

# Ministry

International Journal for Pastors August 2006

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### Dynamics of inspiration

Pastor Coffen, referring to the Waldenses states, "They flourished from 1170 and ceased to exist in 1532, when they merged with another Christian group" ("Thy Word is a Light Unto My Feet," February 2000). I visit the Waldensian Valleys often and my Waldensian friends would be amazed to learn they are not supposed to exist. A large Waldensian Church in Rome hosted the Seventh-day Adventist Net 2000 broadcast by ACN satellite from February 4-20, 2000. Waldenses certainly exist today!

In 1989 the Waldensian Church, now affiliated with Methodists had 13,000 members in the historic Waldensian Valleys and about 17,000 members in the rest of Italy and Switzerland, and another 15,000 in Uruguay.

In 1532, the Waldensians joined the Protestant Reformation. They later sent young men to Geneva for pastoral training, but never then aligned themselves with any religious group.

Brother Coffen also states, "That the Waldenses did not exist for a thousand years as Ellen White asserted." A close review of her wording is necessary. In the context of the Waldenses, in the bulwarks of the mountains, she states, "Here, for a thousand years, *witnesses for the truth maintained the ancient faith*" (*Great Controversy*, 66). Long before they were referred to as Waldenses, the followers of Ambrose and Vigilantius (A.D. 400), Claudius (early 9<sup>th</sup> century) Peter de Bruys (early 12<sup>th</sup> century), Henry of Lausanne and Arnold of Brescia (12<sup>th</sup>) resisted Papal authority and doctrine in northern Italy and southeastern France. They

all were considered "heretics" staunch dissidents of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, advocates of the "faith once delivered to the saints," before 1170. When Ellen White stated that these *witnesses for the truth maintained the ancient faith* (called Waldenses after perhaps the 11<sup>th</sup> century), we find abundant historical support.

Again, author Coffen states, "... there is no historical record of Waldensian Sabbath keeping; in their own documents they clearly refer to worshiping on Sunday." It is true that by 1532, the subject of Sabbath keeping was not an issue; Sunday is the only day mentioned. It is essentially true that we have no official records of their seventh-day Sabbathkeeping. However, that is understandable, considering that virtually every document was destroyed by their persecutors.

B. G. Wilkinson, Ph.D., in *Truth Triumphant* draws from many sources for his support of their keeping of the Sabbath. "Abundance of evidence can be produced to show that these Sabbath keepers (A.D. 1194) were interchangeably called Waldenses and insabbatati" (*Truth Triumphant*, 261). Then quoting Goldast, Wilkinson states, "They were called Insabbatti, not because they were circumcised, but because they kept the Sabbath according to the Jewish law" (*ibid.*, 262).

"While, under the pressure of long-continued persecution, some compromised their faith, *little by little yielding its distinctive principles*, others held fast the truth" (*The Great Controversy*, 65). Regular Sabbath observance with absence from Sunday mass would be most obvious grounds for heresy, an easy target for Inquisitors.

The clearest voice, however, is "Among the leading causes that had led to the separation of the true church from Rome was the hatred of the latter toward the Bible Sabbath. . . Through ages of darkness and apostasy there were Waldenses who denied the supremacy of Rome, who rejected image worship as idolatry, and *who kept the true Sabbath* (*The Great Controversy*, 65).

It is apparent that faithful witnesses found a haven in northern Italy and southeastern France from the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> centuries. By the 14<sup>th</sup> century, some were beginning to compromise because of relentless persecution; some were seventh-day Sabbath keepers, but not all. So, from perhaps the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> until the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the light of apostolic truth shone from that "Church in the Wilderness" for a thousand years. —Bill Sherman, Wildwood Lifestyle Center, Wildwood, Georgia.

♦ While I was challenged by some of the logical arguments Richard W. Coffen uses, I find his documentation threadbare and his attention biased when arguing for historical errors in Ellen G. White's writings ("A Fresh Look at the Dynamics of Inspiration" [December 1999] and "Thy Word is a Light Unto My Feet" [February 2000]).

Upon Coffen's assertion that the Waldenses were not Sabbath keepers, there is testimony to the contrary. Christian Edwardson in *Facts of Faith*, 125, quotes David Benedict's *General History of the Baptist Denomination*, vol. 2, 413, "Robinson gives an account of some of the Waldenses of the Alps, who were called Sabbati,

*continued on p. 31*

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**E**llen White has a way of expressing profound realities with such a quality of simplicity that her insights tend to be concealed from

over-intellectualized minds. The well-educated reader, committed to estimating the worthiness of theological writing by whether or not it is sufficiently loaded with the prevailing currents of sophisticated expression, tends to bypass what is concealed beneath Mrs. White's unaffected language.

The insights shrouded in Mrs. White's simple literary style shine only on those who are actually humbly searching for truth. Truth, as expressed in these writings, presents itself in much the way it did in the case of the "stone that the builders rejected" (see Acts 4:11, NIV). Perhaps this characteristic is in fact a worthy test of whether or not a body of writing is "inspired."

As you might already suspect, I am saying this because recently I was struck squarely between my spiritual eyes by something that tackled not only my mind, but my heart as well. It pressed its way through the well-guarded doors of conscious thought and broke in on the private world of my well-barricaded conscience! Here's the sentence that especially struck me:

"The disciples might speak fluently on doctrines, they might repeat the words of Christ Himself; but unless they possessed Christlike meekness and love, they would deny Him, whatever the profession."<sup>1</sup> As you can see by the way I have introduced this sentence, I am keenly aware that in and of itself there appears to be nothing new in it. In fact, it is a thought we often repeat, especially at ministers' meetings. After all, this particular statement was written in the context of the full-time evangelistic work of Jesus' disciples.

## "The truth about truth"

W I L L E V A

But three things convict me in this sentence:

1. The disciples are not only pictured as speaking, but they are doing it "fluently."
2. As they speak, they might even be "repeat[ing] the words of Christ Himself."
3. But all this impressive communication may well in fact "deny Him" if certain elements are absent from their speech or witness.

**T** *truth lies*

*much more in the Heavenly Presence that is behind or within the thought and word, than in the word or thought itself.*

When we look at this sentence carefully, it seems that truth in fact is not even being communicated in the first place if crucial, supernatural, and experiential realities are absent. In other words, as we proclaim truth it may be that no viable witness is actually taking place, even though deft, elegant expressions of theologically pristine proclamation are flowing from our lips. There is a striking sense in which truth is not

even truth if the Truth Himself is not present in the proclamation. Truth lies much more in the Heavenly Presence that is behind or within the thought and word, than in the word or thought itself. Truth is at its heart a particular Person—He who called Himself "the truth" (see John 14:6).

This, of course, has huge implications for our witness. We are not merely asked to impart information, to educate or instruct. Our communication does not merely involve telling people how to get from point A to point B. We are instead summoned to be mediums of conviction and of the healing grace of God. Such a role resoundingly transcends the necessity of mere theological and homiletical training, professional skill, and even charisma (which easily masquerades as the voice of God). If we want to be authentic Christian ministers, there is nothing for it but to possess the genuine article.

Along this line, I once heard the story of two businessmen who were visiting a certain city. One night they went together to a nearby church to hear the preaching of a renowned minister. After the meeting they returned to their hotel in awe of the preaching and unable to stop savoring the impressiveness of the sermon.

The next night the two men went their separate ways. One went back to hear the same minister while the other went to hear a second, less renowned preacher. When they met later, the first man could again hardly contain his enthusiasm, saying that he wished his friend had come with him to once more hear the minister they had heard the first night. If anything, his second sermon had been even greater than his first.

The man then asked his colleague how it had gone with the sermon preached by the second minister. His friend, unable to express what had actually happened to him, could only

*continued on p. 19*

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# INDICATORS OF MINISTERIAL RESILIENCE

**I**n 1987 several Seventh-day Adventist academicians and the Southwestern Union Conference launched a longitudinal research investigation on Seventh-day Adventist clergy residing and working in the United States of America.



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Stage I of Project SDA Clergy was designed to survey 82 senior ministerial students enrolled that year at Adventist colleges and universities in the United States and Canada. The highly detailed questionnaire resulted in an extensive database of demographic, attitudinal, and experiential information from the study group. Extremely insightful and useful reports on patterns of origin, background, recruitment, and placement of young Adventist ministers were subsequently published in two issues of *Ministry* in 1993.<sup>1</sup>

In 1997, in keeping with the ongoing longitudinal commitment of the research team, Walla Walla College sponsored Project SDA Clergy: Stage II. This second phase was initially designed to focus solely on the 66 percent of the 1987 ministerial student graduates who actually entered the professional ministerial ranks of the church. We wanted to find out how they had progressed in their ministerial careers during the intervening ten years—their fulfillments and frustrations, pleasures and problems, significant experiences and aspirations, along with their attitudes, values, and

opinions as they evaluate their past and face their future as ministers.

At the same time, we realized that 34 percent of 1987 senior ministerial students did *not* climax their college training with a ministerial appointment. What became of them? To our knowledge, there has been no previous systematic inquiry into the possible stress, maladjustment, and sense of failure and rejection that may afflict many of those whose “call to ministry” and years of hope and preparation did not bear fruit. Thus, this large group became a secondary target of the 1997, Stage II investigation.

As our research strategy crystallized, another troubling and understudied subgroup emerged. Not all of the 53 members of our 1987 cohort who entered the ministry of the church remained in that capacity; 34 percent had dropped out of church employment between 1987 and 1997 for one reason or another. This unexpected and alarming finding alerted us to the need for different forms of the 1997 survey instrument to address the three current subgroupings of the 1987 cohort of SDA ministerial students, which in this study are called: 1) Minis-

**Table 1: Evaluation of pre-ministerial components of college curriculum**

	Good	Mediocre	Poor
Courses in Homiletics	69%	21%	0%
Courses in Bible	72%	18%	9%
Courses in How to Give Bible Studies	33%	30%	24%
Courses in Church Administration	24%	42%	21%
Courses in Pastoral Counseling	21%	33%	33%
Courses in Biblical Languages	78%	6%	6%

*Responses in course categories may not total 100 percent because a few subjects did not respond fully or clearly.*

terial Persisters; 2) Ministerial Dropouts; and 3) Ministerial Rejects. The nomenclature of “Dropouts” and “Rejects” troubled us as unhappy and stigmatizing labels—regardless of the validity of those terms in describing the experience and identifying the members of those two groups. Later it was found that those subjects often referred to themselves as “Dropouts” and “Rejects” in their completed questionnaires.

**The data**

During the summer of 1997 we began our search for the current addresses of our original 82 subjects. Our intensive data gathering efforts were well rewarded: we received the completed questionnaires from 33 of the 35 Ministerial Persisters (94 percent); from 9 of the 18 Ministerial Dropouts (50 percent); and from 14 of the 29 of the Ministerial Rejects (48 percent).

In the 1997 Stage II report that follows, readers may see a few things in the minds and experiences of the ministers that may be surprising. We asked for candid responses and we got them. Our job is to report faithfully the facts and findings. We trust that colleagues will rejoice with us with what seems good news. When the news is unsettling, we trust there will be empathy and compassion for the occasionally beleaguered young ministers.

**The research findings**

1. *1997 evaluation of 1987 pre-ministerial college curriculum* (See Table 1). In general, our Ministerial Persister and Dropout groups—ten years after graduating from college and based upon their ministerial experience—gave high

marks to ministerial education courses they had received in homiletics, Bible, and biblical languages. On the other hand, the respondents were less enthusiastic about the usefulness of course work in how to give Bible studies, church administration, and pastoral counseling.

Nearly 75 percent of respondents suggested that their college preparation for ministry would have been greatly improved with additional instruction in how to handle church finances and administration, leadership skills, ethics, conflict resolution, fund raising, how to give Bible studies and officiate at weddings and funerals, and course work in business, sociology, and psychology. One pastor complained: “Upon graduating, I received my own church. While I could parse a Greek text, or discuss theology from a philosophical standpoint, I lacked practice in daily application. I completely lacked in understanding of church orga-

nization and committee structure.”

Another summarized a point made by many respondents: “I highly valued my biblical studies, and critical thinking classes; however I was left helpless and hopeless when it came to administration and leadership.”

2. *Recollections of unrealistic college expectations of ministry.* The 1997 survey inquired of cohort members whether any expectations they may have had in college concerning their future ministry proved to be unrealistic and disappointing, and whether such expectations required later revision. The close correspondence of answers to this question from both Ministerial Persister and Dropout groups allowed us to combine their responses in Table 2. The table organizes the subjects’ responses in a typology of three clusters of unrealistic expectations: The Role of the Minister, The Role of Church Members, and The Role of Conference Leadership.

One pastor verbalized some expectations that proved unreal: “My education would be valued by my congregation. My personal devotion and ministry would be appreciated by my conference. I would be master of my time and to some extent my ministerial agenda. It doesn’t matter who I knew for I was following God’s leading.”

Another pastor contrasted the situation: “Expectation: ministry is about winning souls. Reality: Ministry is

**Table 2. Unrealistic expectations of respondents when commencing their professional ministry**

Unrealistic Expectations Regarding Minister’s Role . . . . .	29%
<i>(e.g., the time and latitude to set personal goals and agenda with focus on soul winning; time for personal devotion and family; leadership opportunities; spouse involvement; etc.)</i>	
Unrealistic Expectations Regarding Church Members . . . . .	58%
<i>(e.g., cooperation, respect, and encouragement of pastor; democracy and fair play in church and school board meetings; support for church standards and doctrines; brotherly love, etc.)</i>	
Unrealistic Expectations Regarding Conference Administrative and Departmental Leadership . . . . .	42%
<i>(e.g., cooperation and support of local pastor; absence of prejudice and politics; flexible, spiritual, and zealous conference leadership; etc.)</i>	
No Unrealistic Expectations . . . . .	14%

*Total responses exceed 100% because some respondents cited multiple disillusionments.*

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Table 3. 1997 lifestyle comparison of three groups from the 1987 cohort of senior, Seventh-day Adventist ministerial students

Lifestyle Indicators	Persisters <sup>1</sup>	Dropouts <sup>2</sup>	Rejects <sup>3</sup>
a. Attending SDA Church	100%	63%	63%
b. Sending Children to SDA Schools	95%	62%	50%
c. Life Satisfactions <sup>4</sup>			
Completely Satisfying	39%	37%	0%
Partly Satisfying	61%	37%	100%
Unsatisfying	0%	26%	0%
d. Residence Moves During Last Ten Years <sup>5</sup>	4.5	—	—
e. Social Class <sup>6</sup>	3.2	2.6	2.4
f. Buying Home (or paid for)	64%	50%	36%
g. Number of Automobiles	2.0	2.3	1.5
Age of Newest Auto	5.1 Yrs	5.7 Yrs	6.3 Yrs
h. Enthusiasm for Work	75%	69%	63%
i. Voted in Most Recent National Election	48%	65%	54%
j. Spouse Employed Outside Home	66%	70%	74%

<sup>1</sup>Those subjects who entered and “persisted” in ministry.

<sup>2</sup>Those subjects who entered ministry and later “dropped out.”

<sup>3</sup>Those subjects who never entered ministry.

<sup>4</sup>A well-known scale measuring fulfillment and purpose in life.

<sup>5</sup>Young ministers are often transferred; not applicable to other groups.

<sup>6</sup>Social class determined by widely-used “Occupation Status Rankings.”

about keeping the saints from killing each other.”

3. *Persisters, Dropouts, and Rejects: lifestyle comparisons.* Table 3 presents several concrete indicators that identify, measure, and compare the current “lifestyles” of the 1987 cohort subgroups.

Table 3 provides data to compare the three subgroupings on family life, work and community involvement, socio-economic status, and religious commitment. Note the following:

◆ Church attendance. While the Ministerial Persisters all reported regular attendance at an Adventist Church, over a third of the Reject and the Dropout groups no longer attend church. A few of them reported joining other churches.

◆ Support to church schools. A third to one-half of the Dropouts and Rejects send their children to public schools. However, it must be noted that despite disappointment and stress associated with their unfulfilled ministerial careers, one-half to nearly two-thirds of

Dropout and Reject groups continue to attend SDA churches and send their children to church schools.

◆ Life satisfaction. Results on this scale were not unexpected. Although the Persisters are often troubled by serious misgivings regarding their congregations and conferences, they demonstrate a stronger sense of purpose and fulfillment than Dropout and Reject groups. Even after ten years, many of the Rejects are still haunted by their lost hopes and dreams. One respondent lamented: “I still feel pain over my rejection because I know I was called to the ministry.”

◆ Residence moves. Young ministers moved on an average of 4.5 times between 1987 and 1997. This familiar pattern seems to be accepted as a standard inconvenience and “part of the job.” This variable is not applicable to the lifestyles of other groups.

◆ Social class. In this study, the social class of every subject in each of the three subgroups was identified and quan-

tified with a highly regarded “Occupation Ranking System.” The Persisters have, on the average, significantly higher social class status than members of the other two subgroups (based on occupation).

◆ Economic indicators. The social class standing and status of the three groups are reinforced by the economic indicators targeted in f and g. In spite of numerous moves, nearly two-thirds of our young ministers have acquired their own home mortgages. Several announced that their homes are “almost paid for!” Members of the Dropout and Reject groups, because of their generally lower incomes, lag behind. Similarly, the Persisters drive newer automobiles. It is interesting to note that the economic fortunes of the three subgroups of subjects (as indicated by home ownership and vehicle quality) consistently decline as ministerial involvement declines.

#### 4. *Comparative findings on selected attitudes and values.*

Table 4 provides a set of continuum-type scales developed by researchers in the social and behavioral sciences to measure such variables as authoritarianism, marginality, liberalism/conservatism, idealism/realism, tolerance/prejudice, and alienation.<sup>2</sup>

Responses to the first scale indicate that Persisters are more likely to have authoritarian inclinations. This means that a majority tends to perceive issues as “right” or “wrong,” and to have unswerving loyalty to focal institutions (e.g., government or church). Ministerial Dropouts are more likely to take a less rigid position and to be more independent from centralized authority.

Data from the second scale reveal that a large majority of minister respondents reinforced their earlier lack of confidence in conference administrators. One anonymously observed: “I simply cannot trust the conference with my own weakness or vulnerability.” This survey item uncovers a serious concern. Ministers are human, too, and therefore can experience spiritual crises. But in whom might the minister confide without fear of judgment or career endangerment?

The third scale illuminates a para-

dox. Ministerial Persisters—even with their common complaint about administrative leadership—do not feel over-regimented or over-regulated. Thus, it appears that subjects are able to separate what they perceive as unfavorable administrative style from favorable administrative substance. The result is that most ministers in this study willingly conform to tasks and expectations defined by conference leadership.

Scale d reveals a measure of cynicism and fatalism regarding job promotions among a majority of subjects in all three subgroups. And one respondent noted: “A few pastors have made apple-polishing an art form!” Perhaps merit criteria for advancement to larger responsibility should be defined and emphasized.

Scales e and f touch on a perceived vulnerability and helplessness among many of our respondents. Ministers sometimes feel that they are subjected to unrelenting criticism, yet are required to maintain a pious and stoic compliance and congeniality. Over half of our Min-

isterial Persisters are deeply hurt by their critics. Dropouts apparently are less thinned. At the same time, the majority of Persisters and Dropouts feel “used” or manipulated by other people.

Scale g focuses on the dimension of pessimism/optimism by probing subjects’ attitudes toward the world at large. The majority of Persisters disagree with the statement that “the world is basically a friendly place.” This perspective may be more common among those who strongly anticipate future plagues and persecutions. On the other hand, the Dropouts have evidently found living in the secular world less threatening.

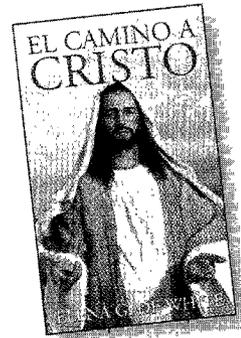
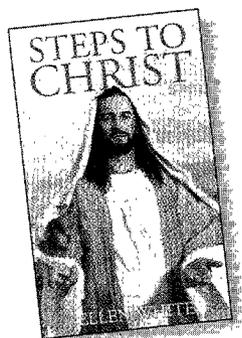
Scale h produces the most confirming occupational data. Ministers are considered models of faith and spokespersons of truth regarding God’s plan for humanity and the ultimate destiny of this world. Consequently, the vast majority of Persisters is confident about “the meaning of life.” Dropouts and Rejects are less sure.

The last scale finds that over half

of our Persisters “sometimes feel very lonely or remote from other people.” Clearly, this is part of a larger pattern of occupational isolation from full association with their congregations and their conference leadership. Ministers have been “set apart” somewhat—both symbolically and literally. Many respondents recognize formidable barriers to candid communication and to anything more than superficial relationships with most parishioners and colleagues.

Sadly, Ministerial Dropouts reported an even higher incidence of loneliness and remoteness. Social scientists have developed some theoretical constructs that can help explain this phenomenon. For example, Stonequist<sup>3</sup> and Wittermans<sup>4</sup> describe the plight of individuals who experience marginal, incomplete, and unsatisfying social assimilation. The construct of the “Marginal Man” suggests that persons are painfully caught between two divergent cultures, groups, or perspectives. The individual’s involvement and commit-

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Table 4. 1997 attitudes and values of three subgroups from 1987 cohort of senior ministerial students: Likert scales

	Persisters	Dropouts	Rejects
a) Obedience and respect for authority are the most important virtues children can have.			
Agree	54	12	46
Uncertain	18	25	36
Disagree	28	63	18
b) It would be difficult for ministers to tell conference leaders that they have a personal spiritual problem.			
Agree	67	N/A	N/A
Uncertain	12	N/A	N/A
Disagree	21	N/A	N/A
c) We're so regimented today that there's not much room for choice even in personal matters.			
Agree	15	37	9
Uncertain	9	0	0
Disagree	76	63	91
d) In getting a job promotion, some degree of "apple polishing" is required.			
Agree	66	62	54
Uncertain	6	0	28
Disagree	28	38	28
e) I often feel upset when someone criticizes me.			
Agree	55	13	54
Uncertain	15	37	18
Disagree	30	50	64
f) Sometimes I have the feeling that other people are using me.			
Agree	52	63	27
Uncertain	9	0	9
Disagree	39	37	64
g) The world in which we live is basically a friendly place.			
Agree	33	50	27
Uncertain	15	12	9
Disagree	52	38	64
h) I often wonder what the meaning of life really is.			
Agree	16	50	37
Uncertain	3	12	0
Disagree	81	38	63
i) I sometimes feel very lonely or remote from other people.			
Agree	55	75	36
Uncertain	15	0	18
Disagree	30	25	46

ment are fragmented between the often contrary demands of the two. Consequently, there is a failure to identify fully or bond with either of the conflicting groups or orientations. The "Marginal Man" concept is helpful in describing and understanding the situation of many Dropouts as they are torn between their previous occupation and religious subculture on the one hand, and their new occupations and orientations in the secular world, on the

other. Similarly, many Persisters may also experience a kind of lonely marginality as they negotiate their ministry between the expectations of congregation, conference, and their own special calling.

**Editorial note:** *The concluding part of this report will appear in October. It will examine the reasons why individuals leave the ministry and suggest a prevention and treatment strategy for this critical loss of clergy. It will also develop*

*a demographic profile of those subjects with the greatest probability of becoming Ministerial Dropouts.* ■

<sup>1</sup> Jack Bynum, Douglas Clark, and George Hilton. "Project SDA Clergy: Part 1," *Ministry*, April 1993, 16-21; Part 2 in June 1993, 9-13.

<sup>2</sup> Delbert C. Miller, *Handbook of Research Design and Social Measurement* (New York: David McKay Co., 1970).

<sup>3</sup> Everett V. Stonequist, *The Marginal Man: A Study in Personality and Culture Conflict* (New York: Scribner's, 1937).

<sup>4</sup> Tamme Wittermans, "Structural Marginality and Social Worth," *Sociology and Social Research* 48 (April 1964), 348-360.

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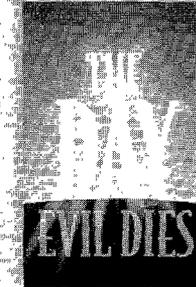


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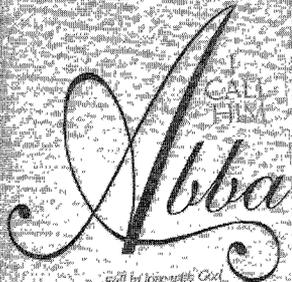
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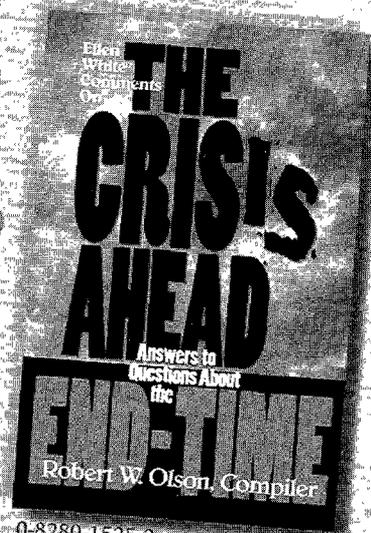
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# PRAYER

## *A Leader's Point of View*

**D**o you want to see tangible evidence of God's power in your life? Pray. Do you want to see resolutions of knotty problems in the churches? Get down on your knees."



*George Rice, Ph.D., is pastor of the Tridelphia Seventh-day Adventist Church, Tridelphia, Maryland.*



*Neville Harcombe is president of the Chesapeake Conference in Columbia, Maryland.*

So says Neville Harcombe, president of the Chesapeake Conference. Because Elder Harcombe is a conference president who has enthusiastically supported and promoted the North American Division's (NAD) call to prayer and revival in his conference, the Spiritual Emphasis Committee of NAD asked him to share with the readers of *Ministry* what he has experienced.

**George Rice:** Please share with us how you introduced the book, *Getting Ready to Meet Jesus*, the covenant card, and NAD's call to prayer and revival.

**Neville Harcombe:** When I looked through the little book, *Getting Ready to Meet Jesus*, I saw something that could be used by the Holy Spirit to direct the minds of our pastors and church members to the important work of preparing our hearts for the latter rain. I was excited by the vision of leading our pastors into a commitment to the covenant found at the front of the book, and then by the idea of them, in turn, leading their members into accepting and signing the covenant. I realize, of course, that the conference leadership must set the pace in spiritual renewal. But our pastors are the key to the spiritual condition of the churches. If we have pastors who are

spiritually strong, we will have congregations that are committed to the third angel's message. So the Chesapeake Conference immediately bought enough books to give to the pastors and to their members who regularly attend church.

At the pastors' meeting in January 1999, the book and the covenant were introduced. We spent time talking about the responsibility of church leaders to guide the people into a deeper relationship with Jesus. We spent time in prayer over this covenant and what God expects us to do. When it came time to call for a commitment, and the pastors were asked to sign the covenant and to move to the front of the room where we were meeting to acknowledge their commitment, not one stayed in their seats. It was a moving thing to witness.

**GR:** You and Rob Vandeman, secretary of the conference, set the example for the pastors by signing your covenant cards first. As you have followed through on your commitment over the past eighteen months, have you noticed or felt any difference in your spiritual life?

**NH:** Definitely. I blocked off time in the mornings for private study and prayer. I began rereading *Acts of the Apostles* by Ellen White, and, believe me,

GEORGE E. RICE

it was moving. There are two powerful chapters at the beginning of the book dealing with the Day of Pentecost and the work of the Holy Spirit. I realized as never before how dependent we are on the power and efficiency of the Spirit and what God wants to do with and through His people. And you know, I experienced some unusual things. First of all, I felt a spiritual renewal within myself. Then I began to realize that I was being helped with administrative responsibilities. It seemed to me that my leadership style was being strengthened and solutions to problems were coming more easily. The whole experience is exciting.

**GR:** Since *Getting Ready to Meet Jesus* and the covenant card were introduced to the pastors in January 1999 and then introduced to the churches of the Chesapeake Conference in March of that year, what has your administration done to help keep the focus on the renewal experience?

**NH:** Several things. The emphasis of our 1999 camp meeting was on getting ready to meet Jesus. Peoples' attention was directed to the book repeatedly, and the importance of entering into the covenant was emphasized over and over again. The pastors are encouraged at workers' meetings to be loyal to the covenant that they have signed, to keep praying and studying.

Letters have been sent to the pastors and church elders stressing the need for revival and encouraging all to stay focused. There is a strong emphasis on prayer ministry, seminars for prayer coordinators are being conducted, and a strong emphasis on daily prayer sessions is a part of our camp meeting. Rob Vandeman is preparing a daily Bible reading schedule for our conference members, and Rick Remmers, our conference prayer coordinator, is preparing a Spirit of Prophecy reading plan that will be used in 2001.

**GR:** Have you detected any changes in the congregations that make up the conference constituency?

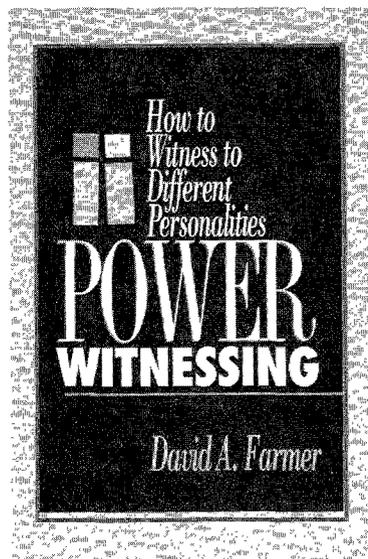
**NH:** Within a number of congregations, there is a growing interest in developing prayer groups that meet on various days of the week. And where there is an emphasis on prayer, there is spiritual growth, and conflict is minimized. As with my responsibilities in the office, it seems that solutions to knotty problems within church families are resolved much more easily. Another thing that I have noticed and find quite interesting, prayer helps people correct distorted pictures of God. There is no question in my mind that prayer helps the saints to be saints, and a strong emphasis on prayer in churches helps churches to be a loving family.

**GR:** I understand that you have been asked to be the prayer coordinator for the Columbia Union. What will that responsibility involve?

**NH:** This is something new for me and for the Union, so I am entering uncharted waters. This responsibility opens

up many doors of opportunity. The various conferences are being encouraged to select a prayer coordinator for the entire conference. In Chesapeake, we have asked Rick Remmers, pastor of our Atholton Church, to assume this responsibility. The prayer coordinator of the conference will facilitate and help organize the program of the prayer coordinators of individual churches.

I see the focus of my responsibilities as Union Prayer Coordinator to be on the administration of the Columbia Union conferences. As conference leaders throughout the union gather for various meetings, opportunities can be given for special times of prayer. This is where I can give some guidance and make a contribution. Between meetings, I will have opportunities by letters and by phone to encourage our leaders to make prayer and revival a top priority. I am sure that a strong emphasis on prayer, revival, and reformation will continue to grow in the Columbia Union as we prepare our hearts to receive the latter rain. ■



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# THE ADVENTIST CHURCH AND INDEPENDENT MINISTRIES

**S**elf-supporting,” “supporting,” and “independent” ministries are terms that have created considerable discomfort and confusion in the minds of many Adventists in recent years.



*Woodrow W. Whidden, Ph.D., is professor of religion at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.*

These expressions encompass Adventist para-church groups and organizations that normally have some missionary, evangelistic, revival, or reform (theological or lifestyle) goal as their reason for existence. “Self-supporting” and “supporting” groups have generally been positively viewed by denominational administrators. It is the “independent” ministries that have raised the most concern.

While these varied “independent” ministry groups are not monolithic in their theological emphases and their relationship to the church, they all seem to have two things in common:

1. The vast majority of these groups proclaim their loyalty to the formal denominational organization. This, however, is usually followed with a careful listing of the church’s numerous faults and theological defects.

2. While affirming loyalty to the church, such organizations deliberately claim that the church is deficient both

in doctrinal purity and ethical accomplishment.

What is to be made of these para-church groups and their various theological and ethical concerns? How should the leadership of the denomination relate to these groups and yet still maintain a sense of unity and common effort in the fulfillment of the church’s stated mission and goals?

This article looks at the history of the Wesleyan revival in 18th century Britain to see if there are any lessons that can be learned from the way the Wesleyans and the established Anglicans related to one another.

## **The Wesleyan/Anglican struggle**

Any effort to draw parallels from one historical setting to another is always a delicate pursuit since the parallels of history are often elusive and inexact. The Wesleyan Revival,<sup>1</sup> however, presents numerous striking similarities to many Adventist para-church movements. The

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WOODROW W. WHIDDEN

parallels and concerns are so striking that I find them quite irresistible as a laboratory to explore the dynamic ways religious minorities and establishment majorities relate to one another.

John Wesley never intended to be a divisive schismatic in any of the innovations that he introduced in his 18th-century evangelical revival. He died an ordained Anglican priest and proclaimed his loyal intentions to the very end. However, Wesley never shied away from doing what he thought necessary to advance his Methodist outreach, especially to the "poor" who were caught in the social and spiritual crossfire of the early Industrial Revolution. It is in this context that we will seek to identify the major factors that contributed to the unwanted schism that the Methodist revival ultimately experienced.

Two main sets of factors brought about the schism: doctrinal and organizational.

#### Doctrinal contention

Three main doctrinal issues gripped

the Wesley brothers: justification by faith, Christian perfection, and the "witness of the Spirit."

*Justification by faith.* John Wesley's advocacy of justification by faith largely stems from the influence of the Pietistic Lutheranism of the Moravians, especially that of Peter Bohler. The discovery that divine forgiveness is the basis of holy living, rather than the reverse, was the key to John's evangelical awakening. He stoutly proclaimed the doctrine and experience of justification by faith alone to all who would listen.

This brought considerable discomfort to Anglican divines of the day who had been nurtured in the moralism of Enlightenment rationalism. Many Anglican clergy considered justification by faith alone a serious threat to moral formation. Wesley's response to such criticisms was to refer his critics to the articles on justification in the Thirty-nine Articles and especially to the Edwardian Homilies (1547),<sup>2</sup> which addressed the subject. The evangelical (mostly Calvinist) Anglicans and Inde-

pendents largely supported Wesley in this emphasis.

*Christian perfection.* When it came to Wesley's emphasis on Christian perfection, the partisanship was somewhat reversed: the Calvinistic evangelicals suspected Anglican moralism, even Pappal, Tridentine influences. The establishment vicars and prelates were more indifferent.

The issue was to remain controversial, especially with evangelicals—both in the church and among independents and dissenters. Most of the opposition came from the Calvinistic wing of the evangelical revival led by the redoubtable itinerant and sometime ally of the Wesleys—George Whitefield.

The heart of the Wesleyan understanding of perfection could be expressed this way: just as there was an identifiable moment of grace called conversion and justification, so there was also a second or subsequent work of grace variously referred to as perfection, perfect love, fullness of faith, or simply the blessing of holiness.

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Very few Anglicans denied that there was, subsequent to conversion and justification, the experience of sanctification and growth in grace. However, the Wesleyan understanding became controversial in its insistence that this second work of grace was instantaneous and essential for salvation. The recipient of this second blessing was supposed to receive the direct witness of the Spirit that full deliverance from the power of sin had taken place; and while remissible, it was taught that the perfect had all original or birth-sin purged away in an instant.

This vision of "Scriptural holiness," proclaimed and wrought out in the nurturing setting of the Methodist United Societies (with their bands, classes, and emphasis on devotional piety, Christian service, and sacramental observance), was deemed by Wesley to be the distinctive contribution of the Wesleyan revival to Christian thought and experience. Furthermore, the spread of "Scriptural holiness over the land" was understood

to be Methodism's central reason for existence.

*Witness of the Spirit.* Drawing on Paul's concepts found in Romans 8:14-17, Wesley held that Christians should experience the direct witness of the Spirit to their minds and hearts that they had come into a saving, forgiven relationship with God through Christ.

The Spirit that witnessed to their initial salvation was also deemed to be the Spirit who would witness to their experience of fullness of faith—the second work of perfect love. This concept seemed to stir up the most reaction and opposition. Wesley's opponents were not slow to suggest that this version of the personal witness by the Spirit was the source of revivalistic "enthusiasm" (the 18th-century derisive term for religious fanaticism). Especially troubling to many of the rationalistic Anglicans was the evident emotionalism, which had been manifested in the early stages of the revival. Such a direct link to the Spirit also seemed to inspire what ap-

peared to many to be a species of spiritual elitism.

### Organizational issues

I am using the expression "organizational" in a rather broad way to describe a wide range of issues having to do with parish boundaries, evangelistic techniques (such as field preaching and the use of lay preachers), parachurch structures of nurture (the societies with their bands, classes, and various ministries to the poor), public criticisms of the clergy, ordination, and the administration of the sacraments.<sup>3</sup> It is in these more practical issues that we find the most dynamic elements actuating the schism that finally erupted.

"*The world is my parish.*" As the Wesleyan wing of the evangelical revival rapidly unfolded in the late 1730s and early 1740s, it did so in the setting of "field preaching" (open air proclamation) by Whitefield and the Wesleys. The established church did not appear to have any burden to reach out to the

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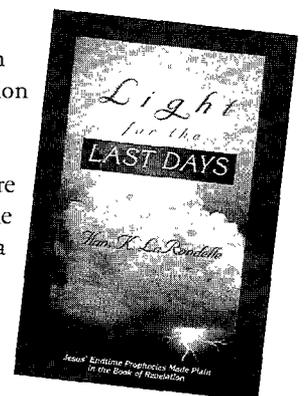
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alienated masses and thus the Methodists (both Calvinistic and Wesleyan) felt led to take the revival to the people where they were.

Such an outreach seemed inevitably to incite the parochial instincts of the established clergy who accused Wesley and company of not respecting their parish boundaries and prerogatives. When Wesley was challenged about his obvious disregard of such established boundaries, he replied that his ordination to the Anglican priesthood gave him universal access to the people of the church. In fact, he would proclaim that not only his ordination, but also the great needs of the masses and the evidences of the abundant harvest in such non-parochial ministry justified him to conceive of the whole "world" as his "parish." Things were simply moving beyond the most ambitious dreams of the Methodist revivalists, and there was no time to pander to the insecurities and proprietary claims of the settled vicars.

*Lay preachers.* The problem, however, became even more acute when Wesley felt the need to use the services of itinerant laymen to serve as his "preaching assistants" or "sons in the Gospel." Their work was not only to win new believers, but also to minister to the growing multitudes of awakened and converted sinners who were being gathered into the burgeoning United Societies of the Wesleyan wing of the Methodist revival. Ordained itinerants such as Whitefield and John and Charles Wesley were one thing, but to have to contend with an invasion of fervent and mostly uneducated lay insurgents was more than many vicars could bear.

It was the role of these "sons in the Gospel" that would eventually prompt many questions about ordination and the lay preachers' right to administer the sacraments. These questions of ordination and administration of the sacraments and the Wesleyan religious societies would be the main issues that would eventually precipitate schism.

*Religious societies.* Religious societies were nothing novel in early 18th-century Britain. Numerous small groups had gathered for nurture or some specific

ministry (such as the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts and the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge). The difference between these groups and what would develop under Wesley's organizing genius is that the former groups were always under the sponsorship of the Anglican ministry, while Wesley's groups were under his direction.

So while Wesley urged his people to attend services at the local parish church

**I**t should come  
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nurture, and not in the  
Anglican church.

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(especially the sacramental occasions), it should come as no surprise that the Wesleyan Methodists found their main church identity more and more in their local societies and the various ministries of outreach and nurture, and not in the Anglican church. This was all exacerbated by the often hostile attitudes of the local parish priests and some bishops.

*Alienation in the church.* In addition to these tensions, when the scores of Wesleyan converts arrived at their local parish church for communion, the resources of the vicars and the parish were overwhelmed with the large groups seeking sacramental fulfillment. On many occasions officiants did little to hide their

annoyance. Thus, many Methodists did not feel welcome at the church's sacramental seasons and viewed the clerical officiants as critical and corrupt.

This tense state of affairs contributed significantly to a growing undercurrent among the Methodists agitating for the ordination of Wesley's "assistants." Wesley, to his credit, had strenuously sought to unite his efforts with the parochial clergy (especially those with more evangelical leanings), but his efforts were only slightly successful.

In fact, the lack of sacramental opportunity for Methodists in North America, during and after the Revolution, was one of the main factors that forced Wesley's hand when he ordained Thomas Coke, who would in turn go to North America and ordain Frances Asbury, leading to still further schism.

#### Was schism preventable?

The question is hard to answer; yet there seems to be, from the easy chair of historical retrospect, a number of steps that both Wesley and Anglican leaders could or should have taken to prevent it.

*First, the doctrinal issues.* Wesley and his wing of the evangelical revival were quite orthodox by any of the acknowledged canonical standards of the Anglican establishment. In fact, Wesley was probably correct in his oft-repeated claim that he was more orthodox than were many of his most critical opponents. The main bones of contention centered around Wesley's teaching on justification and perfection.

On the first issue, Wesley certainly had the better part of the argument. Wesley and the Calvinistic evangelicals were quite "justified" in being critical of the pervasive moralism (and its de facto legalism) prevalent among many of the establishment clergy.

The issue of perfection and the witness of the Spirit, however, is considerably more problematic. It is quite ironic that the establishment clergy would be all that critical of Wesley's perfectionism: on the face of it, it would seem that their moralism would be quite comfortable with Wesley's emphasis on sanctification. It appears, however, that what sparked

their criticism was Wesley's move to base his perfectionism solidly in the setting of the evangelical emphasis on human depravity and total corruption—a perspective not very popular among many clergy heavily influenced by the Enlightenment optimism regarding human nature.

So even though Wesley's perfectionism was not really all that radical in comparison with the Puritan heritage of sanctification (making a clear differentiation between willful sin and unwitting mistakes), it did cause considerable opposition from both the establishment clergy and the Calvinistic evangelicals.

Furthermore, anytime there is a strong emphasis on "holy living" in the setting of revivalistic fervor, it seems to generate a body of rebuke aimed at the unsanctified—especially the clerical opponents who can very easily be perceived to be resisting the power of the Spirit. Such an atmosphere is simply fraught with great schismatic potential. Add to this the evident emotionalism of the early revival and the rather arrogant claims of the clear "witness of the Spirit"

that the Wesleyans were among the perfected, and the charge of fanaticism was bound to erupt. The result was growing suspicion and a deepening divide.

Could anything have been done? Ironically, today there are very few Wesleyans that hold to the perfectionism of Wesley. A bit of patience on the part of the Anglicans would have probably permitted the Wesleyans, over time, to work through their issues.

Wesley, for his part, would have been wise to proclaim his doctrine with a bit more tentativeness. Not only is one hard put to be able to cite such a perfectionistic precedent in church history, but also the witness of the Scripture, while it speaks of the witness of the Spirit, is absolutely quiet about anything like an instantaneous work of perfecting grace that burns away all propensities and tendencies to sin.

When the main body cannot reach consensus on a doctrinal issue, it is best for all concerned, especially the promoters of that which is new and novel, to hold their positions with some char-

ity and prefix their teaching with the caveat—"this is just one person's dearly held conviction." The establishment needs to exercise patience, giving much sensitive pastoral attention to the doctrinal insurgents and pray that time will reveal whether there is precious new light or only a dead-end street.

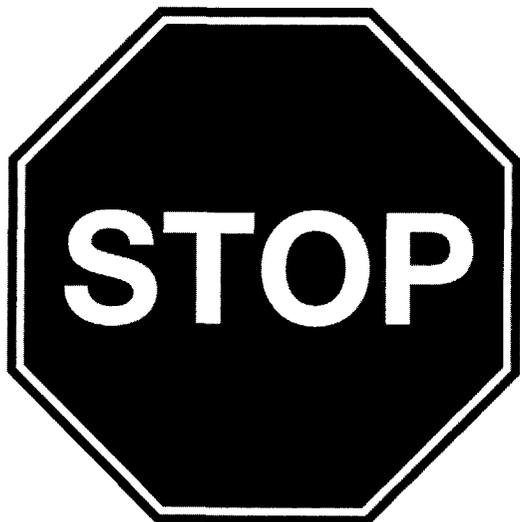
*The organizational issues.* It is probably asking too much of the 18th-century establishment Anglicans, but they appear to have been the main offenders when it came to most of ecclesiological issues. Some theological patience and positive tolerance and support for many of Wesley's para-church outreach and nurturing innovations could have greatly augmented the numbers and ministries of the church. In retrospect, much of the opposition to Wesley and his "sons in the Gospel" was the fruit of cultural elitism and parochial jealousy.

As we view the Wesleyans and their work among the masses in hindsight, we wonder at the lack of compassion and adaptability shown by the established leaders. Many more of the bishops and the local vicars could have simply given basic support and affirmation to the abundant fruits of both spiritual and social uplift that were so evidently manifest amongst the efforts of the Wesleyans.

#### Considerations for preventing schism

All across Protestantism, including Adventism, and in a number of sectors in the Roman Catholic community, there is a growing appreciation for small group ministries and lay leadership in all aspects of church outreach and nurture. In the face of these trends, denominational ministers and administrators need to adopt wise and restrained practical and/or theological caution. At bare minimum, in many cases, church leaders need to get out of the way if there is an abundantly evident manifestation of positive spiritual fruitage. If the teaching and action of a particular para-church movement shows little or no positive fruitage, there may well be need for church administrations to take necessary action.

Second, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has long recognized many para-



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church organizations as “self-supporting” movements. These include varied ministries—from medical, publishing, missionary, and training institutions to independent business persons who have special burdens to be entrepreneurial about specific ministries. The denomination, from its highest levels down to its local churches, has now developed quite a lengthy and successful history of engaging such para-church ministries in mutually affirming ways that have produced surprisingly little schism.

This does leave the question of how the “independent” reform movements and the established denominational leaders can most harmoniously relate to one another.

In the Adventist situation, the central issues that appear to be unresolved between the main body and some of the so-called “independent” or “self-supporting” ministries does not seem to primarily concern theology per se. Like with the Wesleys and the Anglicans, the issues mostly have to do with matters of organization and lifestyle. The main matters crying out for resolution are these: How should the organized body relate to groups that continue to criticize it regarding real or imagined compromise on moral and lifestyle issues? Further, how does the church relate to a manifest claim of entitlement, by the “independent” ministries, to receive “tithes.”

The solutions don’t reveal themselves easily, but some potential schisms do appear to be amenable to solution if enough mutual patience and dialogue can be brought to bear on the situation. Much of the stress could be alleviated if the establishment administrators would take more time to reassure the “independent” ministries that they affirm their doctrinal orthodoxy, loyalty and sincere zeal to protect, for example, the delicate balance between justification and sanctification. Denominational leadership needs to be prepared to humbly and patiently dialogue with the independents and seek every possible area of agreement. They should be prepared to be vulnerable to the questions and concerns put to them.

On the other hand, the “independ-

## NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION PASTORS

### An opportunity to revoke Social Security exemption

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dent” ministry leaders would do well to renounce any intention to knowingly receive tithes. They need to ask themselves: How far are we actually willing to go when it comes to our separate publications, institutional development, camp meetings, conventions, and other independent teachings and activities? Are we reaching the point where the finer points of our own prescribed behavior and teaching are becoming the primary points of ecclesiastical identity and meaning for our followers? And, at what point do our criticisms of the church and its leadership become destructive or irreparably damaging and divisive to the body of Christ?

With the loudest protestations of loyalty and all the best motives for reform and renewal, the Wesleys eventually found their primary ecclesiastical identity with the United Societies rather than established Anglicanism. Do Adventist “independents” really want now to go this route when it comes to established, denominational Adventism? ■

<sup>1</sup> The best introduction and overview of the Wesleyan Revival of the eighteenth century is Richard P. Heitzenrater’s *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> See John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches, Third Edition* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 230, 239-66.

<sup>3</sup> The classic study of the Wesleyan’s relationship to the Church of England is Frank Baker’s *John Wesley and the Church of England* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970).

## “The truth about truth”

*continued from p. 4*

whisper, “I could hardly wait to get back to my room, fall on my knees, and cry out, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner!’” That’s real preaching.

What is it we are trying to achieve in our witness, either in the pulpit Sabbath by Sabbath, in our evangelistic preaching or elsewhere? This question badly needs to be regularly assessed before God by every Christian minister. I think that to quite some extent, we achieve what we aim for. I find myself increasingly uneasy with the desire to be seen merely as “a good speaker.”

So, in clear, deductive language what are the elements so crucial to proclaiming a living witness? Here again are the simple, convicting, inspiring words of Ellen White:

1. “He who would confess Christ must have Christ abiding in him.”

2. “. . . Unless they possessed Christlike meekness and love . . .”

3. And “He cannot communicate that which he has not received.”<sup>2</sup> ■

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1898), 357.

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

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# THE MISSION OF A GOING CHURCH FOR A COMING LORD

**T**he Adventist Church sees itself fulfilling a unique role, that of proclaiming the imminence of Christ's return in the context of the Three Angels' Messages.



*Zebron Masukume Ncube, D.Min., is associate professor of religion, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.*

We are a waiting and working people, confident that we have a message to proclaim and a method with which to proclaim it.

Nevertheless, in a radically changing world, we must keep pace with the trends unfolding around us. We must constantly fine tune our self-understanding. Yet no matter what our updating and methodology becomes, we must never lose sight of what our mission is. Different places and different circumstances require different approaches and methods, but we must keep vividly in mind just who we are and why we are here. In short, mission is foundational. We lose everything when we lose a clear sense of identity and mission.

#### **Mission is imperative**

The verity that underlies Jesus' words to His disciples in Matthew 28:18-20 is that mission is essential.<sup>1</sup> Jesus mandated a clear mission on the basis of His universal authority. For that

reason, any form of neglect, negation, or territorial restriction to the mission of the Christian church contradicts the marching orders of Jesus. Note that the commission is preceded by the enunciation and establishment of universal authority by Jesus. After all, "mission is the summons of the Lordship of Jesus."<sup>2</sup>

Scholars agree that the Greek word *matheteusate*, "make disciples," is the principal verb in the Great Commission. The other accompanying words, "having gone,"<sup>3</sup> "baptizing," and "teaching"<sup>4</sup> are modal participles subordinated to "make disciples." They describe the making of disciples through teaching (a process) and baptizing (a one time event). The difficulty here is to have a single verb that makes a better translation of *matheteusate*.

According to Broadus, the verb "disciple" was used in classical literature. While it has not found its way into popular versions, "it may be used in religious discourse with great advantage."<sup>5</sup>

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ZEBRON MASUKUME NCUBE

Thus the mission of the church is to disciple people.

Matthew 28:18-20 offers the only instance the term “make disciples” is used in the imperative mood. Its basic intent is to signify a permanent relationship with Jesus. The mission of the disciples was to enlist people into a relationship with Jesus. The bottom line is that the disciple bears the yoke, submits to the teachings and requirements of the Master, and simply follows Him.

According to Gerald West, the central axis of the New Testament is discipleship. He states that “the theme of ‘discipleship’ provides us with an interpretive key for our reading of the various texts in the New Testament. Even texts which appear to have no direct discussion of discipleship can be read in the light of this theme.”<sup>6</sup>

Jesus does not demand the impossible; thus discipleship is both a necessity<sup>7</sup> and a possibility. Anything short of this is a negation of the gospel itself.

Jesus’ imperative to His disciples, and thus the disciples’ imperative mission is simply to make disciples. To have clarity of mission and to carry out that mission is imperative.

#### Mission is contextual

But as an imperative, mission must be relevant to situation. For Adventists, three key biblical passages supply a point of departure for the contextual understanding of our mission: Matthew 28:16-20, Acts 1:4-8, and Revelation 14:6-12. These passages assert that the gospel must go to all nations. “Every nation” (Rev. 14:6, 7) underscores the universality and importance of the message.<sup>8</sup> Any form of exclusive regionalism, sectarianism, and racial or tribal exclusion is a contradiction to the essence of Christian mission.

The task of the church is to take the gospel to all cultures, which means there is no such thing as a prefabricated approach that will work everywhere. Bruce Moyer once remarked that “the McDonald approach to evangelism no longer works.”<sup>9</sup> There is no such thing as one mode for everyone. The church must cultivate tolerance as we debate

issues. We are all finite beings trying to understand God’s ways in every part of our human societies.

The quality of the presence of the church in every part of the world is crucial. The church should take the attitude of humility, courage, and servanthood. It should be a wounded healer.<sup>10</sup> In humility and transparency it must experience the hurts of the world around it and bring healing through the gospel. Jesus provided an incarnational model for mission (see Heb. 13:12,13). He became

In many  
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our Brother; He suffered and died for the world outside the gate. He did not recoil from the hurts of society. The church too must go outside the gate and face the threats of a complex world with a message of healing. The church is the salt of the earth and the light to the world (Matt. 5:13-16). This implies being involved with God’s creation.

#### Mission is Christ-centered

Jesus Himself is the gospel we preach. Ellen G. White spoke about Christ-centered preaching.<sup>11</sup> The “I Am” sayings of Jesus (John 6:35, 48; 10:9, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1) provide us with a door of hope for this Christ-centered, Christ-sourced mission. These sayings endorse Jesus as the content of the gospel and

thus of mission. Tooke is on target when he suggests a paradigm for evangelism<sup>12</sup> that emphasizes the transcendence, the immanence, and the deliverance of Jesus.

The mere mention of the name of Jesus is neither the message nor the mission of the church. Christ must be presented as key in answering the questions people ask. He who is “the way, the truth, and the life” meets the essence of human need.

Yet we must acknowledge that part of our problem in Christian communication is the tendency to thrive on slogans. We invite people to “look to Jesus” when neither the eye of the preacher nor that of the listener can see Him. We tell people to “walk with Jesus” without defining what this means. This visual and symbolic language needs to be translated into concrete terms that people can relate to. Theology and preaching go hand in glove. In mission, the abstract language of theology must be transformed to suit the worldview of the people. Johnsson underscores the inseparable link between theology and exhortation as the main characteristic of the Epistle to the Hebrews.<sup>13</sup> In the same way theological pillars must become the basis for the imperatives of evangelism and mission.

Pickard suggests that the schism between evangelists and theologians is unnecessary because they both fall under the discipline of communication. Evangelism is “not a full stop, but a comma”<sup>14</sup> in the process of communication. Theology is the extension of it. Hall also decries the lack of interaction between theological scholarship and the churches. There are thousands of theologians, he observes, yet churches are not affected. Scholars seem to write only for one another and for the students to whom they assign their books.<sup>15</sup>

In many cultures of the world, Christians resort to religions of culture just because Christ is presented only as an abstract concept. These Christians believe in Jesus but in hard times He is one among many options. I suggest that the task of theology and of homiletics is to communicate the supremacy, the sufficiency, and the servanthood of Jesus. The

“greater than” and “better than” sayings about Jesus are a rich source for this approach. The symbols used to define Jesus should be translated into the thought forms of society without changing the meaning or substance of the Christian faith.<sup>16</sup>

### Mission is Spirit-directed

In the book of Acts, the birth of the apostolic church, its work, and its leadership were the work of the Holy Spirit. The missionary journeys of the apostles were spearheaded by the Holy Spirit. In the Gospels, the Holy Spirit was at work in the life of Christ. As the Holy Spirit was in Christ, He was also involved in the life of the church. As Wells shows, “this intimate association is indispensable to our presentation of Christ in the world today.”<sup>17</sup>

It is therefore important that any understanding and pursuit of mission by the church should recognize the centrality of the Holy Spirit. The whole church must always be at the disposal of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, the Holy Spirit is always

at our disposal, not to be used but to use us. He promotes the mission of the church. As the “supreme resource for the church’s life and mission,” He “gives power in evangelism as he glorifies Christ.”<sup>18</sup> According to Froom, the Holy Spirit makes God’s truth a reality in our inmost being.<sup>19</sup>

The church will do well to solicit, by prayer, His supremacy over its decision-making processes. We need to constantly be on guard against the Holy Spirit becoming a mere slogan of the church at the beginning and conclusion of its deliberations. He energizes and guides the church all the way from the planning to the implementation of decisions. Therefore, no individual or level of the church can claim a monopoly of the Holy Spirit. His presence in the church leads to unity of purpose, selfless motivation, and the vibrant evangelistic life in the church.

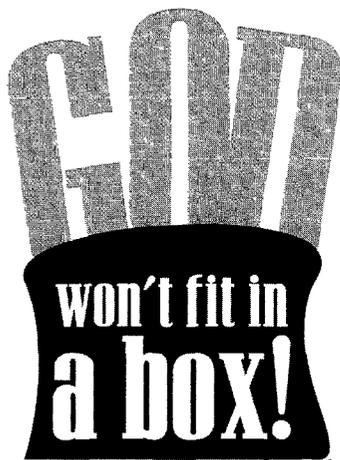
### Mission is ecclesiastical

Mission is the function of the church on behalf of Jesus Christ. To carry out its mission more effectively, the

church must seek to become what Jesus intended it to be, in terms of its being and function.

The founders of the Advent movement struggled with the concept of the church and its mission in the context of Christ’s soon coming. They formulated a tripartite construct that highlighted organizational order, doctrinal purity, and effective witness as inseparable elements of the church.<sup>20</sup> This has kept the Seventh-day Adventist Church together despite its geographical and numerical expansion. Uncertainty about any of the above elements destabilizes the whole. We may disagree on some details but the basic principles must remain foundational.

In all its challenges the church should take comfort in the words of Jesus: “The gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matt. 16:18, NIV). This verse underscores the stability of the church even when it appears to be ungovernable or divided over some issue. We all must move to the center and maintain the unity of the church. This promise of Jesus

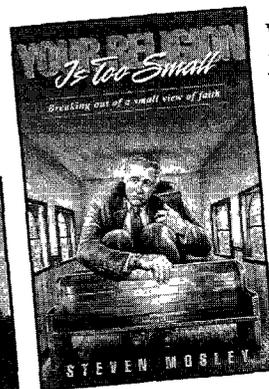
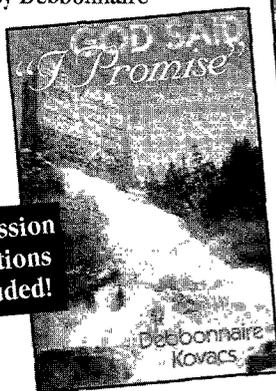


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also carries the assurance of victory over the enemy. Through its mission, the church is on the offensive while Satan is on the defensive.

The church should always reflect simplicity, community, and evangelistic zeal—the hallmarks of apostolic Christianity. With resilient faith it must withstand threats to its existence. It must adjust to changing historical and cultural situations while preserving the essentials of the message. It is the depository of the message of truth and as such the depository of God's mission on earth.

### The evidence of mission

The evidence of mission is disciples who worship, fellowship, and witness. Worship (upreach) is the point of departure for the inreach and outreach life of the church. Anything short of this is legalism, humanism, and secularism. When personal and corporate worship of God dominates the life of the church, the rest of what is done falls into place.

Worship of God must express itself in fellowship and community (Heb. 10:24, 25). The idea that one can belong to Jesus and not to the church negates the principle of discipleship. Another misconception is that one can belong to the church without participating in its witness to the world. Discipleship also extends to the matter of stewardship, which includes responsible living and making the earth habitable. All this is evidence that the mission of the church is alive and well.

### Mission and method

The methods for accomplishing the mission hinge on three key words: *ministry*, *message*, and *language*. Without the function of these, mission cannot be effected. These are the means to the end in mission.

To achieve its mission, the church must construct a *ministry* that is shared. Unfortunately ministry tends to become too sacerdotal. Reliance on those who are on the payroll of the church and the rift between "pastors" and "laity" is unscriptural. Ministry as a method for mission is the function of the whole community of believers.

The method in mission is the *message* and how it is defined. The doctrines we believe, preach, and teach are not an end in themselves. They are human statements of faith about God. Charles Kraft rightly argues that the ultimate Christian message is a person, Christ, and not what is said about Him.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the achievement of mission presupposes the message.

Scripture also strongly suggests that a Christian is a crucial part of the message. Life is an act of worship (Rom. 12:1). Life is a stewardship (Rom. 14:7, 8). The treasure is in earthen vessels (2 Cor. 4:1, 7). Christians are a letter of Christ which people read (2 Cor. 3:2, 3). The idea of spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:1-11; 14:1ff; Eph. 4:8-16) finds its context here. God equips every believer with a particular spiritual tool for achieving His mission. We are the method for mission.

Communication or *language* forms the other method in mission. James Engel underscores what he calls "audience sovereignty."<sup>22</sup> According to Kraft, strangely, we take communication too much for granted.<sup>23</sup> It is virtually a universally believed myth that hearing the gospel with one's ears is tantamount to being reached with the gospel. A person can hear and not understand. It is also a myth that mere preaching (monologue) is God's exclusive means of communicating the gospel. Ellen White said: "My ministering brethren, do not think that the only work you can do, the only way you can labor for souls, is to give discourses. The best work you can do is to teach, to educate. Wherever you can find an opportunity to do so, sit down with some family, and let them ask questions."<sup>24</sup>

It is a myth that the sermon itself is an effective vehicle for bringing about life or behavior change.<sup>25</sup> Monologue is limited because it lacks personal interaction. It is also a myth that there is one best way to communicate the gospel. The theology of spiritual gifts proves this point. Yet we want to duplicate the preaching styles of those who appear to be successful. We can't all be a D. James Kennedy on television, a Billy Graham in public evange-

lism, an H. M. S. Richards on radio, or a John Wesley in small groups. Situations differ and we need a multiplicity of approaches.

### Mission is conclusive

Mission culminates at the second coming of Jesus. Until then we must toil on. A going church for a coming Lord is both looking and working. It is expectant but also is missional. While we wait for the return of our Lord, we must work urgently, for the night comes when we shall work no more.

A going church goes by mission. Our mission is to make disciples. We can do this if our mission is imperative, contextual, incarnational, Christ-centered, Spirit-directed, ecclesiastical, productive, methodic, and if it has a clear sense of destiny. ■

<sup>1</sup> Richard R. DeRidder, *Discipling the Nations* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1977), 185.

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

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>4</sup> See David Bosch in Wilbert R. Shenk, ed. *Exploring Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983), 230.

<sup>5</sup> John A. Broadus, *Commentary on Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, 1990), 593.

<sup>6</sup> Gerald O. West, *Contextual Bible Study* (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Cluster Publications, 1993), 39.

<sup>7</sup> Broadus, 593.

<sup>8</sup> Francis D. Nichol, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary 7* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1980), 827.

<sup>9</sup> Bruce C. Moyer, interview coverage by Three Angels Broadcasting Network at the General Conference Session, Utrecht, Netherlands, July 3, 1995.

<sup>10</sup> Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972), *passim*.

<sup>11</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 157.

<sup>12</sup> J. V. Tooke, "Toward Contextual Evangelism," *Missionalia 21* (August 1993), 135.

<sup>13</sup> William G. Johnsson, *In Absolute Confidence* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Pub. Assn., 1979), 136.

<sup>14</sup> Stephen K. Pickard, "Evangelism and the Character Of Christian Theology," *Missionalia 21* (August 1993), 169.

<sup>15</sup> Douglas John Hall, "The Changing North American Context of the Church's Ministry," *Currents in Theology and Mission 22* (December, 1995), 413.

<sup>16</sup> Frank A. Salomone and Michael Mbabuike, "The Ancient Mind: Inculturation and Resistance," *Missionalia 23* (November 1995), 262.

<sup>17</sup> David E. Wells, *God the Evangelist. How the Holy Spirit Works to Bring Men and Women to Faith* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987), 28.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>19</sup> LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Coming of the Comforter* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1956), 59.

<sup>20</sup> Andrew G. Mustard, "James White and the Development of Seventh-day Adventist Organization, 1844-1881," Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, 1987, 195.

<sup>21</sup> Charles H. Kraft, *Communication Theory for Christian Witness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 41.

<sup>22</sup> James F. Engel, *Contemporary Christian Communications: Its Theory and Practice* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 1979), 57.

<sup>23</sup> Kraft, 25-31.

<sup>24</sup> White, *Gospel Workers*, 193.

<sup>25</sup> Kraft, *op. cit.*

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# READING THE BIBLE

**T**he Bible says it. I believe it. That settles it,” says one Christian. “History may have been wrong. What I think the Bible says is . . .” states another. The first is introjecting. The second is projecting.



*Linwood Chamberlain, D.Min., is co-pastor of the First Lutheran Church in Lorain, Ohio.*

They both feel they have a special knowledge of the Bible. They both may aggressively, even arrogantly accuse the other of intellectual or spiritual negligence. But it is impossible for them to let the truth of Scripture into their lives until they challenge their dysfunctional approach to Bible reading.

## Projection and introjection

How we read the Bible matters. However, how we read the Bible does not of itself promote or prevent our salvation. Salvation is still by grace alone and not by the works of “reading correctly.” But the way we read the Bible does shape the way we respond to Jesus’ salvation. Our psychological tendencies can open our minds and hearts to knowing the will of our Lord, or they can cause us to hide and resist His desire to change and direct our lives. A psychologically healthy relationship to the Bible is necessary for a transforming relationship with Jesus.

Healthy relationships between people can be visualized as we see communication as arrows pointing in two directions. As our friends share with us their opinions, an arrow points from them toward us. We react to their opinion and share with them our own understanding and a second, returning

arrow points from us to them. They further respond to us by expanding the areas of interest that we have identified, and a third arrow points back in our direction. We say how we feel about this new exchange, and once again an arrow points to them. And so on.

When we recognize only our own thoughts and do not take time to understand the thoughts of another, we create a relationship in which the arrows go only from us. If everything comes from us, we *do not know others* because we are only encountering our own ideas.

Similarly, if we are so impressed with others that we neglect to develop our own thoughts, then we have a relationship where all the arrows come from outside ourselves. When everything comes from others, we *still do not know them* because we do not know how they will react to our ideas. We only know them partially. We do not know if they would accept or reject us if we are honest and let them see our questions. We do not know if struggling with us would drive them away or lead them to love us more. We have only a sanitized, partial image of them and do not know them fully.

Gestalt psychology calls a relationship with all the arrows going from us projection. A relationship with all the

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LINWOOD H. CHAMBERLAIN, JR.

arrows coming from others is called introjection.

Describing situations of projection is fairly easy. If we put a slide into a projector and show the image on a screen, we do not look at the screen but at the projection on the screen. Likewise, if we are proud of our preaching skills and we see every comment of "good sermon today" as resounding support for all our ideas but do not see the glazed eyeballs and rushed handshakes for what they are, we are not really seeing the people in front of us. We are merely seeing what we want to see in their comments. This again is a form of projection.

### Projection and reading the Bible

Let's now apply this to reading the Bible. When we live from a posture of projection, we read the Bible as if only our ideas about it matter. We read to interpret the Bible; we do not read to be interpreted by the Bible. We do not struggle to separate the Bible from our hopes, dreams, or fears. We assume that the Bible mirrors our beliefs and then we go about proving that it does. Our projections blur awareness of the Bible by making it a proof text for our own way of thinking or behaving. Thus we tend to create the Bible in our image.

When we project, we do Bible study by saying, "What the Bible means to me is . . ." We tend to ignore what others say the Bible means to them. When we project, we see Scripture as flexible to our favor. Parts of the Bible that are not consistent with our thoughts or that cannot be shaped to support our thinking are sometimes relegated to insignificance by ruling them as culturally biased in terms of the historical setting in which they were written by human beings. In this way we misuse what could be a constructive way of getting at the meaning of the Bible.

Reflections on the world that are jaded by projection, even though expressed in terms of scriptural truth, are "I" centered and eliminate any impact another outside opinion could have. Projection distorts our perception of truth and invalidates our proclamations about the issues of the day. We might

also ignore other biblical evidence that is contrary to our own limited projections. When we project, we are loathe to ask the question "What if I'm wrong? What if others' views about the Bible are right?" When we project, we end up trying to prove we are right, and thus we cannot really know the Bible, at least not all that it has to say.

### Introjection and reading the Bible

Describing situations of introjection is more complex. Introjection is accepting, at face value and without question, something that another person says or believes. Suppose a person comes to me and says "Others have talked to me, and we believe that your hair is too long." If I rush out to get a haircut, forgetting that this person always criticizes people whenever he disagrees with them, then I am introjecting. If the weather forecaster says "It's going to be a beautiful sunny day today with zero percent chance of precipitation" but the sky outside my window is dark and cloudy, lightning is streaking overhead, thunder is echoing off the surrounding buildings, and the cars on the highway are using their windshield wipers, and I still leave my house without an umbrella because the weather forecaster said there would be no rain,

then I have introjected his perceptions! Teenagers introject nonsense phrases ("That's fresh!" or "Cool!") and businessmen introject blue, pin-striped suits. Mothers know what introjections are when they ask, "If everybody else jumped off the bridge, would you jump too?"

We can certainly apply the principles of introjection to reading the Bible. To do so, we must look at the complex interplay between words and the person receiving the words. As an illustration we can use the sentence, "The man in charge walked onto the field, picked up an object, and shouted 'Play ball!'"

The words in this sentence could imply to some that the man in charge has made a discovery; that the ball on the field is a "play ball." This is an appropriate and true rendition of what the words mean. Americans, however, would probably never notice that interpretation as a possibility. They are so influenced by their time and place that their first perception of the sentence would be to interpret "Play ball" as the command to those on the field, "You are at this moment to begin play."

Teenagers today might assign different images to the word *ball*. Some might picture a basketball, others a football or soccer ball. If, however, the

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## New Paradigm

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sentence was being read by somebody influenced by the well-established idiom of America in the late 1950s, the sentence could have no other meaning than "Start the baseball game."

Thus it is true that words have meanings in themselves, but the speaker and the receiver of words also apply meanings to the words. To say "The Bible says it. I believe it. That settles it" could well be to swallow a limited, current, tradition-bound interpretation of what God's unlimited Word has to offer. This could be described as a kind of social or cultural introjection. Whenever we stop short of examining root meanings, variations of understandings, and possible corruption of interpretations, we force all the arrows in the relationship to come from human sources outside of us. To swallow words at their face value or with only the obvious constructions that the traditions of our denomination places on them, without questioning or verifying them for ourselves (Acts 17:11). This is introjection. When we swallow anything whole, without digesting or applying it, we gain no value from it. We do not "know" it.

#### Avoiding introjection in Bible reading

To keep our relationship to the Bible from becoming a series of introjections, thereby reducing ourselves to nonentities in the relationship, we must chew and digest what we are receiving and not merely swallow it. Although this seems contradictory to the process of being an earthen vessel for Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 4:7), even Paul chewed on Scripture. He approached Scripture and showed a broader truth beyond the literal language, as when he quotes 2 Samuel 7:14 in 2 Corinthians 6:18 to include "and daughters," which is not in the original text.

Did Paul really "steal" from other churches as he says in 2 Corinthians 11:8, or did he merely accept help from them in order not to have to seek help from the Corinthians? Are the super-apostles in 2 Corinthians 11:5 really that good, or are they being mocked by Paul? Are the super-apostles the same men as

the false prophets in verse 13? Are we supposed to steal from our church to make friends with the sons of darkness as the dishonest steward did in Luke 16? Should we nag Jesus the way the woman did who wanted the scraps tossed to the dogs in Matthew 15? Did Judas commit suicide by hanging himself or throwing himself off a large cliff?

When we introject, we do not allow the Bible to touch us, because we keep

**T***o keep our relationship to the Bible from becoming a series of introjections, thereby reducing ourselves to nonentities in the relationship, we must chew and digest what we are receiving and not merely swallow it.*

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our own questions suppressed or hidden. We grant the Bible the authority to answer questions, as long as they are not the questions that bother us. In this way we become receptacles for whatever is poured out, even if what is poured out does not speak to the issues our minds are exploring at the time. We only know the Bible partially because we do not allow the Bible to speak to something new and real that concerns us.

When we introject, we are afraid to think or say "That doesn't fit my experience." We hide our reactions for fear

our relationship to the Bible could not stand up to the reality of our doubts and disagreements. Somewhere within ourselves we wonder if the Bible or our faith in it is actually able to measure with the questions or challenges which have come to the Bible or to our faith. We keep secret our inner feelings (perhaps even from ourselves) for fear that if we really admitted how we feel and our first understanding of the Bible was thus changed, we would abandon the whole Bible or the Bible would prove us to be unworthy of our faith.

We, therefore, compartmentalize the Bible into a "religious" realm and keep our daily lives away from it. We never know the Bible in the inner life of our existence. Scripture becomes an external set of controls that we must follow but which we never fully understand or appreciate. When we introject, we do not allow ourselves to ask the questions, "What if my doubts and differences are correct? What if other views about the Bible are wrong? What if my questions change the understanding of the text?" These were the very questions the religious establishment of Jesus' day failed to ask and which they prevented others from asking. In doing this they rejected and opposed the most stupendously important truth that ever came onto the human scene. Their inability to open their own minds to truth, listening only to one another, caught them in a maelstrom of introjection and dead-end traditionalism.

#### A two-way relationship with the Bible

To know the Bible we must learn healthy habits that lead us into a two-way relationship with the Word of God and not a one-sided relationship that yields much empty information but no deep, inner knowledge. To know the Bible, we must choose methods of study that let Scripture question our way of thinking and that also let us question Scripture.

Reading the Bible may very well be the most important activity we will ever undertake in our lives. Hence it is too important to do without carefully informed thought, prayer, and divine guidance. ■



**W**henever I interact with pastoral colleagues, I learn much more than I teach. In fact, I discover fresh approaches

to ministry wherever I find pastors. I hope these good, practical ideas will awaken excellence in pastoral ministry for you.

**Come Home for Christmas.** Lay leader Norma Beier and Pastor Dan Knapp, of Pendleton, Oregon (USA), encouraged all churches in their city to invite missing members "home for the holidays." Norma and Doris Olson prepared a special banner and shared it with pastors of all denominations at a monthly meeting of the local ministerial association. Following their presentation, 22 of the 26 area churches posted banners which invited their missing members to become reinvolved in church life.

**Providing a suitable house of worship draws people.** Lay members in Windhoek, Namibia (Southern Africa Union), wanted to invite their colleagues to worship services but lacked a suitable location to invite their professional friends for worship. They began holding services in a university classroom but soon outgrew that limited space. Undaunted by financial reality, they moved forward in faith and secured one of the city's largest church facilities. Today, they fill the entire complex with worship, evangelistic, educational, and training activities and multiply their impact on government, academic, and business leaders in the capital city of their country.

**Encouragement Committee.** A creative layperson at First Christian Reform Church, Lynden, Washington (USA), became tired of people seeing only the negative in situations and decided to emphasize the positive. The ministry of the Encouragement

## Seven good ideas

JAMES A. CRESS

Committee is to watch the congregation closely, trying to catch people in the act of doing something good. When a "detective" snoops out good deeds, he or she sends a note or card—often homemade, one-of-a-kind creations—to celebrate the contribution to the church family.

**Women ministering.** Female members in Yorkton, Saskatchewan (Canada), established five specific objectives for their emphasis on ministering to their families, their church, and their community.

1. Encourage daily devotion to learn to know Christ as best Friend and example.
2. Pray, "We are willing Lord, to love others as You loved us."
3. Encourage unity among the women in our church.
4. Encourage each woman to develop her own personal outreach.
5. Initiate short-term and ongoing outreach projects sponsored by the women of the congregation.

**Getting out the good news.** French-speaking pastors and members now have a four-color booklet available to share with those who seek information about Adventists. This attractive booklet, introduced by Bernard Sauvagnat of the Franco-Belgium Union (France), arrests attention and provides a quick overview of life and ministry provided through the church. Major themes include present activities through ADRA, education, health ministry, religious freedom, a brief history of our denomination, a statement of beliefs emphasizing life in Jesus, an overview of the great controversy theme, and current statistics about the church worldwide with special

information about francophone institutions, publications, and geographical concentrations.

**Aaron and Hur Club.** Lay evangelist, Willard D. Regester, initiated an emphasis on supporting pastoral leadership based on the Exodus 17:12 story of Moses receiving support which led to victory. He combines the Biblical principle of joint effort to win the battle with the following quotations which form a covenant card where members can pledge their personal commitment to support their pastoral leadership. "Happy the minister who has a faithful Aaron and Hur to strengthen his hands when they become weary and to hold them up by faith and prayer. Such a support is a powerful aid to the servant of Christ in his work, and will often make the cause of truth to triumph."<sup>1</sup> "How . . . pleasing to God it would be for [members of the church] to act the part of Aaron and Hur and help hold up the hands of those who are bearing the great and heavy burdens of the work."<sup>2</sup>

**Family-friendly services.** Youngsters are eager for worship services to begin at the Sandy, Oregon (USA), church because they get to visit their "pocket pals." The brightly-colored fabric "pockets" are decorated with a Noah's ark theme and are filled to their tops with materials for quiet, creative, and spiritual activities. Each child chooses one of the "pockets" as they enter the church sanctuary.

You are encouraged to share your own good ideas and to adapt any of these for your ministry. None of these ideas will work in every situation. All of them combine elements of faith-visioning plus a determination to share God's good news. One of them may just be the spark your congregation needs. ■

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1885), 4:531.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1885), 1:526.

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# Decision on Hope International and associated groups by a General Conference-appointed committee

## Introduction

*As a result of concerns raised by then General Conference President, Robert S Folkenberg and several world division presidents, the General Conference Administrative Committee (ADCOM), in early 1998, established an ad hoc committee to interview the leadership of Hope International, publishers of "Our Firm Foundation," and two other private groups, Hartland Institute, headquartered in the United States, and Remnant Ministries, based in Australia.*

*The committee, comprised of General Conference Biblical Research Institute scholars, current and former General Conference administrators and Andrews University Seminary and Oakwood College instructors, developed a 20-question instrument that was the basis of their inquiry and appraisal. The leaders of Hope International and its associated groups accepted the committee's invitation to answer the questions. They met with the General Conference appointed group on two occasions for a total of three and one-half days. The following report constitutes the committee's assessment of their responses, both written and verbal, and its evaluation of results of research done by individuals contracted specifically to study the theology and methodology of Hope International and associates.*

*ADCOM received the ad hoc committee's conclusions on April 25, 2000 and, in light of the questions raised by church membership in general over the years, voted to share this information with the world Church.*

## Report

All of us would agree that Christ is the Head of the Church. As Ellen G.

White wrote, "Nothing else in this world is so dear to God as His church. Nothing is guarded by Him with such jealous care" (*Testimonies for the Church*, Volume 6, page 42). But the Church is made up of mortals in constant need of His presence and guidance.

For these reasons there is great need for revival and reformation in the Seventh-day Adventist Church as it faces the final chapter in the great controversy. No one will question the importance for church administrators, pastors, teachers, and laypersons to be personally involved in the task of calling the whole Church back to the purity of faith and Christian living as found in the Scriptures. Such revival is simply indispensable for the effective fulfillment of the mission of the Church. Our message and mission should be constantly reaffirmed through voice and action until the glory of the Lord is revealed throughout the world by a people who are totally committed to Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

Therefore the emphasis on revival and reformation we found in the message of Hope International, Hartland Institute, and Remnant Ministries (hereafter referred to as Hope International and associates) is welcomed. Further, we observed in conversations with Hope International and associates that they affirmed agreement on many of the major elements of the Seventh-day Adventist faith.

However, the method they have used to express their concern has resulted in what is perceived by many to be a spirit of constant criticism directed against the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which is the body

of Christ, the Remnant Church. The effect of this methodology is the discouraging portrayal of the Church as steeped in a state of apostasy. After studying their materials and meeting with their leaders, we have some serious concerns with respect to the nature and purpose of Hope International and associates.

## Areas of Serious Concern

### 1. Charge of Apostasy Against the Seventh-day Adventist Church

According to Hope International and associates, it is an understatement to say that there is apostasy in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. *The Church itself is in apostasy!* Therefore the condition of the Church is worse than that of any other Christian religious body that forms the end-time Babylon. They are not willing to refer openly to the Seventh-day Adventist Church as Babylon because of the occasions in which Ellen G. White opposed those who made such accusations. Yet they have found a way to bypass her counsel by accusing the Church of being in apostasy. We have not found a single case where Ellen G. White or the book of Revelation accuses God's remnant people of being in apostasy. It is this charge of apostasy against the Church that keeps Hope International and associates alive.

If the Church is in apostasy, it has no reason to exist and the Lord must raise up a new church as His instrument for these last days. Hope International and associates see themselves as spokespersons for those who perceive that the Church is in apostasy, and they believe that they have a divine mandate to catalogue and publicize this apostasy and to call the Church to repentance. Although

we acknowledge that there is apostasy in the Church—Jesus Himself acknowledged the co-existence of wheat and tares in the Church—we reject the blatant and irresponsible accusation that God’s Remnant Church is *in* apostasy. Their definition of apostasy as “any deviation from God’s truth or mandated Christian practice” is not found in the Bible or in the writings of Ellen G. White.

## 2. *Distorted View of the Nature of the Church*

It is our clear impression that Hope International and associates believe that the Church is composed of both an organized system of administration and a parallel self-supporting ministry independent of the organized system. We understand their position to be that, as divinely-appointed self-supporting ministries, they are not ultimately bound by the decisions of the world Church. This model of church organization is used by them to justify their activities. Such understanding of the Church lacks any biblical support and is not found in the writings of Ellen G. White. Although we acknowledge the need for supportive ministries within the Church, we perceive Hope International and associates as having parallel organizational structures separate to, and critical of, the official Church organization. Support for this perception is found in the following characteristics of their organizations:

### a. *Diverse Understanding of Doctrinal Positions*

Though strongly affirming their support for the Seventh-day Adventist Statement of Fundamental Beliefs, Hope International and associates seem to have some reservations with respect to several of them. One such reservation concerns “The Son” (#4). In this particular case they have taken a position different from that of the Church by making their particular understanding of the human nature of Christ part of the doctrine. On the topic of the Church (#11 and #13)

their understanding of its nature and authority does not seem to reflect the doctrine of ecclesiology as held by the Church (see below). The same applies to the statement on “Stewardship” (#20).

### b. *Reluctance to Accept the Authority of the Church*

Although acknowledging that the Church has a God-given authority, Hope International and associates do not consider the authority of the Church to be final in the community of believers. It is the Seventh-day Adventist position that the Church was formed when a group of believers voluntarily, and under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, accepted a common gospel, a common lifestyle, and a common mission, understood to be based on the authority of the Scriptures. This community was vested with authority by Christ (Matt 18:15-18). Decisions made by the properly appointed representatives of the Church community are binding on all members who, in order to preserve the unity of the Church and to facilitate the fulfillment of its mission, are willing to set aside personal opinions and/or practices to follow the decisions of the body. But if elements of that commu-

nity break the common bond that unites it, by developing a judgmental attitude against the authority of the community, the result is confusion and insubordination. Hope International and associates appear to have taken the position that their interpretation of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy is the final arbiter over the Church, to determine whether its decisions are correct or not. If, in their judgment, a decision is not correct, they reject it and proceed to believe and act as they think best, while at the same time claiming to be loyal members of the Church. That attitude is consistent with the spirit of schism and, at the present time, contributes to undermining the authority of the Church.

Self-supporting ministries are to work harmoniously with the Church. Paul, who is often referred to as a self-supporting worker was, after his conversion, brought by the Lord into a permanent connection with the Church. In that context we are told:

“God has made His church on the earth a channel of light, and through it He communicates His purposes and His will. He does not give to one of His servants an experience independent of and contrary to the experience of the church itself.

Igniting  
a *passion*  
for *living*  
God's  
*love...*  
never losing  
focus of  
the *cross.*

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Neither does He give one man a knowledge of His will for the entire church while the church—Christ’s body—is left in darkness. . . .

“There have ever been in the church those who are constantly inclined toward individual independence. They seem unable to realize that independence of spirit is liable to lead the human agent to have too much confidence in himself and to trust in his own judgment rather than to respect the counsel and highly esteem the judgment of his brethren, especially of those in the offices that God has appointed for the leadership of His people. God has invested His church with special authority and power which no one can be justified in disregarding and despising, for he who does this despises the voice of God.

“Those who are inclined to regard their individual judgment as supreme are in grave peril.”—*Acts of the Apostles*, 163, 164.

### c. *Rewriting of the Baptismal Vow*

A Baptismal Vow was put together by Colin Standish using the 1932 *Church Manual* and other sources. An examination of this baptismal vow reveals that it is significantly different from what is found in the current *Church Manual* as approved by the world Church. Among the differences are the following:

1) A new fundamental belief added as a requirement for joining the Church: that “Jesus took upon Himself our fallen nature.” Such a statement has never been part of the Seventh-day Adventist Baptismal Vow or of official statements of fundamental beliefs. Such change illustrates an independence from the Church in doctrinal matters as they constitute their own particular views into tests of faith, independent from the remainder of the Church.

2) The vow dealing with tithing does not identify the Church as the repository of tithe, as does the official Baptismal Vow.

3) In the rewritten Baptismal Vow, the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not receive a mention. The Remnant Church is mentioned, but it is never identified with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The fundamental question here is one of the nature and authority of the Church and where that authority resides. Those who promote the use of this reworded Baptismal Vow demonstrate that they do not recognize the authority of the organized Seventh-day Adventist Church.

### d. *Redefinition of the Tithe “Storehouse”*

The financial support of their organizations comes, not only from their own earnings, nor only from the offerings of church members, but also from tithes. Some of their publications redefine the “storehouse” to be any instrument of God that is proclaiming “unadulterated present truth.” Whether intended or not, the influence of such literature is to encourage members to redirect their tithe away from the Church “storehouse,” and to invest it instead with these independent ministries.

### e. *Conducting Their Own Camp Meetings*

Every year they conduct their own camp meetings, usually without the concurrence of the conference administration. They express that the need for such camp meetings arises from their perception that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is in apostasy, and is therefore incapable of meeting the spiritual needs of its members through the regular conference camp meetings.

### f. *Operating Their Own Publishing Enterprises*

Hope International and associates have their own publishing program for the production of materials promoting their views on different doctrines and lifestyle issues. While much of this material is Adventist in character, there are numerous examples of a judgmental attitude

against the organized Church and its leaders and, from time to time, assertions that the Church is in apostasy. Whatever truths these periodicals contain are more than discounted by a recurring critical refrain.

### 3. *Supporting Dissident Movements*

Hope International and associates have supported, and continue to support, dissident movements who turn against the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its organization. They have been supporting Norberto Restrepo in Colombia and Venezuela, a former Seventh-day Adventist minister who is no longer an Adventist, and is rather one of the most severe enemies of the Church in the Inter-American Division. In 1997 they supported a group of church elders in Guatemala who rebelled against the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and they sent one of their representatives to Guatemala to support them. Recently they supported, in a court of law, a non-Adventist who was attempting to use the name of the Church for his own organization. Their encouragement of breakaway activities in the following countries, and others besides, is well documented: Australia, Bolivia, England, Fiji, France, Germany, Holland, Hungary, New Zealand, Macedonia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Sweden, United States of America, Vanuatu, Zimbabwe. These associations do nothing to build confidence in the professed loyalty of Hope International and associates to the Church. Rather, they are a powerful evidence of their disregard for the carefully considered decisions of the Church, and it amounts to disloyalty to the Church itself. Their misdirected support interferes with the regular organization’s attempts to deal with, and hopefully redeem, such dissident individuals, and makes the task of the Church more difficult.

### 4. *Selectively Using Ellen G. White Writings*

Hope International and associates

pride themselves in their profuse use of the writings of Ellen G. White to support their teachings. But they select statements that seem to support themselves, while disregarding other statements in which activities such as theirs are clearly condemned by Ellen G. White. Her overriding support of the organized Seventh-day Adventist Church is intentionally minimized or ignored by Hope International and associates, or explained away as irrelevant for us today.

### Conclusion

The accumulative effect of the above information results in the perception of many Church members that Hope International and associates are offshoot organizations. They have not taken the decisive step of officially separating themselves from the Seventh-day Adventist organization, and they claim that they never

will. However, by rejecting the authority of the world Church in session when their interpretation of Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy differs from that of the Church, they have set their authority above that of the world Church and operate in a manner that is consistent with offshoot movements.

### An Appeal

We appeal, in all sincerity and Christian love, to Hope International and associates to hear the counsel of the Church they claim to love. It is time for the spirit of condemnation and rebellion to be set aside, allowing the reconciling blood of Christ to bring unity among His people.

All agree that there is serious need for revival and reformation in God's Remnant Church, but the methods used by Hope International and associates have produced disso-

nance instead of reform. When assessed by their fruits, it is seen that the movement of reform promoted by Hope International and associates has failed to bring about either reformation or increased unity. The Church is not perfect, but there is wisdom in listening to its advice. We appeal, in Christian love, for a turn of heart and purpose that will bring Hope International and associates into full unity with the body of Christ, the Remnant Church.

If Hope International and associates cannot bring themselves into harmony with the body of the world Church, clearly evidenced within twelve months, the Seventh-day Adventist Church may need to consider whether there exists a "persistent refusal to recognize properly constituted church authority or to submit to the order and discipline of the church" (*Church Manual*, 169). ■

## Letters continued from p. 3

Sabbatati, Insabbatati, but more frequently Inzabbatati. One says they were so named from the Hebrew word Sabbath, because they kept the Saturday for the Lord's day. Another says they were so called because they rejected all festivals." . . .

If these historical "errors" to which Coffen alludes are subject to dispute, the argument of Ellen G. White and her supposed historical errors cannot be settled from his choice of exhibits of proof. If the author is ignorant of, or biased against, the evidence in history that would concord with her accuracy, what effect does that have upon the effectiveness of his apparent resolution to the issues of understanding prophetic inspiration?

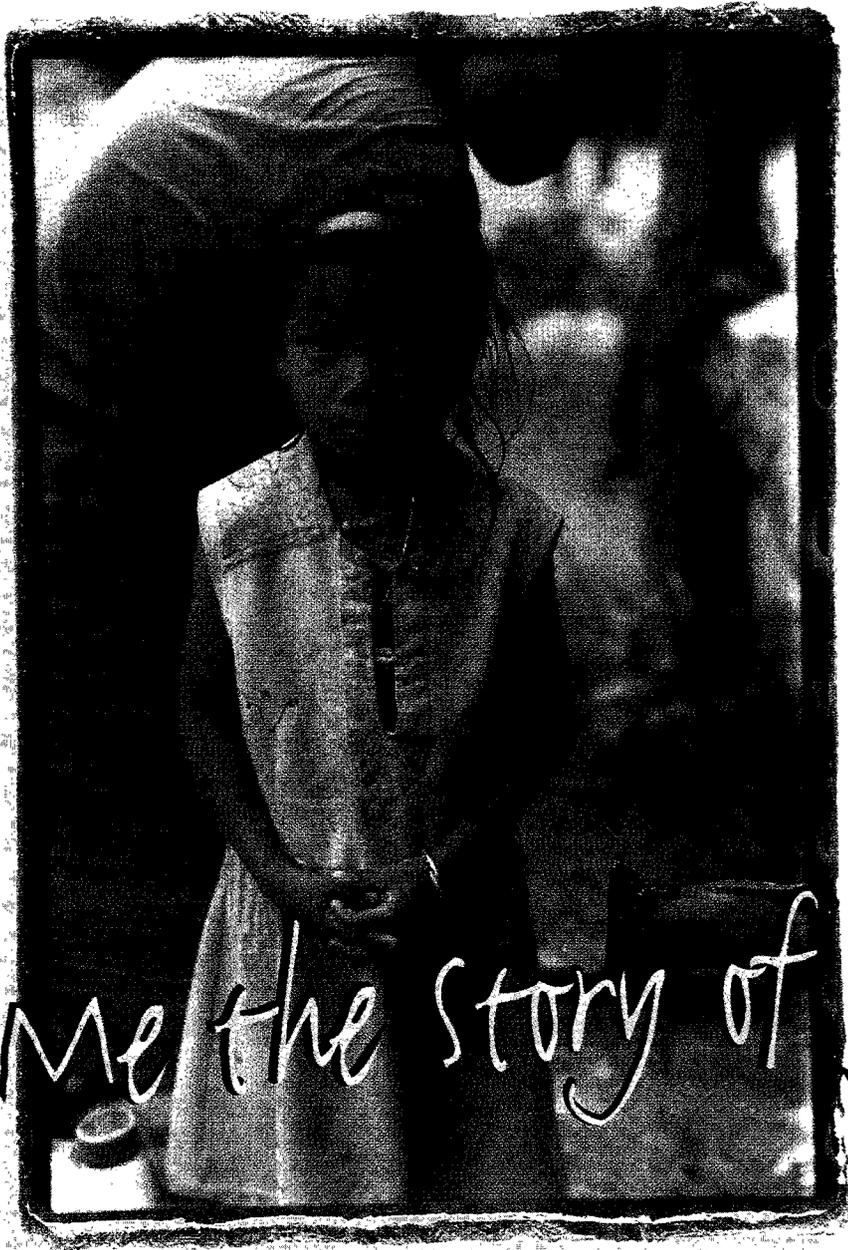
While credit is due Coffen for addressing certain thorny issues surrounding the distinctly Adventist acceptance of prophetic ministry, as opposed to Roman Catholic or Charismatic viewpoints, his February article only partially succeeds in

taming the seven-headed hydra he has confronted. In it, at times I feel asked to grant him credibility at the expense of Ellen White. While I wish him well, I am not willing to do so without sufficient cause. I hope I am not alone. If the purpose of "Viewpoint" is to elicit thought, perhaps this installment was successful, for I am left with a rumination of my own:

Isn't the whole issue of faith based upon one's resolution of the often apparent conflict between the evidence from logic, and that which is from intuition (or revelation)? The former certainty rests on the evidence of the mind, the latter within the heart. To accept the product of inspiration as authoritative is to give credence to the working of the supernatural, without attempting to create an exact schematic of how it works. Once that is done, inspiration can be cloned, (as some false prophets appear to have done) and it no longer would be a human experience of Divine origin. And further, once such precision becomes a prerequisite to accepting the voice of the messenger as authoritative, one no longer walks by faith, but by sight.

—Ted Toms, Pastor, Paw Paw and Hartford Seventh-day Adventist Churches, Michigan.

*Editorial note: Thank you for thoughtful and challenging replies to a Richard Coffen's Viewpoint article. It should be said that it was definitely not Richard Coffen's objective to "argue for historical errors in Ellen G. White's writings." Had that been his objective, the article would not have appeared in Ministry. Coffen's objective was simply to look honestly at the way inspiration worked in the life of Ellen White and in the lives of Bible writers and thus to bring about a just strengthening of faith and understanding of the authoritative gifts of God given us in such writings (particularly the Bible). To those who tend toward a belief in some genre of verbal inspiration (something Seventh-day Adventists and Ellen White herself have constantly resisted), a quest such as Coffen's will always seem questionable. We hope our readers have read the response article to Richard Coffen's thoughts, which was authored by Ekkehardt Mueller and appeared in our April 2000 issue.* ■



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