (2) the call for Sunday rest

legislation to facilitate Sunday observance.

A surprising aspect of the pastoral letter is the way the pope develops the theological foundation of Sunday observance by appealing to the continuity of the Sabbath commandment, rather than to the traditional distinction between the moral and ceremonial aspects of the commandment. The pope correctly notes the theological development of the Sabbath from the rest of Creation (Gen. 2:1-3; Exod. 20:8-11) to the rest of redemption (Deut. 5:12-15). He describes the Sabbath as a "kind of 'sacred architecture' of time that marks biblical revelation. It recalls that the universe and history belong to God; and without constant awareness of that truth, humanity cannot serve in the world as a co-worker of the Creator" (#15).

Contrary to Dispensationalists, who emphasize the termination of the Sabbath at the Cross, the pope affirms the continuity of the Sabbath in the observance of Sunday, which embodies and preserves the theology and practice of the Sabbath. The pope states: "More than a 'replacement' of the Sabbath, therefore, Sunday is its fulfilment, and in a certain sense its extension and full expression in the ordered unfolding of the history of salvation, which reaches its culmination in Christ" (#59).

The pope maintains that New Testament Christians "made the first day after the Sabbath a festive day" because they discovered that the creative and redemptive accomplishments celebrated by the Sabbath found their "fullest expression in Christ's death and resurrection, though its definitive fulfillment will not come until the Parousia, when Christ returns in glory" (#18).

The problem, however, is that from a biblical perspective, there are no indications that New Testament Christians ever interpreted the day of Christ's resurrection as representing the fulfillment and "full expression" of the Sabbath. In fact, the New Testament attributes no liturgical significance to the day of Christ's resurrection, simply because the resurrection was seen as an existential reality experienced by living victoriously by the power of the risen Savior, and not a liturgical practice, associated with Sunday worship.

None of the utterances of the risen Savior reveal an intent to memorialize the day

by making it the new Christian day of rest and worship. Biblical institutions such as the Sabbath, baptism, and the Lord's Supper all trace their origin to a divine act that established them. But there is no such divine act to sanction a weekly Sunday or annual Easter Sunday memorial of the resurrection.

#### Legislation needed to facilitate Sunday observance

In his pastoral letter, the pope devotes one of the five chapters (chapter 4) to emphasizing both the moral obligation of Sunday observance and the legislation needed to facilitate compliance with such an obligation. The pope finds "the underlying reasons for keeping 'the Lord's Day' holy inscribed solemnly in the Ten Commandments" (#62). He appeals to the Sabbath commandment, rather than to Church councils, to justify the moral obligation of Sunday observance, because he recognizes that the fourth commandment provides the strongest moral conviction that Christians need for sanctifying the Lord's Day.

The problem, however, in this reasoning is that Sunday is not the Sabbath. The two days differ not only in their names or numbers but also in origin, meaning, and experience.

In terms of experience, for example, the essence of Sabbath keeping is the consecration of time to the Lord by giving priority to Him in one's thinking and living during the twenty-four hours of the Sabbath. By contrast, the essence of Sunday keeping as it appears in the Papal pastoral letter is attending the church service. Sunday originated as an hour of worship (Justin, *Apology*, 67), followed by regular secular activities. In spite of the efforts made by Constantine (321 Sunday Law), church councils, and Puritans to make Sunday into a holy day, Sunday has largely remained the *Hour of Worship* and not the *Day of Rest and Worship*. The recognition of this historical reality has made it possible in recent times to anticipate the Sunday worship obligation to Saturday evening, an increasingly popular practice not only among Catholics but even among Protestants.

To facilitate compliance with the moral obligation to observe Sunday, the pope calls upon Christians "to ensure that civil legislation respects their duty to keep

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Sunday holy." However, Sunday Laws have not fostered church attendance. In Western Europe, Sunday Laws have been in effect for many years, yet church attendance is considerably lower than in the United States. Second, Sunday legislation is superfluous today because the short work week already makes it possible for most people to worship on either Sabbath or Sunday.

A possible solution to the crisis of declining church attendance has been conceived in the papal letter. The letter does not call upon the State to legislate the day of rest and worship; instead, it summons Christians to live according to the moral principles of the Ten Commandments. The fourth commandment is featured along with its specific command to Christians to "remember" what many have forgotten; namely, that the seventh day is holy unto the Lord our God (Exod. 20:8-11).

An important factor that has caused many Christians to forget the observance of the Sabbath is the anti-Sabbath theology that has deprived Christians of the moral conviction needed for remembering the Sabbath day to keep it holy. This the papal letter seeks to restore.

### Conclusion

The Sabbath is still in the crossfire, but the crossfire victimizes those for whom the Sabbath was made rather than the day it-

self. It is depriving countless Christians of the physical, mental, and spiritual renewal provided by the Sabbath. At a time when many are seeking for rest and release, the Sabbath still invites us to stop our daily work in order to experience more fully and freely the presence, peace, and rest of Christ in our lives (Heb. 4:10). ■

<sup>1</sup> J. A. Hessey, *Sunday, Its Origin, History and Present Obligation* (London: Murray Pub. Co., 1860).

<sup>2</sup> See Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: The Pontifical Gregorian University, 1977), 178-182.

<sup>3</sup> See *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>4</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue With Trypho* 23, *The Writings of Justin Martyr*, T. B. Falls, tr. (New York: Christian Heritage, 1948), 182.

<sup>5</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 12, *The Writings of Justin Martyr*, 166.

<sup>6</sup> S. R. E. Humbert, *Adversus Graecorum Calumnias* 6, *Patrologie Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris: Garnier Freres, 1844), 143, 937.

<sup>7</sup> See Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 187-198.

<sup>8</sup> See L. L. McReavy, "Servile Work: The Evolution of the Present Sunday Law," *Clergy Review* 9 (1935), 279f; Paul K. Jewett, *The Lord's Day* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 128-169.

<sup>9</sup> *Luther's Works* (1958) 40:93. On Luther's views on Sabbath, see Richard Muller, *Adventisten-Sabbat-Reformation* (Lund: Studia Theologica Lundensia, 1979), 32-60.

<sup>10</sup> *Concordia or Book of Concord, The Symbols of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957), 1974.

<sup>11</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, tr. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 1:341.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 26; cf. 2-12.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 45, 46.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>15</sup> The English text of the Pastoral Letter *Dies Domini* was downloaded from the Vatican website: [www.vatican.org](http://www.vatican.org). Since the document is divided into 87 paragraphs, the references in parenthesis are to the number of the paragraph.

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**D**uring an anticapital punishment campaign in France, postmodernist avatar Michel Foucault wrote a letter to a major French newspaper in which he urged the abolition of not just the death penalty but of prisons themselves!



*Clifford Goldstein is editor of Liberty magazine and associate director of public affairs and religious liberty for the North American Division.*

Foucault argued that criminality, like madness and morality, are all merely subjective constructs, social attitudes imposed by those in power for the sole purpose of exerting political domination. He reasoned that society's preference for a nun over, say, a pedophile, is no different than preference for Franciscan Chardonney over Sauvignon blanc. Thus, Foucault said, prisons are nothing but manifestations of power by the elite and, therefore, their walls should be torn down and all their inmates released.

Foucault, who died of AIDS in 1984, had an uncanny knack for being able to take his premises to their logical, if untenable, ends. Once a person determines that no ultimate and absolute moral transcendence exists, that there are no eternal laws or principles that humans can tap into in order to derive moral guidance, that "truth" is merely a fluctuating and contingent expression of human desire, culture, and physiology—conclusions such as Foucault's become the only logical alternatives, no matter how troubling or destructive they may prove to be.

Because, as Adventists, Foucault's premises are not ours, his conclusions aren't either. Nevertheless, despite the overarching Seventh-day Adventist great controversy

theme—the architectonic template within which we fit and explain reality—the moral fuzziness so prevalent in postmodernism has subtly filtered into our own thinking. And nowhere is there a truer example of this filtering than in the issue of church-state separation.

### The separationist principle

Church-state separation arose out of a belief that God created natural laws and that humankind could find freedom, fulfillment, and happiness by obeying those laws. The principle is premised not only on the notion that truth exists but that this truth can be known, lived, and implemented in everyday life. This is heresy to the postmodernist notion that truth is nothing but (to quote Nietzsche) "a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short a sum of human relations . . . which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people." Separationism was founded upon an overarching, enduring, and universal moral truth, which is that God wants human beings to be free and happy, that He has placed the desire for these ideals in the heart of the rational and moral beings He created. Further, one of the best ways to ensure that

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CLIFFORD GOLDSTEIN



happiness and freedom is to allow humanity to worship and serve God (or not to) according to the dictates of conscience.

"Separation of church and state," I wrote in a recent *Liberty* editorial, "is an edifice, however limited, built upon the concept that God in heaven has established eternal norms of right and wrong, good and evil, justice and injustice—and that one fundamental expression of this right, good, and justice is freedom to worship God according to the dictates of one's own conscience and not the conscience of others."

Thus, when government-funded sex education programs are challenged because they are seen to be in violation of separationism because they advocate sexual abstinence before marriage, Madison and Jefferson's original principle has been turned on its head. When same-sex marriage or gay rights are defended on the basis of the Establishment Clause, the time (to quote Hamlet) "is out of joint." Even on the inimitable SDA CompuServe forum, some have argued that to restrict a woman's right to abortion would be to violate *church-state separation*. This argument is akin to using the Free Speech Clause to combat noise pollution laws!

The Establishment Clause was meant to stop the government from imposing, even promoting, religious *forms and worship*, not from promoting morality, even if that morality has—as it almost inevitably does have—some sort of religious underpinning. Our society's moral base, to one degree or another, is rooted in our religious heritage, and thus of necessity so are our laws. As a Supreme Court justice wrote in a case involving the practice of homosexuality, "the law . . . is constantly based on notions of morality"—and those notions are almost always religiously derived. You can no more separate law from morality or morality from religion than you can the song from the sound and the sound from the singer.

"A state," wrote British jurist Lord Patrick Devlin, "which refuses to enforce Christian beliefs has lost the right to enforce Christian morals."

Nonsense. Prayer and pedophilia both have their respective admonition and prohibition rooted in Christianity. Separation demands that the first not be imposed. But

this has nothing to do with laws that forbid the latter. Some might argue that the difference between the two acts merely represent two different points on the same continuum of actions, either admonished or proscribed in Christianity; however, even a quantitative difference, if wide enough apart, can become qualitative, as with prayer and pedophilia.

#### The protector of faith

Far from being a mechanism of moral nihilism, church-state separation was instituted to expedite civic morality. America's

**F**ar from being  
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Founding Fathers understood that a democracy, in which the people themselves play a major role in government, must have a moral base. They called it "civic virtue," and all agreed that religion was crucial in promulgating it.


Indeed, the early American debate over separation of church and state was never over the necessity of religion as the foundation for morals. Religion was deemed by everyone to be critical to the formation and maintenance of polity. The debate, instead, was over how best to preserve and protect

the free exercise of religious faith. Some believed that religion needed government support, others (like Madison, Jefferson, Washington, and Franklin) believed that it would thrive on its own. The latter won out; the United States maintains a certain level of "religious vitality" that in many ways exceeds that of other western, industrialized nations.

#### Whose morality?

Whether banning bubble gum (as in Singapore) or prayer (as in former communist Albania) or murder (as in everywhere), governments always enforce morality. The question, of course, is Whose? In America, established as a republic, laws in most cases should reflect the morals of the majority. Because the majority of Americans have some sort of Christian background or heritage, Christian morality (as opposed to animist or Buddhist) is still regnant.

The question is where government draws the line. Lines drawn that forbid rape and lines drawn that forbid lust are both lines drawn, however far apart. Church-state separation is meant to keep the line from being drawn in the area of religious forms and worship *alone*. Thus separationism should have no more do to with general laws about abortion, pornography, or condoms than with laws about the speed limit, campaign finance, or securities trading. Otherwise, any law with a moral base (which is about every law) will become suspect and, in the end, to be logical a la Foucault, even the prison walls will have to come down. That's hardly a position that Adventists want to find themselves defending, even implicitly. That is why we had better stay off Foucault's postmodernist road to begin with. ■



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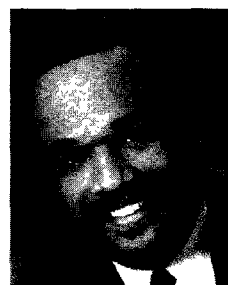
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# The “old” truths of the Bible



**I** pastor a church, rather contemporary by design. We have programmed ourselves, on Sabbath morning, to be “seeker sensitive.” We define seeker sensitive as “planning for the guest to arrive.” Everything—from the time visitors park their cars to how clean the restrooms are—is taken into account. Though our target is the Baby Boomer, my generation, all generations are invited. Our worship service is overseen by a worship coordinator, and our music is put together by praise leaders and practiced before Sabbath morning. Sometimes drama is used to raise a question the sermon will answer. Everything we do focuses on how to make the proclamation of the Word more effective.

We have a program once a month called Seeker Service, where we even more intentionally target the unchurched friends of the church family. Series such as “Self-Esteem” or “How to Overcome Adversity” or “When Enough Is Too Much” are used to introduce church members’ friends to Christianity. The Seeker Service consists of several numbers of our “Bridge Band,” a drama that fits and leads into the message. We also have a strong, exciting children’s ministry.

At one of these “Seeker Services,” on Easter Sabbath, the topic was the “Empty Tomb.” We were looking at the meaning of the Resurrection. Our band, though rather shorthanded that Sabbath, helped to set the tone. The drama was powerful and communicative. A member, dressed in biblical costume, played the woman caught in adultery. She told the story from her point of view. I followed, in my talk, by stressing how she must have felt to be accepted by Christ rather than rejected and condemned to death. As I preached, I began to focus on the new life that comes when Christ is encountered as this woman encountered him. I then shifted to concentrate on the miracle of the

empty tomb, which brought new life to the world. I ended by talking of the triumph of eternal life over death and the matter of the real condition of people after death. As I covered this topic, that truth palpably pierced the hearts of people, and they were visibly moved.

Up to that point I had thought that seeker services were meant only to introduce people to Jesus. I had theorized that once this was done, people could be taken further through some other program. I see more than that now. I witnessed what truth did in that service. One of my members, a seventy-five-year-old man, came up to me with an unchurched friend and kept saying “What a message! What a message!”

I sensed the presence and power of the Holy Spirit at that service, so I took the chance—I invited everyone there to come to our worship service during the next two weeks, where I would be giving a two-part series on the Second Coming, another “old” truth not spoken of as often as it should be these days.

The following Sabbath, I preached on the Second Coming. After the service, that same seventy-five-year-old member, with his same friend, patted me on the back and said, “That message, that message was from God! Doesn’t it thrill your soul!”

We have designed our program with people—a certain kind of people—in mind. And we have the “trappings” that go with such a program. But, now, I am just as convicted that our truths—the truths that make us Seventh-day Adventists—are the most powerful agents we have for reaching everyone and anyone, Baby Boomers included.

No doubt there is a time for “felt need” preaching. But I have learned: Never wander very far from the truths that make us who, and what, we are. ■

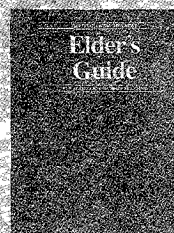
*David Livermore is senior pastor in Kelso, Washington.*

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# MEGACHURCHES, MARSHALL, AND MISSION

**I** grew up attending a small Adventist church of 54 in a small town of 625. Most of my early years of ministry were in similar environments.



*John Glass, D.Min., is pastor of the Pipestone District, Marshall, Minnesota.*

Tales of that mythical megacongregation in Seoul, Korea, were just a churchman's urban legend.

Then, thanks to men like Bill Hybels and Leith Anderson, the megachurch became American. I heard about them, and my wheels began to spin. I attended a couple, and my wheels *really* spun.

Why couldn't an Adventist congregation become a megachurch? All you needed to do was add the word *Community* to your name and some praise songs to worship and, well . . . the rest would become history.

Then I landed in Marshall, Minnesota, on the edge of the prairie. Walk or ride your bike—and you're anywhere in town in a few minutes. Most everyone goes to church at 10:30 a.m. on Sunday. Not a very likely place to build a megachurch, but with over 12,000 population, Marshall is the largest town in southwest Minnesota, so why not? I could visualize a smaller-sized megachurch here, so—with great enthusiasm—I began.

Although I wanted to focus exclusively on Marshall, my district spans the entire southwestern corner of Minnesota, with members living everywhere from Montevideo to Luverne, from Sleepy Eye to Flandreau and Brookings (they're in South

Dakota). That's over 100,000 square miles, which includes 136 communities of varying smallness, and endless farms! I had two (now three) small congregations and a tiny company meeting on a side road outside of Marshall.

Reality hit me hard—and fast.

"When is the pastor going to live *here*, in our town?"

"Isn't it time we got *our* due for a change?"

"*What?* You mean you're going to be here only once a month? We're as important as that big church in Marshall!"

I soon realized that my megachurch wasn't going to come easily. It was a realization that I wholeheartedly refused to accept. Then I listened to an interview with Patrick M. Morley, author of *What Husbands Wish Their Wives Knew About Men* (Zondervan). He concluded that the single biggest thing in a man's life is significance. Men have a compelling need to be important. Some men sacrifice their families for their work; with others it's the way the vote at the church board meeting goes. However they seek it, the key motive of men is their significance.

I don't remember the exact circum-

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JOHN GLASS

stances when I finally felt a conviction from the Lord, who spoke to my heart, saying, "Which of us would you like to be more significant, John, you, or Me?" I had to get on my knees to confess.

Why did I want a megachurch in Marshall? The answer was simple: I wanted significance. I wanted to be someone important. I wanted my name in lights. I wanted popularity.

As I began to think about it, more and more the idea of a megachurch in an area like mine became laughable. It just didn't fit.

Meanwhile, day after day I drove by thousands of acres of farms. Day by day those thousands of acres of corn and beans became more beautiful. I prayed for the farmers to have good crops. I gasped in awe at the mountains of grain *beside* the elevators. I prayed for the farmer whose grain wagon tipped over into Heron Lake. The power and force of the Minnesota River in flood awed me. I prayed that in some way the farmers would hear what they needed to know, if they were ever going to leave with Jesus when He returns. And I prayed that I would be open to be used of God to help reach these souls, in whatever way He deemed fit.

Then it clicked. It took driving past a lot of acres, but it is so simple, so obvious: Buried seeds germinate and grow and produce food to feed the world simply by receiving what God provides for their growth. Minnesotans are just fields waiting to be planted with the seeds of the gospel, and all the church needs to do is supply what God provides for spiritual growth.

"The plants and flowers grow not by their own care or anxiety or effort, but by receiving that which God has furnished to minister to their life. The child cannot, by any anxiety or power of its own, add to its stature. No more can you, by anxiety or effort of yourself, secure spiritual growth. The plant, the child, grows by receiving from its surroundings that which ministers to its life—air, sunshine, and food. What these gifts of nature are to animal and plant, such is Christ to those who trust in Him."<sup>1</sup>

One day a member requested that I begin a group Bible study in my apartment on Friday evenings. It continues to be one of the most enjoyable things I've ever done in min-

istry. We sing praise songs to my heart's content. The studies focus on God and His character as revealed in the Word. Even a Baptist minister and his family join us. Recently I started two other groups, and I'm already hearing about their positive impact.

This wasn't exactly the megachurch of my earlier dreams, yet I have learned from these small, Spirit-filled meetings that our significance comes not from our size but from our willingness to be faithful and committed to the Lord, in whatever work He gives us.

There's always time for personal commitment to God; of that there's no question. And who knows, maybe there's even time for a megachurch, maybe even in Marshall. Until then, through the grace of God, I plan to be faithful to the work that He has given me, both here in Marshall and along the wide open fields of southwestern Minnesota. ■

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Lift Him Up* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1949), 70.

## Writers Needed continued from p. 4

before sending in your work, and we will work with you as well as we are able.

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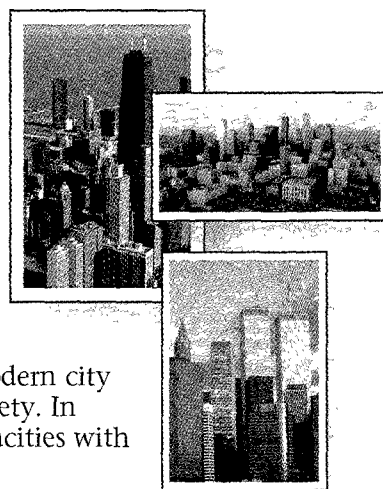
So take the plunge. It is true that your article may be turned down, but even if it is, you will still have clarified your thinking and learned much. Ministers all over the world await your contribution. ■

# They Need to Know Jesus

This is what Ellen G. White wrote in 1905: "We stand rebuked by God because the large cities right within our sight are unworked and unwarned" (*Evangelism*, 401).

It's now 1998. What is the state of the cities?

Cities are a difficult field. Modern city dwellers are a largely secular society. In North America there are 44 megacities with populations of over 1 million.



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# PASTORAL MINISTRY TO CONTEMPORARY SINGLES

I'm in my midthirties and single. It's really starting to bother me that I don't have someone special in my life. How will I truly know if I'm meant to be married or single?"



*Neil Reid, D.Min., is the youth/associate pastor of the historic Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist Church in Harlem, New York.*

"Do I just wait for the Lord to bring the right man into my life, or should I join a Christian dating service? I wish I had some clear-cut direction."<sup>1</sup>

This letter appeared in an online version of *Today's Christian Woman* magazine. It expresses the questions, longings, and frustrations of Jackie, a single Christian woman. Unquestionably she is one of thousands. Doubtless, too, there are myriads of singles in the Seventh-day Adventist Church between the ages of 18 and 35 who would relate strongly to Jackie's private pain.

What can we as ministers do to assist these people? Don't we have resources beyond those offered in secular arenas? Do our single young people seek help through psychological, social, and other services, when we could offer them more satisfying alternatives or at least services in addition to those found in the secular community? What do pastors need to know so that they may more effectively and positively impact this burgeoning group?

## A theological base for singles' ministry

The first two chapters of the Bible present God as a caring father who "formed man from the dust of the ground," "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life," and then made every provision for his

happiness and welfare (Gen. 2). God's actions suggest that He had a particular relationship with this, at first single man, Adam. Following the footsteps of Yahweh, pastors need to personally know as many of their single parishioners as possible. It is not enough to be satisfied with filled pews and a growing head count.

It is not stretching the Genesis narrative too far to observe that God recognized, verbally noted, and entered into the lonely singleness of Adam, which stood in contrast to the "matedness" of every other creature in Eden (Genesis 2:18, 20). Is it not consistent with at least the spirit of the Creation story to observe that God moved creatively to minister to Adam's need by helping him find a mate and then that He brought that mate to Adam so that his solitude would be assuaged (Genesis 2:22, 23)?

The essence and substance of pastoral ministry is this kind of personal service. Although we cannot, of course, "create" mates for the singles in our churches, we can enter into the spirit of service and help. The noun used by the apostle Paul for "gospel ministry" is *diakonia*, which refers to the activities rendered by a servant (Acts 20:24; 2 Cor. 4:1).<sup>2</sup> Though it is impossible for one person, the pastor, to have a per-

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NEIL W. REID

sonal relationship with all the members in his charge, whenever any member of the group seeks pastoral attention, an immediate response would make a strong statement about their importance to the pastor and the congregation.

We also need to remember that singleness should not disqualify anyone from important service in any area of the church. It is clear in Genesis 2:15, 19, 20 that before God joined Adam to Eve, the single man had notable duties to perform. Adam was charged with the responsibility to not only "dress" and "keep" the garden; he also "gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field." God was obviously pleased with Adam's performance, for "whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof" (Gen. 2:19). A pastor needs therefore to see that each mature, responsible, single male or female young adult disciple have an opportunity to use their God-given gifts "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12).

### The future of singles' ministry

The single young adults of today were the children, junior high school, and senior high school students of yesterday. Just as the years passed and the children gradually changed into adults, ministry paradigms to nurture them have also gone through changes. In fact, ministry models are always in flux. Mark Senter III, of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, is heralding a "revolution" for youth and young adults that will have a "radical impact" upon ministers and their churches.

"There is no way," Senter writes, "in which the tactics currently being used will stem the tidal wave of spiritual, moral, and psychosocial problems faced by the current and coming generations of [singles]."<sup>3</sup> It is important and exciting to note that the epicenter of the next youth ministry revolution will probably occur in non-Anglo settings in urban Black, Hispanic, and Korean churches.<sup>4</sup>

Inner-city pastors who start redirecting resources and employing new methods to reach their young single members may be the architects of a coming revolution.

In order to start the process, I would like to suggest the following course of action:

### Concrete steps

First, it is important to recognize that single young adults are a mobile group. In many congregations the two dominant ages present on Sabbath are children and seniors. Pastors should not blame themselves for the absence of many singles between the ages of 18 and 35. Most are transitioning "between school and work and moving from life with parents to life on their own."<sup>5</sup> The majority who leave for school never return to their home churches except for occasional summer vacations, holidays, or special-event visits. While this may be viewed as negative, there is an opportunity for service that accompanies this phenomenon. Large urban settings tend to have many educational institutions, job opportunities, and attractions that young adult singles from other congregations find appealing.

The minister who wishes to develop a singles' ministry will make his church "singles friendly." He may not be actively ministering to many of his "own" singles who may have relocated, but he will be serving single young adult members in the surrounding community.

Second, with this in mind, it is important to organize classes to address issues of interest to singles in contemporary ways. Sabbath School classes serve their purpose, but frequently the Sabbath School curriculum and the teaching methods employed by inexperienced instructors fall short of "scratching where young single persons itch." The pressing issues on the minds of a majority of single young adults relate to concerns such as intimacy, sexuality, relationships, careers, self-awareness, finance, ethics, education, recreation, nutrition, fitness, and spirituality. In the eyes of many older members these matters may seem too mundane or far removed from issues more "appropriate" to the church setting. They may seem too "secular" to be taken up as themes for discussion on the Lord's Day. But the truth is that they are life and death matters to singles. Many among this age group don't have a relationship with God or refuse to come to church because of failures in one or more of these areas of life. These topics

can be presented in such a way as to be most apropos for any Sabbath setting.

Third, we must harness the energy of singles for the benefit of the church and its community. Pastors should take note that single young adults are often the most creative and energetic members in their parishes. They can add life to any church through their characteristic enthusiasm, eagerness to try new things, emphasis on action, and idealism. The problem, according to Alban Institute researcher Robert Gribbon, is that some churches "want new blood, but they don't want new people."<sup>6</sup> Pastors must therefore exert their influence as soldiers or commissioned officers to ensure that fresh troops are readily integrated into the army of Christ. This course of action is not only for the vitality of the church now but also for the viability of the congregation later on. When the senior members are laid to rest and the adolescents have gone off to school, who, other than God, will guarantee the presence of the church? Often enough, those we call single young adults.

### Conclusion

Pastoral ministry to single young adults is God's urgent mission to a new and maturing generation. It's hard work, but it is most rewarding. We must spare no effort to make sure that the Jackies in our midst may find answers, fellowship, love, and God in our churches. Eyebrows will be raised, some members may desire to take their membership elsewhere, and calls may be made to conference administrators—but our churches must continue to be Spirit-supervised laboratories to devise and test paradigms of ministry to reach people no matter their age or social status. ■

<sup>1</sup> Diane Mandt Langberg, "Help—I'm Still Single!" *Today's Christian Woman* 18, (November/December 1996), 6:30.

<sup>2</sup> *The Greek-English Dictionary, Delta-Epsilon* (Missouri: The Complete Bible Library, 1990), 80.

<sup>3</sup> Mark Senter III, *The Coming Revolution in Youth Ministry* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1992), 16.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>5</sup> Robert T. Gribbon, *Developing Faith in Young Adults* (Washington, D.C.: The Alban Institute, Inc., 1990), 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

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# REVISITING WILLOW CREEK

**W**illow Creek Community Church, near Chicago, Illinois, is an interdenominational community of faith.



*Lee Strobel is teaching pastor of the Willow Creek Community Church in Barrington, Illinois.*



*Mark Mittelberg is executive vice president for evangelism at the Willow Creek Community Church.*



*Andy Nash is assistant editor of the Adventist Review.*

Each year thousands of church members from hundreds of churches visit Willow Creek in search of answers and inspiration.

Here, Andy Nash talks with two of Willow Creek's teaching pastors, Mark Mittelberg and Lee Strobel, about Willow Creek as a local church and as a burgeoning influence on churches everywhere.

**Andy Nash:** Your mission is to turn irreligious people into fully devoted followers of Christ. What's the best way to do that?

**Lee Strobel:** It takes a variety of approaches to reach irreligious people. Willow Creek's approach is one of them. Other churches use different approaches that are equally valid. But I think we have to be relevant, we have to defend the truth of Christianity, and we have to show its pertinence to life in our day and time. We've got to answer the questions that searching people are asking. We need to build authentic relationships with them so that we may share our faith in the context of an honest, no-strings-attached friendship. We need to create an environment where seekers can come and investigate Christianity at their own pace as God begins to draw them to Himself.

**Mark Mittelberg:** That term—"turn irreligious people." Ultimately, the Holy Spirit has to do that. We're very clear on

that. What we're trying to do is to *cooperate* with what God's Spirit is all about.

**AN:** You offer seeker services on the weekend and believer services during the week. Is it smart for a church to offer two distinct types of services, rather than simply making believer services seeker-sensitive?

**LS:** We separate into two venues because many seekers cannot worship a God that they do not know and cannot sing lyrics that aren't true to their heart.

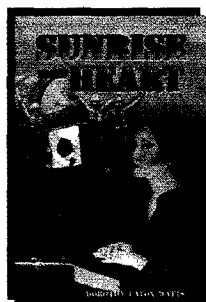
On the other hand, there are some excellent churches that have taken a more seeker-sensitive worship approach and have created a worship experience that nonbelievers can find very helpful in their spiritual journeys. What I would caution very strongly against, however, is just making a few cosmetic adjustments to a worship service and considering that to be seeker-friendly.

The best way to *really* create a service that's seeker-friendly is for the leadership of that church, each one of them, to build authentic relationships with unchurched people—to spend time with them, to get to know them, to care about them, to have them over to their home, to go bowling together, and *then* ask themselves the question, "Now what do I need to do to create a place for my friend Harry or Mary?"

---

LEE STROBEL, MARK MITTELBERG,  
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AN: Suddenly you care a lot more.

MM: Exactly. It sensitizes you.

AN: You've decided to meet culture through contemporary mediums like drama, video, and upbeat music. Do you ever revisit this decision in your own mind?

LS: We're always monitoring what we do in our services—the teaching, the dramatic elements, the music—to make sure that we're staying true to the gospel and to our responsibility as Christians.

When I came to this church as an atheist, I heard music in a style that I could understand and relate to. And in that setting, almost without being conscious of it, the Christian lyrics began to speak to me. The next morning I was in the shower singing these Christian songs. I would stop and say, "Why am I singing that? I don't believe those lyrics." But the lyrics ricocheted around in my soul all week long. They began to till the soil of my soul until the gospel seed could germinate in me and grow.

Can you go too far in the way you use music or drama or multimedia? Yes, you can. However, God created the arts, and we as Christians have surrendered the arts to the world, and we need to reclaim them.

AN: When you hear Barna's research about the "cyber-church" and how it's going to be the church of the next century, does that worry you?

MM: It would worry me if people really substituted the Internet for in-person relationships. There's never going to be a replacement for getting real people in a real room somewhere to pray and worship and learn together.

AN: Willow Creek calls itself an interdenominational church. What does that mean? Is it Protestant?

LS: Yes, it's Protestant. I think there's a significant nuance of meaning between a church that sees itself as nondenominational versus one that describes itself as interdenominational. Some nondenominational churches imply that they don't believe in the legitimacy of denominations.

We're not challenging that legitimacy; we're just saying that we're going to be interdenominational.

We hold very close to the core teachings of Jesus in the gospel—who we are before God, our sinfulness, our need for a Savior, our need to follow Christ fully—which is kind of the common denominator within Protestant denominations. However, on some less central issues, on which there are legitimate differences of opinion among Christians—such as how exactly to interpret the endtime—we hold things a little more loosely. We emphasize the core of what Christianity is and allow people to form their own conclusions based on Scripture.

AN: You've both been at this church for eleven years. How long do you plan to stay, and do you think it's healthy for a pastor to stay long at one church?

MM: Unless God leads otherwise, I want to be involved in this local fellowship all my life. I see huge value in ministers staying long-term in one place. In this way deep relationships are built and trust grows.

LS: You look at the churches that are thriving, and many of those are pastored by people who have been there long periods of time.

AN: What would you say to those who think Willow Creek preaches a soft gospel?

MM: They need to see for themselves what we're really doing.

LS: There's a big misperception that if you're going to communicate to spiritual seekers, you've got to water it down. That's false. If a person comes into the church, he or she wants to know what the difference is between this church and the rotary club down the street. They both seem to do good things. If we don't stand up and clearly defend Christianity and challenge people with the truth of it—with a sense of urgency—they won't see the need to stick around.

AN: Willow Creek's biggest channel of impact on other churches is its half-dozen annual leadership conferences and summits. What goes on at these conferences, and what

do you hope attendees will take away?

MM: We hope that people will come and have a renewed vision of what the Christian church is all about and the impact it can have on the contemporary world. Many times people will come with a very pragmatic attitude—"I'm going to fill a notebook with lots of clever ideas." But what often happens is, people get their notebook out for the first session and 15 minutes into it, they close the notebook and begin to worship God.

AN: Is the contemporary worship format a "must," from your standpoint?

LS: No. Some people will only be reached in a more traditional setting. I have friends who have come to Christ through a very liturgical church, and I celebrate that!

MM: In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul says, "I have become all things to all men . . . for the sake of the gospel" (verses 22, 23, NIV). What he's saying is this: "I'll never change the gospel in any way, but I will figure out what it takes to relate to people so that they will open their souls to the gospel."

So let's say I'm going to start a church among the retirement community of Sarasota, Florida. The most seeker-sensitive thing in the world might be to get a really big organ and do traditional hymns. Doing Willow Creek-style music in that retirement community would not be seeker-sensitive. It would be seeker-insensitive.

LS: The methodology grows out of the great desire to reach friends and neighbors for Christ. Willow Creek holds one seminal value as a priority: that lost people matter to God. Had this not been so strongly taught, modeled, encouraged, and nurtured here over the years, Willow Creek would shrivel and die.

AN: Adventists consistently make up one of the largest groups at your conferences. What do you think attracts Adventists and others to Willow Creek?

MM: The Adventists we meet at these conferences are often some of the most "heart-after-God" people, wanting deeply

to do whatever it takes to serve God and build up the church. When they see what's happening here to reach more and more people, I think there's just a natural affinity that emerges between hearts that are warm for God.

LS: The kind of people we see coming here are very often folk who love God deeply, who mourn the fact that the local church in many cases seems to be anemic in influencing the community, and who have a great desire to see prevailing churches built and communicating the gospel unflinchingly but relevantly to new people. They come in here because their hearts beat for God and for the church, and they want to see if there are any ideas or teachings that might be helpful.

Personally, I learn as much from other churches as they learn from us.

AN: What have you learned from Adventists?

LS: Some of the most heartfelt Christians I've ever encountered have been Adventists. If I could identify one trait among the Adventists I've met, it would be love. I walk away saying, "I want to be more loving like that person." That isn't true of all Adventists I've met, but it's true of many of them.

AN: While many Adventist pastors and lay leaders have successfully implemented Willow Creek methods into their local church, several in the past couple years have split with the denomination. Among other things, they began sending less money to the church organization and downplaying the Adventist name and distinctive beliefs. Any comment?

MM: First of all, we do not encourage churches along those lines. Whenever a church can stay within the denominational structure and flourish, that's best. Not only do they have their built-in benefits and relationships there, but in many cases they can be a shining example within their whole group of a church that's becoming more effective in reaching people and growing them in the faith. We love to be able to point to churches and say, "Here's a United Meth-

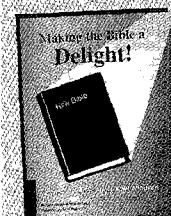
odist church, here's a Southern Baptist church, here's a Seventh-day Adventist church. Look at the ministry they are doing. Look at how God is blessing them. Look at the people coming to church." Then when other Adventists call, we'll point to that example.

AN: What counsel would you give to a church member who goes to Willow Creek, finds a passion for ministry and for lost people, and then returns home and feels thwarted by tradition and other members who oppose change?

MM: We actually do give advice. In the Saturday morning session of our church leadership conference, Jim Mellado (Willow Creek Association President) gives a talk entitled "Changing Your Church Without Blowing It Up." The whole presentation is about a patient, loving, biblical change process where the theme is to build biblical values into people, into their hearts, by modeling it, teaching it, patiently discipling people, helping them to see that we're not trying to do a Willow Creek thing, we're not even trying to be contemporary. What we're trying to do is be biblical and apply God's heart to our situation.

We try to help leaders to be patient, to understand that change is hard and that it creates chaos in people's lives. There's a middle ground between trying to change people overnight and saying "Well, the status quo is ok."

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**D**uring the Wyoming camp meeting, I was privileged to meet with the Junior group who used Noah's ark as their theme. They shared their enthusiasm with me, just as many of you have shared your

favorite quotations to help my collection of quotes and arks grow. I thought you would enjoy these:

If the average church should suddenly take seriously the notion that every lay member—man or woman—is really a minister of Christ, we could have something like a revolution in a very short time.—*Elton Trueblood*

You may encounter defeats, but you must not be defeated.—*Maya Angelou*

In the darkest days, when appearances seem most forbidding, have faith in God. He is working out His will, doing all things well on behalf of His people. The strength of those who love and serve Him will be renewed day by day.—*Ellen White (MH98)*

Begin with the end in mind. If the ladder is not leaning against the right wall, every step taken just gets us to the wrong place faster.—*Stephen Covey*

Do not bite at the bait of pleasure until you know there is no hook beneath it.—*Thomas Jefferson*

Just as important as knowing what gift God has given you is knowing which gifts He hasn't give you. Many Christians try for years to function with gifts they never had in the first place, and this doesn't do the Lord's work much good. It's like trying to hear something with your knee or throw a ball with your nose. Knees and noses are better off doing other things.—*C. Peter Wagner*

## Quotes again

JAMES A. CRESS

We are disgusted by the things that we desire, and we desire what disgusts us.—*Mario Cuomo*

The actions of the son sing praise to the character of the father.—*African proverb*

Toss a pebble at a king, and he'll pay no attention. But put it in his shoe, and he'll limp.—*Marilyn vos Savant*

The blood of the Lamb is a real cleansing, which really purged away sin. This we believe and declare, and by this sign we conquer.—*Charles Spurgeon*

A smile is an inexpensive investment and the returns are worth a fortune.—*Judy Holbrook*

Train up a child in the way he should go and walk there yourself once in a while.—*Josh Billings*

Forgiveness is not an occasional act. It is a permanent attitude.—*Martin Luther King, Jr.*

At the end of your life, you will never regret not having passed one more test, not winning one more verdict, or closing one more deal. You will regret time not spent with a husband, a friend, a child, or a parent.—*Barbara Bush*

Rare is the person who can weigh the faults of others without putting his thumb on the scale.—*Byron J. Langenfield*

When there are those who have something against you, disarm them with love.—*Reba Fichthorn*

By blood and origin, I am Albanian. My citizenship is Indian. I am a Catholic nun. As to my calling, I belong to the world. As to my heart, I belong entirely to the heart of Jesus.—*Mother Teresa*

Truth is incontrovertible. Panic may resent it; ignorance may deride it; malice may distort it; but there it is!—*Sir Winston Churchill*

The church's or Christian group's methods are as important as its message.—*Francis Schaeffer*

God save us from single-issue Christians who judge the truth or validity of any policy by how it fits their own agenda.—*David Allan Hubbard*

The dogs bark, but the caravan moves on.—*Arabic proverb*

There are no coincidences. They are really miracles in which God chooses to remain anonymous.—*Art Tonkinson*



If we don't stand for something, we will fall for anything.—*Irene Dunne*

Nothing so needs reforming as other people's habits.—*Mark Twain*

We buy junk and sell antiques.—*sign outside a country store*

If you just set out to be liked, you would be prepared to compromise on anything at any time, and you would achieve nothing.—*Margaret Thatcher*

When you educate a man, you educate an individual, but when you educate a woman, you educate a nation.—*Johnetta B. Cole*

I don't go out and preach because of my desire as much as I go out to fulfill the command of Christ. He said, "Go!" to all of His disciples, and we're to go and witness to Christ by the way we live and by our verbal witness about the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and about the need to repent and believe. I've never had any doubts about my call.—*Billy Graham* ■

## Letters

continued from p. 3

church. These signs play a significant role in our history.

I do not see a need to present them now. With conditions in the world today (population saturation, starving millions, AIDS, etc.), the world stands on the brink of ruin. All these, along with recent papal promotion of Sunday legislation, the evangelical connivance with that effort, and the unprecedented progress of our message scream out that the Second Coming is at hand.

If Ellen White was wrong about the celestial signs and the great earthquake, what can I be sure she was right about?—Dunbar W. Smith, M.D., Redlands, California.

● LaRondelle says: "In retrospect, can we, today, maintain the same understanding of these phenomena, especially since they are no longer inexplicable supernatural happenings—but are known to be the results of specific laws and predictable movements in nature?"

This is a new thought to me. Am I now to believe that all fulfillment of prophecy should be supernatural in nature? As the *other* signs were obviously natural phenomenon—the earthquake and the falling stars—why, suddenly, must the dark day be "supernatural"? The real "supernatural" is in the biblical prediction before the event.

Ellen White is still correct in saying that "since the time of Moses, no period of darkness of equal density, extent, and duration, has ever been recorded" (GC 306). And Moses' event was also localized. And it may have had some natural connection also. God can "foresee" natural events, and He can even "use" natural events for His purposes.

Speaking of the earthquake, Ellen White says, "In fulfillment of this prophecy [Rev. 6:12], there occurred, in the year 1755, the most terrible earthquake that has ever been recorded." In addition to her emphasis on "timing," Ellen White correctly points to the widespread extent of the Lisbon earthquake. LaRondelle, however, turns to a body count and argues there have been

other earthquakes with more casualties. But the criteria that Ellen White refers to is "extent," not "body count." I stand by Ellen White.—Fred Ellis, Vale, Oregon.

● LaRondelle questions whether we can continue to maintain Ellen White's clear understanding of the cosmic signs mentioned in Matthew 24:29, Mark 13:24, 25, and Revelation 6:12, 13, particularly because "they are no longer inexplicable supernatural happenings—but are known to be the results of specific laws and unpredictable movements in nature."

If God chooses to fulfill Christ's prophetic signs by working through natural phenomena in the cosmos, this in no way diminishes or contradicts their clear fulfillment in the period between 1755 and 1833, or approximately "at the close of the great papal persecution" (DA 632), as prophetically interpreted by Ellen White. If the scholarly community within Adventism is reluctant to receive the Word as interpreted by the Spirit of Prophecy, I fear for the future—not of the Seventh-day Adventist Church merely—but of the scholarly community itself.—Jerry Stevens, Ferndale, Michigan.

● I agree with LaRondelle that we need to be cautious about preaching what we are not ready to back with good exegesis. At the same time, we must hesitate to propose even our best scholarship as a solution that would seem to challenge the word of those through whom God has spoken. It is better to suspend judgment, waiting for further evidence.—Ted Wade, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

● LaRondelle's article was thought-provoking but perhaps not entirely in the way he intended. His conclusion that because these cosmic signs are not Adventist pillars or landmarks, they can be dismissed in order to let "truth" progress to positions arrived at through a more "responsible" exegesis leaves a bitter taste. LaRondelle knows that, according to writings that the Adventist Church understands to be inspired, our Lord could have returned at some time around 1883 if God's people had been ready to let Him use them and bring the work of the

gospel to closure (SM 1: 68). If God had foretold through His prophets cosmic signs and not produced them by some point, He would have made Himself a liar. So the signs had to come in order for them to fulfill their purpose as signs of the Lord's soon return. The fact that both our pioneers and we ourselves have delayed the second coming should not cause us to write off signs that have been again affirmed through prophecy (see GC 304, 306, 333, 334).—Larry Kirkpatrick, SDA Theological Seminary, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

### Dr. LaRondelle responds:

*To understand the interpretation of the cosmic signs in Bible prophecy by contemporary Adventist Bible scholars, we must place the issue in the larger context of biblical exegesis. Over the years two different mindsets have developed within Adventist tradition. One approach uses Ellen White's writings as the final interpreter of Scripture, the other maintains that the Bible is its own interpreter. This development in principle only repeats the history of the Bible and the Christian Church at large, which led to the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. Fortunately, the Adventist Church states officially that "the Bible is their only creed" (27 Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists, preamble; SDA Church Manual, Rev. 1995, 7). A representative group of Adventist leaders, Bible teachers, and editors published a declaration in which they stated: "We test the writings of Ellen G. White by the Bible, but in no sense do we test the Bible by her writings. . . . We have never considered E. G. White to be in the same category as the writers of the canon of Scripture. . . . These [E. G. W. writings] are not the source of our expositions. We do not make acceptance of her writings a matter for church discipline . . . [or] a test of Christian fellowship" (SDAs Answer Questions on Doctrine, Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1957, 90-97). For a fuller treatment, see Appendix A, in my new book How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible: The Biblical-Contextual Approach, Sarasota, Florida: First Impressions, 1997; fax 941-358-0162. ■*

## SHOPTALK

### James White Library web site

Did you know that the James White Library at Andrews University has a Church Ministries web site? I would like to share some impressive statistics about this resource. As of July 23, 1998, it has been accessed 46 times from Europe, 17 times from Australia, amazingly 17 times from Asia (including China), 6 times from South America, 5 times from Africa (including Egypt), 3 times from Middle America, and an astonishing 870 times from North America (including Canada).

Looking at the numbers gives an indication of an intense interest in witnessing throughout the world. When I realized, a few months ago, that this could become an important resource, I decided to upgrade existing links and work on developing new project ideas for the site as quickly as possible. I promised myself to either add or revise a project each month. There are eight projects currently available at <http://www.andrews.edu/~touchard/>—Wolfhard Touchard, reference librarian, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

### Internet for evangelism

In the Swedish Union Conference we are using the Internet to spread information about the SDA Church, such as our beliefs and our various congregations in Sweden. The pages are being maintained, in most cases, by lay members in each congregation. On the pages you can find information about the local SDA school, Ingathering, and some of the departments at the union office, etc. In the near future we hope to offer Bible correspondence courses, together with SDA literature.

We also have something we call CyberPastor, where people can write their questions and send them to a pastor, who answers the questions via fax, letter, or E-mail. People ask about theology in general, the SDA Church and what we believe, and how the CyberPastor service

works. The service has received some attention in the local and national media both in newspapers and radio. Over 300 people have written to the CyberPastor so far this year. The Internet is one contemporary way of spreading the gospel. I can recommend it to other conferences or unions. Above all it is a media that the younger generation appreciates. Our site address is [www.CyberPastor@Adventist.se](http://www.CyberPastor@Adventist.se)—Peter Nilsson, pastor, Uppsala, Sweden.

### The National Association for the Prevention of Starvation

The National Association for the Prevention of Starvation (NAPS) is a non-for-profit relief organization founded in 1978 and registered in Alabama. A board of directors governs the organization. Oakwood College students comprise a large percentage of NAPS relief work and are actively represented on the governing board. The use of college students in NAPS has a threefold purpose: it develops leadership skills, improves self-worth, and mitigates against indifference and complacency. For more information, contact NAPS by phone (800-458-9999); fax (205-726-7055); E-mail ([www.oakwood.edu](http://www.oakwood.edu)); or write to NAPS, Oakwood College, Box 196, Huntsville, Alabama 35896.

### Compassion ministries

A recent successful church plant in the Navajo Indian reservation included a strong compassion-ministries component in the overall strategy. Dale Wolcott, the supervising pastor, has described the development of the Kayenta Adventist Community Services Center in a readable, narrative-style dissertation which also includes a theological study of evangelistic compassion ministry, a review of other SDA and non-SDA examples of evangelistic compassion ministry, and a cultural and demographic introduction to the Navajo people. This resource could be of value to cross-cultural church planters and to anyone interested in Native American ministry or in felt-needs evangelism.

The 187-page resource is available in an attractive D-ring vinyl binder for U.S.\$15.00 or on 3.5-inch high density diskette for U.S.\$5.00 (specify WordPerfect 8.0 or WordPerfect 5.1). Write Pastor Dale Wolcott, Dakota Native Ministries, P.O. Box 4009, Pine Ridge, South Dakota 57770. Phone: 605-867-1788; E-mail [dandnw@gwtc.net](mailto:dandnw@gwtc.net).—Dale Wolcott, Pine Ridge, South Dakota.

### Spanish/English hymn translation

Many bilingual Spanish/English churches continue to sing Hymn No. 487 in the Spanish hymnal, "Suenen Las Palabras," when they collect the morning offering. Second and third generation descendents in my congregation enjoy singing the words in English. A poet and musician in our congregation, Dolores Gonzalez, made a beautiful translation which I would be happy to send free of charge to anyone who would like a copy. Simply send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Bernie Baerg, 1841 Gray Avenue, Yuba City, California 95991-1232.

### Welcoming new Adventists

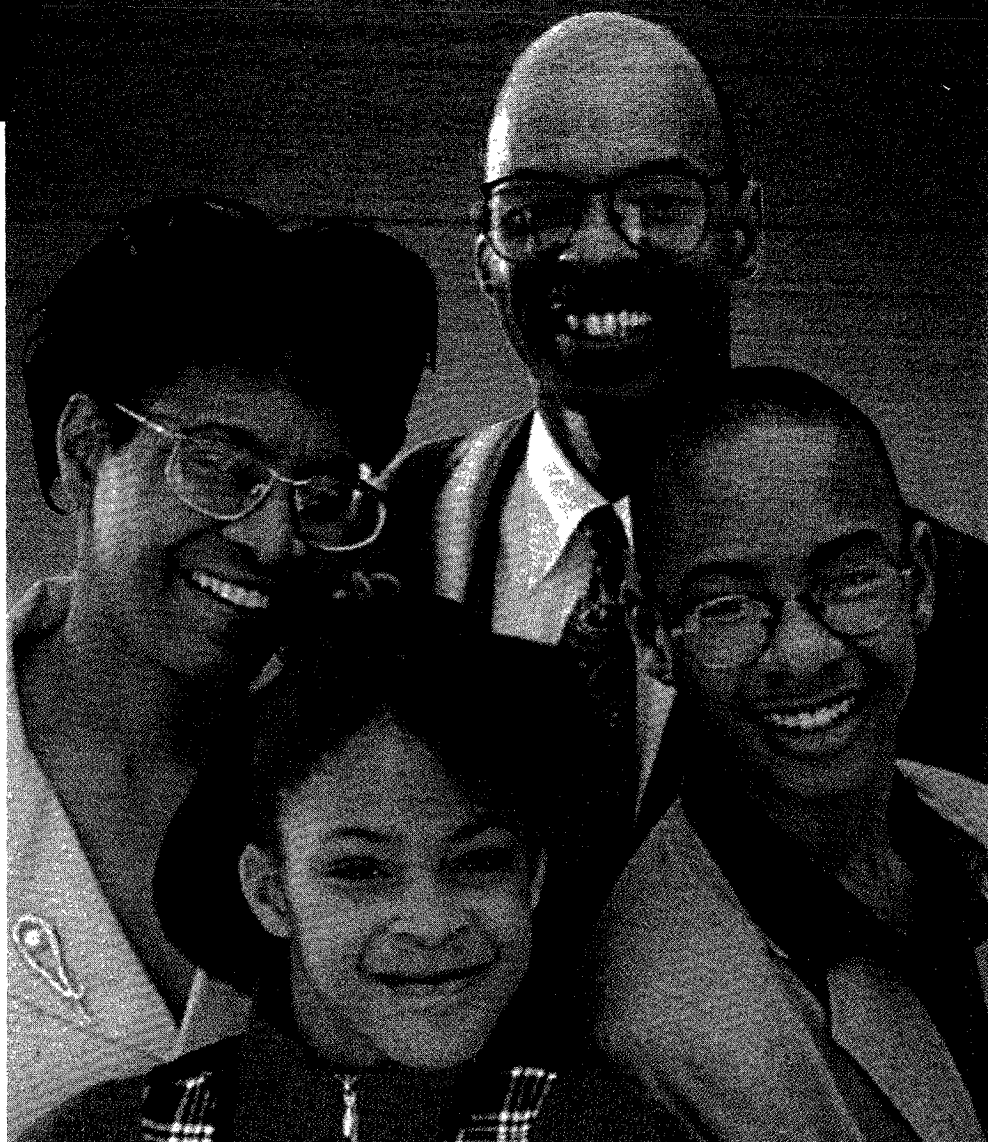
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