


OCTOBER-DECEMBER 1996

CQ
COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

*The
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A Family Affair





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OCTOBER - DECEMBER 1996

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Sabbath
School

THE CHURCH: A FAMILY AFFAIR



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Welcome to *CQ*'s World!

The following pages represent the creative energy of a truly international group of Adventist young adults. The map above indicates the locations of the writing groups that have participated in *CQ*'s writing program for this quarter.

In producing this unique Sabbath School Bible-study guide, more than 300 individuals contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety—and occasional repetition—of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond individually to the subject under study.

Worldwide circulation of *CQ* is about 59,000. It is published in the English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and Finnish languages.

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Ever think about writing a Sabbath School Quarterly?

Why not! Each year 300 young adults from around the world participate in the *Collegiate Quarterly* writing program. CQ gives Seventh-day Adventist young people aged 18 to 35 a unique opportunity to grow spiritually, to share the benefits of their Bible study, to exchange ideas, and to contribute to the mission of the church.

You are the most important ingredient in our CQ formula because you can be the answer to our greatest need—the need for caring, committed, contributing authors. If you think you'd like to participate in the writing of a lesson—and get paid for it—write us today:

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COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

This Quarter's Illustrator



Rob Ritzenthaler, the eldest of four children, was born March 11, 1972, in Benton Harbor, Michigan. He attended elementary school in Sturgis, Michigan, and academy in Battle Creek, where his chief interests included biology and art. While he was working on a bachelor of fine arts with an emphasis in graphic design, during summers he worked as horsemanship director and later boys' director at Mt. Aetna Camp in Maryland. In the summer previous to his senior year, he served an internship in the art department at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Getting the Most Out of *CQ*

Facts You Should Know

CQ is based on the conviction that the Word of God offers transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. *CQ*'s purpose is to provide Seventh-day Adventist young adults with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed each week in Sabbath School. Many who use the adult Bible-study guide find that because *CQ* deals with the same topics, it enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

Pointers for Study

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.

2. The Bible passage on which each week's lesson is based appears in bold type in the "Logos" pages (Monday's portion of the lesson). Read this entire passage in conjunction with the quarterly introduction to give yourself an overview of the lesson.

3. The Bible passage for the week is divided into sections on the "Logos" pages (Monday's portion of the lesson). When studying this section, carefully reread Bible passages indicated in bold headings before reading the comments beneath the heading.

4. Read remaining sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passage.

5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the quarterly:

"**Introduction**" (Sunday) is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week's theme.

"**Logos**" (Monday), as described above, is a guide for direct study of the Bible passage for the week.

"**Testimony**" (Tuesday) presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.

"**Evidence**" (Wednesday) approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective.

"**How-To**" (Thursday) discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.

"**Opinion**" (Friday), a personal viewpoint on the lesson, is meant to encourage further thought and discussion.

CQ and the Church

CQ is the General Conference-approved Bible-study guide for the collegiate/young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. *However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the church.*

THE INTERGALACTIC VILLAGE



“[Christ] is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church” (Col. 1:17, 18, NIV).

The Wedding Day

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Isa. 61:10

When the doors at the rear of the sanctuary swung open, the guests gasped in awe. The once simple, ordinary young woman now stood transformed into a radiant beauty. She was stunning! Her hair hung in dark ringlets about her face, framing gleaming eyes and a glowing smile. Her face was a love story. The pages of the previous 10 months were easily read through her expression. Her white satin gown adorned with fine lace and sparkling sequins accentuated her girlish figure.

As she marched down the aisle toward her groom, her dancing eyes never left his; their souls were interwoven. Never before had she met a man who made her feel so incredible. She had longed for, hoped for, and even prayed for someone who would love her wholly and with whom she could share her deepest secrets and most private dreams. But she never dreamed that someone so divinely perfect really existed, let alone that he would come into her life. And now he stood before her dazed by her beauty.

The young man choked back his tears of joy and excitement. He could hardly believe this day was real. He felt as if he had just stepped out of the pages of a fairy tale, and his princess was coming toward him. Oh, how he loved her. He knew that

When you stand before the altar, how will you answer the question?

their love was rare—it was deep and true. She was his dearest friend and closest companion. She was his bride!

Just as this bride and groom delight in each other, the Lord delights in His church. We are His bride—the joy and love of His heart. He longs to be one with us, to share eternity with us, to hold us in His protective arms forever. He has proposed to you. So, when you stand before the altar, how will you answer the question: Do you take this Man to be your husband, to have Him, to hold Him, from this day forward, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish as long as you both shall live?

I do!

By Janesta Walker, English and art teacher at Mount Pisgah Academy, Candler, North Carolina.

Christ's Church

LOGOS

Gen. 12:1-6; 15:18; 1 Cor. 3:9-17; 12:12-17; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 3:14, 15

We are the church—a group of people within whom Christ is forming His character. Other commonalities may arise as Christian relationships continue to mature.

The idea of the church as a Christ-centered, called-out people runs as a common thread throughout Scripture. All hearts are united in His love (Col. 2:2). Christ is in each person, the hope of glory (1:27), urging each one on (2 Cor. 5:14) toward a new life focus (1 Cor. 5:17). Our former life out of Christ was self-focused. Our new life in Christ is outside-of-self-focused.

Each member involved in this experience will probably have a different way of describing what is happening. The vision Christ has for us as His church is so large that no one definition or metaphor is sufficient to explain fully or describe the church. Consider three familiar biblical metaphors: the body, the bride, and the family.

The beauty of the human body metaphor is that the body has one focus—life. The life of each organ is dependent on the continuing life of the body. The life of the body is dependent on the life and continued working of each organ. Each person has a unique contribution to the vitality of the church body. Each can celebrate the reality of that contribution toward a Christ-focused church.

The body metaphor leaves no room for the concept of a clergy/laity hierarchy based on importance. Our access to salvation by faith in Jesus is not granted by some human, such as priest or pastor. During the Reformation, the recognition that the just shall live by faith (Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17) and that we are members individually (1 Cor. 12:27) countered the misconception of access by human hierarchy. God-given and God-directed talents, fruits, and gifts are freely and equally shared with all who choose to be in Christ by faith (verse 11).

When the church is likened to a marriage, God means to indicate a close and permanent relationship between Himself and us. In many Scripture references, the English words *know*, *known*, and *knowledge* are translated from several Greek and Hebrew words that mean a fuller, more complete knowledge than merely “I know today is Monday.” The original word used for knowledge in 1 Corinthians 13:2 (God’s knowledge of us), Colossians 1:9 (how He wants us to know about His will), and Ezekiel 39:7, Septuagint (that He makes Himself known to us) describes godly knowledge, which is omniscient. Such complete insight and understanding of a person come only because of a trusting relationship.

Although *relationship* is not commonly used in Bible versions, it is an excellent word to describe the idea accurately. According to Isaiah 54:4 and 2 Corinthians 11:2, God desires a close relationship with us. Our saving relationship with God is through the method of faith. A better word for faith is trust. Salvation becomes a personal reality, and the church becomes His corporate body, as each one chooses a trusting relationship with our Redeemer Kin (Ruth 4:13, 14). The permanence of our marriage is promised in Isaiah 54:5. The purity of our marriage is assured in Ephesians 5:25-27. The joy of our marriage is celebrated in Solomon’s song. God shares His character with us. His personality is what makes us

all radiant. Nothing else will satisfy us except the joy of His company.

The term *brethren*, meaning “family members,” is used often throughout Scripture. In the Old Testament, *brethren* refers to fellow Hebrews; in the New Testament, to fellow Christians as members of God’s family. Whoever does God’s will is part of His family (Matt. 12:50) and is His friend (John 15:14). God has family throughout the universe. They are often in God’s presence (Job 1:6), and they rejoiced when earth was created (38:7). Matthew’s judgment scene indicates that whatever we do in service for the members of God’s family, we are doing for Him (Matt. 25:31-40). Jesus says He will be our teacher and we His students (23:8), indicating a friendly, trusting relationship. After His resurrection, as He was leaving to meet with His Father, He gave Mary a message to encourage His earthly family (John 20:17).

Another indication that God has an earthly family is that Satan, who always works against God, is the accuser of the family (Rev. 12:10). On that Thursday night in the upper room, Jesus established the Christian church family on humble service. His was a call to community and showed us that “day after day we must take up the basin and the towel.”*

The church compared to a body represents our unique part in the body of Christ. The marriage metaphor illustrates the oneness of purpose He shares with His

The life of each organ is dependent on the continuing life of the body.

church. The church as His family and friends is another step in understanding the church as community. We are the church—Christ’s body, His bride, and His family. Praise Him for His everlasting, saving, and family name!

REACT

1. What other metaphors, from the Bible or your own experience, could be used to illustrate the concept of “church”?

2. What basic elements of the Old Testament church are crucial for today’s church?

3. How does the metaphor of the church as a human body relate to the issue of access to God through human hierarchy?

4. How can one know that God is leading in one’s life?

*Michael Card, *The Basin and the Towel* (Birdwing Music, 1994).

Does This Shoe Fit Me?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 1 Cor. 3:9-17

The following appeared in the *Review* 96 years ago under the title "Lessons for Christians," by Ellen White:

"The third chapter of 1 Corinthians contains instruction which all who claim to be following Jesus should study. Contentions in the body of believers are not after the order of God . . .

"It was impossible for the apostle to reprove wrong-doing without some who claimed to believe the truth becoming offended. The inspired testimony could do these no good; for they had lost their spiritual discernment. Jealousy, evil surmising, and accusing closed the door to the working of the Holy Spirit. Paul would gladly have dwelt upon higher and more difficult truths, truths which were rich in nourishment, but his instruction would have cut directly across their tendencies to jealousy, and would not have been received. . . .

"'Ye are yet carnal,' Paul declared, 'for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and division, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?' Their contentions revealed that they had not the mind and Spirit of Christ, that they were walking after the wisdom of their narrow, conceited minds.

"Let no man belittle another man's work."

Their views and feelings were bound about with selfishness. They did not show the liberality, the generosity, the tenderness, which reveals an abiding Christ. . . .

"Let no man belittle another man's work because it is not in exactly the same line as his own. . . .

"There is to be no unkind criticism, no pulling to pieces of another's work. . . .

"There are to be no separate parties in God's work. Every man to whom God has entrusted a message has his specific work, and this is to be done under the great Master Workman."

During the three decades that I've been aware of my church's climate, I've heard of many "separate parties." In describing Christians who aren't Adventists, we use the term *outsider*. We sometimes refer to their sphere of influence as a *dark county*. When talking about SDAs, we use other terms. There are *historic Adventists*, believers in the *new theology*, followers of *independent ministries*, distinctive views of *West Coast theology*, etc. Stories told from abroad suggest that this partitioning into sects is not unique to North American Adventists.

Is there any possibility that these lessons are for this generation too?

**Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Dec. 11, 1900.

By Larry Ashcraft, a physics and computer-programming teacher at West Henderson (North Carolina) High School.

What We Are

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 1 Tim. 1:15, 16

Have you ever been hospitalized? Ever notice that there are two kinds of people in a hospital? There are those who dress in a suit or uniform and wear their names on their lapels. There are also those who wish they could have real clothes and who wear their names on a wristband. Two types: staff and patient.

It's said that the church is not a haven for saints, but a hospital for sinners. Thus we are patients in this hospital called the church. We are sick. We have come to get better, to learn about our deadly illness, to struggle, to cope, to support one another, to be cared for. Not all our symptoms are alike. But we share a common condition: we are, without exception, *patients*. We are not *staff*.

A problem arises with many of us patients after a time. We begin to think of ourselves as staff. We want to be a physician—to make observations; to do examinations, diagnoses, and heart surgery. Or perhaps we want to be a nurse—to administer medication, record progress, give reports, and write care plans. We begin to see ourselves as qualified to determine who will be admitted. But search as we might, we'll never find in the *Administrator's Handbook* the idea that patients are to take the duties of staff.

In 1 Timothy 1:15, 16, the Jerusalem Bible translates the words of a patient

After a time, we begin to think of ourselves as staff.

named Paul. He would not let himself forget what he was. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners [patients]. I myself am the greatest of them." Paul continues to relate what the patient's duty really is when he says that he is "evidence" of the power of the Great Physician (verse 16). In this text, Paul testifies to two important facts: (1) who the physician is and what He does and (2) who the patient is and what he or she does. Jesus treats the patient. The patient encourages other patients by his or her own experience with the Great Physician.

The day is fast approaching when the sick will come to our church doors in droves. Are we ready for them? Do we know what our role as a fellow patient is? Let us remember what we are till that great day when we are healed and we will be able to go home.

REACT

1. In the above analogy, if God is the physician, who would the nurses be?
2. In what ways does today's lesson apply to Acts 3:1-10?

By Michael Carpenter, a carpenter in Asheville, North Carolina.

Doing Church

HOW-TO

Key Text: 1 Cor. 3:9

“We are God’s fellow workers” (1 Cor. 3:9, NIV). “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen. 12:3).

Church means many different things. People may associate church with a particular building, a specific denomination, or a small group of friends who study the Bible together. Below are some suggestions for forming a healthy concept of church:

1. The church is people. In the broadest sense, all our fellow believers on earth comprise our church. In more practical terms, church means a group of fellow Christians with whom we meet to worship. We should use our time at church to interact spiritually with other people in the church, to comfort them, nurture them, offer them an encouraging word, and to give them a personal example of Christ’s healing and forgiveness. We should have supreme love for our fellow church members, as outlined by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13. We should also allow our fellow church members to encourage and uplift us, recharging us for the challenging time before meeting with them again. More important than the money contributed, the sermons preached, or the fundamental beliefs expounded is the process of fellow church members’ turning their eyes toward Christ, drawing closer to Him and thus to one another.

If we as a church constantly look inward, we will eventually disappear into a black hole.

2. The people of the church are to “preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15, KJV). By building up fellow church members, there is created a body of believers with energy to spread Christ’s gospel. Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 12 that as a church body we can reach the world in many ways. Christ often reached people through simple acts of kindness, and He encourages us to do the same (James 1:27; Matt. 25:34-40). The more actively we as a church reach out in service to our fellow human beings, the stronger will our church body grow. If we are focused on the innumerable unmet needs (physical, emotional, spiritual) of those with whom we come into contact in everyday life, we will have no time in church for criticism, backbiting, and turf protection. If we as a church constantly look inward, we will eventually disappear into a black hole of self-criticism and complacency. If we focus our energies outwardly, we can explode Christ’s message across the globe.

REACT

1. Why do we often spend more church time on processes than on people?
2. In welcoming His children home, why does Christ focus on simple, everyday acts of kindness?

By David Markoff, an ophthalmologist in Waynesville, North Carolina.

Musical Chairs

OPINION

Key Text: Matt. 25:40

We've all played musical chairs at one time or another. "I got here first! This is my chair! You're out! I'm the winner! I'm stronger, faster, and quicker than you!" The rules are "Every man for himself" and "Don't let anyone cut in front of you." Someone has to win, after all—don't they?

What if you're the loser? What if you get squeezed out at the beginning of the game? How do you feel then? Dumb? Slow? Not good enough? Does this make you want to play again?

That's not how we relate to one another in our church body, of course. Or is it?

What if we were to play musical chairs a different way? This time, *everybody* sits. If you don't have a chair, then you sit with someone. As more chairs are removed, it becomes a game of organization, balance, and support.

"You sit on that knee, and I'll balance here. We did it! One chair left. OK—biggest and strongest on the bottom. Put your arms around her like so and don't let go. Let him sit on my knee. "Voilà!" (Everybody wins. Laughter is heard.) Want

**"You sit on that knee, and I'll balance here.
We did it!"**

to play again?"

With cooperation, everyone is pulling their own weight. No one is more important than anyone else. Everyone wants to play.

This is how we relate to one another in our church body, isn't it?

REACT

1. How does my competitive attitude affect my relationships with my church family?
2. What can I do to contribute to the organization, balance, and support of my brothers and sisters in Christ?
3. In what ways can support of fellow believers mean more than just being involved in the service on Sabbath?

By Amy Leslie, a homemaker in Asheville, North Carolina.

THE BARNYARD OR THE SKY?



**“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing”
(Gen. 12:2, NIV).**

A Difference in Vision

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Heb. 11:8; James 2:23

A flock of barnyard geese met weekly to discuss life. "We were not born for this lifestyle," one goose often said. "We must not limit ourselves to this dirty yard, when we can fly freely in the blue sky." Occasionally wild geese would pass over them. "We, too, were born to fly," the barnyard goose said. All stood looking upward, filled with dreams. Then, after the wild geese disappeared, the ranch geese would return to the familiar mud in the yard. They never flew.

To Abraham it was said: "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you" (Gen. 12:1, NIV). "Abraham must be separated from the associations of his early life. The influence of kindred and friends would interfere with the training which the Lord purposed to give His servant."¹ Can a true friendship with God be achieved only by isolating oneself from everyone else?

"By faith Abraham, when called . . . , obeyed" (Heb. 11:8). "Relying upon the divine promise, without the least outward assurance of its fulfillment, he . . . went forth, he knew not wither, to follow where God should lead."²

"God does not require us to give up anything that it is for our best interest to retain. . . . The divine requirements call upon us to shun those indulgences that

God does not require us to give up anything that it is for our best interest to retain.

would bring suffering and disappointment. . . . He requires us to perform only those duties that will lead our steps to heights of bliss to which the disobedient can never attain."³

God intended that Abraham would be free to develop his spirituality removed from opposing forces. When He separated Abraham from the heathen environment, He gave him promises (Gen. 12:1-3): (1) he would receive a land; (2) he would be father of a great nation; (3) other nations would be blessed through him.

How can we, today, share in the promises that were made to Abraham?

A man visiting a construction site asked the workers, "What are you doing?"

"I am preparing the mortar for the mason," someone said.

"I am building a wall," said another.

"I am carrying rocks," said a third one.

But the carpenter answered, "I am building a church."

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 126.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Steps to Christ*, pp. 46, 47.

By Merlinto P. Oliveira, chaplain of Salvador Adventist School and pastor of the Nazare SDA Church in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil.

In Search of Fame

LOGOS

Gen. 12:1-6; Acts 7:1-8; Gal. 3:6-9, 29; Heb. 11:8-12

You must remember many people who became famous for things done or left undone. Perhaps a musician, a singer, a sportsman. I remember, especially, one man who was neither a soccer player nor a basketball player, nor was he a famous actor.

His name? Abraham. What made him famous? Let's see: "God told him, 'Leave your own country behind you, and your own people, and go to the land I will guide you to. If you do, I will cause you to become the father of a great nation; I will bless you and make your name famous, and you will be a blessing to many others'" (Gen. 12:1, 2, TLB). Abraham's fame was the result of the divine blessing. For this, however, a requirement was necessary—to have faith—accepting the divine will for his life (Heb. 11:9-12). Abraham's motivation to go ahead was the assurance that God approved his plans.

God appeared to Abraham as He did to many others. "Every time God appeared it marked an important development in the revelation progress, as well as on the lives of these men." No one stayed the same in the presence of God: God's plan is either accepted or rejected.

In Genesis 12:1 God called Abraham to leave his country, his father's household, and his friends to go to a strange land. Abraham could even have said: "But can't I serve God where I am and the way I am?" The answer would be no! God called him, as He calls us today, to do His will, not our own. The Lord's prayer says: "Your will be done."

As the result of doing God's will, we see a fourfold promise (Gen. 12:2):

1. A nation—descendants.
2. Would be blessed—prosperity.
3. Would make his name great—fame.
4. Would be a blessing to others.

Regarding the first point, after accepting the will of God in his life, Abraham knew there would be a descendant. Yet the promise appeared to take long to be fulfilled, and he decided to help the Lord. He took his wife's servant and produced a son by her—Ishmael (Gen. 16:2, 3). Often impatience can bring disastrous results. How often have you stopped to think that certain decisions could have been better if there had been a waiting period? On one occasion, I lost the chance of doing well on a test because I hurried my answers to the questions to impress my friends. The son of the promise was not Ishmael; it was Isaac (Gen. 17:19).

Isaac's descendants would be the people of God on earth. The apostle Paul, speaking of this descent, extends this status to all who, like Abraham, accept by faith the call of God into their lives (Gal. 3:29). Abraham "believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (verse 6, NIV).

Second, the result of this faith obedience would be a divine blessing that produces prosperity. In Abraham's case it would be a land for his nation. The result of hearing the voice of God is to receive His blessing. How many there are who ask for God's blessing but continue to do what He has already condemned? This is similar to a man who, being allergic to cats, goes to the doctor to solve his

problem but continues to keep many cats in his house. If you want the Lord's blessing, accept the will of God for your life.

Third, his name would be made great. Many people employ all their efforts to achieve fame, even one minute of fame. These are identified by what they do or do not do. Abraham, too, had his fame; he was "the Friend of God" (James 2:23). His name was changed by God, and the same will happen for us (Rev. 2:17).

Last, the blessed becomes a blessing to those around him—and a curse to those who despise him. As Abraham's children, we, too, are invited to become a blessing to others.

To be blessed of God and to be a blessing to others is the key to success and good fame. "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed"

To be blessed of God and to be a blessing to others is the key to success.

(Prov. 16:3, NIV).

REACT

1. Having so many plans and decisions to make every day, how can I accept and wait for the will of God for my life?

2. What will result?

3. In my home, my church, my studies, and with my friends, how can I be a blessing?

4. What is necessary to be a blessing to those around us?

5. How are faith and works combined so that God can fulfill His purposes?

6. What relationship can there be between Abraham's faith experience and his journey to the heavenly Canaan?

7. How is it possible to maintain good relationships with relatives and friends who do not share the same faith without hurting them or breaking the divine principles?

8. List some challenges you have had to face that showed that the hand of God was leading you.

*Walter C. Kaiser, *Teologia do Antigo Testamento*, p. 88.

Be a Blessing

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Gen. 12:2

The majority of Bible stories show God working to restore humanity to His own image, trying to accomplish His purposes for humankind's destiny. God called Abraham and promised to make of him a great nation, blessing him and making him great; however, He also wanted Abraham to be a blessing to those he contacted. Of course, when God called Abraham, this call would extend to his descendants, who would be the great nation proceeding from him, which would be the people called of God.

Ellen White describes the purpose and the responsibility of the call made to Abraham, affirming that the Lord "chose Abraham, of the line of Shem, and made him the keeper of His law for future generations,"¹ giving emphasis to the fact that "his religion was not to be held as a precious treasure to be jealously guarded, and enjoyed solely by the possessor."² On the contrary, "The people of God are His representatives upon the earth, and He intends that they be lights in the moral darkness of this world. . . . They are God's witnesses, the channels through which He will communicate . . . the knowledge of His will and the wonders of His grace."³

To you and me comes the assurance that we also are part of the people called by God. "The church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was

The call of God to Abraham cuts through millennia and reaches us.

organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God's plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fulness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest . . . the final and full display of the love of God."⁴

The call of God to Abraham cuts through millennia and reaches us, inviting us to be part of the people called of God, thus becoming a blessing to the world.

REACT

1. How does God call human beings?
2. Describe the specific ways in which you have experienced God's call.
3. How do you describe your answer to God's call?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p.125.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 9.

By Weber Thomas, district pastor for the Central District in Feira de Santana, Bahia, Brazil.

The Pilgrim Friend

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Heb. 11:13-15

If God suddenly said to you, “Leave your country, your people, and your father’s household, and go to the land I will show you,” you’d probably spend some time thinking about that. Perhaps you would think: *Is this what God really wants? How will those family members who are not in church take this?*

God did this with Abraham, who lived in Ur, surrounded by his relatives. At that time, Ur was a comfortable, progressive city. It had an efficient sewage system; its construction was admirable; the educational system was advanced. The city offered significant comforts. Leaving it would mean to sacrifice, especially if there was no assurance of any kind of appeal in the place to which traveling was intended.

But when Abraham heard “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you” (Gen. 12:1, NIV), he did not resist; rather, he “obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going” (Heb. 11:8).

Abraham did not know the place to which he was going, but he already knew the One who called him. He knew that YAHWEH would go with him in his faith journey. This is the detail that makes all the difference. Abraham was going to

“Wherever he pitched his tent, he set up beside it the altar for sacrifice and worship.”

travel being assisted by his “Friend” (see Isa. 41:8). “Wherever he pitched his tent, he set up beside it the altar for sacrifice and worship.”¹ Every morning and evening he called “all within his encampment to the . . . sacrifice.”²

Abraham’s consecration and his great faith qualified him to be the “father of the faith” (see Rom. 4:11, 12). By his life of dedication to God, the nations of the earth were blessed (Gen. 12:3) through his Descendant, Jesus (Gal. 3:16). Through Abraham God reached the whole world in the marvelous person of Christ. What a great privilege!

As God called Abraham, He calls all who desire to love and serve Him. God is calling you to do His will anywhere you may find yourself. Are you ready to cooperate with the Lord and to take His light to others?

REACT

1. How can I respond to God’s call in my home?
2. During my journeying, how can I leave an altar everywhere I pass?

1. *Education*, p. 187.

2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 128.

By Natan Fernandes da Silva, district pastor in Candido Sales, Bahia, Brazil.

I Am Coming, Lord

HOW-TO

Key Text: Gen. 12:1

I was 15 years old when Antonio Barbosa challenged me to canvas. My town was small, and the work possibilities were narrowed to a short period. The group would go to another city, and that meant that I had to make the second biggest decision of my life: Accept the “go” or stay comfortably in my family’s bosom. Leave my house, my parents, and go work out there? I was frightened, but I accepted. I left everything and went.

By this decision, two previous lessons fixed themselves in my mind when I read today’s key text:

1. It is never too early or too late to accept God’s challenges. Young people accept challenges with ease. By nature they are adventurous. Abraham, however, was 75 years old when he was challenged by God. Do you see what a young, brave spirit he had? To go beyond distrust, this is the great challenge to each of us. Nevertheless, there was an extraordinary and powerful force driving him—God! It does not matter how old you are. When the invitation comes, accept the call, because with it comes the enabling.

2. Abandon the bonds that replace heavenly interests. God said to Abraham: “Leave your country.” It is true that the place where we were born or were raised

The Christian must not be an enemy of family or society.

holds us with very strong sentimental bonds. Abraham disentangled himself from them without hesitation, because he considered this world a “foreign country” (Heb. 11:9, NIV) and looked for a permanent home, considering that his home was not where he had been born or raised, but “the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10).

God said to Abraham: “Leave . . . your father’s household” (Gen. 12:1). God did not invite him to be a hermit, much less to deny his family ties, but He separated him from his relatives because their choices went diametrically against the divine principles, principles that were dearer to Abraham than his relatives. The Christian must not be an enemy of family or society. He must take to heaven as many as would want to go with him. Nobody is excluded, only those who exclude themselves. Therefore, to be able to influence them to accept Christ, we have to associate with them. It is their choice to be one of those coming along.

By Roberto Carlos Santana Matos, assistant chaplain of Salvador Adventist School and assistant pastor of the Nazare SDA Church, Bahia, Brazil.

We Are a Divine Blessing

OPINION

Key Text: Gen. 12:2

“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; . . . and you will be a blessing” (Gen. 12:2, NIV). Abraham had received the call of God. Together with the call there was the promise of being blessed.

The Bible does not advocate the idea of a call without God’s providing the skills to fulfill the call. The same is true of God’s righteousness, which is not just a statement. On the contrary, God not only states it, He bestows this righteousness to humanity. Therefore, the apostle Paul associates the blessing given to Abraham with the righteousness given by Heaven (see Gal. 3:6-9.) The blessing rested upon Abraham, and he was to be a blessing to all who came in contact with him. Abraham’s witness to his relatives, friends, and neighbors ensured that he had been blessed by God. All the residents of Ur were acquainted with his faith. He was the spiritual leader and a blessing wherever he was (see Genesis 18). “Wherever he pitched his tent, close beside it was set up his altar, calling all within his encampment to the morning and the evening sacrifice.” We become a blessing when we

The Bible does not advocate the idea of a call without the skills to fulfill the call.

receive the blessing of God.

In every place where we live, study, or work, there is a “city of Ur,” where idolatry and sin prevail. We all are called of God to be a blessing wherever we are. I have a picture that I carry with me that bears a relevant truth: “Be a light wherever you are.” If we are not light or a blessing, we will be darkness or a curse. There is no halfway in the Christian life. The evidence that we have been called of God is the blessing that we are, anywhere.

REACT

1. How do people around you know that you are a divine blessing?
2. What kind of light or blessing have you been, and what kind of way have you shown to those around you?
3. How would you illustrate to Christians who do not have the experience or the method of being a blessing?

**Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 128.*

By Jose Orlando da Silva, district pastor in Capim Grosso, Bahia, Brazil.

THEN AND NOW



“You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron” (Ps. 77:20, NIV).

The Chosen People of the Nineties

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ps. 77:20

When we think of the children of Israel, we usually remember all their mishaps and mistakes. When people look back at us, what will they remember? Do we have only mishaps and mistakes, or will they see that we are the chosen people of the nineties? It is important that when we think about being the chosen people of God, we realize people do not see only our failures; they see our successes, also. People are just as interested in what we do that is right, because they are looking for something positive to believe in. If we as Christians never made any mistakes, the rest of the world wouldn't know of the grace of God that has been present since the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden.

As a chosen people, we are called to do what is right, but part of that is admitting we are weak. When Jesus died on the cross, He cried out to His Father, begging to know why He had been forsaken. As I see it, one of the problems with some Christians today (and I struggle with this too) is that we are constantly trying in our own strength to be good. This is not all bad. Yet we need to realize that even

When people look back at us, what will they remember?

as the chosen generation, we are still human and have a sinful nature. When we look back at the children of Israel, it is easy to see what they should have done differently, but had they been perfect, what lessons would we learn? If we were perfect now, what would be the point of having a Saviour?

The fact is that we are the chosen people of God. We are the church and have a special place in God's heart. That doesn't mean we have to be perfect or sinless; it means that we recognize our need for our Saviour and show others that they need Him also.

Breastplates and Birkenstocks

LOGOS

Exod. 25:1-9, 21, 22; Isa. 56:1-8; Heb. 8:1-13

“Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them” (Exod. 25:8, NIV).

Every Adventist I have ever known has had something to say about the sanctuary. Some view it like the singing of “Auld Lang Sine” on New Year’s Eve—lots of folks are into it, but nobody seems to know what it means. Others picture Jesus in heaven, decked out in ancient tabernacle gear, complete with breastplate and robe. Some see the sanctuary as proprietary information to be disseminated only through underground videos and woodsy camp meetings where everyone wears Birkenstocks or combat boots. Some become frightened at the mere mention of the word, surrounded as it often is with an aura of judgment and guilt. Many simply dismiss the idea of the sanctuary as entirely irrelevant for Christians today. All of these have one thing in common. They miss the point.

What are some of the things you’ve heard said about the sanctuary? What do you think its relevance is for young adult Christians today?

A Relational Structure

“There . . . I will meet with you” (Exod. 25:22).

The foremost thing God wants us to learn from the sanctuary is that it is a visible symbol of His desire to be with us. My daughters find pleasure in the presence of their friends. I like being with my friends. The sanctuary tells us that God does too.

Jehovah is saying, “Hey, people, I want to be with you all the time, so build Me a place where I can stay with you and be involved in your lives.” This is the same God who went “walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (Gen. 3:8) to chat with Adam and Eve. He “became flesh and lived for a while among us” (John 1:14). The same God who wished to be known as “Immanuel— which means, ‘God with us,’” (Matt. 1:23) “was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them” (2 Cor. 5:19). Ultimately, in His eternal plan to be present with His people, God declares His unbreakable connectedness with the human family forever: “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them” (Rev. 21:3).

The biblical idea of sanctuary is more of a relational structure than an architectural one. The building and the furnishings are real, but only intended to provide the context in which the really good stuff takes place—the relational stuff, the redemptive stuff. The altars and the drapes are physical representations or symbols of the ultimate realities, which are relational and spiritual. It is God’s activities, His temporal interactions in the human stream of existence—it is the sanctuary events, in other words—that are of primary importance in understanding the sanctuary message.

When and where do you feel closest to God? How is God’s presence most real to you?

A Good-News Message

“What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31).

One can hardly go anywhere in Scripture without bumping into the idea of the sanctuary. And everywhere we encounter the sanctuary the message is the same—God is here with us and for us. Sanctuary is not primarily a building, it is a Being.

The sanctuary forms the ground of God’s message to us. He is *with* us, here and now. He is *for* us, here and now. And *nothing* can separate us from His love. Incarnation, atonement, grace, sin, and salvation are not mere abstractions. They are relational terms, rooted in historic realities—God’s history and our history having been woven together—precisely because God has chosen to interact with us in time and life-centered ways. It is a good-news message. It is filled with hope.

Where in your life do you most need God’s presence? How is knowing that He will be there for you a source of help to you?

Being There

“We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us” (2 Cor. 5:20).

The sanctuary, symbolizing God’s presence with us and for us, becomes a guiding principle for our calling and mission as a people. If God is present for

Every Adventist I have ever known has had something to say about the sanctuary.

humanity in time and space, then the church’s presence will be known and felt in distinctive ways. We must be there for the people around us. We may be all of the sanctuary they ever see.

Rather than withdrawing from the world, God’s church will seek to interact with the mainstream of humanity in culturally relevant and inclusive ways. By being there for people, especially those who are most in need, we make it possible for people to believe in the ultimate reality that God is there for them too. The sanctuary message becomes more than mere words. We don’t merely proclaim the good news of God’s sanctuary presence; we *become* the good news, serving as Christ serves, caring as Christ cares, being present as He is present.

On a corporate as well as congregational level, the church of Christ must learn to maximize the deployment of its resources toward reaching the peoples and communities to which we are called to witness as living ambassadors of the sanctuary reality. We must learn, in today’s marketplace of ideas, to be customer friendly and culturally aware. This is the sanctuary message at work, through the caring lives of dedicated Christians, in a world that desperately needs to hear the good news of reconciliation in Jesus Christ.

In what ways is God calling you to be there for others? How can you respond? How can your church respond? What do you think such a response will do for your church’s witness in your community?

By John C. Cress, chaplain of Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

“Heirs to the Lord’s Vineyard”

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Hos. 10:1

“Through the Jewish nation it was God’s purpose to impart rich blessings to all peoples. . . . The nations of the world, through following corrupt practices, had lost the knowledge of God. . . . He purposed to give them opportunity for becoming acquainted with Him through His church. . . .”

“God desired to make of His people Israel a praise and a glory. . . . Their obedience to the law of God would make them marvels of prosperity before the nations of the world. . . . If obedient, they would be preserved from the diseases that afflicted other nations, and would be blessed with vigor of intellect. The glory of God, His majesty and power, were to be revealed in all their prosperity. . . .

“But Israel did not fulfill God’s purpose. The Lord declared, . . . ‘Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself.’ Hosea 10:1. . . .

“The Lord had through Moses set before His people the result of unfaithfulness. By refusing to keep His covenant, they would cut themselves off from the life of God, and His blessing could not come upon them. . . .

“They forgot God, and lost sight of their high privilege as His representatives. The blessings they had received brought no blessing to the world. . . . As a people the Jews had failed of fulfilling God’s purpose, and the vineyard was taken from

“The church in this generation has been endowed by God with great privileges.”

them. The privileges they had abused, the work they had slighted, was entrusted to others.

“The parable of the vineyard applies not alone to the Jewish nation. It has a lesson for us. The church in this generation has been endowed by God with great privileges and blessings, and He expects corresponding returns.

“The Lord desires us to appreciate the great plan of redemption, to realize our high privilege as the children of God, and to walk before Him in obedience, with grateful thanksgiving. He desires us to serve Him in newness of life, with gladness every day. He longs to see gratitude welling up in our hearts because our names are written in the Lamb’s book of life, because we may cast all our care upon Him who cares for us. He bids us rejoice because we are the heritage of the Lord, because the righteousness of Christ is the white robe of His saints, because we have the blessed hope of the soon coming of our Saviour.”

REACT

If someone were to visit your branch of the vineyard, what kind of fruit would they find?

**Christ’s Object Lessons, pp. 286, 288, 291, 296, 299.*

By John Cress, chaplain, Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

Finding Hope in the Past

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ps. 77:20

Take five to ten minutes to read Psalm 77. Read it aloud at least once. Listen to the words. Try to get a feel for the movement of the psalm.

The writer of this psalm is deeply distressed in the first section (verses 1-10), most likely about a national disaster. Scholars speculate that this was written during the early exilic period or some other time of distress. God's apparent absence is seriously troubling. Is God still "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands" (Exod. 34:6, 7, RSV)?

God's present apparent uninvolvedness in the situation leads the psalmist to meditate on the past. Remembering God's redemptive acts was a significant part of Israelite culture and worship. The second half records the psalmist's conscious effort to regain courage and hope by remembering both God's power and majesty and His past intervention on behalf of His people.

God does not jump into the history of His people on a whim. He leads His people *daily*. We are a flock—those needing guidance and forgiveness. God provided this literally and symbolically for the Israelites through Moses, the community leader, and Aaron, who became the religious leader through the priesthood. How

Remembering God's redemptive acts was a significant part of Israelite culture and worship.

does God provide this for us today? If He led Israel, surely He is equally concerned with leading spiritual Israel.

Some would see the Adventist Church in a crisis right now. Are we losing our identity? Is "Generation X" going to oust our 27 fundamental beliefs? Do we embody Laodicea? We who are committed to Adventism, regardless of our personal beliefs on controversial issues, do see some sort of an identity crisis and a sudden serious contemplation of our *raison d'être*. Is God abandoning us? Perhaps we can relate to the psalmist's lament.

But the psalmist does not stop there. He goes on to remember God's leading and His mighty deeds. As Christians, we have a tremendously rich history on which to meditate. From the inception of the plan of salvation after the Fall until today, we see evidence of God leading His people and performing mighty deeds on our behalf. Adventists can observe the same. Ellen White penned, "As I see what the Lord has wrought, I am filled with astonishment, and with confidence in Christ as leader. We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history."^{*}

^{*}*Life Sketches*, p. 196.

By Mindy Rodenberg, a religion major at Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

I Realized I Was Wrong!

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 78:5-8

One afternoon three of us set out to conquer a mountain in the Eastern Washington wilderness. Two hours into our excursion, we were lost. I was sure our way was just over the ridge to the right. My friend Jeff was sure that it was to the left. We decided to go straight. We hiked for three hours, getting nowhere. Finally Sherry, the third member of our group, suggested we sit down to determine how we had become lost. Here is what we did.

1. Recognize. We had to recognize that we were lost, admit that we did not know the way back. Most important, I had to realize I was wrong.

2. Remember. We had to remember how we got to where we now stood. After taking the time to do this, we were able to begin trying to retrace our steps. We collectively determined the wrong turns and side trails.

3. Reorganize. We decided that the best plan was to use all our ideas combined to figure out the way back. If we were each to go our own way, we would more than

We hiked for three hours, getting nowhere.

likely become even more lost. We set as our goal as a group, getting back to camp before dark.

After we sat down and decided to do these three things, the hike back was easy. We worked together to discover where we had made detours and become lost. We found our way back to camp in two hours!

The Israelites became lost because they took too many side trails (idols, etc.), not recognizing that they were wrong. They forgot what God had done for them, and—most devastating—they forgot whom they were supposed to represent.

REACT

1. How can we as a church keep our focus on Jesus Christ?
2. What can you do in your own life to keep your own goals in line with God's goals?
3. When I feel as though I've been abandoned by God, what are some specific things I can remember about God's leading and direct involvement in my life?
4. What are specific things God has done for the Adventist Church?

By Kirk Doty, assistant chaplain, Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

Why Israel?

OPINION

Key Text: Isa. 56:1-8

Why did God choose to single out one race to be His people? Did the Egyptians annoy Him? Did the Syrians not meet His requirements to be His chosen few? Perhaps the children of Israel needed God's guidance more than the other races did. Let's face it, slavery in Egypt was no party.

Although I will never understand why God chose Israel above all others, I believe it is important to focus on whom God has chosen as His people for today—the Seventh-day Adventist Church, of course. Oh, now, don't deny it. I've heard the words *Catholic* and *Baptist* and *New-ager* used by myself and fellow church members on occasion as if they were swear words. So, obviously, our church must be superior to all others. Seventh-day Adventists are simply lucky enough to have found the "true" truth. Everyone else is wrong.

The children of Israel lived in a time when it was culturally acceptable to kill those who believed in Ashtoreth or Baal or Osiris. Our church, however, is not nearly as barbaric. We simply choose to ignore them. We kill them by pretending they and their beliefs do not exist.

I've never been to mass at a Catholic church. I have no idea what Baptists be-

Seventh-day Adventists are simply lucky enough to have found the "true" truth.

lieve. I never understood the pantheon of Hindu gods and goddesses. For me, their religion and theology do not exist, because I was raised to believe in the "true" truth.

Aren't we, as a church, being a bit arrogant to assume that our church is God's new chosen people? Why did Christ die on the cross if He were simply going to choose another group to be the chosen?

Christ died to reverse the idea of a "chosen people." This time around it is not God who chose His people, but people who chose their God.

REACT

1. If people believe they have found the truth, even though their version of truth might differ from yours or mine, have they found it? For example, if a devout Buddhist is the best Buddhist she can be, has she found truth?

2. Israel needed the three Rs: revival, repentance, and reformation. Could the same be said of our church today?

By Mark Trussell, a mass-communications graduate of Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

ALL FOR ONE AND ONE FOR ALL



“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18, NKJV).

The Rest of the Building

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 Cor. 3:11

The sound of clashing swords could be heard in the quiet night as they whispered together. "It is time," one of them said, and they lifted their swords high and shouted, "All for one and one for all!" and charged toward the enemy.

The three musketeers may have been real or fictional, but whichever, their cry has become famous. As a child I loved reading about their adventures, their bravery and loyalty to one another. They would do anything for one another, even if it meant fighting to the death. To die for a best friend seems unimaginable, but Jesus Christ died for all, even those who scorned Him, mocked Him, and crucified Him. His love is so vast that He died for those who will never accept Him. Jesus was the one who died for all, and He would like us all to accept Him.

In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul speaks of the church as having only one foundation, Jesus Christ, the one who died for us. The foundation of a building is its most important part, for it holds the rest together and prevents it from falling apart. If the foundation is not good or strong enough, the building will not stand for long. The church has a strong foundation, Jesus Christ, on which the rest of the structure can be based. We are the rest of the building. Do we have a strong foundation? What are our lives built on?

The foundation of a building is its most important part.

Ever hear this before?

"Oh, I really am sorry, but I'm far too busy this week. Anyway, isn't it his job?"

Jesus is the Rock on which our lives must be built. Without Him as the center of our lives, we become selfish and preoccupied with things that we consider important. We become far too busy to talk to God, let alone spend time with Him, listening for Him to tell us His will. God has tasks for us all to do and has given us talents with which to carry out those tasks, but without knowing Him personally and letting Him rule our lives we do not hear what He wishes us to do.

Christ is the foundation of the church *and* our lives. Only through Him can we reveal His character and love to those around us.

By Lynn Retallick, an assistant accountant from Rogerstone, Newport, Awent, Wales.

Building Stones and Foundation Rock

LOGOS

1 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:18-22; 1 Pet. 2:6-8

“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18, NKJV).

It was school summer holidays. The sun was splitting the sky, a perfect day for the beach. There I was digging a trench with my dad, a builder. It was hard going, and I wondered why we had to dig down so far. “Foundations are important,” Dad said. “If we don’t have a solid foundation, the walls will sink, and the house will fall! We have to dig down to stable ground and then lay a base foundation of concrete on which to build.” His words reminded me of the choruses I had sung in church as a child: “Don’t build your house on the sandy land” and “The wise man built his house upon the rock.”

The church Jesus came to establish on earth also needed a solid foundation! When He spoke to Peter about the rock on which He would build His church, Jesus was playing on words to make a point. Peter was originally called “Simon the son of Jona” (see John 1:42, KJV) but when he met Jesus for the first time, he was renamed Cephas (Aramaic) or Petros (Greek) by Jesus. This new name had a new meaning. *Simon* means “hearing,” but *Peter* means “a piece of rock, a stone.”

In Matthew 16, Jesus and the disciples had been talking about who He was. Peter had responded with the words, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (verse 16, NIV). Jesus pointed out that this correct identification came to Peter as a revelation from God. He then referred to the building of His church. It was to be built, not on a stone, but on the solid rock [Greek = *Petra*]. The fact that Peter was a stone that could easily be moved is seen just a few verses later (21-23) where Jesus had to rebuke him as a mouthpiece for Satan. Some time later, after vigorously claiming he wouldn’t, Peter vehemently denied Jesus three times (26:69-75). Yet the material that Peter the stone was made of was worth preserving, for, when built upon the foundation of solid rock, it would become part of the church that would not be overcome.

Paul identifies what or who the solid rock is. Speaking of the Israelites during the wilderness wandering, he says, “All did drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ” (1 Cor. 10:4). That Paul saw Jesus as the rock upon whom the church is built is clear when he says, “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus” (3:11, NKJV). For Paul, who had once persecuted the followers of Christ, Jesus had become the rock of solid foundation. Then in Ephesians 2:20-22, Paul speaks of people being brought together as the household of God: “Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.” Without that cornerstone, there would be no foundation, no building, no holy temple in the Lord. For Paul, life without Christ Jesus the rock was life without God.

No less was true for Peter. He saw Jesus as “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense” (1 Pet. 2:8) that had been predicted by Isaiah. He knew from his own

experience that it was easy to stumble over Jesus. Yet, he also knew the solidity of the rock that became the chief cornerstone. Having been a stone tossed about, Peter became fixed to that cornerstone. Once fixed, he sought out other stones to bring to Christ, "as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious" (verse 4), that they, "as living stones" (verse 5), might be "built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (verse 5).

"Make sure you dig down to solid ground!" said my dad and so says our heavenly Father. As young people living in the 1990s, we need a solid foundation on which to build our lives. Jesus Christ, Son of God, our Saviour and Lord, is such a foundation. It takes a lot of effort to build a solid foundation for a house. Jesus put in that effort for us at Calvary. He has been made the cornerstone on which our lives can be built, if we so choose. Jesus the Rock still makes people stumble and fall, so that self can be broken and made whole in Him. The alternative

"Foundations are important," Dad said.

is to resist Him and be crushed by the solid rock that will grind all things and then grow to fill the whole earth (see Matt. 21:42-44; Dan. 2:34, 35, 44, 45).

Come as a stone to Jesus, and be built on that solid foundation, and you will become part of that living building that will never pass away.

REACT

1. If you had been Peter, would you have objected to Jesus' changing your name and calling you a stone? Explain your answer.

2. How do stones in a building aptly symbolize the members of a church?

3. How is stumbling over the cornerstone a negative experience? How is it positive?

4. Knowing that the church is built on the body of Christ, how should we react to political debate or power struggles within the church?

5. If Christ is the foundation of the church, then what or who are the walls, ceiling, and roof?

6. What alternative foundations do people try to build on?

By Paul S. Lockham, pastor of a two-church district and youth sponsor for the Welsh Mission, Caerphilly, Mid Glamorgan, Wales.

Christ Our Rock and Our Responsibility

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Isa. 28:16

“On this rock,” said Jesus, “I will build My church” (Matt. 16:18, NKJV). In the presence of God and all the holy intelligences, in the presence of the unseen army of hell, Christ founded His church upon the living rock. That rock is Himself—His own body, for us broken and bruised. Against the church built upon this foundation, the gates of hell shall not prevail.

“How feeble the church appeared when Christ spoke these words! There was only a handful of believers, against whom all the power of demons and evil men would be directed; yet the followers of Christ were not to fear. Built upon the Rock of their strength, they could not be overthrown.”¹

“All who receive the life of Christ are ordained to work for the salvation of their fellow men. For this work the church was established, and all who take upon themselves its sacred vows are thereby pledged to be co-workers with Christ.”²

“During His ministry, Jesus had kept constantly before the disciples the fact that they were to be one with Him in His work for the recovery of the world from the slavery of sin. When He sent forth the twelve and afterward the seventy, to

“How feeble the church appeared when Christ spoke these words!”

proclaim the kingdom of God, He was teaching them their duty to impart to others what He had made known to them. In all His work, He was training them for individual labor, to be extended as their numbers increased, and eventually to reach to the uttermost parts of the earth. The last lesson He gave His followers was that they held in trust for the world the glad tidings of salvation.”³

As members of the true church, built upon the body and sacrifice of Christ, we should accept the commission of Christ to “go . . . and make disciples of all the nations” (Matt. 28:19). We should not be content to rest secure against the power of demons and evil men while others know nothing of Christ or His ministry.

“‘The keys of the kingdom of heaven’ are the words of Christ. All the words of Holy Scripture are His, and are here included. These words have power to open and to shut heaven. They declare the conditions upon which men are received or rejected. Thus the work of those who preach God’s word is a savor of life unto life or of death unto death. Theirs is a mission weighted with eternal results.”⁴

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 413.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 822.

3. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 32.

4. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 413, 414.

By Richard Down, a third-year design and technology student at Manchester Metropolitan University, England.

Foundations

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 1 Cor. 3:10, 11

At 5:46 a.m. on Tuesday, January, 17, 1995, an earthquake, measuring 7.1 on the Richter scale, hit Kobe, Japan, killing more than 5,000 people and leaving 300,000 homeless. It would be wrong to say that all the deaths and homelessness could have been prevented. But it is accurate to say that with good foundations, there would have been far fewer casualties and less damage to homes. You cannot overstress the importance of good foundations.

We can tell from the Bible that Christ is our foundation, but how do we know that He is strong enough to take the burdens? Will He buckle under pressure? When the storms of temptation come and shake the structure, will the foundation hold? Looking to the Bible for the answers, we find:

“The Lord God says, See, I am placing a Foundation Stone in Zion—a firm, tested, precious Cornerstone that is safe to build on” (Isa. 28:16, TLB). “To those who believe, Christ is a sure foundation. Upon this living stone, Jews and Gentiles alike may build. It is broad enough for all, and strong enough to sustain the weight and burden of the whole world.”*

We have no doubt that foundations are very important in the construction of a building. The church has one foundation, that is Jesus Christ our Lord, and so Jesus

An earthquake, measuring 7.1 on the Richter scale, hit Kobe, Japan.

is essential in building a church. But so often Jesus is neglected, forgotten, set aside for more “important” things like tradition and keeping the law. There is nothing wrong with keeping the law or with tradition, but they should be carried out with Jesus at the center of them.

When I bought Christmas cards, I noticed how few actually have the nativity scene on them. It is sad that we are so busy keeping the Christmas tradition we have forgotten the reason for the holiday, presents, and festivities.

I have heard a lot of criticism about the church being too formal, about how this detracts from God. But couldn't being too informal also detract from God? I think that we need to find a balance of the two and always try to keep our minds centered upon Jesus. If you think there is too much tradition, then instead of trying to get rid of it, try to review the reasons behind the tradition, and always to keep those in mind when observing that tradition.

Christ is the foundation of the church. As a building is useless without foundations, so the church is useless without Christ. It is important, therefore, to keep Christ at the center of everything we do and say.

* *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 175.

By Jason Clee, first-year mechanical-engineering student at Cardiff University, Wales.

The Absolute Necessity for Jesus Christ

HOW-TO

Key Text: Rom. 1:20

Today it is immensely profound to insist that the one and only foundation of the church is Jesus Christ. Consider the following:

1. Other foundations. People try to build their lives on foundations other than Jesus, at the same time suggesting many false reasons for the church's existence. They attempt to explain away in sociological or scientific language the fact that Christ is living and active, through His Spirit, building His church. Many claiming to follow Him use the words of His name, but deny who He really is. They seek to explain away His *real* history: virgin birth, sinless life, miracles, death, and resurrection. They thus are left with Jesus as just a good man.

2. An absolute in a world of shades of gray. To insist that Christ is our one foundation is to proclaim He is alive and with the Father in heaven. It means building our lives and faith on the fact that God really exists and has taken the initiative to meet our fallen condition and reconcile us to Himself. There are no gray shades in God's existence; it is black and white fact! Humanity makes everything negotiable—shades of gray. Claiming degrees of rightness and wrongness, they see only degrees of certainty and uncertainty. From this position all morals are on a gray scale and everyone his own arbiter of right and wrong. Without a living

There are no gray shades in God's existence.

absolute, Christ, they can have no moral absolute. Scripture meets this head on. God explains the created order and the complexity of the world around us. No one is excused by God for denying His existence on the basis of this evidence (Rom. 1:20).

Not only does God exist, but He has not remained silent. He reached out to us. "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9, RSV). In Jesus there is indisputable evidence, not only of God's existence, but of His character, as well. The questions, "Why am I here?" "Where did I come from?" "How can I find meaning in life?" can be answered only by accepting the absolute of God as revealed through His Son. Looking for true answers elsewhere is building upon shifting sand. The solid truth is that Jesus Christ is the foundation for life now! We have a firm place to stand, and to build for eternity, in a generation that is fumbling around in the half-light of shades of gray and confusion.

REACT

1. What is the basis of the biblical moral absolute, as contained in the Ten Commandments?
2. How does this differ from the basis modern humankind uses to define right and wrong?

By Duncan Bayliss, university lecturer in environmental management, Bristol, England.

Peace and Safety?

OPINION

Key Text: 1 Thess. 5:3

You step out of your cabin and breathe the sea air. Walking to the side of the ship, you lean on the rail, gazing out to sea. The spray of the waves catching the light of the moon falls like millions of pearls into the depths. A company of friends pass by and offer evening greetings. Staring up at the mighty clouds and down at the sturdy vessel below, everything seems peaceful and safe.

You walk over to a group of friends and join in the conversation. After a while some bid you goodnight; others carry on to some planned amusement. As you watch them go, your eye catches sight of a life raft. In the dark you can't quite read the letters. You wander over, and by the light from a nearby cabin you just manage to read: *S. S. Titanic*.

How peaceful—how safe—do you feel now?

Though seemingly impossible, the destruction of the *Titanic* was imminent. Those on board truly believed she was unsinkable. Its owners claimed, "Not even God can sink her." Yet the moment she left port she was a doomed ship. What a fatal lie to believe! To trust your life to something like that!

Sadly, billions are today doing the same. They are trusting, living, lusting after

The moment she left port she was a doomed ship.

this world, which will soon meet with a rock not hewn with hands that will cut short its life, just as surely as that of the *Titanic*. "While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly" (1 Thess. 5:3, NIV).

To set yourself upon the wrong foundation can be—will be—fatal! If you are trusting in any other than Jesus—a way of life, a person, anything—no matter how innocent it seems or how many excuses make it seem right, you are in danger of being deceived. Soon a disaster dwarfing that of the *Titanic* will come upon the world, whether we believe it or not, whether we're ready or not. Are we doing all we can to prepare ourselves? We have the hindsight; some others do not.

And what about those who don't know what we do? Are we telling them about Jesus, His hope for this world, His answer to the pain and sorrows of everyday life?

A most horrifying fact emerging from a recent documentary was that when the alarm was sounded aboard the *Titanic*, gates constructed on board were locked, separating the poor from the wealthy. So while the wealthy made escape in the lifeboats, the poor were condemned to death.

Are we doing the same? Do we withhold God's last message of mercy because we're too caught up in self?

"I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'" (Isa. 6:8).

By Michael Sheppard, a window cleaner from Newport, Gwent, Wales.

EXPLOSIVE GROWTH



“And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:33, NKJV).

“What Shall We Do?”

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Acts 2:37

After sin entered this earth, God sought people who were willing to choose His side. Noah, Abraham, Moses, Esther, Deborah, and others in the Bible are notable examples. And He chose a people: Israel. God’s purpose was that His people should defend Him by offering salvation through the Messiah.

Because Israel failed as His people, God established a universal church with the same purpose. It has no other mission than to make salvation known through the cross of Jesus Christ. This is a great honor the Lord has given His people.

At first the church fulfilled its commission. When Jesus died, only a few remained faithful. In the upper room only 120 persons were present (Acts 1:15). Then only 10 days after receiving the Holy Spirit, 3,000 persons were added (2:41), and membership later reached 5,000—not counting women and children (4:4).

In Acts 5:14 the writer did not know how many had been added to the church but mentions a “multitude” (NKJV). Finally he speaks of “thousands” and describes the number of converts, literally in the tens of thousands (21:20, NIV).

How did such marvelous growth take place? The Bible tells us that in the upper room those 120 disciples fought against sin and resolved their differences. They set aside their pride, their selfish ambitions, and their preeminent desires.

Because Israel failed as His people, God established a universal church.

Jesus Christ meant a marvelous awakening for them. Without a doubt, He was the Messiah. The intimate relationship with the Master during those last 40 days, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, gave His message a new dimension. They spoke with such force and gave such a testimony of what they had seen and heard that listeners were convinced by the Holy Spirit to exclaim, “What shall we do?” (2:37, NKJV).

The gospel was explosively successful; God’s power internally possessed them. That same power has been promised to us. “Before the final visitation of God’s judgments upon the earth there will be among the people of the Lord such a revival of primitive godliness as has not been witnessed since apostolic times.”

For the church to speak again with the power of the Holy Spirit, we need to live an intimate experience with Jesus. We have to desire a new Pentecost. Just as then, we are to resolve our differences now by uprooting pride, selfish ambition, and the desire to occupy powerful positions in the church. Now, as never before, the Lord needs a people who can declare to the world the salvation Jesus won on Calvary.

**The Great Controversy, p. 464.*

“All With One Accord”

LOGOS

Acts 2; 14:21-27

“They were all with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1, NKJV).

If there is any book in the Bible that teaches us better than any other the method of establishing churches, it is the book of Acts of the Apostles.

This book, written by the evangelist Luke, belongs to a volume that contains the history of the origins of Christianity. In that passionate history, two parts are clearly shown. The first part is dedicated to the activity of the earthly Messiah (the third gospel). The second part portrays the glorified Messiah (the Acts of the Apostles) who would continue His work through the preaching of His messengers, thanks to the Holy Spirit.

In the second chapter of Acts we witness the unleashing of a chain reaction that would end with the birth of the Christian church. This happens in the Gospels shortly after we see a group of scared men hiding in Jerusalem. But we ask: How can a handful of men meeting clandestinely establish the early Christian church?

Continuing Unity in Prayer (1:14)

Christ’s disciples were filled at that time with joy and hope, despite their Master’s having ascended into heaven. They had seen their Saviour resurrected, and they were now waiting for His promises to be fulfilled.

They should patiently wait in Jerusalem until an extraordinary miracle took place, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. While they were waiting, the voice of Christ was still echoing in their ears. They remembered the lessons He had taught them during the three years of His earthly ministry, and they only regretted that they could not relive those three years with their Master. How they would have changed their attitude regarding Him!

During that period in Jerusalem, the disciples were not idly waiting with folded arms, but “the disciples prayed with intense earnestness for a fitness to meet men, and in their daily intercourse to speak words that would lead sinners to Christ.” Christ’s love had penetrated their hearts, and now they were thinking of offering the way of eternal life to others. They now needed to receive the Holy Spirit to approach others. They already felt that need. Do we feel the same need today?

Speaking in Other Tongues (2:4)

When God confused the languages at the tower of Babel, somehow He allowed the pagan nations to revert to second place on the stage of the Holy Scriptures. However, from the beginning of the book of Acts, the Gentiles became protagonists in the New Testament. Pentecost is a certain counterpoint to the tower of Babel because it unites the different human races around the Lord; Babel, on the other hand, is the sign of dispersion of those evil nations. Jerusalem, that crossroad of three continents, was the place designated by God’s strategy to begin the conquest of the earth. That is why Jesus asked His disciples to remain there, despite being persecuted. In that way they could preach with power to those “dwelling at Jerusalem . . . devout men, out of every nation under heaven” (verse 5). In that way a new polyglot and multiracial church was founded, most of all united around its Founder and Lord.

Maintaining Unity in Growth

“When they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed” (14:23).

The texts that speak of the places where the gospel had reached show the precision and accuracy of the writer. Luke carefully considered all the geographical details to show the concern God has when He plans a well-organized church. Once more God reveals Himself as a God of order. Paul was elected as one of His principal organizers, but the world councils appointed the delegates for the world field. That is the way those few men founded the early Christian church. That church still exists today. Its history is written in the book of Acts and in the heavenly record where each of us is called to participate in spreading the gospel. “They that were

The disciples were not idly waiting with folded arms.

scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” (8:4).

REACT

1. On what specific principles was the early Christian church established?
2. In what respects, if any, did Paul’s view of church organization differ from that of Peter?
3. What aspects of the early church would you like to see more of in today’s church?
4. What is the difference between being responsible for one another and being codependent?
5. Why are some of the doctrines that we consider fundamental (the Sabbath, the investigative judgment, health reform) not mentioned explicitly in the doctrinal formulations of the New Testament?
6. To whom or what do you attribute the spectacular success of the early church?

**The Acts of the Apostles, p. 37.*

By Jose M. Weindl, assistant editor and designer, Safeliz Publishing House, Madrid, Spain.

Founded on the Written Word

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Acts 2:1

Have you ever thought about organizing a church? Have you ever asked, How would I do it? We cannot say that the disciples and apostles of the first century had a special talent to organize the early Christian church. None of them had a degree in ecclesiastical sciences, and none of them had a doctorate in sociology of religion. Neither did they have any experience in this field.

Have you ever asked yourself how they could start a worldwide religious movement? In chapter nine of her book *The Acts of the Apostles*, Ellen White singles out some of the successful secrets of the early Christian church pioneers:

1. Unity with Christ. Only in the measure that they were united with Christ could the disciples expect that the power of the Holy Spirit and the cooperation of the heavenly angels would accompany them.¹

2. Constant growth. Preaching the gospel to all the known world was the priority activity of the first Christians. Wherever they found sincere souls ready to give themselves to the service of Christ, they established a community of believers, a church.

3. Learning from the ages. The same principles of piety and justice that

None of the disciples had a degree in ecclesiastical sciences

guided the leaders of God's people in the time of Moses and David should also be followed by those to whom the vigilance of the recently organized church of God in the gospel dispensation had been given.²

The organization of the apostolic church was not improvised; instead, it was based on the principles that God had revealed to Moses and the prophets. Undoubtedly, the diligent study of the written word available at that time, the Old Testament, was of great help to the disciples and apostles when they established that powerful church.

REACT

1. If you were called upon to help organize a new church, how would you proceed?
2. How can we know what is approved by God in the organization of a church?

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 91.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

Catholic and Apostolic

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Acts 2; 14:21-28

“They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42, NKJV). Ecclesiastical and individual faith should be built on the “foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*” (Eph. 2:20; see Gal. 1:8, 9).

A great Spanish writer said: “This discourse of Peter [Acts 2:14-36] inaugurates the Christian apologetic, and in it we can see the outline of what would become the apostolic preaching or *kerigma*.”* Therefore, we find ourselves contemplating a defense of the faith by Peter, mobilized by the power of the Spirit (verses 7-12).

Considering that Peter was addressing an audience of Jewish believers, in his sermon he tries to clear up discrepancies and misunderstandings. He asserts that: (1) God’s people have always been guided prophetically (verse 17); (2) the remnant people have always lived in the shadow of the judgment (verse 20); (3) salvation has always been through grace (verse 21); (4) the core of his message was the resurrection and exaltation of Christ (verses 31-33); and (5) his conclusion was to exhort the listeners to believe in the Lord as the Messiah (verse 36).

The direct testimony of the apostles, evaluated against the predictions of the

This community, God’s people, ceased to have an ethnic cohesion.

Old Testament prophets, produces an influx of faithful into a community, the church, united in faith (verse 47). This offers a greater testimony of the Crucified One, whom “God hath made . . . both Lord and Christ” (verse 36, NIV), moved by the Spirit, and continues to follow a given structure and order (14:22, 23). This community, God’s people, ceased to have an ethnic cohesion, to be transformed into the catholic; that is, universal, which becomes manifest by the acceptance of the Gentiles (14:27; cf. 11:18).

REACT

1. What changes and adjustments do I have to make so that my faith and practice may become universal and apostolic?
2. In what ways should our church look like the church of the apostles?
3. Are there some aspects in which we should be different from that of the early Christians? Explain your answer.

* Professors of the Pontifical University of Salamanca, *Biblia Comentada* (Bible Commentary), 2nd edition (Madrid: BAC [Library of Christian Authors, 1975]), p. 43.

“Return to Your First Works”

HOW-TO

Key Text: Acts 2:42

When you study the life of the apostolic church, as you are doing this week, do you feel envy? Miracles! Powerful sermons! Spectacular results! Genuine communion with one another! Stupendous personal experiences!

However, there is no place for envy: “Before the final visitation of God’s judgments upon the earth there will be among the people of the Lord such a revival of primitive godliness as has not been witnessed since apostolic times.” We are those privileged people!

Yes, but the question is *how*. It does not seem easy, does it? It really does not have to be easy or difficult. That extraordinary life of the early Christians was basically spontaneous, like all genuine things. How did they achieve that?

1. **“And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42).** They were not passive believers. They wanted to learn more, and they lived what they accepted.

2. **They lived in fellowship (verse 42).** Those believers had a clear concept of belonging. Fellowship implies much more than just being together. They identified themselves with a group of people with whom they shared ideals. Verse 42 suggests that they got together frequently to eat (breaking bread was more than

Fellowship implies much more than just being together.

just partaking of the Lord’s Supper).

3. **“They continued stedfastly . . . in prayers” (verse 42).** The modern life can trap us in such a way that without determination we will not be men and women of prayer—as they were. They could face the problems of life because they had sought God first. Frequently we wish to reach personal goals through our own efforts. But if we let God participate, our own efforts will be reduced, and the results will improve. In the case of these believers it was spectacular.

4. **“They had all things common” (verse 44).** Maybe they learned this habit from Jesus and His disciples. Can one imagine greater solidarity and generosity? The early Christians perfectly understood the extraordinary evangelical novelty: to be close to your fellowmen is to be close to God. Doesn’t Matthew 25:40 say as much? “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”

5. **They did not forget to praise God (verse 47).** The new personal experiences fully satisfied their most intimate needs, and that motivated their gratitude and praise to God. They could not fail to praise the One who was the source of their security and hope!

**The Great Controversy*, p. 464.

We've Got the Power

OPINION

Key Text: Eph. 4:7-16; Acts 1:4, 5; 2:1-4

The apostle Paul uses the metaphor of a body to represent the church. Each individual in the church has a specific function to perform according to the gifts and talents God gives to us. Jesus, the Master Mind of this body, uses the individual's talents and gifts, if we let Him, for a single purpose—salvation.

Jesus promised His Holy Spirit, His Power, to His church (Acts 1:4, 5). The apostles and other believers who were in the upper room on the day of Pentecost received Him. Is His church ready to receive Him today? Are you ready to receive Him?

Even though we may not have received the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit as the believers at Pentecost did, as His church and as individuals, we have an amazing potential that we don't know how to use, or even worse, we don't dare use it.

At some stage in our lives we may consider what we may do for Jesus and for His church. It seems as though we fail to see what our talents are. When you find out which gifts God gave you, not the gifts that you would have liked God to give you, it is as if everything becomes suddenly right. Have you tried letting God take complete control of your life? This may sound hypothetical to some, but it is probably because they have never tried to leave their lives completely in Jesus' hands before.

Some of our church members are using the information highway to reach one another.

Are we using all the means available to us to preach His gospel. I've heard of people worrying about how we don't conduct as many evangelistic campaigns as we used to, but is this the only way of spreading the gospel?

Imagine Paul in our time, with all our new technologies. Would he just keep on walking from town to town, preaching in the city squares or in big halls? God has given us not only our personal talents to serve Him better, but also all the available means: media, technology, computers, travel, and many others. Have you thought what multimedia could do to spread the gospel? Already, some of our church members are using the information highway to reach one another and keep in touch. What a way to keep united with other fellow Adventists around the world! Furthermore, why not use those means to reach others as well?

Are you one of those talented young people who finds himself lost, having to use your "modern gifts" in secular activities when you could be using those gifts more profitably for the winning of souls? I was one of them, but now I am exercising my gift, to the best of my abilities, for His work, and you can do it too. Only when we learn that the Holy Spirit is given to each one according to one's capacity and that each one has a function in the body of the church, no matter how radical our gift may be, we will be united and ready to receive Him.

By Benjamin I. Galindo, production and systems, Safeliz Publishing House, Madrid, Spain.

REACHING OUT



“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8, NKJV).

Blessed to Be a Blessing

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Gen. 12:2

"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing" (Gen. 12:2, NIV).

Recently, I saw new meaning in this verse. This was not just God's promise to Abraham the patriarch. It was given to all God's people as a blueprint for building up the kingdom of God. The following passage fills in the details for me: "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.'"^{*}

God trained Abraham to be this kind of missionary. Take a few moments to peruse the book of Genesis again. The stories there reveal God molding Abraham into a patriarch who mingled with his new neighbors, desiring their good and showing a Christlike example. He showed his sympathy to their needs, freely helping even when doing so meant going to war. He ministered to those with physical needs, such as in the well-known story of the visiting angels. Boldly he built altars of worship to God, which stood as a witness to the power of the true

Abraham ministered to those with physical needs.

God. We know the rest of the story, especially how these results were reversed when Israel ignored God's instructions and turned inward.

Ask yourself, "Am I willing for God to change me so that I can be like Abraham? Do I want to be so involved in other people's lives?" Reading carefully, we see the Bible is full of stories in which God's people became involved. Boldly they intruded with the love of God; carefully they listened for directives from the Holy Spirit. We can do the same. That is our mission.

Weimar Institute's focus on mission through service gave me fantastic opportunities. I began to understand God's mission for me as I counseled people about lifestyle change during large conventions across California. I realized my need for further study and growth while presenting healthful cooking classes in the community. I felt the power of the Holy Spirit as I spoke to guests in the cafeteria about things I had so recently learned for myself. I couldn't answer all the questions. But God could. I couldn't solve all the problems. But I could be interested, encouraging, prayerful.

God wants to bless you and make you a blessing to the world. Are you ready?

^{*}*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.

By Holly Miller, a massage therapist with Weimar Institute's NEWSTART Lifestyle Program, Weimar, California.

Go!

LOGOS

Gen. 12:1-3; Matt. 28:16-20; Acts 1, 2

The Original Commission (Gen. 12:1-3)

The first person God asks to “go” is Abram (later Abraham). God asks Abram to leave his father’s family, all his relatives, even his home country. He is told to go to some place—unknown to himself—that God would show him. If he does this, God promises that He will make of Abram a great nation. Abram is also promised that God will bless him and make his name great. Actually, through Abram’s family, God would extend this blessing to “all the families of the earth.” Therefore, if Abram would go to the place that God shows him, through this, God would bring blessings to every other family on earth.

The Apostolic Commission (Matt. 28:16-20)

Through a particular member of Abram’s family the commission is given again. At the end of His ministry, Jesus tells His disciples to “go.” To just a handful of faithful friends, Jesus gives this commission to leave the comfort of their homes and communities to go out to strange and unknown places where He would lead them. But this time they are not promised to be made into a great nation, nor is it *their* name that would be made great. They are to go and make disciples of anyone who would respond to the good news about Jesus and what He has done for humanity. This mission would take them to every people group on our planet. Those who responded by being baptized and growing in a teachable spirit (verses 19, 20) would enjoy the blessings promised to Abram so long ago. Finally, to this Jesus adds another promise, that they would never be without His presence—even to the end of the world.

Marching Orders: “Wait” (Acts 1:1-11)

We are told that just before Christ’s ascension, “He had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen” (verse 2, RSV). It says that “He charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father” (verse 4). Jesus explains to them that this was a special baptism, not with water, but with the Holy Spirit, who would come, “before many days” (verse 5).

Could this be what Jesus meant when He said that He would be with them always? Jesus responded to their wondering by pointing out that they were not to know all the details of what God was going to do for them, but they could be sure that the Spirit was going to come on them, and when it did they must act. “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth” (verses 7, 8). On this note the disciples saw their Leader rise off the ground and float into the clouds.

Pentecost—the Realization of the Promise (Acts 1:12-2:47)

When Jesus tells His disciples to wait in Jerusalem, they do just that. But while

they are waiting for the Spirit, they are active. To be adequately prepared, they pray continually and take care of the business of replacing Judas (1:14-26). Evidently these things are vital ingredients to their preparation for the coming Spirit. Now, about ten days after Jesus is taken up, the disciples are together on the day of the Feast of Pentecost (2:1). On this occasion, the Spirit comes suddenly with tongues of fire resting on the disciples while the tongues in their mouths are loosened, giving them the ability to speak in other languages (verses 3, 4). Now filled with the dynamic power of God's own Spirit, they are ready to go!

At this point Peter delivers a sermon on the meaning of this fantastic event, pointing out that Jesus' disciples are not drunk, but that they are the recipients of a promise made long ago by God. Through the prophet Joel (2:28-32), God promised that He would pour His Spirit out on everyone with supernatural effects, and they were seeing this coming true right before their eyes! But the best part is that this is only a sidelight. The main event was going on in heaven! Jesus, who had not long before been unjustly tortured and executed, has risen from the dead and ascended to the courts of heaven to take His rightful place on a throne where He reigns over the entire universe (Acts 2:33-36). And on that same throne, Jesus is

The first person God asks to "go" is Abram.

able to provide forgiveness for their sins and with it the gift of the Holy Spirit that had been promised so long before (verse 38). "For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him. . . . Save yourselves from this crooked generation!" (verses 39, 40).

In response to this appeal, about 3,000 people were baptized and disciplined (verses 41, 42). To these many more were added every day (verse 47). "They sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need" (verse 45), and they came together in the temple and in one another's homes for meals and fellowship. This group of believers experienced phenomenal growth, economic equality, a strong sense of community, and abundant happiness. With this movement God would bring blessing to every family on earth.

REACT

1. Do you think that the scenario presented in Acts 2:43-47 could be repeated in our time? Explain your answer.

2. As Abram represents the first generation of witnesses, are we to be the final generation?

3. What can *you* do to help carry the gospel to the whole world so that Jesus may soon return?

4. What factors make it difficult for you to reach your peers with the gospel?

5. What are the possible solutions to your difficulties?

6. If your church does not have a systematic outreach plan, what steps can *you* take to promote your witnessing ideas and strategies?

7. What, if any, are the outward and inward evidences of entire surrender to God?

By Tim Watson, religion teacher at Weimar College, Weimar, California.

Call to Action

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Acts 1:8

God has appointed His church the agency for the proclamation of the three angels' messages. The end will not come until the church has fulfilled this mission in warning the world. We are to witness "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8, NIV).

Consider the two major thoughts presented in today's text. First, we have power to witness *only* as the Holy Spirit moves us. Second, a progressive order of evangelism is suggested, beginning with Jerusalem and moving outward to the uttermost parts of the earth. The possible comparisons are numerous. Jerusalem could be thought of as our immediate family or our local church, for example. Today Samaria might mean for us all of Christendom. The uttermost parts of the earth may be seen as the non-Christian peoples of this world.

God has a great work for the church to do. "They are not to be pronounced Babylon, but to be as the salt of the earth, the light of the world. They are to be the living messengers to proclaim a living message in these last days."¹

To whom is this great mission given? Each member should be a missionary, whether at home or abroad. "The entire church, acting as one, blending in perfect

Each member should be a missionary, whether at home or abroad.

union, is to be a living, active missionary agency, moved and controlled by the Holy Spirit."²

Let us possess that great missionary nature that the Lord designs His church to have. Let us each ask ourselves whether we are doing our part to further the gospel mission. "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14, NIV). How much could be accomplished if every person were an active missionary! "Shall we not heed His voice? Shall we not trim our lamps, and act like men who look for their Lord to come? The time is one that calls for light bearing, for action."³ God is waiting on us to proclaim His message to the "uttermost parts of the earth," so that the work may be finished and He can return.

REACT

What does being "living messengers" with a "living message" suggest?

1. *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 67.
2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 47.
3. *Maranatha*, p. 159.

By Libby DeLong, a business-management major with a religion minor at Weimar College, Weimar, California.

Go! Glow! Grow!

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Acts 1:8

Biblical history is fraught with examples of what happens when there is a centralizing of power and influence. One of God's first commands given to the fresh-from-the-earth couple was to "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28, KJV). After the great Flood, multitudes massed together in defiance of this command, and the tower of Babel resulted. To force the multitudes to spread as God intended, He confused their language.

When the lineage of Abraham refused to be a blessing to the nations surrounding them, God allowed these same nations to overpower them as a means of rekindling their first love. And after a few short years when the apostles began to lose their missionary vision, having evangelized only Jerusalem, God permitted persecution to help disperse the church into unentered territory (Acts 1:8). The lesson was repeated again in A.D. 70 at the destruction of Jerusalem.

The apostles thoroughly ministered in Jerusalem and Judea (11:1). Philip influenced the Samaritans (8:5). Thomas worked in India. Paul was able to transform his converts into powerful missionaries, who then turned the then-known gentile world upside down (17:6). Paul influenced the Galatians, who were of Celtic origin. The other nations of Celtic derivation, such as the Scots, British, Welsh, and

Witnessing is not any easier in Africa than it is in your own neighborhood.

French were consequently affected, and so, too, were the Greeks and Romans.

Great men and women were blazing, evangelistically and literally, during the persecution of the Dark Ages. Patrick moved the Irish; Columba formed a center of evangelism on the island of Iona, a steppingstone to the continent of Europe. Columbanus went throughout the length and breadth of France, Switzerland, Germany, and Italy. Who hasn't heard of the stalwart spirit of Vigilantius and the Waldensians living in Northern Italy and Southern France?

God's sanctifying truth has been etched into the world's nations, despite such seductive teachers as pagan mysticism (new and old), Greek philosophy, Buddhism, monasticism, Confucianism, and evolutionism. Our evangelistic forebears were grounded in the authority of the Word.

Contrary to popular belief, witnessing is not any easier in Russia, Africa, and South America than it is in your own neighborhood, wherever you may live. Success is happening in those countries only because of the spirited and energetic work of the laity—people like you and me. God's church has always been missionary-minded. Will you unite with God's last generation of witnesses? Growth *will* result in your church when you accept that ancient imperative to Go! And Glow!

By Robert Granger, chairman of Weimar College health-ministries department, Weimar, California.

The Holy Spirit as the Driving Force

HOW-TO

Key Text: Acts 1:8

The Holy Spirit is a divine person, and as God, He is equal in authority and power to the Father and Christ. Even so, there is only one God. The presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts is the presence of God the Father and Christ the Son. All genuine missionary endeavor will be prompted and accomplished by God's Spirit. God ordained that all those who believe in Him be united into a body, which is the church, knowing that such a union would increase their usefulness in the world. To further the church's usefulness, God made provision for this body to be arrayed with the weapons of spiritual warfare, also known as spiritual gifts.

How do I receive the Holy Spirit?

Through prayer and study of the Word, you enter into fellowship with the Father and Christ, and, therefore, with the Holy Spirit.

What does this fellowship do to my heart?

Each day as you study and pray, you are able to respond to the convictions of the Holy Spirit by accepting Jesus as God. Your past sins are forgiven, and God's perfection is given to you and counted for you. You have passed from death unto life and become a new creature in Him (Rom. 6:4).

All missionary endeavor will be prompted and accomplished by God's Spirit.

How does this daily new-birth experience affect my witness for God?

When you have this friendship with the Holy Spirit, He will give you the power to do unselfish ministry to spread the gospel of Christ.

Then what?

1. Ask for a promise from the Word. "Ask and it will be given to you" (Matt. 7:7), because all that God promises to do in you, He is also able to perform (Rom. 4:21).

2. Believe that God has given you what you have asked for according to His Word. "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mark 11:24).

3. "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer" (Matt. 21:22). This is where you receive the fulfillment of His promises for you.

"Hanging upon the cross Christ was the gospel. . . . This is our message, our argument, our doctrine, our warning to the impenitent, our encouragement for the sorrowing, the hope for every believer."

*Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1113.

By Stephanie Gregorius, a pastoral-ministries major, and Sharon Freitas, who has completed the massage-therapy certificate, Weimar College, Weimar, California.

Messengers With a Message

OPINION

Key Text: 2 Sam. 18:18-33

Have you ever been in a favorable position to witness for Christ, yet you didn't know what to do or say? This is how Ahimaaz must have felt. This self-appointed messenger cum Olympic sprinter pleaded to run and give a message to King David regarding the death of his son Absalom. But there was one problem—he didn't have a message worth giving (see 2 Sam. 18:18-33). He felt he just *had* to do something. Zeal without knowledge. Mission without purpose. Works without faith. “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit” (John 15:16, KJV).

God's church, represented by Cushi, the slower but purpose-motivated runner, recognizes its Master's calling and obeys by faithfully delivering the message of the moment. In every age, God's people have been responsible for sharing truths specific to their time. Noah had a message, along with Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, and John the Baptist. God's last church also has a message, the most powerful missionary message ever, and it is clearly outlined in Revelation 14:6-12.

God does not countenance our self-confidence on one hand, nor our excuses aimed at negating soul-saving activities on the other. When God calls His church membership to witness, the calling is always independent of our:

In every age, God's people have been responsible for sharing truths specific to their time.

- Age (1 Sam. 2:18; Luke 2:36, 37)
- Gender (Acts 1:14-16)
- Race (Rom. 2:10, 11)
- Education (John 7:14, 15; Acts 4:13)
- Natural ability or inability (1 Cor. 1:20; Exod. 4:10)
- Elapsed time since conversion (John 4:7, 28-30, 39)
- Human reasoning (Isa. 55:8, 9).

Students often request exemption from prerequisite subjects. They fail to see the importance of taking classes in a certain order, of laying foundations of knowledge and experience. In the same way, missionary activity presupposes conversion. Surrender to Jesus means servanthood. We are at the disposal of our Lord, to use us by His Spirit as He wills. The missionary ability of God's end-time church will surpass that of Pentecost in A.D. 31, as unfettered as that power may have been. Let's believe Jesus' words: “He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do” (John 14:12, KJV).

With the climax of satanic delusions, are God's people to take a nonaggressive stance? Are we going to be noncombatants or conscientious objectors in the war that decides eternal destinies?

By Robert Granger, chairman of Weimar College health-ministries department, Weimar, California.

ORGANIZATION OR RANDOMIZATION?



“God is not a God of disorder but of peace” (1 Cor. 14:33, NIV).

Diamonds Are *Not* Forever

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: John 1:1-5

Place an ice cube in a glass of water at room temperature, and it melts. Why doesn't the rest of the water freeze?

Touch a lighted match to a piece of paper, and the paper burns to carbon dioxide and water (ideally, anyway). But you can mix carbon dioxide and water *ad infinitum* and they will never form paper or anything that even remotely resembles it. Why not?

The answer lies in the fact that favorable processes proceed spontaneously because systems of molecules have a natural tendency to randomization. In each case above, the products have a more random structure than did the reactants. Despite the old adage, although the reaction is imperceptibly slow, even diamonds are *not* forever—just almost.

So in a universe of ever-increasing randomization, where does church organization fit into the picture? Surely the pursuit of organization must necessarily be a futile one if even the energetics of life depend upon the process of randomization. But paradoxically, although life depends on this tendency to randomization, requisite organization is the vital precedent to this process. Without organization, life cannot exist. Just as an organism that comes into absolute equilibrium with its

Just as an organism that comes into absolute equilibrium with its surroundings is dead, so is an establishment without organization.

surroundings is dead, so is an establishment without organization.

Thus it follows that as our source of both physical and spiritual life, God is a God of order (1 Cor. 14:33). It is only He who can provide the power to maintain organization amidst our tendency to randomization and thereby sustain life. Organization does matter, and, thankfully, God thinks so too.

This week we are going to examine church organization, what the Bible has to say about it, what E. G. White says about it, and how you can enjoy being a part of it. Organization is the path to achievement. How about checking your progress next time you sit down to an iced water or strike a match.

A diamond may not be forever, but be assured, God is. "Before anything else existed, there was Christ, with God. He has always been alive and is Himself God. He created everything there is—nothing exists that He didn't make. Eternal life is in Him, and this life gives light to all humanity. His life is the light that shines through the darkness—and the darkness can never extinguish it" (John 1:1-5, TLB).

That's organization! Without organization, life cannot exist.

By Denton Wade, a senior medical student at the University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia.

Why Church Organization?

LOGOS

**Exod. 18:20, 21; Mark 3:13, 14; Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Cor. 14:33, 40;
1 Tim. 3:1-8, 15; Titus 1:5**

Organization can be a pretty unpleasant word. Organization, structure, plan, formation, establishment—these are not the kinds of words that leap out to a person looking for adventure. In fact, the whole subject of church organization seems boring—at first.

Before you switch channels, consider this question: Why have a Seventh-day Adventist Church? There are plenty of denominations around, many with valuable contributions to the work of God. What do we have to offer the global Christian community?

Is the answer “organization”? Jesus organized His disciples to go out and witness (Mark 3:13, 14). Paul was a proponent of organization in the early church (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Cor. 14:33, 40; Titus 1:5), and we as a denomination have a strong worldwide structure. Could our best contribution, our highest purpose on earth, be that of supplying an organizational structure?

I hope not. Consider the name, “Seventh-day Adventist,” a unique group of people with a unique, prominent, critical message. Jesus is coming again:

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19, 20, NIV).

“Be shepherds of the church of God” (Acts 20:28).

“These, then, are the things you should teach” (Titus 2:15).

Jesus is coming again! That is what our church is for. And if we are going to be anything for anyone, then we had better be getting people ready by showing them Jesus through our church. Right there is our purpose, our function, and our mission. It is what our church is all about. *And it is the reason that we have an organized church.* Here is how we do it:

1. Worship. The church exists to lift up and to praise God. The church at worship is God’s flagship in the world. It is uniting into one voice the experience of a congregation. It must be organized to do this. It must be focused in its direction. The church reveals Christ through its worship (Zech. 13:9).

2. Witness. The outcome of worship is the infectious and purposeful spreading of the gospel to those who have not yet accepted it. This is the commission of Jesus to His disciples. This is the love of God shown to the world through His people. The church reveals Christ through “His story,” the gospel (Matt. 24:14).

3. Service. The first work of Jesus was to meet the practical needs of the people. The kingdom of God is a mission of service. The church reveals Christ through practical service to humanity (Matt. 10:7, 8).

4. Love. The church is the family of God, which nurtures and cares for the members of the family. The church is a place of protection from the influence of Satan and a place of belonging for those within it. The church reveals Christ through its love to the world (1 John 1:3).

5. Teach. The church has a responsibility to search the Scriptures corporately, being always open to ongoing, revealed truth, and to teach that truth. The church reveals Christ through the teaching of the Word of God (Rom. 10:14).

6. Fight. The church must stand against evil (Eph. 6:12). It reveals Christ by

standing against social and spiritual evils in the local and worldwide society in which it exists.

The church must worship, witness, serve, love, teach, and fight so that the world, through our church, might be ready for Jesus to come again. Organization? Consider it in terms of function. I cannot do all of those things by myself. I have some gifts, which can be complemented by others. So we work together, and together we are the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Not perfect. Not even close. In fact, we are "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked" (Rev. 3:17). Yet Christ still uses us, and because He does, I will place myself under the authority of that organization. Christ is the head, not me (Eph. 4:15). I will submit myself in humility (Heb. 13:17) to the work that He has prepared in advance for me to do (Eph. 2:10).

The organization of God's people is His corporate body, the church. It is valuable only as it performs the function of the church, which is to reveal Jesus. The particular message that we Seventh-day Adventists must proclaim is that Jesus

Organization can be a pretty unpleasant word.

is coming soon, and we must be ready. I choose to submit myself to this organization to fulfill the role that God has for me to play. I am His servant. I am His church.

REACT

1. In what specific ways does the organization of the church facilitate each of the six functions of the church listed above?

2. How could the church be improved to do so even more effectively?

3. How did Jesus work within the system of the church?

4. How did He work outside the system?

5. How can we know when it is appropriate to work outside the system of the church?

6. Does having an effective church administration lessen the role individual church members play in mission: How is their role still important?

7. How different from world governments should our church government be?

8. Why are the conclusions of a community more well rounded than those of an individual couple or ordinary group?

Christ Our Focus

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Eph. 1:21-23

I am a very organized person. I love making lists—things to do, people to see, timetables. You name it, I'll have a list for it. Yet the trouble comes not with working out what needs to be done, but with actually doing it. Lists are no good until you use them.

The same is true of organization in the church. It is a very necessary aspect of our effective functioning. But we need to remember our primary focus. Organizational structure is a means to an end rather than an end in itself.

“Organization and discipline are essential, but there is now very great danger of a departure from the simplicity of the gospel of Christ. What we need is less dependence upon mere form and ceremony, and far more of the power of true godliness.”¹

“Love is the basis of godliness. Whatever the profession, no man has pure love to God unless he has unselfish love for his brother. But we can never come into possession of this spirit by *trying* to love others. What is needed is the love of

Organizational structure is a means to an end rather than an end in itself.

Christ in the heart. When self is merged in Christ, love springs forth spontaneously.”²

It is through Christ that we received salvation and became part of the church, His body. And as a part of this church, we must remember that it is Christ who should be our focus and our guide in every thought and action. “God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way” (Eph. 1:21-23, NIV).

REACT

1. In our ever-more-complex society, how should we balance simplicity and organization?
2. In what practical ways can we ensure that Christ is the basis of all we do?
3. How can we know when we're overly organized?

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 461.

2. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 384.

Organized for Growth

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Rev. 14:15

In 1863 we conducted our first General Conference. We'd been called "Seventh-day Adventists" for only three years. At this time our membership consisted of 3,500 North Americans scattered between New York in the east and southern Iowa in the west. The fledgling church was brimming with expectation and enthusiasm. But something happened to our church that set it apart.

By 1888 there were Seventh-day Adventists in 13 other countries, with a membership of 26,112. Between 1888 and 1900, 38 additional countries had been entered by Seventh-day Adventists, the membership reaching 75,767.¹ The three angels' messages imply a distinctively global vision of evangelization that compelled the young church to conduct world mission on a most ambitious scale. The form of organization we chose to adopt was simply one that best promoted the missionary work.²

Some central coordination of resources was necessary, so that wealthy members in Washington were able to help a struggling new congregation in South Africa. Further, in order to implement global strategies, a global unity of purpose and belief was essential. Clearly a "congregational" form of structure, in which

Our church structure is in place as an instrument for the task we're sent to do.

the local church is autonomous, would have been inappropriate for our church.

Assuming our priorities today are the same as they were when we began, unity is still vital to the life of the church. It can't be denied that centralizing the church government ensured unity, as well as church identity and strength. Of course, it was not God's intention for the church to have unity without diversity. We are diverse parts making up a Christ-unified whole.

But neither unity nor diversity should be goals in themselves; each is the means to an end. Our church structure is in place as an instrument for the task we're sent to do, so adaptability to suit the changing shape of our task is important. Other denominations, whose structures have been appointed as the result of theological doctrine, such as the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, must remain rigid.

Our vision is the fulfillment of the goal Christ set for us so that we can go home, and the church structure is part of God's plan to get us there.

1. B. D. Oliver, *Seventh-day Adventist Organizational Structure* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1989), p. 45.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 322.

By Monique Sharland, graduate mathematics student at the University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia.

Give Yourself!

HOW-TO

Key Text: Rom. 1:11, 12

Humans strive toward community for the fullness and vibrancy it generates. It brings together people who have a common focus and allows them to make that focus an active part of their lives. The organization of a community requires that we pool our abilities and resources. We also share the things we most have in common: our weakness, our imperfections, and our lack of wholeness. A genuine community also requires that we contribute our uniqueness as individuals. The blending of these human qualities creates a balanced communion, where all individuals can truly be themselves.

M. Scott Peck, author of *The Different Drum*, talks about the necessity for all to be willing to share their individuality, and to accept others' uniqueness as being invaluable: "In community, instead of being ignored, denied, hidden, or changed, human differences are celebrated as gifts."^{*}

It is interesting that communities that have organization and structure are invariably composed of diverse and varied people. The contribution of an individual's views creates the more well-rounded conclusions of the community. Our church as a structured community requires that each of its members fulfills an integral role not only in maintaining the unity, but more important, to help fulfill the church's

A genuine community also requires that we contribute our uniqueness as individuals.

purpose. To members of this church striving toward a common focus, structure is important. We can be organized, but to be well balanced it is important to:

1. Recognize the gift of individuality. Individuality is the basis of a community. Celebrate your uniqueness, as you endeavor to share it.

2. Become more aware of the unique gifts others have. Accepting that we are not—or cannot ever be—the same, is the first step toward developing a workable church structure.

3. Understand how we can unite as part of the church structure. Paul speaks of his relationship with the church and describes his desire not only to share his faith with the church members in Rome, but also to be encouraged by them. He stresses the importance of mutual sharing and individual input.

Together as the body of Christ, we can do far more than we could ever dream possible.

^{*}M. Scott Peck, *Meditations From the Road* (London: Random House, 1993), p. 266.

By Anthea Burnett, a science student at Griffith University; and Marissa Parkin, a speech-pathology student at the University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia.

The System

OPINION

Key Text: 1 Cor. 12

I like the system, this worldwide church organization of which I am a part. It means I can sit back and watch it all happen. I give my offerings, sure. I mean, this is my eternal destiny that is at stake here, so I guess it is worth almost as much as the Saturday night movie or the latest CD single.

The great thing is that I give my offering, and that means, basically, that I can pay someone else to do my “Christian duties” for me. Just think, as we speak, there’s some missionary converting whole villages of tribal primitives to this higher calling. There are crusades being run in major cities all around the globe, winning people from the world of sin. There are also people lending a healing hand to those involved in famines, wars, and natural disasters, and to third-world communities, helping them develop their economy and become self-sufficient. Along with that, there are people caring for the sick, visiting those in prison, and even local pastors caring for the needs of their membership. All this from my offering.

Checking off the list of things to do for “the least of these my brethren,” I think I’ve got it pretty much covered, as well as preaching the gospel to the ends of the

**I give my offering, and that means, basically,
that I can pay someone else to do my
“Christian duties” for me.**

earth. And because this organization to which I pay my weekly subscription is the true church, the elect, then I’m going through to the kingdom, no questions asked. Plus a bit of weekly entertainment thrown in at no extra cost (if you choose the right church, that is)!

But Paul didn’t merely sit in a pew and pay his tithes and offerings every week.

When we’re talking about this “body of Christ,” as Paul did, let’s not forget the bits that make it up, people. Especially, don’t forget the Head, the whole reason for the body’s existence, Jesus Christ Himself.

It must be remembered that the most important, maybe the only, level of Christianity is one-to-one—whether you and God, you being used by God to encourage and help others, or you being encouraged and helped by those who let God use them. “You are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Cor. 12:27, NIV).

“And now I will show you the most excellent way” (verse 31).

REACT

1. How does “the system” fit in with the concept of one-to-one Christianity?
2. How does oneness in Christ avoid the loss of individuality?

By Daniel Brown, a second-year architecture student at the University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia.

HEROES INCORPORATED



“We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body . . . and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Cor. 12:13, NIV).

Solo Warriors

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 Cor. 12:13

Stressful situations often break us apart, but sometimes they unify us. Here's an example from the unique history of the Czech Republic:

In the 1860s, Czechs couldn't feel at home anywhere, not even in Prague. Their nobility was in exile, and their culture was eroding under German influence. So the Czechs created "Prague Sokol," an athletic organization promoting national pride through harmony of the soul and body. Known as *jednota*—meaning union or unity, as well as unit—Sokol chapters appeared in Czech communities across Europe and America. When the Soviets took over in 1948, they paid Sokol the compliment of using it to promote their own political program. As national identity was established and Communism fell in the Velvet Revolution (1989), the Sokol lost its spark. Prague's current "Fitness Clubs" don't concern themselves much with being Czech.

While the Sokol was spawned in response to crisis, some of our Adventist brushes with community occur in less than ideal circumstances. During camp meeting, a little religious fellowship and a few principles in common bring people

What does it mean to be a part of this family, anyway?

fairly close to the "long-lost relative" routine. Things change a bit as the warm fuzzy thoughts and greetings collide with not-so-warm and somewhat fuzzless topics like "Your children are too loud," or "Swimming on the Sabbath?" It seems that the same humanity that brings so much color and vitality to things, and sometimes brings out the best and most noble parts of us, can turn around and tear us apart.

What does it mean to be a part of this family, anyway? A reading of 1 Corinthians 1:10 and 2 Corinthians 13:11 gives us a look at what Paul is asking for and where he expects it to come from.

Sometimes it's hard to remember that we are a church of people crippled and diseased by sin, struggling toward God. From this more humbling position, the church takes on the characteristics of a hospital rather than a country club. So the excuse, "I can't go to church if *he* is there," is the same as, "I'm sick, but I can't go to the hospital because there are sick people there." The ruggedly self-sufficient hero, the solo warrior, makes for good movie footage. But in matters of the soul (at least), true heroism is drawing on our family resources.

Where does personal independence and individuality fit into all this? These ideas of unity in the church, of family identity, are what we hope to explore this week.

By Jason McLin, student missionary, Prague, Czech Republic.

Superordinate Goals

LOGOS

1 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 4:1-6; Matt. 5:13-16; James 2:14-26

Our church ranks with the largest of multinationals, and in a surprising number of ways is subject to the same problems. However, our “company manual” offers us precisely the kind of superordinate goals necessary to keep us on the right track.

The Conversion Goal: Am I promoting my conversion or building my relationship with Christ?

The church is made up of individuals, and that is where Christ wants us to start. Jesus said it simply: “Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3, RSV). We need to pursue this goal like no other. Paul says, “No other foundation can anyone lay than . . . Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11; cf. Col. 2:6-9; 2 Tim. 2:19). But it doesn’t end with conversion: Christ implores us to “seek first his kingdom” (Matt. 6:33); Peter gives us the growth ladder of faith (2 Pet. 1:5-8); and Paul inspires us to progress toward perfection (Heb. 6:1).

Conversion is the realization that without Christ I am nothing, and that my highest goal is to be like Him. This is my first step in fulfilling His will, and the prerequisite to being used effectively by Him. Ellen White says: “We must be in earnest and secure our soul’s salvation. . . . All importance should be attached to this, and everything besides should come in secondarily.”¹ Through this conversion we open ourselves to the Holy Spirit, who acts as the catalyst for unity and helps us meet our second goal.

The Unity Goal: Pulling in One Direction

Perhaps the most powerful call to unity is given by Paul: “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:1-6, RSV). Powerful motivational language! It’s up to us to act.

The underlying principle of unity is found in Christ’s words, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12). Belonging to the church should be about allowing God to create, through me, an atmosphere of love in the church, which then becomes our most powerful witnessing tool.

The Mission Goal: Spreading the Good News

Christ expressed our third goal well: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them” (Matt. 28:19). The metaphors of salt and light only reinforce this theme (5:13-16).

How can we best meet this goal? Jesus guides us back to the importance of unity: “That they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou has sent me” (John

17:21, 22; cf. John 13:34, 35). "Such unity is the church's most powerful witnessing tool, for it gives evidence of Christ's unselfish love for humanity."²

This, interestingly enough, brings us back to our starting point: "I in them and thou in me" (17:23). Without a firm personal relationship with Christ, unity, witnessing, and, generally, church life will be paper definitions.

Measuring Up: Am I Meeting Company Expectations?

In the context of these goals, church life becomes more than the social element of our religion. Indeed, without a pursuit of all three goals, religion will tend toward a form of godliness but deny its true power (2 Tim. 3:5). I like David's words: "Prove me, O Lord, and try me; test my heart and my mind. For thy steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in faithfulness to thee" (Ps. 26:2). It's difficult to have growth without testing. Paul himself admits it's not easy (Rom. 7:22-25), but inspires us to persevere. And as with most other things, action is the key. Jesus' parables of the talents, the priceless pearl, and hidden treasure assume action on the part of the protagonist. Throughout the New Testament the injunction "Do" and "Be" are familiar. James challenges us that faith without works is dead (James 2:14-26). Finally, Ellen White says: "I was shown God's people waiting for some change to take place—a compelling power to take hold of them. But they will be

Our church ranks with the largest of multi-nationals and is subject to the same problems.

disappointed. They are wrong. They must act. They must take hold of the work themselves, and earnestly cry unto God for a true knowledge of themselves."³

Christ's church is an exciting place, with 38,000 churches, 5,782 institutions, and 8.2 million members in 209 countries.⁴ This all beats most multinationals, hands down. Through Christ we have achieved this, and through Christ we are called to achieve even greater things. In pursuing His will: "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

REACT

To what extent should pastors be responsible for creating opportunities for members to be involved in church work?

1. *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4B, p. 10.

2. *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .* (Silver Spring, Md.: Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988), p. 172.

3. *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4B, p. 59.

4. General Conference information, 1993 data.

Only Through Him

TESTIMONY

Key Text: John 15:4, 5

In many instances we have tried to have proper church life without the Life of the Church—this is fruitless, frustrating, and discouraging. To serve Christ properly and fruitfully, we need genuine faith, which comes as a result of knowing Him.

Note that it would not be enough to know a lot *about* Christ without communicating with Him. For “knowing Jesus comes as a result of spending time in communion and fellowship and relationship with Him.”¹

The more time we spend with Him, the better we shall know Him, and in us the Spirit will create genuine faith in Him, helping us to trust Him more. “The Spirit operating upon and enlightening the human mind, creates faith in God.”² Without faith (trust) in God, we can’t obey Him, and true obedience is integral in church life.

To benefit from a relationship with God, we should apply the “Give all/Receive all” rule. If we give Him all that we have, then our receiving shall be without end. Note that giving all goes far deeper than giving up this or that bad habit. It means

It would not be enough to know a lot *about* Christ.

surrendering ourselves to Him. A defeated army does not surrender only the tanks and grenades or only the spears and pangas. They surrender themselves, and then all the weapons are automatically surrendered too.

This means allowing Him into every sphere of our lives and obeying Him in each of those spheres. This is being born of the divine Spirit.

Pray about it, He will help you do so. “In order to serve Him aright, we must be born of the divine Spirit. This will purify the heart and renew the mind, giving us a new capacity for knowing and loving God.”³ What more shall we ask for than to be born again, with pure hearts, with renewed minds, with new and ever-growing capacities for knowing and loving God!

1. Morris Venden, *95 Theses on Righteousness by Faith*.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 940.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 189.

By Fortunate Mchechesi and James Otina, medical students at Charles University, Prague.

Adaptive Morality

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Rom. 7:21-25

Love, the foundation of biblical law (Matt. 22:37-40), evokes diverse definitions. Kant thought that no action has moral value unless performed out of pure reverence for moral law, independent of natural law. But what behavior has *no* ulterior motives? We take inspiring examples from God's second book, Nature. One bird alerts the flock though its call advertises itself to the predator. Yet study of animal behavior consistently reveals that such martyrdom protects the species' genes, and so is not strictly altruistic. Even Christ's surrender to crucifixion can be attributed to faith in God. Resurrection glory and eternal praise from one's creatures—incredible dividends for a few hours of agony. Aristotle points out that the more virtuous people become, the more they enjoy virtuous actions.

Selfishness pushed to extremes, however, clearly displays its true nature. Experiments show that cats and rats in crowded conditions fight and practice homosexuality and cannibalism. Humans exhibit the same behavior in concentration and prisoner-of-war camps. Sociobiologists recognize that even though these behaviors are adaptive (decreasing stresses such as overcrowding), they do not produce happiness. If we can't avoid stress, what is left to us?

Extrapolating from Calvin's doctrine of total depravity, selfishness may per-

What behavior has *no* ulterior motives?

meate every aspect of this planet from our noblest thoughts to genes on a strand of DNA. Paul struggles against a natural law (Rom. 7:21-25). Later, he spends an entire chapter describing incredible love and concludes, "We see but a poor reflection as in a mirror" (1 Cor. 13:12, NIV).

God's frequent linkage of His commandments to rewards doesn't exclude obedience to Him unmotivated by reward. Historically the Creator works with what He has, even evil. David, adulterer and murderer, was still (because of his repentance) a man after God's own heart. Preaching Christ from selfish ambition condemns the preacher, but God still uses it (Phil. 1:15-18).

Against logic, biblical law includes loving enemies and giving with no expectation of return (Luke 6:22-36). Paul speaks of a veil of sin that is lifted by beholding Jesus (2 Cor. 3:16-18). God's love, although beyond knowledge, is our objective (Eph. 3:17-19). Our desire for unconditional love makes "Do unto others" a good starting point. Surprisingly, the happiness we sought through selfishness may come as a good side effect.

REACT

1. How can love for friends, spouse, or family be unmotivated by return?
2. Would I love God above everything if no gain existed?

By Juliana King, a teacher of English as a second language in Prague, the Czech Republic.

Go to the Ant . . .

HOW-TO

Key Text: Gal. 6:6-10

So, do we like the concept of God's family? Do we want to have good experiences in this environment? Or maybe we even want to contribute with our part?

A person who decides to give his life to Christ usually also decides to join the community of believers, and indeed Jesus Himself calls us to this. This decision results in two kinds of change. There are observable lifestyle changes, such as new associations with fellow believers, changes in friends, and adoption of new pursuits. Changes in diet and health maintenance are also not excluded.

From conversion, though, there are unobservable changes as well. These are changes in thinking, a change in the purpose of one's life. Through a person's friendship with Christ, God's love changes one's selfishness into a service for others, a service of love. Paul entreats us to "do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Gal. 6:10, NIV).

What can we do so that our "family of believers" experiences something more than do the non-Christian societies around us?

There are many practical answers, and more when individuals allow God to work through them. Christ gives us hints all around us, and particularly in nature: "Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise" (Prov. 6:6).

The first ant waits patiently, without any nagging or preaching.

A certain kind of ant makes its nest 1.3 meters underground for winter hibernation. When spring begins to warm the earth, the most sensitive ant feels the temperature change and wakes up. Immediately it climbs to the surface and stays for a few minutes, soaking up the warm rays of sunshine. Then, without further delay, it descends into the nest and lies next to a second ant, who is warmed until it also awakes.

The first ant waits patiently, without any nagging or preaching, until enough heat has been absorbed by the second ant. We don't observe any kind of persuasion: "Hey! You know what's going on outside? What are you still doing in bed?" Isn't this sometimes our approach, thereby creating an air of self-righteousness and judgment. When the second ant wakes, they both climb out of the nest, warm up in the sun, and descend to wake up two additional ants. This cycle expands until the whole nest is awake.

Let's keep our eyes open as we look around us. God is speaking to us: it's up to us whether we're listening.

By Jan Kreisl and Roman Jonczy, theology students in Prague, Czech Republic.

Adventists: A Meek People?

OPINION

Key Text: Rom. 6:3

Cosmic misunderstanding. Confronted with the Great Disappointment, these Adventists began a movement with it. You can't help being impressed with their vitality. After such a rough start, it's understandable that they bartered a bit of disciplined self-scrutiny for a few years of relatively placid growth. Assumptions about the proportions of inspiration and nineteenth-century scholarship in Ellen White's work developed, until the 1980s, when they collided with reality. You almost wonder whether God said, "Have you considered My servants, the Adventists?" We were in full-scale adolescent turmoil.

Then what advantage has the Adventist? And what is the value of Sabbath keeping? Much in every way! To begin with, the Adventists are entrusted with the oracles of God (Rom. 3:1, 2), which have left us with an illusion of superiority that doesn't wear well. Considering our history can keep us humble. Truth may have another layer—which other people may already have discovered.

The myth of the corn king illustrates the paradoxical truth that burial (death) precedes germination. In Western cultures, being part of the body of Christ means imitating the surrender of His death. We've whittled our community down to those willing to assent to a 27-point statement on issues ranging from alcoholic

Truth may have another layer—which other people may already have discovered.

beverages to the sanctuary. But there's still plenty of opportunity to practice this death, this distinctively newborn response to conflict. Sorting and synthesizing our impressions of truth (embodied in everything from working models of inspiration to church budgets) is a continuous, full-church-body workout.

Conflicts remind us, "If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2). M. Scott Peck draws on Keith Miller's *The Scent of Love* to suggest the secret of the early church's remarkable growth: There was something about the way these people talked together, laughed together, the way they touched each other and cried together—that was (however inexplicably) attractive. Here's the motive power of the Great Commission, here's how it really works: "They'll know we are Christians by our love" (John 13:35).

REACT

1. What do the SDA Church and Alcoholics Anonymous have in common?
2. What gives Adventism its special mission? What is its central core?

By Jerilyn Webb, a teacher of English as a second language in Prague, Czech Republic.

TO DO OR TO BE



“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Phil. 4:8, NIV).

Just Like an Amusement Park?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matt. 7:20

Have you ever gone to an amusement park? Some years ago I happened to go on excursion to such a place. The place, named Gardaland, was an amusement park like Disneyland, though quite a bit smaller. Just beyond the entrance my eyes saw something they had never seen before. It seemed like being in a Walt Disney tale. There was a merry-go-round full of children and adults, attracting the curiosity of everyone with its music and colored lights. A little bit farther we discovered another attraction, an old-age train that carried passengers around the amusement park, passing through a garden with smiling flowers and singing bees.

Beyond an artificial lake was a huge roller coaster. It was an exciting experience. It seemed like being a ball in a pinball machine, hurled from one side to another.

After my first impression of the place wore off, I began to notice other things about the place. Everything worked there. The roads were always clean. I never saw a cigarette butt on the ground. The staff were efficient and kind, willing to give

We discovered an old-age train that carried passengers around the amusement park.

you all the information you asked. I was impressed by such dedication. When I remember that place, I hope to return there sometime, not just for the shows and attractions, but also for what I found there: people dedicated to what they were doing.

Christians should be the same. People are not much impressed by the programs we present. Others do programs as well and sometimes better than we. They are not impressed by what we say. Others speak as well. People are impressed by what we are and what we do. They observe our behavior and attitudes toward everyday situations.

To what degree do we consider our behavior as important for the preaching of the gospel? What do people notice *in* us? I remember the famous saying: "What you are speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say."

To the Image of God

LOGOS

Exod. 20:8-11; 1 John 2:3-11; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; Ps. 24:1; Mal. 3:9, 10

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness" (Gen. 1:26, NIV).

Man was made in God's image. This statement is the basis of the biblical anthropology. In the ancient world the image was not only a simple imitation of reality, but it implied the real presence of the person or thing depicted in the image.

A king used to show his subjects the extent of his kingdom by setting images, statues, royal symbols on every corner of his kingdom. He who held the royal seal could rule on behalf of the king. Likewise, human beings, who have been made in God's image, are being invited to rule on His behalf, for good or for bad, as His legal representative. Each human being is responsible for the authority that he or she has received from God, according to an arrangement that includes both privileges and responsibilities.

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy" (Exod. 20:8).

The Sabbath was made for the development of solidarity between God and humankind. It is very important to remember that Jesus said the Sabbath was made for us. He gave a new meaning to the biblical rest. God does not indicate a particular time in which we have to serve Him; on the contrary, the Sabbath is a gift that God presents to us so that we may remember we have been created (Exod. 20:11) and saved (Deut. 5:15).

The Sabbath is even more important today because the modern world, with all its sudden changes, seems to weaken memory. The Sabbath is a means of escape from the slavery of time. It is a symbol of liberty that appeals to modern culture.

"They gave themselves first to the Lord" (2 Cor. 8:5). Every Christian knows that he or she must find the right relationship with himself or herself, with his or her neighbor, and with God. Adventists regard the ability to manage one's life as Christian stewardship.

Respect for someone loved is a sign of a mature and consistent feeling. Does a father who does not support his family with time and money really respect and love his family? Is it possible to be a member of the Adventist Church, a church with so many far-reaching goals for the world, without supporting it with one's means? Even club members are usually asked to share the costs of their association. It would be strange if a church expected less of its members!

The church is being built every day by each of us through commitment and solidarity. Tithes and offerings are neither the price of a profitable contract nor a new kind of taxation. They are voluntary contributions given by those who have made a free choice and want to be consistent with that choice. Free choice implies consequences and duties that, if correctly understood, turn out to be as pleasant as the initial choice.

The tithe does not serve God; it serves us. When I return my tithe, I know I am doing something that draws me closer to my neighbor, something that allows my church to be more helpful, and something that shows my praise for the Lord. In

the Adventist Church, why do we have the problem of a decreasing faithfulness to the principle of tithing?

“Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives” (2 Pet. 3:11, NIV).

Students of philosophy know that metaphysics calls for consistent ethics and that ethics needs some points of reference in its worldview. A church that neglects its ethical standards shows that it has lost sight of God and His revelation. This is what is happening to many Protestant churches, and it may happen to us as well. Jesus said that His disciples will be recognized by their fruits. What fruits can people perceive in us but our actions and our attitudes? They should perceive such basic values as respect for life, a chaste sexual life, respect for nature, tolerance, acceptance of those who are different from us, modesty and so on. Such values must remain as the most visible characteristics of a church that is announcing the soon coming judgment of God. Such values must be translated into consistent behavior.

Of course, even universal values are expressed through a cultural language that cannot be considered as everlasting, since it is linked to time and space. The expression of Christian modesty a century ago can convey quite a different mean-

Even club members are usually asked to share the costs of their association.

ing today, but in the meantime, other useful expressions have come into use that may help to convey such a principle. Being consistent with biblical values often means being different from other people; this is a burden we should carry not with shame, but with dignity and pride.

REACT

1. Should the way we keep the Sabbath be revised? If it should, on what basis?
2. What activities are appropriate or inappropriate on the Sabbath?
3. What are the important principles in Sabbath keeping?
4. What should be the church's relationship to moral standards?
5. In some countries the Adventist Church is confronted by a conflict between conservatives and liberals. What positive and negative aspects can you see in this struggle?

By Vittorio Fantoni, director of the Seventh-day Adventist Junior High School and Theological Seminary of Villa Aurora, Florence, Italy.

The Benefits of the Advent Message

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Matt. 11:28

Historically, Seventh-day Adventists have claimed to be “people of the book” because we have made the Bible our normative authority. Our reason for existence and our mission to the world are based on the authority of the Bible.

The effectiveness of our witness largely depends upon the degree to which our beliefs and practices are solidly based on Scripture. We cannot convince anyone about the validity of the Adventist message unless we are fully convinced ourselves. To grow spiritually, we need the nourishment of the Word of God. Through the study of the Scriptures, we discover who God is, who we are, and what God wants us to become by His enabling grace.

Our pioneers gave themselves unreservedly to the mission of the church, because they were profoundly convicted that God had led them, through the diligent study of the Bible, to discover a message that the world desperately needed to know. Concern for the teaching of Scripture was paramount in the minds of our pioneers. We need to recover the same concern if we want to experience the same compelling desire to share our faith.

An important factor that can motivate us to share our faith is the experience of

Some view the Adventist message more as rules to obey than as benefits to enjoy.

the blessings of the Adventist message. It is possible to accept the validity of the Adventist message without experiencing its values and benefits. It is only to the extent that we enjoy the benefits of the Adventist message that we will be able to influence others to accept it.

Some view the Adventist message more as rules to obey than as benefits to enjoy. For example, some observe the Sabbath as a commandment that must be obeyed in order to be the remnant, rather than as a free response to God’s invitation to experience more fully and freely the awareness of His divine presence, peace, and rest in our lives. It can be a day characterized not by frustration because of the things that cannot be done on the Sabbath, but by exultation over the blessings that can be enjoyed on this day. Ellen White wrote in this regard, “Parents can make the Sabbath, as it should be, the most joyful day of the week. They can lead their children to regard it as a delight, the day of days, the holy of the Lord, honorable.”*

We need to help our people not only to understand more deeply the biblical soundness of our Advent message, but also to experience more fully its benefits in their daily lives.

**Child Guidance*, p. 537.

Remember

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Exod. 20:8-11

What does keeping a day holy mean? Are we not supposed to live a holy life seven days a week? Does it not sound legalistic to divide our time into “worldly” and “holy”? Isn’t this the very problem many Christians face in the modern world?

The verb *qadash*, keep holy, can be translated as “set apart,” “sacred,” “dedicated.” A dedication usually implies gratitude or friendship. My wife likes gifts, but she always appreciates a dedication along with it, a few words to show my love for her. I like to see the Sabbath in this light, as a dedication expressing love and gratitude, a little sign to explain the meaning of my gift to the Lord: my whole life.

On the other hand, the Sabbath is also a sign of God’s love toward me. It sets me free from the usual worries and deadlines of my life. I still remember how I used to look forward to the Sabbath when I was a university student. It set me free from all the deadlines I had imposed upon myself, and as a result, I could set time apart for God and me without that terrible sense of guilt for “wasting my time,” though the day of the exam was sometime very near.

Pirandello, an Italian novelist, used to say that exams never end. How true! I remember how I planned my future then. I thought my life would consist of a lot of fun and free time, provided I could find a good job. I especially relished the idea

The Sabbath sets me free from the usual worries and deadlines of my life.

of doing away with all the deadlines. In fact, I have found a good job, but my life is now even more full of deadlines than before. And so the Sabbath still sets me free from the cares and troubles of the week.

Yet the key word of the text is not only the word *qadash*, but also the word *zakar*, “remember.” One of the problems in my relationship with God has always been my memory. We tend to take for granted all the gifts of life. The word of God says, “Remember!” There is no future without memories. We lose our human dimension if we forget our roots and what God has done for us. The Sabbath is a remembrance of the great deliverance from the slavery of Egypt (Deut. 5:15). We have been set free “from the empty way of life handed down to . . . [us] from our forefathers” (1 Pet. 1:18, NIV) and we have been taken to a “resting place” (Deut. 12:9). Besides, the Sabbath is a celebration of life, a memorial to the miracle of life (Exod. 20:11). But in order to celebrate, one needs to remember. Are we still able to remember who we are and where we come from?

REACT

How can we learn to regard the Sabbath as a delight?

By Roberto Vacca, a teacher of English as a second language, Adventist Junior High School, Villa Aurora, Florence, Italy.

Putting Christianity Into Practice

HOW-TO

Key Text: John 17:21

It is important to keep strictly and faithfully the fourth or any other commandment, so that we don't lose our faith. Those who continually fail to abide by any one or another of the commandments, risk the possibility of losing conviction. Have you ever wondered why it wouldn't be enough just to believe firmly in God and in Jesus Christ's saving sacrifice for humankind?

Hebrews 11 gives us a good variety of examples of faith brought to the practical level. This seems to be just as important today as it was 2,000 years ago.

Why wouldn't it be enough to believe on a mere mental level? Let's try to give some practical answers:

1. The Christian experience put into practice strengthens and confirms the faith. By observing any of the commandments, we confirm our original decision to be faithful.

2. Habits like the Sabbath, the tithe, and Christian standards are an external

Why wouldn't it be enough to believe on a mere mental level?

representation of how religion functions. When people notice that it works, it will be the most effective form of witnessing.

3. These habits are the means through which God establishes a rich relationship with His people, and it also is the channel for His blessing, through which we receive inner joy. The result of observing Jesus' commandments is like the result of observing the safety notice on the ferry boat across the channel.

4. Without the option of putting Christianity into practice, we would experience the cost but not the reward. It would be foolish. We would have the cost of being different, but not the gratification of a harmonious life.

REACT

1. What is the difference between putting Christianity into practice and practicing righteousness by works?

2. What are the practical aspects of putting Christianity into practice?

3. Why do we sometimes have difficulty in remembering what God has done for us and in sharing that experience with others?

A Love Affair

OPINION

Key Text: John 14:15

A young man and a young woman attended the same high school. During the last year, they discovered the love they felt for each other and began dating. The young man was very attentive toward the young woman. He spent a great deal of his time preparing for their being together. He tried to think of ways to make their time together meaningful. The woman did the same thing, preparing some nice cookies and wearing her most beautiful clothes to make their time together unforgettable.

They finally became married. After a few months, they realized that life was not the same as it was before. The young man wasn't as attentive toward his wife anymore. He didn't take time to be with his wife, to talk to her, to listen to her needs; instead, he spent his time watching sports on TV and doing the things that pleased him. The young woman, on the other hand, didn't take time to prepare for her husband those things that she had before. For both of them, it seemed that taking time for one another had become a heavy duty. Nevertheless, they felt they loved each other very much.

The Bible uses the marriage image to illustrate our relationship with God.

The young man spent a great deal of his time preparing for their being together.

When we begin to discover God and His love for us, everything appears nice. We become enthusiastic about Sabbath and all the other wonderful revelations of the Bible. After some time, we still love those truths, but in some way we just don't burn for them. It seems that after we have surrendered all to Jesus, we want to take something back. We are not willing to let "our" time and "our" money go. As human beings, we have the inclination to egoism, to grab everything we can for ourselves. "To establish a love relationship with man, God chose the dimension of time and blessed it. God left us a time for worship, not a place or a space. The Sabbath is the presence of God in the world. What we are depends on what the Sabbath is for us. To love the Sabbath is to love what we have in common with God."

God wants to have a love relationship with us based not only on intellectual understanding of some principles, but a relationship that concerns every feature of humanity, including our feelings and emotions.

REACT

1. How can love bring a new perspective to church life?
2. What is the importance of the holiness of Sabbath in the Christian life?

*Heschel Abraham Joshua, *Il sabato* (Milano: Rusconi Editore, 1972).

By Julio C. Ferreira, pastor of the Pompeii (Italy) Seventh-day Adventist Church.

THE CHURCH MILITANT



“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me” (Phil. 3:12, NIV).

Soldiers and Sentinels?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Eph. 6:11

The church militant can be likened to an army fighting a spiritual battle. The army is composed of soldiers, each contributing his part to the battle.

Each soldier or church member lives a life of toil, hardship, and danger. He must be on constant guard against defeat, captivity, or death from the enemy, the prince of darkness, and each needs to be constantly vigilant so that when a battle erupts he is prepared to fight at a moment's notice. If a soldier deserts his post or is caught off guard, an attack from the enemy will be swift and violent. What would happen if half the army is sleeping instead of being on guard?

Each Christian is called to "to put on the whole armour of God" (KJV) so that

What would happen if half the army is sleeping instead of being on guard?

he may be able to fight. We are all called to take part in the battle, some as generals and corporals. But many more are needed as soldiers and sentinels, to dig trenches and build fortifications, so that when all ranks pull together and work as one unit, it creates a powerful force called the church.

By Jennifer Davisson, a senior nursing student at Kettering (Ohio) College of Medical Arts.

Crossing the Finish, Winning a Crown

LOGOS

Matt. 13:24-30, 37-43; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Eph. 6:10-18; Phil. 3:7-21; Rev. 12:17

For centuries the church has struggled with matters of church discipline, the balance between the compassionate Christ who forgives and restores and the Christ who exemplifies and expects holiness. The temptation of the church has always been to downplay one of these aspects of God's character. Emphasizing holiness without compassion produces legalism and judgmental attitudes. Preaching both God's holiness and His grace is an ongoing task that will be successful only when it is guided by God's Spirit and His Word.

The church is not a perfect place composed of perfect people, because I am a part of it. You are too. Yet, you and I are a part of His people, His bride, the church that He is perfecting and preparing for a triumphant entrance into eternity. That journey begins at Calvary and never ceases, for Jesus promises to be with us "to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20, NIV). So, although we may still be imperfect, there is no other bride. Jesus is passionately in love with us and has done everything possible to bring us through safely. How then do we honor Him, pursuing His call to holiness in humility and compassion?

1. Acknowledge God's call to holiness (Heb. 12:10, 11). We have not honored God if we claim that His standard of holiness has been changed. Sin is still sin, no matter how pretty we may paint it or how loftily we may describe it. God calls us to live a life apart from sin.

2. Recognize that we have all sinned (Rom. 3:10, 23). Despite our best efforts, we have all sinned and fallen short of God's holiness. This is not a license to excuse sin, but rather a caution against a judgmental spirit.

3. Understand that the destiny of the church is in the hands of a sovereign, loving God (Jude 24, 25; Matt. 13:24-30, 37-43). God hasn't promised us that we'd never encounter trials. He did tell us that we would be victorious. It is an act of presumption, unless directed by God, to be telling others where they ought to be in their Christian experience. God is the director of development. A Christian may be less than perfect, as humans evaluate things; the church may be failing, as we see it. Still, God's counsel is to leave these things in His hands, for He knows the thoughts and motives; He alone can see the end from the beginning.

4. Approach in humility those who make mistakes (Gal. 6:1, 2; Phil. 2:3, 4). There are three common errors here. One is to pass judgment. It is all too easy to kick a person who is already down. Another error is to excuse the sin, try to make the sinner feel good because we don't want people to lose their self-esteem or to experience guilt. Biblical restoration, however, calls for accountability. There is no feeling good while living in sin. The third error is to ignore the situation as did the priest and Levite on the Jericho road. We don't know what to do or say, so we do nothing. Yet God calls us to go and to go humbly.

5. Rest on the authority of God's Word alone (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). Too often judgment is passed on the basis of cultural norms, rules of etiquette, social conventions, and other extra biblical rules. The "sins" that the Pharisees accused the disciples of committing in Matthew 15 were not violations of God's law, but of

their own traditions. We must be certain of a “thus saith the Lord” before confronting a fellow believer. I remember when an elder with good intentions warned me that the guitar was the devil’s instrument. The truth is, he didn’t have a biblical basis for this opinion, and I learned to play anyway. God’s word from Genesis to Revelation is the only standard of truth.

6. Live and champion the Spirit-life (Rom. 8:1-11; Eph. 6:10-18). The only cure for the problem of sin in an imperfect church is the Spirit-filled, Spirit-led life.

An elder with good intentions warned me that the guitar was the devil’s instrument.

Jesus did not leave us as orphans when He returned to heaven, but in the Holy Spirit He has given us everything we need to gain victory in Him. With Paul we may proclaim, “There is in store for me the crown of righteousness” (2 Tim. 4:7, 8, NIV).

REACT

1. When I recognize that a fellow believer has fallen into sin, what steps should I take to restore him or her to spiritual life?
2. How can I maintain a cheerful, optimistic outlook for the church when I recognize how imperfect we are?
3. What will I say to the church member who is quick to condemn the sins of others in a censorious manner?

Don't Jump Ship

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Phil. 1:16

Picture in your mind a warship on its journey home. There are many wounded who need lots of care. The sea is rough, and the enemy is a constant threat. No one knows when the ship will reach home. One day in utter frustration, a group of crew members decide that they can make it home faster if they jump ship and begin swimming. Another group thinks they should just get rid of the wounded so they can concentrate more on getting the ship safely home.

Unfortunately, we can compare this situation to what is happening in our church today. Many people are so discouraged by the sin and hypocrisy around them that they are tempted to jump ship, or, instead, just throw the sinners overboard. This, however, is not the example Jesus left for us to follow.

“We must not be overwhelmed with discouragement because good and bad are gathered into the church. Judas was numbered among the disciples. He had every advantage a man could have, but although he heard the truth, and listened to the principles so plainly laid down, yet Christ knew that he did not receive the truth. . . . But Christ did not take forcible means to cut Judas away from the disciples.”¹

Christ will complete the work He has begun. He will not forsake His people. “The church may appear as about to fall, but it does not fall. It remains, while

“We must not be overwhelmed with discouragement because good and bad are gathered into the church.”

the sinners in Zion will be sifted out—the chaff separated from the precious wheat. . . . None but those who have been overcoming by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony will be found with the loyal and true, without spot or stain of sin.”²

God is the sifter of souls, and He is the One who makes the final decision. The question we need to ask ourselves is “Am I a wheat or a tare?”

“The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, . . . men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.

“But such a character is not the result of accident; . . . a noble character is the result of self-discipline, of the subjection of the lower to the higher nature—the surrender of self for the service of love to God and man.”³

1. *The Upward Look*, p. 35.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 356.

3. *Education*, p. 57.

By April Getchell, a student physician's-assistant at Kettering (Ohio) College of Medical Arts.

Who Are the Church?

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Rev. 21:22-27; Matt. 7:21-23

Since the emergence of the state church from the Middle Ages, believers have struggled to define what the church really is. In the Massachusetts Bay Colony, it was necessary to be a member of the church in order to enjoy full citizenship. The right to vote, own property, and many other such privileges were based on church membership. In 1635, led by John Cotton, the colony made a narration of a conversion experience a requirement of adult membership. For the first time in Christian history, a state church was requiring an experiential test of church membership. Think of the problems this created! In order to buy property and vote, a man had to be converted—or “fake it”!

This highlights a problem that the church has witnessed since the first century. There were Ananias and Sapphira, Simon the sorcerer, and others. They wanted the goods of Christianity, and to all appearances, they were genuinely converted. But each reached a defining moment when the truth came out. Those whom the church had trusted proved to be dishonest or self-seeking. So who is the church?

Before he reached the age of 30, Jonathan Edwards became copastor with his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, who was a leading minister of the time. But Edwards disagreed with him on a key issue. The “halfway” covenant, which Stoddard had supported, allowed the baptism of infants from families who had not

In order to buy property and vote, a man had to be converted—or “fake it”!

claimed a conversion experience. Edwards felt that this was unscriptural, for, he reasoned, how could there be any grace for those whose parents had no personal experience with Christ?

Coming from the other end of the Protestant spectrum, John Wesley, nevertheless, agreed with Edwards on one thing: True religion was anchored in a personal experience with Jesus Christ. This was remarkable for Wesley, whose early religious experience had focused on external behavior. His contact with the Moravian pietists, however, had led him to thirst for a personal walk with Christ, which he sought and found. How important were orthodox doctrine and zeal for the church? According to Wesley’s sermon “True Christianity Defended,” when standing by themselves, apart from Christ, they were “the faith of a devil, and the life of a heathen!” True religion was deeper than the observable behaviors that he had himself strongly emphasized earlier in his ministry.

The holiness of the individual and of the church depend on a daily living connection with the God of heaven. Outward behavior may show a lack of such connection, but behavior alone cannot prove that it exists. Without it no one can have true holiness, and without holiness, no one will see God.

By Dan Solis, a religion teacher at Kettering (Ohio) College of Medical Arts.

The Church Militant

HOW-TO

Key Text: Phil. 3:12

Unity of the church is very important if we are to finish God's work here on earth. So many of us realize this but aren't sure what we can do to tighten this unity. It begins with the individual's committing his or her life to Christ. In nursing, we assess a person's spirituality by checking for three basics, which can be applied to the individual and thus to the church as a whole:

1. Need for love and relatedness: To love and be loved by others, we need to build one another up and to give one another support.

2. Need for meaning and purpose in life: Serving the Lord and others with whole-heartedness can give us this meaning and purpose in life. Working together for a common goal is also great for bringing about love and relatedness with others. This gives a person a reason for living.

3. Need for forgiveness: We need to forgive, not only others, but ourselves as well. Holding a grudge can really hurt us more than it does the person with whom we are upset.

We need to forgive, not only others, but ourselves as well.

A deep relationship with God will bring these three things into order. By spending time with God, we realize our own imperfections. We can repent of them and thus receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we yield the fruit of the spirit—that of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22, 23). If each individual in the church has the Holy Spirit, then we can move in leaps and bounds toward one another and unity.

Maybe if we think of the church as a hospital for sinners, it would be easier for us to relate to each other in love, forgiving others because we see our own imperfections and realize how much we have been forgiven and healed; then putting all we have into helping our fellow strugglers. Let us as a church pull together and give God and others our best!

REACT

1. Who is one person I can think of who could really use some love, and what are two things I could do to show that love to him or her?
2. What is the first step to forgiving others?
3. What was Christ's prayer to God for His disciples?

By Tina M. Segur, a nursing student at Kettering (Ohio) College of Medical Arts.

Unity: One Lord, One Faith, One Hope

OPINION

Key Text: Eph. 4:4-6

It wasn't until the summer of 1993 that I first came to realize the true depth and meaning in my life of Ephesians 4:4-6. In my eyes, coming from a small church family was not the ideal situation when I was in junior high. There was no one my age who believed in God's love as I did. I felt that it was a hopeless situation. Because I was much younger than the other members of my church, it was difficult for me to feel like a part of this family. I eventually found that in just having faith and hope, I was a part of God's church. God helped me find a way to fit in and use my talents as a vital part of this working body of Christ.

Just as in a hospital situation, we should be there ready to help the spiritually sick, as well as those who are physically, mentally, and emotionally sick. It is our job to show our faith and love that will draw people to God, but all of this is no good if we have no unity. As with our bodies, the arms and legs must work together if we are to accomplish anything. The first time I experienced a uniting of God's young people was one of the greatest times in my life. Since then, I have never been the same. I find myself longing for people to help create an environment where

In my eyes, coming from a small church family was not the ideal situation when I was in junior high.

the Holy Spirit can work and cause a unity drawing ourselves and others closer to God.

To have the close uniting of believers, we must not forget what turns people away from us (as well as from God) and creates deep valleys between us. "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:20). People will know we are part of God's church family by the things we say and do. My mom always says, "You can catch bees only with honey." Jesus is sweeter than honey! If we keep our eyes focused on Christ, we will all be "rooted and grounded in love" (Eph. 3:17, KJV). God's love is greater than any human can fully understand. But one day we will all be able to see face to face the One who *is* the unity among us. Won't that be awesome?

REACT

Have you ever felt a close unity with someone who doesn't feel the same way about God as you do? If so, what was it like? If not, why didn't it work?

By Heather Truxal, a nursing student at Kettering (Ohio) College of Medical Arts.

WE, THE LEFTOVERS?



“The dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (Rev. 12:17, NIV).

The Remnant as a Beginning

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Eph. 2:10; Jer. 29:11

There is nothing sacred about the last bit of sourdough starter. But note how the baker preserves that bit of remnant starter, for it is the only way to produce fresh, hearty, tangy loaves. The remnant reveals a symbol, not of something at its end, but of a profound beginning. Here is the future, locked into limited packages. This is not the beaten down, the heartless, the hiding in the hills, wondering when the terror will end. This is the patience of Jesus looking ahead.

Often, however, we smugly assert that we are the remnant; therefore, we have “arrived.” The end is upon us, and there is not much left but the waiting. We need the eagerness, the forward-lookingness. Our attention has been too much on our viewpoints instead of God’s. God invites us to see a universal and eternal picture,

So many times we think of the remnant in terms of leftovers.

the incredible journey that waits for the group of beginners that we call “The Remnant.”

The Remnant

Fingers rustle through the threads,
 unwoven pieces lay heaped and crumpled,
 his mind wanders with possibilities,
 here is gold to work with,
 glittering, granular, sinuous, crisp—
 the bits and bolts wait patiently
 wondering what will become of this beginning.
 Often, he has stood,
 fingering the pieces,
 pondering the final pattern,
 imagining the whole spectacular
 built from straggled pieces carefully preserved.
 And now, he begins
 the stretching,
 the twisting, the binding, the ripping,
 the pieces winding around his fingers as if in protest
 “How long? How long?”
 But the shuttle flies,
 the unraveled mysteries begin to form
 the glorious beginning
 of an eternity.

By Morna Golke-Bahnsen, an English teacher at Auburn (Washington) Adventist Academy.

“In That Number”

LOGOS

Isa. 37:31, 32; Jer. 31:7-11; Joel 2:32; Zeph. 3:13-19; Rom. 11:1-5

“Oh, Lord, I want to be in that number, when the saints go marching in” (traditional Black spiritual).

The word *remnant* appears several times in the King James Version of the Bible. As with any word, term, or passage, it can easily be misquoted or taken out of context.

For example: “The remnant that remaineth . . . shall hang” (Exod. 26:12). Do you desire to be included in the remnant that is hung? The context of the above passage, however, clearly determines its meaning and application. Look at the entire verse. “As for the additional length of the tent curtains, the half curtain that is left over is to hang down at the rear of the tabernacle” (NIV).

Another verse describes the remnant fleeing to the mountains: “They that remained fled to the mountain” (Gen. 14:10, KJV). How would you explain this passage?

Where are we going with our line of reasoning? May I suggest that a text be studied within the context of the chapter and book from which it comes. Compare scripture with scripture to obtain the greater picture.

As we continue to consider the word *remnant*, keep in mind that there are many perspectives and frames of reference. As I attempt to understand the term, I sometimes substitute a form of the verb *remain* for the word *remnant*. Joshua 18:2 says, “There remained among the children of Israel seven tribes, which had not yet received their inheritance”—a remnant. Amos 6:9 states, “If there remain ten men in one house . . . they shall die.” Another remnant?

At times, phrases are used such as “please remain standing” or “please remain after class.” In these statements, an invitation is extended to be part of a remnant. You can choose to remain standing. You can choose to be among the remnant who remain after class.

Whose choice is it? Will God literally place you among the remnant against your will?

Take the time to explore chapters 5 and 6 in the book of Ezra. God’s people had turned away from Him. The consequences of their choices are clearly explained. Even though destruction was approaching on such wings as famine, pestilence, and war, God in His grace promised to save a remnant group of people. In Ezekiel 6:8 we read the words of a kind, loving, gracious God. “Yet will I leave a remnant . . .”

On the other hand, Jehoshaphat dealt differently with a remnant people. Why? Jeremiah 31:7 says: “Save thy people, the remnant of Israel.” Joel 2:30-32 is a very encouraging passage concerning the remnant. “It shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered: for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call” (verse 32). The NIV uses the word “survivors” in place of the word *remnant*. The remnant are survivors.

In referring to the remnant in Elijah’s experience, Paul writes, “At the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace” (Rom. 11:5, NIV). He says in Ephesians 2:8, “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift

of God” (KJV). The concepts these passages are expressing include the existence of a present remnant. Individuals in this group have chosen to accept the gift of God through a faith relationship with Jesus. The Scriptures point out very clearly that the remnant motif is based upon faith in Jesus. Friendship with Jesus is the hub around which the remnant people revolve. Commandment keeping is important, but not as a replacement for friendship with God. Relating to Jesus on a personal basis cannot really be accomplished without relating to all others. I love and serve—as Christ did and would, were He here today.

If *remnant* is a term that refers to those who remain, they remain what? Remain commandment keepers? Perhaps, but not necessarily—for the rich young ruler was a commandment keeper from an early age. Could it be referring to those who remain faithful? I think so. The Bible teaches that the remnant will be made up of those who choose to remain faithful to God and His teachings as revealed in Scripture.

What does Revelation 12:17 say concerning a remnant? “We believe that the prophecy of Revelation 12:17 points to the experience and work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, but we do not believe that we alone constitute the true children of God—that we are the only true Christians—on earth today. We believe that God has a multitude of earnest, faithful, sincere followers in all Christian com-

“At the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.”

munions . . . who are . . . true witnesses of the living God in our age.”

When you choose to remain faithful to Jesus, you are choosing to be part of His remnant. With His help, you will be found patiently enduring the wrath of Satan while demonstrating your love for God. Your faithfulness will empower you to honor what God says. You will long to obey His command, and you’ll love filling the requests of the Lord. “Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10, NIV).

“Oh, Lord, I choose to be in that number, when the saints go marching in.”

REACT

1. How can we present the concept of a remnant in more positive terms?
2. In what specific ways can we avoid feelings of elitism when we describe ourselves as the remnant?

* *Questions on Doctrine* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1957), p. 187.

Walk in Prayer

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Psalm 34

As a student, I often find myself turning to God in prayer when I need Him most. Usually, it is right before a test for which I haven't studied properly or when there is an algebra formula that I don't quite understand. After the class is over and I've received my grade, I forget to go to Him in thanksgiving for what He has helped me through. I forget to go to Him as to a friend who wants to rejoice with me over a good grade or mourn with me over a bad one.

God wants us, as His children, to be in constant touch with Him throughout the day. He wants to walk with us through the good and the bad. Only through constant prayer and fellowship with Him now will we be prepared for the trials that are soon to come.

Jesus is our best example of the grace God gives to us through prayer. He would spend hours a night asking the Father for strength or praying for His disciples to have understanding (Mark 14:32-36; Luke 6:12). "No other life was ever so crowded with labor and responsibility as was that of Jesus; yet how often He was found in prayer! How constant was His communion with God!"¹

Ellen White expresses the importance of prayer in the last days: "Their only hope is in the mercy of God; their only defense will be prayer. As Joshua was plead-

I often find myself turning to God in prayer right before a test for which I haven't studied properly.

ing before the Angel, so the remnant church, with brokenness of heart and earnest faith, will plead for pardon and deliverance through Jesus their Advocate."²

As we go through each day, let's remember to walk side by side with our God, Lord, Father, and Friend, in prayer.

REACT

1. Look at the different areas in your life. Are you able to talk to God, as to a friend and counselor, about everything?
2. What does prayer to the Father mean to you personally?
3. In what ways is prayer a condition, rather than an event?
4. What are the reliable sources of communication for the remnant church?
5. If you were commissioned to distract the remnant from their duty, what methods would you employ?
6. Is prayerlessness a sin? Explain your answer.
7. What are your obstacles to being convicted?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 362.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 473.

By Jennifer Bailey, an English major at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Communication

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Heb. 2:1

With all of this world's electronic power at our fingertips, we still have not done well at advancing humanity's ability with understanding or compassion. War is still a way of life on planet Earth. And with it, all of the ravages that it leaves behind. As one reads the book of Revelation, it also becomes evident that war is a part of the history of heaven.

In warfare, the use of fatal force and desperate action extracts a high toll on everyone on and off the battlefield. And a very important element for success in the engagement is communication. One of my family members often spoke of the importance of correct information while serving in the United States Armed Forces during the Second World War. He stated, "It is far better to have *no* information on the enemy's position than the *wrong* information. If you expect the enemy to be in a particular location, you will focus your attention there, but if you are not sure where the enemy is located, then you will be alert to all potential locations."

How often have we heard others expound on their interpretation of some particular prophetic event, giving their full attention to this or to that. How tragic it can be if their channel of communication is faulty and they have focused in the

"It is far better to have *no* information on the enemy's position than the *wrong* information."

wrong direction.

The significant battle at Midway was a classic example of the importance of communication. Neither Japan nor the United States could afford any miscommunication. Both fleet commanders knew the potential effects on the final outcome for the war. But in the end, correct information placed into the hands of the United States is credited with making the victory of the United States Navy on June 5 and 6, 1942.

Whatever can be done to alter, distort, or destroy the lines of communication among soldiers in battle is an enormous value to the enemy. That is why the Holy Spirit is so important to the remnant people on this battlefield called earth. The commander of the forces of evil is not new to warfare. He is not asleep. He knows that *this* war will not allow *partial* victory for the loser. He is desperate and knows the importance of focusing his attention to disrupt the channels of communication.

In the end, the last battle will be won by what appears to be a very small, ill-equipped army. But herein is its strength. They are focused, committed, selfless, organized, and most important, in constant communication with the Field Commander. They are described as holy, for so they are. They are one.

By Thomas A. Allen, a physics and engineering teacher at Auburn (Washington) Adventist Academy.

The Remnant in Training

HOW-TO

Key Text: Rev. 12:17

Let's make the remnant relevant for today by focusing on two vital qualities of those special people. With a little patience and willingness to learn, we, too, can develop qualities that will help us be part of those who remain faithful to our God.

1. Conviction is the first important quality of the remnant people. God's remnant people are set apart by a faith similar to that which Jesus had in His heavenly Father. Unshaken and secure. Convicted Christians know what they believe. If you aren't 100 percent sure of what you believe, figure it out. Conviction comes as a result of study. Study the Bible, study the life of Christ, and study the lives of convicted Christians. Talk to other people who are striving to lead a life as a convicted Christian.

Those who will be found faithful to God for the duration will have figured out what they believe and why they believe it. This understanding breeds conviction about their beliefs—and an excitement to bear witness to Christ at work in their lives. People who are confident in their faith won't have problems sharing or defending it—at any cost.

2. Endurance is the second quintessential quality of the remnant people. By definition, those who remain to the end have developed endurance. They have

The key to endurance is training.

kept the commandments of God and witnessed the testimony of Jesus Christ through thick and thin, no matter the risk, and have made it to the end of time as God's people.

The key to endurance is training. People who want to endure to the end of a marathon will train. Why shouldn't Christians who want to make it to the finish line do the same to strengthen themselves and to fortify their faith for the unknown struggles ahead? Endurance-training Christians build their strength through prayer. Prayerlessness is perhaps the greatest obstacle to completing the Christian journey successfully. Personally knowing and entering into conversation and fellowship with God is the first step to endurance as a Christian. Training to develop endurance also includes fellowship with other Christians. It is important to share personal faith-building experiences, as well as struggles, with those who are also building a relationship with God.

As Christians, we often struggle to make time for God and our relationship with Him. If we are really serious about taking on the characteristics of His remnant, we must be convicted of God's plan to save humanity and must develop a prayer-filled relationship with God to sustain ourselves. Preparing ourselves to have the characteristics of God's remnant people is something we can work on each day. Just consider yourself part of the remnant in training.

By Amy Worrell Kneller, director of development at Auburn (Washington) Adventist Academy.

Other Sheep

OPINION

Key Text: John 10:16

When I was a young boy, going to fabric stores with my mom bored me. I'd have preferred checking out model-airplane kits. But these stores first taught me the word *remnant*. Actually, I sometimes found the fabric remnants interesting. I would get these ideas of great things to do with the cloth. Occasionally Mom would cooperate, buy a piece, and take it home. One of those pieces became a pillow in my room. The pillow still lives in my attic, even after all these years.

That cloth experienced a lot. People handling, pulling, dropping, then cutting it, yards at a time, until finally only a small bit remained on the bolt. At home my remnant was sewn into a decorative pillow. As a pillow, it lived on my bed (when I made my bed) where the cat or dog might sleep on it. It would be squashed underneath me while I read a book. And, shame on me, it got used to beat up on my sister. When I went away to school and pretty much moved out, my pillow lived mostly in musty cardboard boxes. Its home in the attic isn't much better. But at least there the thing can breathe. For some reason, I've kept it. Most things that surrounded me when I was little are gone, lost, or left behind. This one survived. A remnant twice.

Most things that surrounded me when I was little are gone, lost, or left behind.

Growing up a Seventh-day Adventist, I learned different meanings for *remnant*. I got the idea that Adventists were it, *the* remnant. I wasn't the only one thinking that way. You may have heard the joke about Peter's giving a tour for some new arrivals in heaven. They asked him what was behind a high, opaque wall that they encountered. Peter responded quickly to their question. "Shhh," he said. "It's the Adventists. They think they are the only ones here."

Jesus said, "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16, NIV). The emphasis in Jesus' parable is on knowing the Good Shepherd. Being part of the flock (or remnant) is not a concern here. Knowing and following the Shepherd's voice is what matters.

That old pillow of mine knows my voice. And it has followed me around all this time. It could have been left in the store. It might have been given away, put in the garbage, or burned. It doesn't matter whether it is a remnant or not. The cloth is still with me, and that is what counts.

REACT

1. What good do all these remnant stories in the Old Testament provide us today?
2. What is the common thread that runs through these stories?

By Gill Bahnsen, a professional photographer from Auburn, Washington.

SHAKEN AND SIFTED



“I will give the command, and I will shake the house of Israel among all the nations as grain is shaken in a sieve, and not a kernel will fall to the ground” (Amos 9:9, NIV).

A Great Horror Flick?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Isa. 17:6

It probably sounds crazy, but I hope you never read this. I simply hope we are in heaven by then, and before that can happen, the church must be shaken. We have been raised to believe we have the truth, forgetting that “even if you’re on the right track, you’ll get run over if you just sit there” (Will Rogers).

While I was young, the events surrounding the end time sent shock waves of anxiety through my entire being. Sunday laws, death penalties for noncompliance, people hunting people, trials with convictions altering pleas from friends and loved ones, jail, the last plagues, the devil as anti-Christ attempting to pass off his lies as truth by performing miracles and by using evil angels to replicate the resurrection of the dead and thereby deceiving most everyone—what kid wouldn’t think of this as the stuff nightmares are made of? And how many people today would merely think this sounded like a great horror flick?

Not surprisingly, when the end does come, many will not see the real life events as anything more than an exciting show. But this is no show! As long as the devil is seen as only a bad court jester, whose worst character flaw is the uncontrollable urge to jab people’s backsides with a pitchfork, no one will feel the inescapable need to fall down at the foot of the cross. Satan’s no fool in red pajamas. Lucifer

It probably sounds crazy, but I hope you never read this.

was once honored in heaven, and, since his fall, he’s spent his time studying the human race. We have very little knowledge of him, and he has thousands of years of case histories on us. Who do you figure has the upper hand?

Actually, we have the choice of having the upper hand in every battle with the devil and temptation. We have victory in Christ if we give ourselves completely to Him. Have you ever seen people falsely accused of something? Even if you didn’t know them, didn’t you want to stand up and defend them? “Hey, wait! That’s not true . . .” But if you knew them, wouldn’t you stand sooner and more firmly?

Lucifer falsely accused God of ruling as a dictator rather than as a compassionate, loving Father. This lie shook all heaven, and the same lie is in full bloom here, making earth ripe for the shaking. We cannot expect that calling Him Lord truly makes us a Christian and worthy to be saved. The earth will be devastated, and few will remain faithful. Get to know the truth regarding the loving and consistent character of Christ through Bible study and prayer; and when you are shaken, you will cling to the vine of God and will inherit a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

By Lisa A. Rockwell, a religious writer and singer/songwriter from Paradise, California.

The Time We Have Prayed For

LOGOS

Luke 3:16, 17; 1 Cor. 15:57, 58; Heb. 12:25-29

The prophet Isaiah has been referred to as God's servant who introduced the gospel in the Old Testament. He was a spiritual leader and political counselor in Israel. His messages were addressed to literal Israel. It was God's plan to make Israel the greatest witness and testimony of what a nation could be in every detail of life if they would be obedient to God. He chose Isaiah to warn Israel of what would result from their apostasy and unfaithfulness. Isaiah gave this message before the devastation of Israel by the kings of Assyria and Babylon. "The Lord is going to lay waste the earth and devastate it; he will ruin its face and scatter its inhabitants" (Isa. 24:1, NIV). God describes how He would destroy their enemies if they were obedient to their covenant with Him.

Details of how completely God would deal with their enemies (Isa. 24:2-4)

The devastation would be in each household, including the servants, the priests, the merchants, and the business structure. Even the earth dries up, withers, and languishes. The reason for this devastation is clear: "The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt" (verses 5, 6).

The application of ancient Israel to spiritual Israel (verses 13-23)

It is clear as we read Isaiah 24 and come to verse 23 that the word *harvest* has some significance in our present time of earth's history. Jesus said, "The harvest is the end of the age" (Matt. 13:39). Our Lord used the allegory of the things of nature many times in the New Testament to teach spiritual values. It is apparent that the harvest in Isaiah and that mentioned in the New Testament refer to the same time, the end of this world. "'Some gleanings will remain, as when an olive tree is beaten, leaving two or three olives on the topmost branches, four or five on the fruitful boughs,' declares the Lord, the God of Israel" (Isa. 17:6).

"In the midst of Isaiah's view of the destruction of the earth he catches a glimpse of the salvation of the remnant. . . . They will be like the few olives that remain on a tree that has been 'shaken of a mighty wind' . . . or like the few grapes that remain when the harvest is over."¹ The few grapes left on the vine and the few olives that had remained on the tree represent the remnant who will remain true to God after the shaking of the church in the last days.

God gave Israel a picture of what He would do to their enemies if they, His people, were obedient. He would completely destroy the enemy countries around them. Instead, the surrounding nations conquered and took Israel into captivity.

Our Sabbath School lesson is dealing with God's family in the church. Adventists interpret prophecy as saying that we are living in the time just before the second coming of Jesus. Isaiah's vision in Isaiah 24 also has an application for these last days. The devastation seen in this chapter is similar to the destruction of the earth that takes place at the second coming of Christ.

"In Rev. 20 John applies the description of the earth, here given, to its desolate

state during the millennium.”² Jesus warned the believers who live in these last days of earth’s history that deceivers and false prophets will mislead some of the very elect. There are those who join the remnant church who do not nurture their own Christian growth, and in time they fall away. Jesus said in the parable of the sower, “This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they cannot believe and be saved. Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away” (Luke 8:11-13). We need to understand that this testing time comes in our lives to prepare us for the time of shaking and sifting; it comes to prove that we belong to the family of God.

As we sort out the purpose of Isaiah 24 in contrast to the last days, it is to educate and inform our own souls of our need to be true children of God—born of the

God gave Israel a picture of what He would do to their enemies if they were obedient.

Spirit, fed by God’s Word and by communion through prayer. The great Shepherd is leading His church to the kingdom of God. A loving and tender picture of a perfect relationship is seen in John 10:27, 28: “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.”

REACT

1. How has the study of this lesson challenged your thinking about God’s honesty toward Christians in the preparation for these last days?
2. What will you do this coming week that is new to you, to prepare you for the testing time?
3. What does it mean to be truly unshakable?
4. How did Jesus demonstrate His unshakable character while He was on this earth?

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 197.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 196.

Know Your Time!

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Hab. 2:6, 7

“The mighty shaking has commenced and will go on, and all will be shaken out who are not willing to take a bold and unyielding stand for the truth and to sacrifice for God and His cause.”¹

We are in the shaking time now. The last days are to be a rapid succession of events. God said He would cut them short for righteousness. “I saw that the powers of earth are now being shaken and that events come in order. War, and rumors of war, sword, famine, and pestilence are first to shake the powers of earth, then the voice of God will shake the sun, moon, and stars, and this earth also.”² After this shaking of the heavens, Jesus will be seen in the clouds of glory. Do not think that the shaking of the church is to come. No! It is occurring and is soon to end.

Ellen White speaks about the shaking of the powers of Europe and states, “It is the shaking of the angry nations.”³ What at this time is causing the nations of the earth to become angry? Violence, death from famine, plague, and pestilence. There seems to be no stopping it. Humanity will be forced to make an attempt to

**“Rooted and grounded in the truth, you will
abide with those things that cannot be shaken.”**

please the God who seems so angry. It is now occurring, governments are uniting, the Vatican has requested the United States to incorporate church doctrine into its laws. The time is surely ripe for the harvest.

“Everything that can be shaken will be shaken, but rooted and grounded in the truth, you will abide with those things that cannot be shaken. The law of God is steadfast, unalterable; for it is the expression of the character of Jehovah. Make up your mind that you will not by word or influence cast the least dishonor upon its authority.”⁴

REACT

1. What specific evidence would you cite to identify the shaking time as in effect today?
2. Does the shaking time apply to anyone outside the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Explain your answer.
3. What is the purpose of the shaking time?

1. *Early Writings*, p. 50.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Messages to Young People*, p. 30.

By Scotty Nordstrom, computer-engineering student at California State University at Chico.

When the Winds Blow

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Luke 6:26-29

When Jesus told the story of two builders who built their houses on vastly different foundations, He used symbols that were readily decipherable. The builders were each person there listening to Jesus. Both builders heard what He was saying, but the difference between them was not in their belief system or their theological viewpoints. Rather, it was their response to the promptings of Jesus that distinguished them.

As we sang in cradle roll, one builder built his house upon a rock and the other upon sand. And so the shaking and sifting of the church is a subject that Jesus addressed in His Sermon on the Mount. Those who have not built their lives upon a firm foundation, the rock, will be shaken by the winds and the storms of adversity and eventually will be sifted out of God's church. Their lives will topple to the ground and become a ruin.

The Bible informs us what the rock in the story represents. In Daniel 2, Nebuchadnezzar dreams about a mud-and-metal man. And a rock, representing the kingdom of God, destroys the statue and stands forever. (I've always hoped that someday I would hear a sermon on Daniel 2 emphasizing the rock rather than the statue.)

The interpretation of the sand is quite self-evident. We read that our "promises

In Daniel 2, Nebuchadnezzar dreams about a mud-and-metal man.

and resolutions are like ropes of sand." Our thoughts, impulses, and affections are continually shifting as long as we depend upon our own power to build our life. And when the winds come, the sand will blow away.

So Jesus makes the point that the foundation makes all the difference. But apparently we can think that our house is built on the right foundation and yet be disappointed when the storm comes. In the verses immediately preceding this story, Jesus alludes to a group of spiritual schizophrenics who call Him "Lord, Lord" but have failed to build their houses on the rock.

Even among Jesus' twelve closest disciples, the smartest, most talented, most promising of them all committed suicide when the winds blew and the storms came. And even the dedicated Peter, who was ready to die for his Lord, denied His Saviour three times when he was faced with crisis.

So a person's true character is revealed in moments of crisis. When the winds come and the house is shaken, it is too late to change foundations. The house is already built. Will your house withstand the storm? Are you firmly grounded on the rock?

**Steps to Christ, p. 47.*

By Brent Lindgren, an attorney from Sacramento, California.

Obtaining the Unshakable

HOW-TO

Key Text: 1 Cor. 15:57

How can we rest assured that, as the church is shaken, we will remain solid and unmoved? We are told in 1 Corinthians 15:57 that God has given us this victory through Jesus Christ. Therefore, through Christ we can be steadfast and unmovable.

Since our strength and steadfastness comes from Jesus, how can we obtain and maintain a “connection” with Christ? Daily commitment and communication with Jesus is the key to keeping in constant touch with the Source of our unshakable strength.

I would like to present to you a method of communicating with Christ that has brought me great blessings. This approach is very similar to that which is wonderfully demonstrated in Dwight K. Nelson’s *A New Way to Pray*. With a daily commitment of 20 minutes a day, in an environment totally free of all distractions where no one else is around, a powerful communication line will result. Before you begin, be sure you: (1) connect *daily*, (2) set aside a *specific* 20 minutes, and (3) have *no* distractions. The steps are:

1. Select only one story from one of the four Gospels. It is in the Gospels where we actually see Christ and His actions and learn most about His humanity and His work as our Saviour. Focus only on one story so that a single powerful

By maintaining a definite “phone line” with Christ, we are assured a solid, unshakable foundation.

message from that specific story will be spoken to you.

2. Read and reread the story, as you personally relive it. Each time you reread the story, let a different sense take over. Imagine what the sights, smells, and sounds are.

3. Listen for Jesus to speak to you through this story; listen for His specific message for you today. Let His words fill your being.

4. Physically write down His message for you each day in the form of either a letter from Jesus to you, personally relaying His message to you, or as a letter from you to Jesus, responding to Christ’s communication with you. Let His words come to you in definite tangible ways as you write them down. Note the day’s date and the verse that really spoke to you.

5. After writing the letter, read it again out loud, letting it lead into your personal prayer time with Jesus. Conclude the day’s session with your own prayer to your personal Saviour, the source of your strength.

By maintaining a definite “phone line” with Christ, we are assured a solid, unshakable foundation. As the shaking and sifting of the church rocks us, we will not be moved, for we are solid in Christ.

By Todd Peterson, a mathematics and computer teacher at the Paradise (California) Adventist School.

Cling to Jesus

OPINION

Key Texts: Heb. 12:25-29; Matt. 14:22-33

“I can hardly wait to see the expression on his face!” We had all gone to the airport to surprise my brother when he arrived. He was surprised, to say the least.

Peter also longed to see the expression on Jesus’ face. When Peter and the others were in the midst of the storm, Jesus came out to comfort them. Peter was skeptical.

Doesn’t that sound like us? Lord, are you really here to comfort me in this storm? Jesus said, “Be of good cheer. It is I. Be not afraid” (Matt. 14:26, KJV).

“Lord, if it is really You, ask me to come to You on the water.”

Jesus said, “Come.”

Peter stepped out and walked toward Jesus. But wait a minute—this is a storm. Peter quit concentrating on Jesus and focused on the storm. He began sinking, and just before he swallows water, he says, “Lord, save me!”

Are we like that? Whom am I to marry? What career should I choose? Where is the money going to come from? Just before the problems engulf us, we cry, “Lord, save me,” and He pulls us out of the water. Are our problems going to shake us away from Jesus, or are we going to tighten our grip on Jesus, never to lose sight of Him again?

Jesus caught Peter and said, “Peter, why did you doubt Me?”

“I can hardly wait to see the expression on his face!”

Peter’s faith was easily shaken. In the end our faith must not be easily blown over; it will stand boldly to weather the storm. “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Eph. 4:14, 15).

Peter looked at Jesus eye to eye. We can look to Jesus now through the Holy Spirit. If we let Him, the Spirit will consume us and give us the power to stand strong. “‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ saith the Lord of hosts” (Zech. 4:6, NIV).

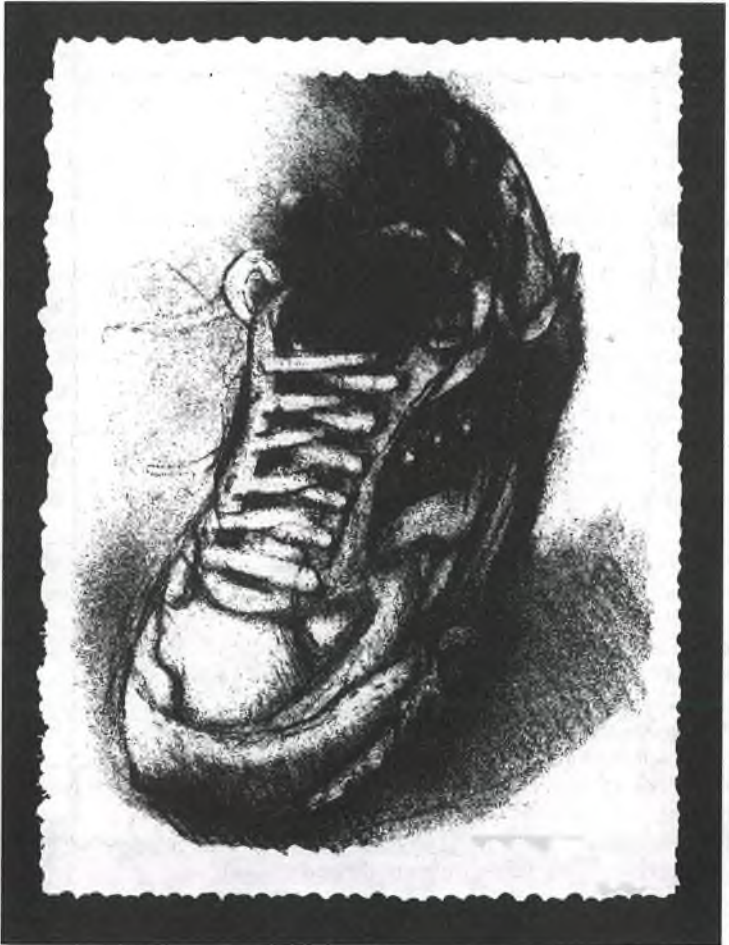
The others in the boat worshiped Jesus. They could not help bowing in awe and wonder, saying, “You, Jesus, truly are the son of God.”

REACT

1. Are you sure enough of your salvation that it cannot be shaken?
2. In what practical, everyday terms does it mean to take our eyes off Jesus?

By Laura Lemons, a nurse at Feather River Hospital, Paradise, California.

IF THE SHOE FITS . . .



“Who is this that appears like the dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, majestic as the stars in procession?” (Song of Sol. 6:10, NIV).

An Old, Familiar Story

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Song of Sol. 6:10

With music, metaphor, and rhythm, John the revelator weaves his rich tale. The tapestry of Revelation, spanning the history of the ages is full of beasts, dragons, and damsels. And then, of course, there is the Prince. Wrapped up in this fantasy language is the eternal truth of a covenant-keeping God and His beloved church. The story recorded by John is designed to capture your imagination and win your heart. In fact, it is almost like a fairy tale you may have heard somewhere before.

Ella of the Soot and Cinders they called her. She was always mopping, scrubbing, cooking, cleaning—trying to accomplish a task that never seemed to be finished. Her sisters, who were “a little more than kin and less than kind,”¹ were constantly belittling her, accusing her, threatening her.

That was all before she met the Prince. When they met and she had the opportunity to look into his eyes, she realized that with him she could find love and happiness, that his love would be her salvation. But how could he ever come to care for her, Ella of the Soot and Cinders? It was for her a night of mystery and magic, a night filled with promise, but then the relentless clock struck the hour of midnight, and she was forced to flee before her dream turned into a nightmare. Trip-

She lost her shoe but escaped just before the spell was broken.

ping in her haste, she lost her shoe but escaped just before the spell was broken.

Ella thought that that was the last she would ever see of the Prince. The news was all over town: the Prince had chosen his bride, but no one could find the girl who had won his heart. All his royal emissaries had to go on was a shoe. By the end of the day many hopeful women had tried it on, but there was only one perfect fit. Ella too tried on the shoe. What a moment of triumph! It was a perfect fit. The Prince had chosen her for his bride. Never again would she know soot and cinders, dust and derision. She was to be united with her Prince for all eternity.

We know this story well. It is also the story of the church. The bride of Christ has long been the church militant, trying to accomplish her mission in spite of the attacks of the adversary. But Ellen White tells us that, weak and flawed as the church may be, it “is the only object on earth on which Christ bestows His supreme regard.”² Truly the moment of the church’s triumph is imminent, for Christ is soon to claim His bride.

1. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 1, scene 2, line 65.

2. *Review and Herald*, Dec. 11, 1888 (2:263).

By Monique Viljoen, a third-year student in religion at Helderberg College, Somerset West, South Africa.

Darkness Doesn't Stand a Chance

LOGOS

Isa. 60:1-3; Dan. 12:1-3; Zech. 2:7-13; Rev. 19:7-9

Sometimes I become really angry (with a righteous anger, I hope) when evil and error are given neon-light acclaim. I become angry when disadvantaged people are exploited and when children are abused. I become angry when preachers who peddle falsehoods as truth get all the limelight, and when the crowds are captivated by some miracle worker without ever checking out his or her credentials.

What makes me especially angry, however, is that my church seems to have so little impact on all of that! Why is our voice but a whisper when it should be a loud cry? Why do the cobwebs cover our baptismal font when the neighboring church's waters are never still? Why do other youth groups thrive while mine struggles to survive? Why do these things make me angry? I know it's not meant to be that way, but I also know that it's not going to stay that way.

What Could Be (Isa. 60:1-3)

There comes a particular point in time when God stands up, shakes His church by the shoulder, and says, "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you" (verse 1, NIV). It is at a time when "darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples" (verse 2).

Could this be a fitting description of today's world? Scripture often uses darkness as a symbol of ignorance of God. In the New Testament it relates particularly to ignorance of the gospel. "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4). God speaks to His people and says that "the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn" (Isa. 60:2, 3).

When the gospel is both understood and experienced by us, it will set us alight for Him. People will come out of the darkness of their confusion about life to bask in our light, "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). Even kings, the world's influential leaders, will be attracted by the brightness of our new day. What a triumph for God's church! *This is what could be.*

What Should Be (1 Pet. 2:9, 10)

God had a dream of what His church could be, and you are part of His dream. "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Pet. 2:9, 10). The Greek word for "people" is *laos*, from which we derive the word "laity." Those same people are also called "a royal priesthood" (verse 9). They have a corporate and an individual responsibility to declare God's praises.

Has God called you out of darkness into His light? Then you have something you must pass on to others. A person doesn't light a candle, Jesus said, and then put it under a bowl or a bed. So, let your light shine! Every church wants its own

minister, but actually every church is full of ministers. You are a minister, to declare God's praises in the way He has gifted you to do. Imagine what would happen if every church member took this verse seriously. Ellen White saw it as it could be: "With such an army of workers as our youth, rightly trained, might furnish, how soon the message of a crucified, risen, and soon coming Saviour might be carried to the whole world!" That's what could be, and *that's what should be*.

What Shall Be (Rev. 18:1)

Change is in the air; great things are beginning to happen in the church. "After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor" (Rev. 18:1). Sweep the baptismal font! Bring in more chairs! God is about to cause His church to triumph gloriously. This angel from heaven represents the mighty power of the gospel in the lives and on the tongues of His people. Put yourself right in the center of that picture, where you belong. Revelation is a book of surprises. The surprise is that things aren't always as they appear to be.

In the end, the Lamb triumphs over the mighty beast and his coalition (17:12-14) and the despised remnant of God stand on Mount Zion, waving palm branches

Sweep the baptismal font! Bring in more chairs!

of victory while their persecutors who had called the shots (13:8, 15) are consigned to the flames (19:19-21). Amid all the amens and hallelujahs in heaven at the great wedding feast of the Lamb, the spotlight falls on His bride, the church, who shares in His triumph and His glory (verses 6-9). *This is what shall be!*

REACT

1. What does it mean to declare the praises of God, who called you out of darkness?
2. What special gifts and opportunities has God given you for the purpose of praising Him?
3. List five people with whom you are in regular contact who need to hear the gospel. Pray for readiness and wisdom to share the good news with each one.

**Education*, p. 271.

By Garth H. Bainbridge, senior pastor of the Helderberg College Church, Somerset West, South Africa.

The Rebirth of the Church

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Hab. 2:4

The church was formally born at Pentecost. Eventually the church will go through rebirth as it moves from the church militant to the church triumphant. One tends to think of this process only in terms of the marriage festival that follows (Rev. 19:7-9). It sounds like all happy sailing! But there is an old saying that puts work before play.

Ellen White states that "It is not possible for us to drift into heaven."¹ It will be like the passing through the "eye of a needle" (Matt. 19:24, NIV). Those who have experienced the normal birth process will know that it moves through a terribly frightful and painful stage and that it is only the cry of new life and love that makes one forget the pain. The Bible calls this the "travail upon a woman with child" (1 Thess. 5:3, KJV; Rev. 12:2).

When Christ comes again, His church will finally be purified for the wedding. Let us call this the rebirth of the church. Before the joy of new life comes, travail will come. This will be a terrible time. A study of chapter 40 in *The Great Controversy* will reveal that at the second coming there will be a coalescence of many of the occurrences that happened during the giving of the law at Sinai² and at the

"It is not possible for us to drift into heaven."

cross. Read also Jeremiah 30:6 and Hebrews 12:21 in this regard.

How will we be able to make it through this experience? "The just shall live by his faith" (Hab. 2:4, KJV). We will need a lot of tested and proven faith through this time. "Faith is essential in order to the keeping of the law of God."³ The process of salvation will run solely on the basis of our tested and proven faith—the oil (enough) that we have (ready) in our lamps for the festival of the Bridegroom. Therefore take courage! Through the hole in the dark and clashing clouds shines a ray of light: "They have received 'the latter rain,' 'the refreshing from the presence of the Lord,' and they are prepared for the trying hour before them."⁴ Eventually they will sing "the song of Moses and the Lamb."⁵

REACT

1. Is your faith strong enough to stand the final test on the Sabbath as testing truth?

2. Why does the Lord test our faith so regularly?

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 280.

2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 304.

3. *The Great Controversy*, p. 436.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 613.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 649.

By N. G. Pienaar, theology student at Helderberg College, Somerset West, South Africa.

Engaged to Be Married

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Rev. 19:7

Waiting for the bride almost becomes an occupation when you attend weddings. But when you hear the first peals of the wedding march and turn to see her in her exquisite beauty, you have to admit it was worth the wait.

A wedding is often used in Scripture as an illustration of what it will be like when Christ comes. This is more than just a “Hi, honey, I’m home!” The whole universe is going to be involved in some kind of celestial celebration that will make the opening night at the Olympics pale in comparison.

Before the wedding can explode upon us, however, we find that the bride needs to prepare herself. Looking at an example of what happened before Jewish weddings gives us an idea of why this is. A Jewish engagement was taken very seriously (you could even be stoned for breaking your vows! [Deut. 23:23]), and preparing for the wedding was no small affair. The groom’s house was made ready during the day. Meanwhile, the bride and her attendants prepared her dress. The ornaments that the bride wore were presents from her fiancé, and without a doubt she made a stunning display. Sometime late in the evening, the groom, along with his friends, started out for the bride’s house. She waited, beautifully dressed for the

This is more than just a “Hi, honey, I’m home!”

coming event, and was escorted by torch light, shouting joyfully to tell everyone the good news about the wedding (see John 3:29; Rev. 18:23).

Jesus also wants to parade His bride through the streets of the universe. We’re out on display, and we must be dressed like a queen. Revelation tells us that the bride needs to wear fine linen, standing for “righteous acts” (Rev. 19:8, NIV). Fortunately, God Himself dresses us and gives us the ornaments we need (Isa. 61:10), but just as a bride shouldn’t forget these, so God reminds us not to forget Him (Jer. 2:32). Finally, in the preparation for the wedding, the good news about the wedding of the Lamb needs to be shouted joyously in the streets of this world: “The Spirit and bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’” (Rev. 22:17). And when all are gathered for the grand procession, the waiting King will come for His queen.

REACT

1. How can the church, with its imperfections, ever hope to measure up as the bride of Christ?
2. How seriously do you take your engagement (baptismal) vows to Christ?
3. How is your engagement the preparation for your marriage (living with Jesus for eternity)?

By Alan Parker, campus chaplain of the University of Cape Town, South Africa.

How to Get to the Feast

HOW-TO

Key Text: Song of Sol. 6:10

We are all invited to the “Wedding celebration of God” and His people. We are the “apple of His eye” and because of this, God has chosen to come and be part of our existence. The names of those at the party are found in the invitation book of God. How, then, can we become part of God’s church triumphant? God’s kingdom actualized at His second coming is in the future, but the preview is the worldwide church of God now.

We all know from sitting through many sermons that we are saved by faith (Rom. 3:22). We define faith often as trust in God or belief in Him. This makes us shift the responsibility onto God’s shoulders and allows us to slip into the Laodicean lap-of-luxury, laziness, and leisure. God is coming in the future, and we have only to be ready to wait upon Him, read our Bibles, and pray every day. Then He will come and finish His work in righteousness.

Sure enough, we fool ourselves into thinking that we are prepared by talking about God and His soon-coming kingdom. We pride ourselves in the “Sabbath School language” that we use to talk about our Christianity, but when Christ does come, we will be the ones shouting, “Lord, Lord!” and He will say, “Depart from

We fool ourselves into thinking that we are prepared by talking about God and His soon-coming kingdom.

me, I do not know you.” We are saved by faith, but our faith is expressed in action. Faith is the appropriate response to the coming of God (Karl Barth), so faith without works is dead (James 2:17). What should our “response-ability,” our ability to respond, our faith in action, be? If you see someone hungry, thirsty, naked, ill, or in prison (Matthew 25), then love them as you would love yourself. Put God’s law of love into practice.

We might also go to the other extreme, assume God’s responsibility, and try to bring about the kingdom of God by ourselves. This seems absurd, but we can easily be deluded into thinking that as our church grows in size and magnitude, we end up concentrating only on the now and the growth of the church superstructure and forget that our mission is to increase the kingdom of God. Our responsibility lies solely with our being a “light to the nations” and not a business organization that must meet its budget and ensure that church buildings are beautifully decorated and adorned. We forget that we should be working with people, and that is actualized through our relationships. “Out of respect for Christ, be courteously reverent to one another” (Eph. 5:21, *The Message*). We exist as members of the church, return our tithes, and are dressed plainly and unobtrusively, but our relationships with our families and friends is one of discord, hatred, and jealousy.

By Andrew Waters II, campus chaplain of the University of Cape Town, South Africa.

Dreadfully Religious

OPINION

Key Text: Eph. 5:14-17

Have you ever asked yourself why our church seems to be stuck between what could be, what should be, and what shall be (see this week's "Logos")? Whenever this question comes up in my mind, only one answer seems to follow: My beliefs as a Christian are sometimes more a matter of mood and sentiment than one of waiting and living in the presence of a Holy God.

This false situation exists not only in my personal experience, but it can be seen in our church, also. Whether in the pulpit or in other relationships, we share opinions and create moods. We successfully make deep impressions, but what do we accomplish? Most of the time what we say does not affect *our* life; therefore, no one takes us seriously. Our religion does not amount to anything serious, and this is reflected in society.

Capitalism has never taken religion seriously. It has built churches in the middle of towns, without the fear of raising up a dangerous counter force. *Militarism* laughs at religion by quietly appointing chaplains who can pass on their sentiments between bombardments and the offense of war. *Socialism* kindly says that religion is a private matter, without being afraid that this may be a force to reckon with. It

My beliefs as a Christian are sometimes more a matter of mood and sentiment than one of waiting and living in the presence of a Holy God.

is clear that the world does not take religion seriously, and it is frightening to see how many Christians share this view. The idea that religion has to do with real power does not exist in the world.*

What a sad state of affairs when Adventists are graded as people who receive an *A* for preaching (talking) and a *D* for worship (living)! So, why are we stuck as a church between what could be, what should be, and what shall be? Does this not suggest that our church, as part of the people of God, needs to stop sharing opinions and creating moods (preaching), and return to a living relationship with a living God (real preaching), a relationship in which we confess our difference from God and our intense need of Him. Let us then cease thinking that invocation of God is a private matter, that my needs and feelings are everything, and that evading obedience to God is acceptable.

*Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *A Karl Barth Reader* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986).

By Leonard Richards, a theology student at Helderberg College, Somerset West, South Africa.

Next Quarter's Lessons

Spiritual Gifts

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for first quarter 1997, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1: What the Bible Says About Spiritual Gifts

Scripture: 1 Pet. 4:10, 11; Matt. 25:14-30; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Rom. 12:1-8

Theme: Spiritual gifts are given to advance the cause of God's kingdom.

Lesson 2: The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts

Scripture: Acts 1:1-26; 2:1, 2; 13:2-4; Ps. 68:28-35; John 16

Theme: The Holy Spirit is the effective agent in accomplishing the work of the church in the world.

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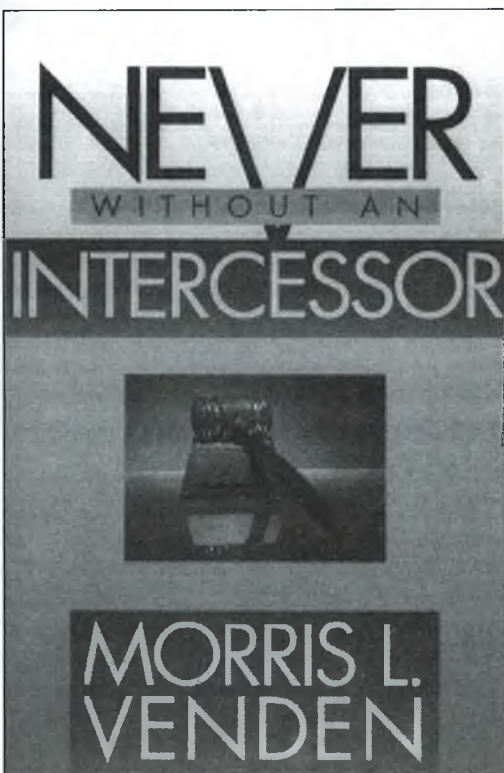


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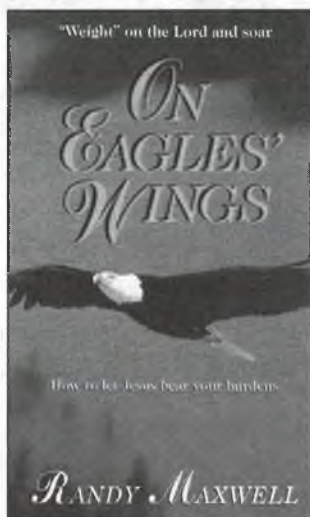
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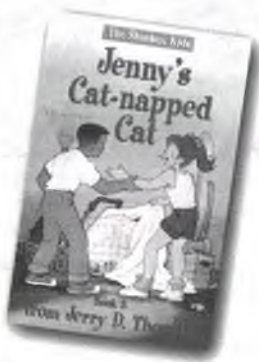


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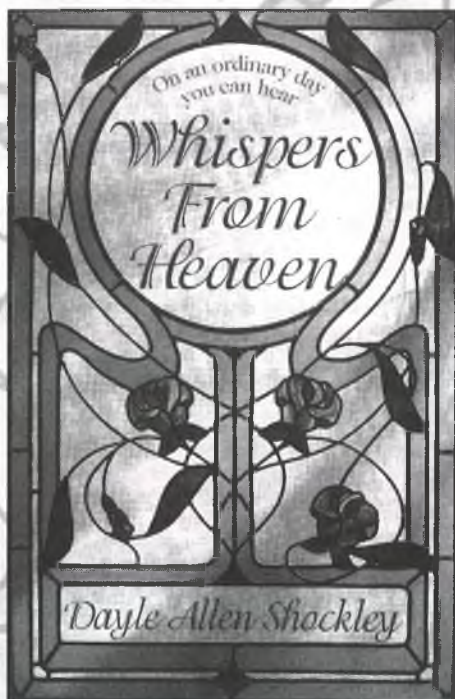
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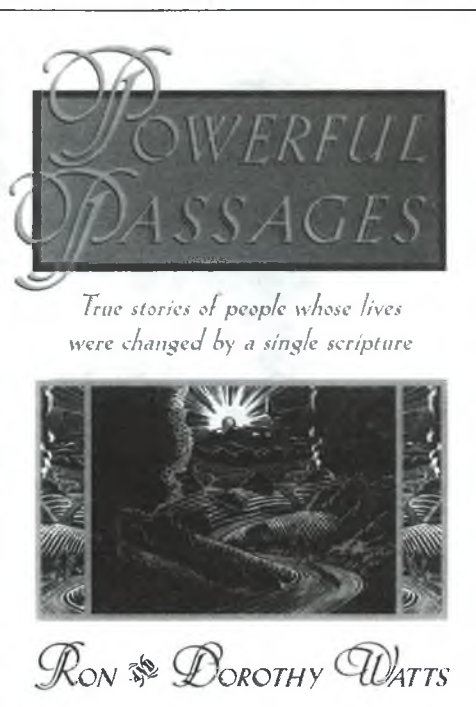
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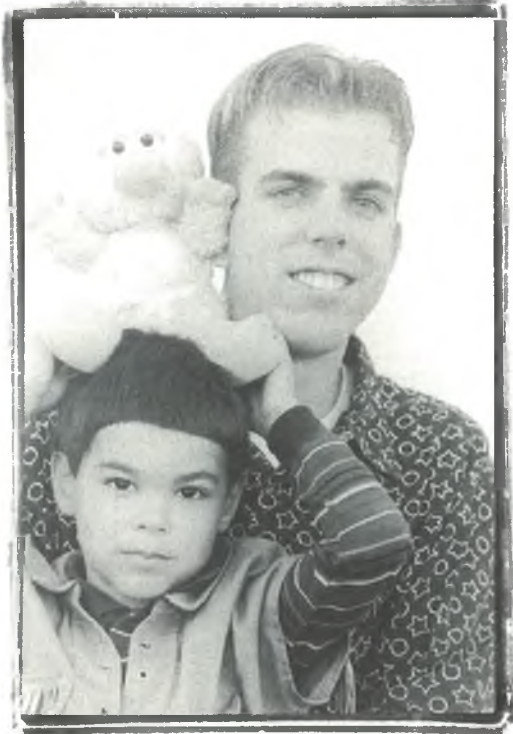
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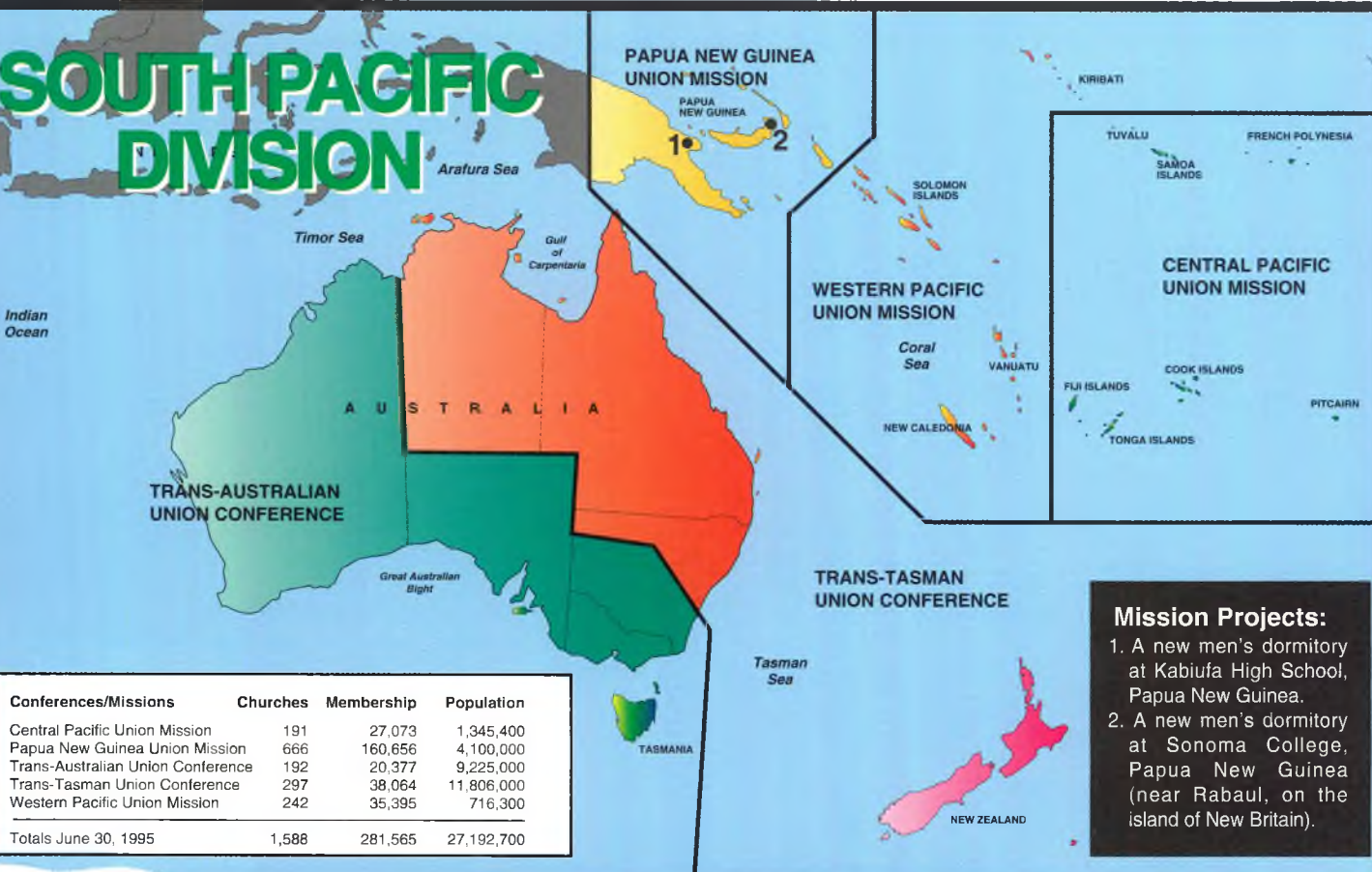
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