

ELDER'S DIGEST

A Quarterly Resource for local Church Elders Vol. 11 No. 1



EDFRED LEE

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The grasshopper Syndrome

Joel Sarli

The full history is found in Deuteronomy 1, but the detail that I want to explore in this editorial is found in Numbers 13:33. *“And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.”*

Here we find what Donald C. Posterski labeled as **“the grasshopper syndrome”** on which I would like to elaborate a little.

The Bible reveals that intimidation is not a new force in the world. There are many members in our church who want to hide their identification with Adventism under the pressure of some denominational intimidation.

Peter the apostle under normal circumstances made great claims of allegiance to Jesus but he folded under pressure. His desire to support Jesus was noble, but the situation of the fateful night around the campfire pushed him into denying he was even associated with his Lord (Luke 22:54-62).

There is a graphic account of the same phenomenon in Numbers 13. The people involved are the twelve Hebrew spies who were sent on a reconnaissance mission and instructed to bring back a report on life in the land of Canaan.

The plan was God’s idea. “The Lord said to Moses,

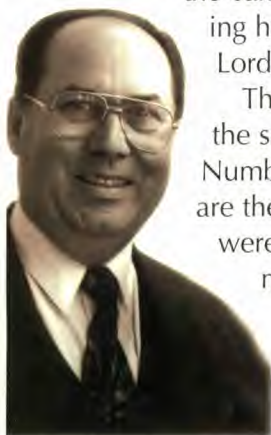
‘send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites’” (Num. 13:1). The twelve leaders did as they were told. They followed the map as they explored the land. They took notes. They made their estimates. They cut down large clusters of fresh grapes and for good measure they brought along some pomegranates too. The mission took them a total of forty days, and then they returned to the desert where Moses and the Israelites were waiting for their report (Num. 13:21-26).

After Moses and Aaron and others welcomed their men back, they sampled the fruit and the debriefing began.

Initially, the majority report had only one dissenter and he was not about to remain silent. Caleb forcefully broke into the proceedings: “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we certainly can do it” (Num. 13:30).

Caleb’s minority perspective did not carry much weight with the others. Although he was able to convince Joshua to join his cause, the Israelites voted to go with the majority. The prospect of staying in the desert or facing defeat led to grumbling and despair. The whole assembly turned to Moses and rebelled against God. The growing consensus was to go back to Egypt rather than ahead to Canaan (Num. 14:1-4). The consequences proved to be severe. God’s plan was put on hold and the whole nation stayed marooned in the desert for another forty years.

The majority of the spies were simply over-





Don't be afraid of identifying yourself with God's people. Don't make room for the "grasshopper syndrome" to find a place among your congregation.

whelmed. They were captured by their circumstances without remembering that God was with them. Their self-image went limp. Their confidence crumbled. The best they could do was identify with grasshoppers. They not only imagined themselves as small and inadequate, they thought the giants saw them as weaklings too. The opposition was too strong. The only alternative was to retreat and back away.

Dear elders, there are forces today operating in the world that are triggering shades of the grasshopper syndrome in many of God's people. Many members feel weak and reticent about making Adventism visible in our society. They say they love God and His church, but feel intimidated. They feel the pressure to be silent. Adventists may be faithful as church attendees, worshiping in the pew on Sabbath morning, studying the Bible, praying, going on weekend retreats. But during the week at their work place, these same members are silent about their church involvement and professed faith in the Advent message.

What separated Caleb and Joshua from the other spies? An assessment of why ten of the twelve leaders were intimidated when they spied out the land of Canaan is revealing. The problem

did not lie with the spies' suitability for their assignment. As persons, they had credibility with their peers. They were solid citizens. They were considered to be worthy spiritual representatives of their tribes. Moses was a competent leader. He would not have chosen them if he was not confident they could handle the assignment.

Caleb and Joshua held on to God's vision for the future because they held on to God. The intimidated ten lost sight of what the future could be because they became spiritually self-sufficient. They made their calculations without God in the equation. And regardless of their gifts and ingenuity, they were not strong on their own to achieve what God had designed for them.

The dynamics remain the same today in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Embracing self-sufficiency is still a major move toward spiritual ineffectiveness among us. The people God can use are not those who claim to be strong and invincible.

Caleb and Joshua, on the other hand, were used by God because they knew their limits and kept their confidence in God's resources. They had eyes to see what God wanted to achieve. Their message to the people was "With God, we can do it." Their confidence in God was stronger than the prevailing social pressure around them. They were ready to go and stand up to the giants in the land.

Dear elder, always remember that the power to do a great work is not in yourselves but in God who elected and sent you. So when some big idea must be implemented in your congregation, don't be intimidated. Don't be afraid of identifying yourself with God's people. Don't make room for the "grasshopper syndrome" to find a place among your congregation. **E**



MANAGING CONFLICT IN THE CONGREGATION

Conflict is universal and a natural part of life where people and relationships are involved. Understanding the difference between inner, interpersonal, and organizational conflict and separating people from organizational issues is vital.

Principles

1. Inner conflict without resolution can act out in different ways. This can affect family relationships and job performance as well as attitude in ministering and witnessing.
2. Dealing effectively with conflicts involving interpersonal relationships requires moving beyond immediate tensions and disagreements and identifying the root causes.
3. Miscommunication or lack of communication is often the root cause of most disagreements. Getting the parties to talk may resolve the conflict or misunderstanding.
4. If the conflict is deeper than mere communication, a neutral, third party may be needed to assist in negotiating resolution. This person can help identify issues, find common ground, and deal with deeper issues.
5. In dealing with organizational conflict, the issues need to be identified before resolution can begin to take place. Both hidden and surface issues must be addressed.

Approaches

Avoiding. Sometimes the best approach is to ignore the situation. Some situations are best left alone. Even if you are right, you often lose. The battle may simply not be worth the cost. Getting involved will sometimes escalate the disagreement into a major conflict. Learn when it is best to walk away.

Avoiding blaming. "Blamestorming" is a popular sport today. Pointing a finger and placing blame on others is easy. More difficult is extending one's hand in a move toward reconciliation.

Accommodating. Hoping to preserve a relationship at all costs, some people automatically give in to the wishes of others. This is appropriate when the issues are unimportant compared to the value of the relationship or when the accommodating person feels that he or she is in the wrong. In other instances accommodating may give others a sense of vindication, even when they are wrong, which might lead to further conflict. The relationship may begin to feel burdensome, which can result in feelings of frustration and resentment. After repeated accommodations and continued conflict, another approach is needed.

Compromising. Sometimes issues are too complex for involved parties to resolve. A mediator can help those involved to bring issues to the surface, while being sensitive to feelings involved. The goal is to have the parties work together to find mutually satisfactory solutions.

Negotiating. The situation may necessitate bringing in a neutral, third party to help adversaries work through the issues. The tension level may be too high for the parties to talk without strong emotions. The neutral party can listen, help them talk through the issues, and help them become aware of ways to resolve the conflict.

Forcing. After listening to the issues and working past any form of resolution, a mediator seeks to explore all possible solutions. The mediator has no power to impose them on the conflicting parties. Those in disagreement can be asked to accept a solution and to agree to work together. Paul said that love is the greatest gift (see 1 Cor. 13). Ultimately the best solutions to any conflict are love and forgiveness. **E**

Adapted from Richard Faling, "Managing Conflict Before It Manages You," *Church Administration*, November 1996, pp. 10-12.

Pablo Sánchez writes from El Paso, Texas.

Q & A

A man after God's own heart

Thomas A. Davis

"A man after God's own heart"

I have many times heard people point out that David was an adulterer and murderer, yet he is in the Bible called 'a man after God's own heart.' I am puzzled by this. Did God really overlook David's evil actions?

It should be observed that when the prophet Samuel made the statement (1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22), he did so in a certain time frame when David was chosen to be anointed to replace Saul. This is clearly stated by Ellen White when she quotes David, "I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes" (Ps. 119:112). "It was this," she states, "that caused God to pronounce David, when in his youth he was called to the throne, 'a man after mine own heart'." — *Education*, p. 48. But does the statement also apply to David when, for example, he had committed adultery and murder? (See 2 Sam. 11:2-25).

Note the clear implications of *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 718, 719: "Every effort which David made to conceal his guilt proved unavailing. He had betrayed himself into the power of Satan; danger surrounded him, dishonor more bitter than death was before him. There appeared but one way of escape, and in his desperation he was hurried on to add murder to adultery."

"It was when he was walking in the counsel of God that he [David] was called a man after God's own heart. When he sinned, this ceased to be true of him until by repentance he had returned to the Lord." — *Ibid.*, p. 723.

When David "departed from God and yielded himself to the wicked one, he became for the time the agent of Satan." — *Ibid.*, p. 719.

Concerning David's reaction following Nathan's rebuke, we read that he "had committed a grievous sin, toward both Uriah and Bathsheba, and he keenly felt this. But infinitely greater was his sin against God." — *Ibid.*, p. 722. Would God, under such conditions, think of him as a man after His own heart?

Had Nathan not reproved David, "he would have gone on unconvicted of his heinous sin, and would have been ruined. The conviction of his

guilt was the saving of his soul." — Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 1023. David "humbled his heart before God in repentance and contrition of soul . . . He . . . was reconverted." — *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 1146.

On the basis of what Ellen White says of David from the time he sinned until he was reconverted, it is plain that during that period he could not have been called a man after God's own heart.

We should ponder the implications of these words: "Through successive generations infidels have pointed to the character of David, bearing this dark stain [of adultery and murder], and have exclaimed in triumph and derision, 'This is the man after God's own heart!' Thus a reproach has been brought upon religion, God and His word have been blasphemed, souls have been hardened in unbelief, and many, under a cloak of piety, have become bold in sin." — *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 722, 723.

Even Martin Luther was caught in this trap. Philip of Hesse, a German ruler won to the Reformation, wanted to form a marriage relationship that would have been bigamous. Luther defended him by holding that: "Even if a man planned the death of a husband in order to marry his widow, he should not be prevented from doing so. He referred to David, who had committed adultery with Bathsheba, caused her husband to be murdered, and then taken her to be his wife, and still remained a holy man. 'In God's name,' he cries, 'why this harshness against one's fellow men, when God himself did not require it!'" — F. D. Maurice, quoted in J. Carter Swain, *Right and Wrong Ways to Use the Bible*, p. 116.

We should be extremely careful, in our usage of the text under consideration, that we do not in any way appear to confirm the unbeliever in his scorn or give justification to one looking for an excuse for his sin. **E**

Thomas A. Davis, lives in Armstrong, British Columbia, Canada. Taken from the book *Questions That Demand Answers*.

The
Next

THOUSAND YEARS

Lawrence Maxwell

Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

Revelation 20:6.

Few topics in the Bible have caught the public fancy or been subjected to so much speculation as the millennium.

Will it happen before Christ comes or after? Will it be spent in heaven or on earth? Or is it merely symbolic and will never really happen?

The account of the millennium really begins in Revelation 19:11, with the coming of Jesus on the white horse. It continues through the destruction of the wicked and the recreation of the earth, ending in Revelation 21:8.

There is only one possible time for the millennium: It has to begin when Jesus comes. There is only one place where the saints can be, and that is in heaven. The wicked are dead, all of them.

Why have the millennium?

The judgment is over. The final destiny of humans and angels has been forever fixed. So why not move forward at once? Sin will never rise again; God has promised. So light the fire! Burn the wicked! Get rid of Satan! Let righteousness reign supreme! Re-create the world! Give the saints full enjoyment of their inheritance now!

Why wait longer?

Why wait a thousand years?

Everything in the Bible must be looked at in terms of the great controversy between Christ and Satan and God's determination that sin will not arise a second time. There are still a few questions left that, if not answered now, could cause trouble later. We can think of some.

Did God decide every case right? Has He condemned some who should have been saved, or brought some to heaven who should have been left out?

What about the millions who lived before Calvary? The heathen? All others who were told little or nothing about Christ and salvation? Has Christ dealt fairly with them?



A time for saints to judge

John tells us that the saints will judge. He says he “saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them.” They will go through the records and see why loved ones are not in heaven with them. This will answer any questions they may have in regard to God’s dealings with those they have held most dear.

And they will work with Jesus in deciding how much punishment the impenitent deserve. This will forever remove any danger that some might question whether God was too severe with sinners, or too lenient. Reviewing what she saw in one of her early visions, Ellen G. White described the process vividly (see *Early Writings*, p. 291).

A time for Satan to worry

The thousand years will be a time for Satan and his angels to tremble in terror, contemplating the fate that awaits them when the millennium ends. They walk about the darkened earth, observing the ruin they have wrought—tumbled buildings, broken bridges, empty factories, smashed airplanes, fruitless orchards, deserted crop land, rusting autos, leering skulls of lifeless corpses.

Self-condemned by whatever residue of rationality he still retains, Satan is also accused and criticized by the grumbling gangs he goaded to rebel. Taught by his own malice to disobey and cheat the God of love, his legions give him little now but disobedience and disloyalty. What a miserable period the millennium will be for him.

A time for proof

The thousand years is a time for Satan to prove he can create a world and organize its inhabitants in a happy, prosperous state. At the beginning of the great controversy, he complained when he was left out of the divine committee that planned our

earth. It was on this point that the great controversy first broke out. “I saw that when God said to his Son, let us make man in our image, Satan was jealous of Jesus. He wished to be consulted concerning the formation of man” (*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 1, p. 17). It is fitting that the great controversy finish where it started, with Satan given unhindered opportunity to prove that he can create a world as good as the one Jesus created six thousand years ago.

Satan is bound in the “bottomless pit” (Revelation 20:1). The Greek word for “bottomless pit” is the Greek word for “deep” in Genesis 1:2, where the world before Creation is described by the phrase, “darkness was upon the face of the deep.” Six thousand years ago, Jesus looked upon the darkened deep and said, “Let there be lights,” and there were lights. He said, “Let there be a firmament.” “Let the waters . . . be gathered . . . and let the dry land appear.” “Let us make man in our image” (Genesis 1:3-26). To every command of Jesus, the deep responded obediently; Jesus “spoke, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast” (Psalm 33:9).

For six thousand years, Satan persuaded men and women to attribute creation to idols or to natural forces, or in our scientific age, to blind chance guided by “natural selection.” Certainly, in his version, creation didn’t need Jesus. Now he has opportunity to exert his creative powers on the same “darkened deep” on which Jesus worked so successfully.

Satan said that his laws were much better than God’s, that his great goal was to improve the statutes of Jehovah (see *The Great Controversy*, p. 498). How very fair of God to give him a thousand years to prove his claims, to show that he can create a world as good as the one Jesus created, and to fill it with inhabitants even more kind, more generous, more loving than the angels that inhabit heaven. No wonder, when the millennium is over and Satan has failed on both claims, saints and angels will praise God for His justice and mercy. Even to His archenemy, He has been supremely gracious.

The thousand years will also give time to prove that Jesus was right in taking to heaven some whom the angels question—youth who died before their characters were fully formed, men and women from heathen lands who never heard the name of Christ, autistic and hyperactive persons whose ugly deeds were traceable to conditions

about which they were ignorant or over which they had no control. For a thousand years the angels watch these less-favored humans and discover that they fit into heaven perfectly. Jesus was right. They were safe to save.

God knows that the one sure defense against sin is evidence—evidence of the terrible consequences of sin compared to the beauty and peace and contentment of love. He intends there shall be enough evidence to ward off sin forever.

The millennium ends

As the thousand years draw to a close, Jesus descends with the saints, and New Jerusalem settles onto the earth. The wicked are raised to life with the same diseases and deformities with which they died. Satan sets to work at once to consolidate their allegiance. He tells them that he resurrected them. He heals them and then, no doubt, gets them busy building huge apartment complexes and factories, repairing bridges and roads, plowing fields, erecting hospitals and prisons. Probably many prisons, for the master lawbreaker generates lawlessness.

New Jerusalem sits on the site of old Jerusalem, resplendent in the glory of God, its gates wide open for passersby to see the beauty of its golden streets and the radiant happiness of its peaceful citizens. Satan tells the resurrected sinners that they deserve to be there, that it is only Jesus who keeps them out, and that it is his intention to win the city for them. He assures them that, if they will attack the city as he directs, they will soon be inside, enjoying all the pleasures Christ denies them.

Sinners who once read Revelation know the plan is doomed, but what other chance have they? Other sinners, already in the habit of believing Satan's lies, believe him now. Perhaps, too, some resurrected preachers of apostate churches assure them that when God sees how much they want inside, He will forgive them in love and permit them to enter.

Plans finally completed, sinners fully trained and armed, Satan gathers his troops "together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea." And, John tells us, "they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city" (Revelation 20:8, 9). Jesus orders the gates closed.

With what intense interest John must have watched these unfolding scenes. Now, as the city

is about to be attacked, John says, "I saw a great white throne and him that sat on it . . . And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Revelation 20:11, 12).

The final judgment

To the accompaniment of the marvelous melodies of heaven's finest choirs, Jesus is crowned in the presence of every soul who ever drew breath in heaven or on earth. Then the final judgment begins.

"As soon as the books of record are opened, and the eye of Jesus looks upon the wicked, they are conscious of every sin which they have ever committed" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 666). They remember the first steps they took in sin. They recall the times their parents or a church school teacher or a pastor pleaded with them to let Jesus bring them victory. They sit again in church or chapel and hear week of prayer sermons and relive altar calls when they scoffed at the strong urging of God's Spirit, and they will admit that God has done everything possible to save them from this day.

Then, Ellen G. White tells us, "above the throne is revealed the cross; and like a panoramic view appear the scenes of Adam's temptation and fall, and the successive steps in the great plan of redemption" with special emphasis on the closing scenes of Christ's sacrifice (*The Great Controversy*, pp. 666, 667).

When that presentation is over, will Jesus make an altar call? Will He plea with the sinners outside the city to come forward, even at this late date, and ask them to bring their lives into conformity with His will? It would certainly be in harmony with His character to do so.

This we do know, that Jesus' presentation of the plan of salvation, there at the end of the millennium, will be more eloquent than the most persuasive sermon ever preached by the world's most effective evangelists. If any appeal to repentance can reach the hearts of the sinners outside the city, that sermon will. The saints inside will be heartbroken to realize afresh that their salvation was bought at the cost of Jesus' death; they will "raise a song of praise that echoes and reechoes through the vaults of

heaven: "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb" (*Ibid.*, p. 665).

But among the sinners outside, not one will respond. Satan has deceived the world into thinking that God keeps sinners out of heaven. Nothing could be further from the truth. Sinners keep themselves out. Character is a lot like concrete. When first mixed, concrete is soft and pliable and can be molded to almost any shape the builder desires. But once it sets, concrete is one of the hardest of substances; it can be chipped or broken, but it can never again be molded. Ellen G. White speaks of the character development of the righteous as "a settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, so they cannot be moved" (*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1161). Sinners, likewise, will be fully set in their ways, and nothing, not even the most eloquent presentation by time's most effective Preacher will be able to change them. That is why, however urgently Jesus may appeal, they will have no second probation.

The end of the wicked

Alas, it is all too true that Jesus can do nothing more to save the sinners assembled "over the breadth of the earth." All, wherever they lived, whenever they lived, have now heard the story of salvation. Yet, even in the full light of the cross, they have no intention of bringing their lives into conformity with God's will. The angels are satisfied that Jesus has been abundantly fair with them. All their questions have been answered. There is no need to continue the controversy longer. So, John tells us, "fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them" (Revelation 20:9). What kind of fire this will be is an intriguing question to which we may not know the answer till we ask Jesus.

John, in Revelation 20, calls it fire from heaven and says that earth and heaven fled away.

In Revelation 14, the third angel warns of fire and brimstone and of smoke that ascends for ever and ever.

Malachi likens the final fire to an oven and the wicked, to stubble burning in the stubble field. The saved will walk on the ashes (see Malachi 4:1, 3).

In Matthew 25:41, Jesus speaks of "everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Paul warned that sinners are killed by Jesus' "brightness" (2 Thessalonians 2:8).

God told Moses, "There shall no man see me,

and live" (Exodus 33:20).

Peter wrote, "The heavens and the earth . . . [are] reserved unto fire against the day of judgment." "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. . . . All these things shall be dissolved" (2 Peter 3:7, 10, 11).

Ezekiel warned Satan that God would "bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and . . . bring thee to ashes" (Ezekiel 28:18).

Putting all these descriptions together, we have a fire that comes down from heaven yet is brought from the midst of Satan. It is likened to burning sulfur, which burns quietly, yet it makes a great noise. It reaches the temperature of a hot oven, but it consumes heaven and earth and melts the elements, all of which require much greater heat.

Apparently we are looking at something that cannot be described in ordinary human language, like transparent gold and glass mingled with fire. The descriptions are all genuine and valid and accurate, and when we see the fire, we will understand why it was described in all these various ways.

The medieval church looked at the texts we have listed and constructed an eternally burning hell complete with pitchforks and demons and a guidebook known as Dante's *Inferno*. Puritan divine Jonathan Edwards read some of the texts and preached a terrifying sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Slowly, quietly, barely whispering at times, he warned his congregation in 1741: "The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: his wrath towards you burns like fire."

Two and a half centuries later, Adventists abhor both interpretations as out of harmony with the character of God. We know that God doesn't have to kill sinners any more than a doctor kills a cancer patient. Cancer kills the patient; sin kills the sinner.

Someone has suggested that at the end of the millennium God simply lets sin play out the full length of its course. From the beginning of the great controversy, Satan has insisted that the universe would be better off without God's laws.

Following this line of reasoning, God could simply withdraw His control over the physical aspect of our world. He could tell the neutrons and protons and positrons and mu-mesons and antilambda

particles and anti-xi-zero particles and the thirty or more additional subatomic particles that make up the matter of our planet, to go their own way and do their own thing.

If we understand nuclear bombs correctly, this sudden lawlessness among the minute particles of matter would result in an explosion so enormous it would make the blasts that demolished Hiroshima and Nagasaki look like mere sparks. In minutes, the world would be hotter than the sun. Everything on it and in it would dissolve, even vaporize, as Peter suggests. In this state of invisible vapor, the world would appear to "flee away." As clouds and mountaintops exploded, fire would appear to come down from heaven. And as sinners disintegrated, the fire would appear to leap up from within their bodies.

Satan would linger much longer than others because the body he has abused, leading billions into sin, was specially built by God to stand in His presence, in the full light of His glory, for a hundred billion years and more.

Whether this is really what the final fire will be like, we'll have to be there to ask Jesus. One beauty of this explanation is that it removes every trace of vindictiveness from God's part in the destruction of sinners. Up till now, He has refused Satan's demand that His laws be done away with. He alone knew the dire results of granting Satan's wish, and that's why He delayed. But now, in fairness to His enemy, He removes the restraints and lets Satan and sinners have what they asked for.

And the watching universe, who have already seen the degradation of character that results from breaking God's moral laws, now see in one frightening display of awesome destruction why God's physical laws are so necessary. How much those who are outside the city will wish for a refuge in that holocaust! How fortunate we are! We still have time, with God's help, to bring our lives into harmony with His will. Then the protective walls of Christ's goodness will be our safe refuge from the all-consuming fire. **E**

Lawrence Maxwell wrote this article when he was a professor of Church History at the Seventh-day Adventist Seminary at Andrews University.

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Strong in the Lord

Margarida F. Sarli

"And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him; for he was but a youth." 1 Samuel 17:42.

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power" Ephesians 6:5.

"Christ has made every provision for us to be strong. He has given us His Holy Spirit, whose office is to bring to our remembrance all the promises that Christ has made, that we may have peace and a sweet sense of forgiveness. If we will but keep our eyes fixed on the Savior, and trust in His power, we shall be filled with a sense of security; for the righteousness of Christ will become our righteousness . . ." — *Messages to Young People*, p. 107.

I. Introduction

Where do you find the strength you need for the living of life in the present?

Some seek for strength and help through the securing of a good education. This is to be commended. However, a doctor's degree does not guarantee him the strength he will need when the pressures of life threaten him.

Some seek for strength on the basis of financial solutions for the problems of life. It should be granted that adequate financial resources solve many of the problems we confront. With man's acquisitive instinct, he is always striving for more of the things the world provides. However, in the final analysis, a man needs strength other than in the area of finances.

Many seek strength through the formation and development of meaningful friendships. We cannot overestimate the value of the right kind of friendships for a successful life. A true friend can be a rich blessing from God.

Some find strength and help through listening to beautiful music.

Others will search for strength by developing the art of meditation and contemplation.

The apostle Paul said: "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might." Paul was living in an environment where the force of the Roman Empire was prominent. He was living in a place where evil was well entrenched. From many years of experience this veteran follower of Jesus Christ encourages us to: "Be strong in the Lord, and the power of His sufficiency." Paul had found the strength he needed through Jesus Christ (Philippians 4:13). He had learned how to live in the depths of despair as well as on the crest of victory and success.

Paul knew that our only hope of victory was to be found in the strength of the Lord. He was aware of the weakness in every person that makes him a potential victim of Satan unless he is strengthened with the strength that comes from God.

The immensity of the task of the church and the responsibility of each believer to be a responsible follower of Jesus Christ demands a strength that comes from above.

Our Lord promised His disciples the spiritual vitality and strength they would need for living a victorious life and for rendering effective service (Acts 1:8). Paul is encouraging the believers in Ephesus to be strong in the power of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18). These exhortations of being filled with the Spirit and being strong in the Lord are in the imperative mood. To be filled with the Spirit, to be strong in the Lord, is not optional to the believer if he would overcome evil and render effective service.

II. The Holy Spirit is a personal gift from God

A. One of the great promises to each person who repents and confesses his faith in Jesus Christ is the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

B. We receive this gift of the Holy Spirit when we put our faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (Galatians 3:14).

God's gifts are personal to us. In the Holy Spirit God gives us His personal presence.

III. The Holy Spirit is a current gift from God (1 Corinthians 3:16).

There are some who think of the Holy Spirit in terms of ancient history. They think of Him as having been active on the day of Pentecost and during the days of the infancy of the church. They have not yet fully responded to His living presence in the present.

Are you aware now that God has given you this precious gift of the Holy Spirit? Do not relegate the work of the Spirit to the past or think only in terms of what He might do in the future. He is God's gift bestow to you.

IV. The Holy Spirit is a precious gift from God

In God's gift of the Holy Spirit, He has given to us a most precious gift.

A. The Holy Spirit helps us to know that we are children of God (Romans 8:16).

The Holy Spirit will assist us in our prayer life (Romans 8:26).

B. It is the Holy Spirit who wants to lead us in the right paths as we try to be worldly children of God (Romans 8:14).

C. It is through the Holy Spirit that God has assured us that He will raise us from the dead (Romans 8:11).

How do you value this gift of God to you? Do you consider it a precious gift?

V. The Holy Spirit is a permanent gift from God

A. The Holy Spirit is the divine seal of God's ownership granted to each believer, and serves as a divine guarantee that God will complete the great redemption that was started within each of us in the conversion experience (Ephesians 1:13, 14).

B. Jesus encouraged His disciples in a time of despondency by assuring them that the Holy Spirit would dwell with them forever (John 14:16).

In comparison with the brief ministry of our Lord, the Holy Spirit was bestowed as a permanent gift to do the work of God within each of us.

VI. The Holy Spirit is a powerful gift from God (Romans 8:26)

When Paul wrote to Timothy, he declared, "God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control" (2 Timothy 1:7).

God's power becomes available to us in adequate supply when we recognize our weakness and cast ourselves upon His grace and sustaining presence (2 Corinthians 12:9, 10).

We are encouraged to strengthen ourselves in the strength of the Lord rather than leaning upon human resources as we try to cope with the stresses, pressures, and dangers of life.

VII. Conclusion

The apostle speaks from personal experience when he says, "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). This declaration does not come from the wild imaginations of a fanciful thinker. Instead Paul is declaring the adequacy of Jesus Christ to give one the strength to do what needs to be done in whatever life might bring.

In the strength of the Lord, let us face the fears that threaten us.

In the strength of the Lord, let us resist the evil one and draw close to our God.

In the strength of the Lord, let us face our responsibilities and opportunities.

Jesus Christ wants to bring the strength of God into your life and will do so as you trust Him and follow Him.

VIII. Illustration

A. Only he who can say, "The Lord is the strength of my life," can say, "Of whom shall I be afraid?" — Alexander McClaren.

B. My brother and I were preparing to leave the bank with his 5-year-old daughter, Melissa. She ran ahead to open the heavy door. She huffed, puffed, and pushed; she stepped back and started again. Finally she pushed with all the might her little body could muster, and the door opened

(Continued on page 17)

Loneliness

Margarida F. Sarli

"About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, *"Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"*—which means, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* Matthew 27:26.

"Alone He must tread the path; alone He must bear the burden. Upon Him who had laid off His glory and accepted the weakness of humanity the redemption of the world must rest. He saw and felt it all, but His purpose remained steadfast. Upon His arm depended the salvation of the fallen race, and He reached out His hand to grasp the hand of Omnipotent Love." — *The Desire of Ages*, p. 111.

I. Introduction

To walk the street of any major city in the world and to look in the faces of those you meet, is to be impressed with the look of loneliness that fills the eyes of thousands of individuals even while they are in the midst of a multitude.

Loneliness is a problem that disturbs the heart of men around the world.

Do you have periods of extreme loneliness when you feel forsaken, cut off, abandoned, isolated, and very alone?

The desire for fellowship, a sense of belonging, and the assurance of acceptance are basic needs of the human heart.

II. Why do we have a problem with loneliness?

A. One can experience loneliness because he is lost in the crowd.

Merely to be in the midst of people does not guarantee that one will have the problem of loneliness solved.

B. Some experience loneliness because they feel they are misunderstood by members of their family or by the circle of people whose acceptance is important to them.

C. One can feel lonely because of mistreatment at the hands of someone else.

This is a perennial problem because we are always subject to mistreatment by others.

D. One can experience loneliness as a result of frustration in his work or in the relationships of life that are important to him.

E. One can experience loneliness because of weariness of body and mind.

The body and the mind must have rest from the burdens and the stresses of life.

F. One can experience loneliness because of a position of leadership.

To bear the weight of responsibility or to stand at the top of an organization can be a very lonely position for the one who must make decisions.

G. One can experience loneliness because of physical or emotional suffering.

Pain can be so intense that it can cause us to feel we are alone in the midst of our agony.

H. One can feel lonely because of a negative and critical attitude toward self.

This is one of the major contributing causes to a feeling of loneliness. Many of us developed a negative way of thinking early in life and have never been able to replace our negative thoughts with a positive mental attitude.

I. Many experience loneliness because of known, unconfessed, and unforsaken sin in their life. This is true particularly among those who are the people of God. To tolerate known sin is to create a feeling of guilt and a feeling of not being in harmony with God. The restoration of fellowship and the joy of association come only after the sin has been confessed and forsaken. To truly make confession is to "agree with God" concerning the sin.

J. Many experience loneliness because of inadequate and incorrect understanding of the nature of God. Many of us have accepted fragments or fractions of God's great self-revelation as being the complete revelation of the nature and purpose of God. In order to overcome the problem of loneliness, one needs to have a proper understanding of the nature of God and a life in harmony with His purpose.

K. Loneliness is often the result of permitting ourselves to live on the level of our emotions rather than letting our intellect determine the way we are going to feel and react to the various situations of life.

III. Our Lord and the problem of loneliness

Would you be surprised to know that our Lord suffered the agony of feeling lonely? Because He has experienced the pain of loneliness, we are assured by the writer of Scripture that He is able to sympathize with us and to assist us with this painful problem (Heb. 2:17, 18).

Our Lord who suffered in all points as we can provide us with a pattern or a model that can give us guidance in dealing with the painful problems of life. The words of our text are words of appalling woe for we hear the Savior crying out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The Savior felt utterly forsaken and very lonely. It seemed as if He were cut off from God completely.

On many different occasions our Lord must have experienced the pain of loneliness.

- A.** Our Lord was misunderstood by the members of His own family (Matt. 12:46-50).
- B.** Our Lord was misunderstood and rejected by the people of His own city (Luke 4:24-30).
- C.** Our Lord was betrayed by one of His twelve intimate friends.
- D.** In a time of great stress when our Lord needed the prayer support of his most intimate friends, they went to sleep leaving Him alone in His agony (Luke 22:45, 46).
- E.** When our Lord was seized by the hands of wicked men, we read that all of His apostles forsook Him though one did follow afar off.
- F.** The words of our text come from the lips of the lonely Savior while He was impaled upon a cross. In the midst of His physical anguish, His greatest suffering was the feeling of having been forsaken by His God. The words, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" are words of deepest mystery and of the profoundest solemnity. The mystery behind these words and behind the event that was taking place is beyond human power to fully comprehend.

IV. Was our Lord really forsaken?

There can be absolutely no question concerning the agony of His loneliness as He bore the burden of human guilt and condemnation. Our Lord had taken upon Himself the sin and the guilt of a rebellious creation and was dying under the penalty of human sin.

A. Our Lord felt Himself to be utterly forsaken.

He felt the awful loneliness of being cut off from God, separated from God, and forsaken by His friends. There is no more intense agony than our Lord experienced at this moment as He died to redeem us from the awful penalty of sin.

B. This cry of utter pathos reveals the genuineness of the agony of our Lord on our behalf. This was no farce. This was no mere drama. Our Lord was "smitten by God, and afflicted." He was suffering the wrath of a Holy God against the malignancy of evil.

V. What can we do to solve the problem of loneliness?

We probably need to admit that we cannot obliterate and make ourselves totally immune from the problem of loneliness. It is a problem with which we will have to deal as time goes by, and the example of our Lord provides us with a pattern to follow.

A. Our Lord responded to the problem of loneliness by crying out to God in His time of need.

First and foremost, when we feel lonely we should look to the Lord for grace, guidance, and help. It is not the will of our Father God that any of us experience the painful agony of loneliness. It is His will that each of us be members of His family and that we dwell together and relate to each other in terms of warm, generous love. It is His desire that we enjoy the delight of spiritual fellowship with other members of the family at all times.

B. To develop a positive mental attitude, based on faith in God, will aid us greatly in overcoming the problem of loneliness.

C. To accept the humanity of others so as not to be knocked off balance by their misunderstanding or by mistreatment by them can help us overcome the problem of loneliness. To continuously practice the habit of forgiving others will assist us greatly in overcoming the loneliness that comes about as a result of misunderstanding and mistreatment.

(Continued on page 21)

CHILDREN'S STORY

Margarida F. Sarli

Story No. 1

Bridge collapses

Lesson: Psalm 56:11.

Morale was low among the workmen on the 2,590 meter West Gate Bridge in Melbourne, Australia.

Word got around that a similar bridge had collapsed in Great Britain.

"This bridge isn't safe," the men grumbled.

Jack Hindshaw, the engineer in charge of construction, called the men together to explain why the bridge in Great Britain had collapsed. "That will not happen here," he promised them. "If I didn't think it was safe I wouldn't be working here."

Not long after, on the morning of October 15, 1970, Jack Hindshaw received an urgent message: "There is trouble. Come to the bridge at once."

Hindshaw arrived within half an hour to find that the bridge had buckled in one section. The men were doing their best to find a way to correct it.

Suddenly there was a terrible wrenching of metal and a whole section of the bridge crumbled and fell to the river below. Thirty-five of the sixty-eight workers were killed. Among them was engineer Jack Hindshaw.

Mr. Hindshaw believed in his project. He had faith in the work of his company. He was sure the span would remain secure. But his faith was wrongly placed, and he fell with the bridge to his death.

It is possible for us to do the same in the spiritual realm. Some people put their trust in money and others in their own abilities. Too many place their faith in a particular person. They honor him so much that should he fall they will fall with him. Others put their trust in a church. They feel that as long as their names are recorded they will be safe. They think that because the church has been around for centuries it will not let them down. Someday they might be surprised.

It is not wise to put our faith in a person or in a system of beliefs. The Bible says that if we do we will be disappointed. There is only one sure support on which we can rely and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He will not fail us. We can count on Him. In Him we will be safe.



Story No. 2

Fulton's folly

Lesson: Hebrews 4:15.

"Fulton's folly" is what someone called it. The thing was described by one writer as "an ungainly craft looking precisely like a backwoods sawmill mounted on a scow and set on fire." The Clermont was actually a steamboat, one of the first in the United States.

August 17, 1807, was the date scheduled for the ship's public trial. A large crowd gathered on the banks of the Hudson River to see if it would work.

"I'll bet you anything it won't go!" said one.

"What a lot of noise it makes!" said another.

"To say nothing of all that fire, steam, and smoke."

"She'll never make it!"

Robert Fulton ignored their comments and made ready to prove that the ship would work.

Slowly the boat began to move away from the wharf. It headed toward the center of the river where it made a clean-cut turn upstream and was on its way. A shout went up from the spectators.

"There she goes!"

"It works!"

"Look at her pass the other boats!"

At the amazing speed of about five miles an hour the Clermont steamed up the river to Albany and back in thirty-two hours. The news that the ship really worked spread all over New York, and soon there were plenty of passengers and freight to keep it busy.

The attitude of those spectators on August 17, 1807, is still around in 2005. People look at Christianity and say, "It will never work. It is not possible to live by the ideals of the Bible." Jesus Christ came into this world to prove that it does work. He came to demonstrate the reality of the things He taught.

Jesus was once a child. He became a teenager and faced the same problems you face. By His life He proved that it is possible for a young person to grow up in a wicked world and yet not sin. He had no resources you do not have. He demonstrated what you can become through His grace and power. **F**

From the files of Elder's Guide

Margarida F. Sarli compiled the information for this article and she works in the Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

(Continued from page 13)

Strong in the Lord - Sermon # 1

She was unaware that her father's hand, high above her head, had actually pushed the door open for her. I laughed at my niece, but then realized God does the same for me every day. — Vicky Marra Franklin.

C. I relive each moment of my visit with Corrie ten Boom (paralyzed by a stroke). Helpless and for the most part dependent, I felt our mutual weakness. Yet I am certain neither of us had ever felt stronger. It makes me think of the Cross of Christ—a symbol of weakness and humiliation, yet at the same time, a symbol of victory and strength.

For a wheelchair may confine a body that is wasting away. But no wheelchair can confine the soul . . . the soul that is inwardly renewed day by day. For paralyzed people can walk with the Lord. Speechless people can talk with the Almighty. Sightless people can see Jesus. Deaf people can hear the Word of God. And those like Tante Corrie, their minds shadowy and obscure, can have the very mind of Christ. — Joni Eareckson Tada.

D. Aqaba in 1917 seemed impregnable. Any enemy vessel approaching the port would have to face the battery of huge naval guns above the town. Behind Aqaba in every direction lay barren, waterless, inhospitable desert. To the east lay the deadly "anvil of the sun" The Turks believed Aqaba to be safe from any attack. But they were wrong.

Lawrence of Arabia led a force of irregular Arab cavalry across the "anvil of the sun." Together, they rallied support among the local people. On July 6, 1917, the Arab forces swept into Aqaba from the north, from the blind side. Arabs on their camels and horses. Lawrence at their head, galloping past the gigantic naval guns that are completely powerless to stop them. The guns were facing in the wrong direction. Aqaba fell, and the Turkish hold on Palestine was broken, to be replaced by the British mandate and eventually by the State of Israel.

The Turks failed to defend Aqaba because they made two mistakes. They did not know their enemy, and they did not have the right weapons.

We must be careful not to make the same mistakes. Ephesians 6:12 makes it very clear who our

enemy is: "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world." — Michael Boyland.

E. In *The Encourager*, Charles Mylander writes: Sunrise was dawning when Los Angeles motorcycle police officer Bob Vernon saw a red pickup truck speed through a stop sign. This guy must be late to work, he thought to himself. He turned on his emergency lights and radioed that he was in pursuit. The pickup pulled over, and the officer approached.

Meanwhile in the truck, the driver thought: The cops already know! He was scared. He rested his hand on the same gun he had used a few moments before to rob a twenty-four-hour market. The sack of stolen money was beside him on the seat. The officer said, 'Good morning, sir, may I see your . . .'

He never finished the sentence. The driver shoved his gun toward the policeman's chest and fired from just inches away. The cop was knocked flat seven feet away.

A few seconds later, to the shock of the criminal, the officer stood up, pulled his service revolver, and fired twice. The first bullet went through the open window and smashed the windshield. The second tore through the door and ripped into the driver's left leg.

'Don't shoot!' the thief screamed, throwing the gun and sack of money out the pickup window.

What saved the policeman's life was dozens of layers of Kevlar, the super strong fabric used for bulletproof vests. Only three-eighths of an inch thick, Kevlar can stop bullets cold.

In Ephesians 6, the Bible instructs every Christian to put on the full armor of God. Simple qualities like righteousness and faith can deflect what the enemy of souls may fire at us. **E**

Margarida F. Sarli is the editorial coordinator for this section.

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a sunset. The sky transitions from a deep blue at the top to a bright yellow and orange near the horizon. In the lower-left foreground, the dark silhouette of a tree is visible against the bright sky. The title 'UNITY of the Spirit' is overlaid on the upper portion of the image.

UNITY of the *Spirit*

The Lord is at work in a
variety of ways to bind
His people together.

Ellen G. White

Holy Spirit

The Lord desires to make man the repository of divine influence, and the only thing that hinders the accomplishment of God's design is that men close their hearts to the light of life. Apostasy caused the withdrawal of the Holy Spirit from man, but through the plan of redemption this blessing of heaven is to be restored to those who sincerely desire it. The Lord has promised to give all good things to those who ask Him, and all good things are defined as given with the gift of the Holy Spirit. The more we discover our real need, our real poverty, the more will we desire the gift of the Holy Spirit; our souls will be turned, not into the channel of ambition and presumption, but into the channel of earnest supplication for the enlightenment of heaven. It is because we do not see our need, do not realize our poverty, that we do not pour forth earnest entreaties, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, for the bestowal of the blessing.

If the workers there only knew their need, their cry would ascend with ceaseless importunity that they might have the Spirit of God to rest upon them. They would see nothing but danger in walking in the sparks of their own kindling. Devising and planning without the Lord to plan with you is to be ensnared by the enemy. Let every soul seek the Lord.

Jesus said, "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." It is in proportion to our appreciation of the necessity and value of spiritual things that we seek for their attainment. "Without me ye can do nothing," says Jesus, and yet many think that man can do very much in his own finite strength and wisdom. Satan is ready to offer his counsel that he may win the souls in the game of life. When men do not feel the need of counseling with their brethren, something is wrong; they trust to their wisdom. It is essential that brethren should counsel together. This I have been compelled to urge for the last forty-five years. Again and again the instruction has been repeated that those who are engaged in important work in the cause of God should not walk in their own ideas, but counsel together. They may regard their plans as without a flaw, but other minds may be enlightened on some points where they cannot

see or may take heed to suggestions and counsels of those who see not the truth.

The Lord may have plans of a different order, not after the plans of finite man. The Lord has not endowed one man with all the qualifications essential to accomplish the work in our institutions. One man may be strong in one direction and weak on other points, and Satan understands how to take advantage of that weak point; and another may be strong in another direction, each making up for the deficiency of his brother. Let no man think himself sufficient of himself, with breadth of mind enough to carry the weighty responsibilities of running such institutions as the publishing house, the college, or the health institutions. Among a multitude of counselors there is safety.

It is essential that men in responsible positions in any branch of the work of God take advantage of religious ordinances and the means of grace to obtain all the counsels of heaven they can. Special efforts should be made by those in the medical profession to place themselves in the channel of light because they are continually exposed to a variety of temptations.

Physicians are deprived of many opportunities to attend important meetings where they might obtain a better understanding of the working of the cause of God. But they can do far better than they do if they will devise and plan with determined purpose. They do not hear the statistics of the work, they lose the direct appeals that are made to their heart, that they may recognize the voice of God in entreaty, in warnings, in testimonies of His Spirit that they may be assured that the Captain of their salvation is leading His people. They lose sight of the importance and force of spiritual truths and fail to reach a position of exalted faith. Those who are in this position need wise counselors who shall alternate in attending the religious meeting for the benefit of the churches. Imbued with the Spirit of God, they may catch the holy inspiration and rehearse the messages of warning, and keep fresh in mind the providences of God, while they live lives of purity and faith and gladness of spirit.

The Lord is at work in a variety of ways to bind His people together. Through heavenly and human agencies He is at work that His professed followers

may all become partakers of the divine nature, that His church may be brought up to the highest standard of Christian excellence. God has made the line of demarcation between the church and the world very distinct, and He designs that it shall be discerned and practiced. . . .

The believers in all ages are to be one, and the Holy Spirit is the living essence that cements, animates, and pervades the whole body of Christ's followers. The duties devolving on the members of Christ's church are tasks set by the Lord, and although each one of the workers is but an atom, a fraction of the stupendous fabric, inhabited by the Holy Spirit, how sacred, how holy do these duties appear! The Jews had an appointed guard whose duty it was to watch the temple night and day, and although the guard was made up of a large number of men, each one felt that he was under obligation to stand in his lot and place; for he was entrusted with a solemn charge. Suppose that the numerous body of guards had been dismissed, and the whole burden of responsibility had been placed upon one man and that at a time when particular danger was near because of the efforts of a vigilant foe. This would be presumption. Thank God, important interests are not to rest on one man's mind or one man's judgment. Every soul is to be on the alert to catch every sound, to note every movement on the part of the enemy that would endanger his God-given charge. This is the spirit that should characterize every worker at the _____; for each one of you is entrusted with sacred responsibility that you may help one another, strengthen one another in keeping the fort. There is to be a building one another up in the most holy faith, and no one is to receive the least sanction in tearing others down. The Holy Spirit must abide upon every worker else he that watches, keeps his watch in vain.

Let every one do his work as unto God and not unto man. Let your conduct accord with the sacred trust that has been given to you. This you may do; for the fountain of life has been opened for you, and principles of a new and heavenly order are to control your spirit and actions. Let not anyone receive the impression that a confederacy may safely be formed with worldlings. Confidences are not to be encouraged with those who are enemies of Christ. No compromise can be made with the enemy. Are you sentinels for God? Then be careful

lest you betray God's people into the enemy's hands. Satan is seeking to insinuate some scheme that will result in separating God from the workers, but I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Let every one stand in his lot and place, and do the part assigned him with unwavering fidelity, and he will see and realize the fulfillment of the gracious designs of the Lord." If you become restless, as did Abraham and Sarah, and work up plans of your own in order to bring about God's promises, a condition of things which you deem desirable after your own ways and ideas, you will find that it will result in sorrow, misery, and sin.

Jesus comes to you as the Spirit of truth; study the mind of the Spirit, consult your Lord, follow His way. If you yield to the dictates of the mind and flesh, your spirit will lose its proper character and balance, and you fail to discern and cannot appreciate moral power. Then you will seek to carry out the maxims of worldlings. Their voices are heard on every side. Here is the path of success. . . . God calls upon you to close the door to human inventions and to open the door to divine illumination. Be careful that you do not resist the Spirit of God in its office work upon the temple of the soul. Be determined to please God, to magnify His name, to enjoy the sweet influence of His grace.

Every element of your nature is to be dedicated to God; lay not one attribute upon the altar of Satan. . . . Give all you have and are, and it is all nothing without the merit of the blood that sanctifies the gift. Could those who hold responsible positions multiply their talents a thousand fold, their service would have no worth before God unless Christ was mingled with all their offerings. The world cannot discern Jesus; then let me not be anxious to unite with the world, lest I, too, become blind as the worldling, so that I cannot see the beauty of the truth. By beholding, by studying the ambitious plans and projects of the world, I become more and more favorable to their methods, and become willing to listen to the suggestions of the enemy and to take the bribes of Satan, when I should instantly reject them as did Jesus when He was tempted.

There are some who talk in a regretful way concerning the restraints that the religion of the Bible imposes upon those who would follow its teachings. They seem to think that restraint is a great disadvantage, but we have reason to thank God with all our

heart that He has raised a heavenly barrier between us and the ground of the enemy. There are certain tendencies of the natural heart that many think must be followed in order that the best development of the individual may result, but that which man thinks essential God sees would not be the blessing to humanity which men imagine; for the development of these very traits of character would unfit them for the mansions above. The Lord places men under test and trial that the dross may be separated from the gold; but He forces none. He does not bind with letters and cords and barriers; for they increase disaffection rather than decrease it. The remedy for evil is found in Christ as an indwelling Savior. But in order that Christ may be in the soul, it must first be emptied of self, then there is a vacuum created that may be supplied by the Holy Spirit.

The Lord purifies the heart very much as we air a room. We do not close the doors and windows and throw in some purifying substance; but we open the doors and throw wide the windows, and let heaven's purifying atmosphere flow in. The Lord says, "He that doeth truth cometh to the light." The windows of impulse, of feeling, must be opened up toward heaven, and the dust of selfishness and earthliness must be expelled. The grace of God must sweep through the chambers of the mind, the imagination must have heavenly themes for contemplation, and every element of the nature must be purified and vitalized by the Spirit of God.

Many seem to feel that religion has a tendency to make the possessor narrow and cramped; but genuine religion does not have a narrowing influence. It is the lack of religion that cramps the faculties and narrows the mind — *Manuscript 3*, 1892 (dealing with the "Relationship of Institutional Workers" at the Health Retreat, St. Helena, California, 1892). **E**

Ellen G. White – Church leader, lecturer, preacher, counselor. She has been called the most prolific woman writer of all time, having written some 25 million words for publication.

(Continued from page 15)

Loneliness - Sermon # 2

D. To secure proper rest and to follow good health habits will go a long way toward helping us overcome the problem of loneliness.

E. If unconfessed and unforsaken sin is causing us to feel lonely, then we need to recognize the cause for our feeling of isolation and unhappiness and confess and forsake that attitude or action or ambition which has set up a vicious, destructive cycle in our life.

Not to do so is to add to our problem of feeling lonely and forsaken.

F. Another positive suggestion comes at the point of defining our reason for being in terms of living a life of unselfish giving rather than just merely living to get.

Our Lord could endure the agony and the loneliness of the cross because of the joy that was set before Him (Hebrews 12:2). Our Lord was sustained, strengthened, and stabilized because He knew that what He was doing was going to please the Father God and be most productive in its benefits for others.

VI. Conclusion

Let the Lord Jesus Christ become the Savior of your life. If you have already trusted Him as your Savior, then trust in His promise to be with you at all times and under all circumstances. He has promised, "I will never fail you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).

VII. Illustration

There is none lonelier than the man who loves only himself. — Moses Ben Jacob.
Solitude is bearable only with God. — André Gide (1869-1951).

Loneliness is being unaware of the One who is with us everywhere.

You don't have to be alone in your hurt! Comfort is yours. Joy is an option. And it's all been made possible by your Savior. He went without comfort so you might have it. He postponed joy so you might share in it. He willingly chose isolation so you might never be alone in your hurt and sorrow. — Joni Eareckson Tada. **E**

Margarida F. Sarli is the editorial coordinator for this section.

AFFIRMATION OF CREATION

The International Faith and Science Conferences 2002-2004 report of the Organizing Committee to the General Conference Executive Committee through the office of the General Conference President, September 10, 2004.

Introduction

The very first words of the Bible provide the foundation for all that follows. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth . . ."—Gen. 1:1. Throughout Scripture the Creation is celebrated as coming from the hand of God who is praised and adored as Maker and Sustainer of all that is. "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands"—Ps. 19:1. NIV.

From this view of the world flows a series of interlocking doctrines that lie at the core of the Seventh-day Adventist message to the world: a perfect world without sin and death created not long ago; the Sabbath; the fall of our first parents; the spread of sin, decay and death to the whole creation; the coming of Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, to live among us and rescue us from sin by His death and resurrection; the Second Coming of Jesus, our Creator and Redeemer; and the ultimate restoration of all that was lost by the Fall.

As Christians who take the Bible seriously and seek to live by its precepts Seventh-day Adventists have a high view of nature. We believe that even in its present fallen state nature reveals the eternal power of God (Rom. 1:20), that "'God is love' is written upon every opening bud, upon every spire of springing grass."—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 10.

For us, all Scripture is inspired and tests all the other ways, including nature, through which God reveals Himself. We have great respect for science, and applaud the prominence of science departments in our institutions of higher learning and healthcare. We also value the work of Seventh-day Adventist scientists and researchers not employed by the Church. We train students at our colleges and universities how to employ the scientific

method rigorously. At the same time, we refuse to restrict our quest for truth to the constraints imposed by the scientific method alone.

The Question of Origins

For centuries, at least in the Christian world, the Bible story of creation was the standard explanation for questions about origins. During the 18th and 19th centuries the methodologies of science resulted in a growing understanding of how things worked. Today no one can deny that science has made a remarkable impact on our lives through advances in the areas of agriculture, communication, ecology, engineering, genetics, health, and space exploration.

In many areas of life, knowledge derived from nature and knowledge from divine revelation in Scripture appear to be in harmony. Advances in scientific knowledge often confirm and validate the views of faith. However, in regard to the origin of the universe, of the earth, and of life and its history, we encounter contradictory worldviews.

Assertions based on a study of Scripture often stand in stark contrast to those arising from the scientific assumptions and methodologies used in the study of nature. This tension has a direct impact on the life of the Church, its message and witness.

We celebrate the life of faith. We advocate a life of learning. Both in the study of Scripture and in the orderly processes of nature we see indicators of the Creator's marvelous mind. Since its earliest days the Seventh-day Adventist Church has encouraged the development of the mind and understanding through the disciplines of worship, education, and observation.

In earlier decades the discussion of theories on origins primarily occurred in academic settings. However, philosophical naturalism (wholly natural, random and undirected processes over the course of time) has gained wide acceptance in education and forms the basic assumption for much that is taught in the natural and social science. Seventh-day Adventist members and students encounter this view and its implications in many areas of daily life.

In its statement of fundamental beliefs the Seventh-day Adventist Church affirms a divine cre-

ation as described in the biblical narrative of Genesis 1. "God is Creator of all things, and has revealed in Scripture the authentic account of His creative activity. In six days the Lord made 'the heaven and the earth' and all living things upon the earth, and rested on the seventh day of that first week. Thus He established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of His completed creative work. The first man and woman were made in the image of God as the crowning work of Creation, given dominion over the world, and charged with responsibility to care for it. When the world was finished it was 'very good,' declaring the glory of God."—Gen. 1; 2; Ex. 20:8-11; Ps. 19:1-6; 33:6, 9; 104; Heb. 11:3.

Reasons for the Faith and Science Conferences

Because of the pervasive and growing influence of the theory of evolution, the General Executive Committee (2001 Annual Council) authorized a three-year series of Faith and Science conferences. These conferences were not called to modify the Church's long-held position on creation but to review the contributions and limitations that both faith and science bring to our understanding of origins.

The principal reasons that led to the convening of these conferences involved:

1. *Philosophical questions:* An ever-present challenge exists in defining the relationship between theology and science, between that of faith and reason. Are these two streams of knowledge in partnership or in conflict? Should they be viewed as interactive or are they independent, non-overlapping spheres of knowledge? The dominant worldview in most modern societies interprets life, physical reality, and behavior in ways that are markedly different from the Christian worldview. How should a Christian relate to these things?
2. *Theological questions:* How is the Bible to be interpreted? What does a plain reading of the text require of a believer? To what extent should knowledge from science inform or shape our understanding of Scripture and vice-versa?
3. *Scientific questions:* The same data from nature are available to all observers. What do the data say or mean? How shall we arrive at correct interpretations and conclusions? Is science a tool or a philosophy? How do we differentiate between good and bad science?

(Continued on page 26)

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The Sabbath was made for man,
and not man for the Sabbath.

Consequently, the Son of Man

is Lord even of the Sabbath. (Mark 2:27-28)

LEGALISM

THE ENEMY OF LEADERSHIP

by Jerry White

Jesus showed that God's intention

Do you remember laughing over those outrageous laws still on the books in some cities? Like, it's illegal to walk a pig across the street on Saturdays in Podunksville! We laugh and wonder how anyone could seriously make such ridiculous laws. Then we look back on some Christian "laws" of the past century and laugh a little less loudly, but still wonder how anyone could seriously have proposed them: no mixed bathing, no shopping on Sabbath, no shaving for married men. The Christian who ridiculed these customs experienced considerable pressure to conform or was excluded from close spiritual fellowship.

Jesus regularly encountered and withstood similar issues. Among the Jews, keeping the Sabbath was a major issue. It governed their lives almost as rigidly as Monday night football in the U.S. governs the lives of some people. The keeping of the Sabbath was the ultimate mark of a faithful Jew. From sundown Friday to sundown Saturday faithful Jews celebrated the sacred Sabbath. Rituals of family worship and the prohibition against any work controlled the day. Even when the Jews were captives in a foreign land, observing the Sabbath gave them a sense of identity and dignity as a people.

Jesus showed that God's intention for the Sabbath had been obscured by legalistic rules. Three gospels (Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5) record the incident of the grain fields. The disciples were hungry, so as they walked through the field, they stripped grain off the standing stems and ate it. The Pharisees were there to confront them. Jesus directly answered these "enforcers," using King David as an example. Hungry and weary from

battle, David entered the House of God and ate the consecrated bread.

Jesus stated both a principle of the Sabbath and of any legalistic rule: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Consequently, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27-28).

Later the Pharisees tested Jesus by seeing whether He would heal a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. Jesus did heal him, challenging them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save a life or to kill?" (Mark 3:4). Jesus tried to break through their tradition to the heart of what God intended.

Through the centuries people have built up traditions, rules, and laws to govern the activities of Christians. Human beings gravitate to rules so they do not have to think for themselves. We at once both resist and value the rules. We resist rules because we tend to rebel against any restraint, we value rules because they provide boundaries for conduct whether or not we intend to observe them.

Living under grace is almost too great a freedom. Thus churches and other Christian groups set up various rule systems for Christian conduct. We may laugh at the puritanical practices of the past, but we also need to examine the rules we impose today, which may be laughed at by the next generation.

At this point it would be easy to embark on a "hit list" of rules and traditions that need to be destroyed, but that would be fruitless. It would make some of you angry both at what was on the list and what was not. We all have our favorite excesses and our favorite touchstones of external fidelity to Christian living.

The issue is deeper, much deeper, than specific rules. The real issue is legalism. Legalism systematically attacks and destroys the purity of the gospel. It substitutes rules for faith, traditions for spiritual thinking, boundaries for freedom, and law for grace.

Legalism often grows out of well-intentioned guidelines for living. A few godly people pray and seek God's will as to how they should live. They set certain patterns for themselves. Were it to end there, all would be well, but it doesn't. Usually they then impose those same guidelines on others, depriving them of the invaluable experience of

for the Sabbath had been obscured by legalistic rules.

seeking God for guidance in their own conduct.

Unfortunately, many of these legalistic rules have no clear biblical basis. Instead, they are secondary or derivative extensions of biblical principles—usually from passages on the care of the body, the weaker brother, or association with the world. They often become hopelessly confused with commonly held traditions of a specific culture.

Legalism obscures and confuses grace in the mind of the unbeliever causing him to live by law or fear, though saved by grace. He sees the rules and concludes that keeping them makes one a Christian. The unbeliever then either rejects the rules and turns away, or accepts them, becoming duped into believing that he is now saved.

Look around you at churches where the rites of membership blind people to the truth of grace. Think about the rituals of many cults. They all began with small excursions from the truth that seemed so harmless at the outset. Then they grew into rules and rites of fellowship.

Paul saw this so clearly in the Galatians' church: "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel" (Galatians 1:6). A different gospel? Was it not just a little dispute over circumcision and association with Gentiles? Didn't Paul overstate the case? No, he saw clearly that anything added to the gospel creates a different gospel.

Surely a believer could choose to be circumcised. It would do no harm. But soon his son or neighbor might be circumcised, thinking it was the ritual initiation into salvation. "Do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1), Paul declared, rec-

ognizing that the law enslaves. Only grace frees.

I can preach and teach on grace, but I am still a legalist at heart. In one occasion my wife and I were traveling in 100-degree heat in northern Texas, and Mary was six months pregnant. It was our anniversary. Where did we go that night? To church, of course, in a strange town and in misery. I was constrained! I was legalistic. It took some time for me to realize this and then to begin a process of change. Yet that change was necessary for me to grow in a deeper understanding of grace.

Every time I interact with my four children on

issues of conduct I am torn between setting rules I think are right for their good and the danger of legalism. I remember many discussions on conduct for which I had no significant foundation. I meant well. I still do. And some restrictions are still in place. Yet I squirm as I write this for I see some of my own inconsistencies and especially my history. I am still learning.

Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath and of all those rules that we allow to be placed upon us. When we live under His lordship, we freely choose to do or not do many things. We avoid sin and worldliness. We long for holiness. We want to be truly like Him. But we cannot force someone else to conform to our leading from Christ.

To leave the discussion here could create considerable confusion. Remember, the topic is legalism—any action, activity, or rule that I perceive will earn grace with God. But rules or rituals can never do that.

Are there rules that a group may accept as guidelines for conduct? Yes, but very carefully, rarely making them a test for fellowship. We do want to influence people to holy living, but not mandate the externals. We want to grow from internal conviction, not external rules.

When Christ is truly Lord of my life, I see others not according to their observance of rules, but by their spiritual hunger and growth. When there are actions or issues they should abandon, let it be like the shedding of a butterfly's cocoon—the natural outcome of growth. **E**

Jerry White writes from Santa Barbara, CA.



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(Continued from page 23)

Affirmation of creation

4. *The issue of nurture and education for Church members:* How is a Church member to deal with the variety of interpretations of the Genesis record? What does the Church have to say to those who find in their educational curriculum ideas that conflict with their faith? Maintaining silence concerning such issues sends mixed signals; it creates uncertainty and provides fertile ground for unwarranted and dogmatic views.
5. *Development of living faith:* Clarification and reaffirmation of a Bible-based theology of origins will equip members with a framework for dealing with challenges on this topic. The Faith and Science Conferences were not convened simply for the intellectual stimulation of attendees, but as an opportunity to provide orientation and practical guidance for Church members. The Church cannot pretend to keep its beliefs in a safe place, secure from all challenge. In doing so they will soon become relics. Church teachings must engage and connect with the issues of the day so that they remain a living faith; otherwise they will amount to nothing more than dead dogma.

The Faith and Science Conferences

Two International Faith and Science Conferences were held—in Ogden, Utah 2002 and in Denver, Colorado 2004—with widespread international representation from theologians, scientists, and Church administrators. In addition seven of the Church's thirteen divisions conducted division-wide or regional conferences dealing with the interaction of faith and science in explanations about origins. The Organizing Committee expresses appreciation to the participants at these conferences for their contributions to this report.

The Ogden conference agenda was designed to acquaint attendees with the range of ways in which both theology and science offer explanations for the origin of the earth and life. The agendas for conferences in divisions were determined by the various organizers, although most included several of the topics dealt with in Ogden. The recent conference in Denver was the concluding conference of the three-year series. Its agenda began with summaries of the issues in theology and science, and then moved on to several questions regarding faith-science issues in Church life. These questions included:

- The on-going place of scholarship in the Church. How does the Church maintain the confessional nature of its teachings while being open to further development in its understanding of truth?
- Educational models for dealing with controversial subjects and the ethical issues involved for teachers and Church leaders. How shall we teach science courses in our schools in a

- way that enriches, rather than erodes faith?
- What ethical considerations come into focus when private conviction differs from denominational teaching? How does personal freedom of belief interface with one's public role as a leader in the Church? In other words, what are the principles of personal accountability and the ethics of dissent?
 - What are the administrative responsibilities and processes in dealing with variations in, or re-expressions of, doctrinal views?

Scholarly papers by theologians, scientists, and educators were presented and discussed in all the conferences. (The Geosciences Research Institute maintains a file of all papers presented at the conferences). The Ogden and Denver conferences involved at least some representation from every division of the world field. Well over 200 persons participated in the conferences during the three-year period. More than 130 attended the Denver meeting, most of whom had attended at least one other of the Faith and Science Conferences.

General Observations

1. We applaud the seriousness and dignity that characterized the conferences.
2. We noted the strong sense of dedication and loyalty to the Church that prevailed.
3. We experienced that even though tensions surfaced at times, cordial relations were maintained among the attendees, with fellowship transcending differences in viewpoint.
4. We witnessed in these conferences a high level of concurrence on basic understandings, especially the normative role of Scripture, buttressed by the writings of Ellen G. White, and the belief by all in God as beneficent Creator.
5. We found no support for, or advocacy of, philosophical naturalism, the idea that the universe came into existence without the action of a Creator.
6. We acknowledge that the conflict between the biblical and contemporary worldviews impacts both scientists and theologians.
7. We recognize that tension between faith and understanding is an element of life with which the believer must learn to live.
8. We observe that rejecting contemporary scientific interpretations of origins in conflict with the bibli-

cal account does not imply depreciation of either science or the scientist.

9. While we found widespread affirmation of the Church's understanding of life on earth, we recognize that some among us interpret the biblical record in ways that lead to sharply different conclusions.
10. We accept that both theology and science contribute to our understanding of reality.

Findings

1. The degree to which tension exists regarding our understanding of origins varies around the world. In those areas where science has made its greatest progress in society, the questions among Church members are more widespread. With the advance of science across all societies and educational systems, there will be a corresponding increase in members wondering how to reconcile Church teaching with natural theories of origin. Large numbers of Seventh-day Adventist students attend public schools where evolution is taught and promoted in the classroom without corresponding materials and arguments in favor of the biblical account of origins.
2. Reaffirmation of the Church's Fundamental Belief regarding creation is strongly supported. Seventh-day Adventist belief in a literal and historical six-day creation is theologically sound and consistent with the teaching of the whole Bible.
3. Creation is a foundational pillar in the entire system of Seventh-day Adventist doctrine—it bears direct relationship to many if not all other fundamental beliefs. Any alternative interpretation of the creation story needs to be examined in light of its impact on all other beliefs. Several of the Faith and Science Conferences reviewed alternative interpretations of Genesis 1, including the idea of theistic evolution. These other interpretations lack theological coherence with the whole of Scripture and reveal areas of inconsistency with the rest of Seventh-day Adventist doctrine. They are therefore unacceptable substitutes for the biblical doctrine of creation held by the Church.
4. Concern has been expressed regarding what some see as ambiguity in the phrase "In six days" found in the Church's statement of belief on creation. It is felt that the intended meaning

(that the six-day creation described in Genesis was accomplished on a literal and historical week) is unmentioned. This situation allows for uncertainty about what the Church actually believes. Further, it provides room for other explanations of creation to be accommodated in the text. There is a desire for the voice of the Church to be heard in bringing added clarity to what is really meant in Fundamental Belief #6, Creation.

5. Although some data from science can be interpreted in ways consistent with the biblical concept of creation, we also reviewed data interpreted in ways that challenge the Church's belief in a recent creation. The strength of these interpretations cannot be dismissed lightly. We respect the claims of science, study them, and hope for a resolution. This does not preclude a re-examination of Scripture to make sure it is being properly understood. However, when an interpretation harmonious with the findings of science is not possible, we do not allow science a privileged position in which it automatically determines the outcome. Rather, we recognize that it is not justifiable to hold clear teachings of Scripture hostage to current scientific interpretations of data.
6. We recognize that there are different theological interpretations among us regarding Genesis 1-11. In view of the various interpretations we sensed a high degree of concern that those involved in the Seventh-day Adventist teaching ministry conduct their work ethically and with integrity—by standards of their profession, the teachings of Scripture, and the basic understanding held by the body of believers. Since Seventh-day Adventists recognize their comprehension of truth is a growing experience, there is an ever-present need to continue the study of Scripture, theology, and science in order that the truths we hold constitute a living faith able to address the theories and philosophies of the day.
7. We appreciate and endorse the significant value of ongoing international and interdisciplinary dialog among Seventh-day Adventist theologians, scientists, educators, and administrators.

Affirmations

1. We affirm the primacy of Scripture in the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of origins.
2. We affirm the historic Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Genesis 1 that life on earth was created in six literal days and is of recent origin.
3. We affirm the biblical account of the Fall resulting in death and evil.
4. We affirm the biblical account of a catastrophic Flood, an act of God's judgment that affected the whole planet, as an important key to understanding earth's history.
5. We affirm that our limited understanding of origins calls for humility and that further exploration into these questions brings us closer to deep and wonderful mysteries.
6. We affirm the interlocking nature of the doctrine of creation with other Seventh-day Adventist doctrines.
7. We affirm that in spite of its fallenness, nature is a witness to the Creator.
8. We affirm Seventh-day Adventist scientists in their endeavors to understand the Creator's handiwork through the methodologies of their disciplines.
9. We affirm Seventh-day Adventist theologians in their efforts to explore and articulate the content of revelation.
10. We affirm Seventh-day Adventist educators in their pivotal ministry to the children and youth of the Church.
11. We affirm that the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church identified in Revelation 14:6, 7 includes a call to worship God as Creator of all.

Recommendations

The Organizing Committee for the International Faith and Science Conferences recommends that:

1. In order to address what some interpret as a lack of clarity in fundamental Belief #6, Creation, the historic Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the Genesis narrative be affirmed more explicitly.
2. Church leaders at all levels be encouraged to assess and monitor the effectiveness with which denominational systems and programs succeed in preparing young people, including those attending non-Adventist schools, with a biblical

understanding of origins and an awareness of the challenges they may face in respect to this understanding.

3. Increased opportunity be provided for interdisciplinary dialog and research, in a safe environment, among Seventh-day Adventist scholars from around the world.

Conclusion

The Bible opens with the story of creation; the Bible closes with the story of re-creation. All that was lost by the Fall of our first parents is restored. The One who made all things by the Word of His mouth at the beginning brings the long struggle with sin, evil, and death to a triumphant and glorious conclusion. He is the One who dwelt among us and died in our stead on Calvary. As the heavenly beings sang for joy at the first creation, so the redeemed from earth proclaim: "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created. . . . Worthy is the Lamb who was slain . . ."—Rev. 4:11; 5:12. NKJV.

Reference

¹ East-Central Africa Division, Euro-Africa Division, North American Division, South Pacific Division, Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, West-Central Africa Division.

Response to an Affirmation Of Creation

The General Conference voted to approve the following statement in response to the International Faith and Science Conference Organizing Committee's report, and affirmation of creation, subject to the changes that were voted in the previous action, to read as follows:

Whereas belief in a literal, six-day creation is indissolubly linked with the authority of Scripture.

Whereas such belief interlocks with other doctrines of Scripture, including the Sabbath and the Atonement.

Whereas Seventh-day Adventists understand our mission, as specified in Revelation 14:6, 7, to include a call to the world to worship God as Creator.

We, the members of the General Conference

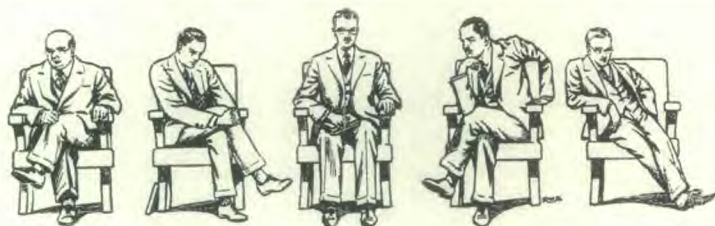
Executive Committee at the 2004 Annual Council, state the following as our response to the document: An affirmation of creation, submitted by the International Faith and Science Conferences:

1. We strongly endorse the document's affirmation of our historic, biblical position of belief in a literal, recent, six-day Creation.
2. We urge that the document, accompanied by this response, be disseminated widely throughout the world Seventh-day Adventist Church, using all available communication channels and in the major languages of world membership.
3. We reaffirm the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the historicity of Genesis 1-11: that the seven days of the Creation account were literal 24-hour days forming a week identical in time to what we now experience as a week; and that the Flood was global in nature.
4. We call on all boards and educators at Seventh-day Adventist institutions at all levels to continue upholding and advocating the Church's position on origins. We, along with Seventh-day Adventist parents, expect students to receive a thorough, balanced, and scientifically rigorous exposure to and affirmation of our historic belief in a literal, recent, six-day creation, even as they are educated to understand and assess competing philosophies of origins that dominate scientific discussion in the contemporary world.
5. We urge church leaders throughout the world to seek ways to educate members, especially young people attending non-Seventh-day Adventist schools, in the issues involved on the doctrine of creation.
6. We call on all members of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist family to proclaim and teach the Church's understanding of the biblical doctrine of Creation, living in its light, rejoicing in our status as sons and daughters of God, and praising our Lord Jesus Christ—our Creator and Redeemer. **F**



James A. Cress

Platform decorum and dress



When an administrator telephoned to describe a congregation's warfare over their minister's platform dress, I remembered an illustration I had seen posted in scores of vestries over dozens of years. Researching the source, I found it came from *Ministry Magazine*.

If that depiction (reproduced above) were normative for all ministers, every clergy would be a middle-aged, white male dressed only in conservative business attire. And multiple congregations which have posted it as a model would have elevated this example to sacerdotal expectation, if not sacred mandate.

If a picture equals a thousand words, this illustration, which accompanied *Ministry's* 1942 article, states more about cultural expectations among members than about any particular viewpoint. Of course times have changed as have expectations both from society in general and the subculture of church-attending believers. Similar debates of music and worship styles typically produce more heat than light as stereotypical opinions—"everyone else should look just like me"—cause many to judge rashly and harshly anyone who differs.

Recognizing wide diversity among clergy in just my denomination and the impossibility of advocating, much less enforcing, one style as appropriate dress, note some guiding principles, hopefully "with charity to all."

Appropriate for the call. Through history, God has designated distinctive dress for spiritual leaders; sometimes, very elaborate and ornate such as

bejeweled, multicolored attire for the high priest; sometimes as plain as a simple linen tunic. A wider range of possibilities than any single culture might adopt seems acceptable to heaven, so the wider question might ought to ask: "How does my dress and decorum display the Holy Spirit's calling?"

Appropriate for the expectations. Among Adventists today, platform dress ranges from ornate pulpit robes in urban congregations to open-neck sport shirts in California. Sweaters in Scandinavia, barongs in the Philippines, dashikis in Africa, and Indonesian batiks may puzzle Thai worshipers with bare feet or Samoan pastors with bare legs. Women sans hats may distract worshipers in Jamaica, while members in economically challenged, arid regions might wonder why waste funds on hosiery. Without mandating any particular style as the sole option, it seems appropriate that spiritual leaders should dress and conduct themselves in a way that will not scandalize the gospel either in the eyes of the community that gathers to worship or in the wider surrounding society. Young adults and families likely tolerate more casual approaches than retirees or those who equate classic, traditional approaches with morality. It seems to me that a conservative business suit is seldom inappropriate for men or women.

Appropriate for the climate. Once, in a super-hot tropical location, I observed that attendees might have considered the weather before garbing themselves in full suits, dress shirts, and ties. They



explained their culture’s expectations, as well as their own self-image for professional ministry, which required formal attire, despite the weather, despite the retreat.

Appropriate for the culture. These same pastors could envision no alternatives. Although they were generous not to scold me for dressing in a light-weight shirt, their uncomfortable laughter at “my favorite verse” for tropical clergy attire (“they shall not gird themselves with any thing that causeth sweat” Ezek. 44:18) demonstrated the seriousness of their understanding.

Appropriate for site and situation. Common sense may dictate the necessity of formal attire in a cathedral pulpit where the preacher may don a flowing pulpit robe versus a small chapel where a business suit would “feel correct” for the setting, or an outdoor event in which a sport coat or “dressy casual” dress may fit the occasion.

Appropriate for the event. And speaking of the occasion, I hope pastors today would choose dark, dignified dress for a funeral or communion even if they otherwise might meet their congregations in less formal attire. I must add, however, that one of the most solemn ordinations in which I ever participated featured each candidate wearing a new pair of rubber flip-flop shoes.

Appropriate for multigenerational, multicultural leaders. Finally, remember that your posture, decorum, and overall demeanor will speak more effectively than any outfit. Our “new” illustration (see above) includes younger participants of both genders from a variety of backgrounds. Options may vary. Appropriate, good taste, however, must be cultivated. **E**

James A. Cress is the Ministerial Secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

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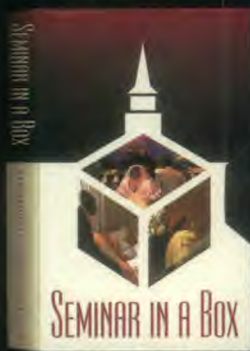
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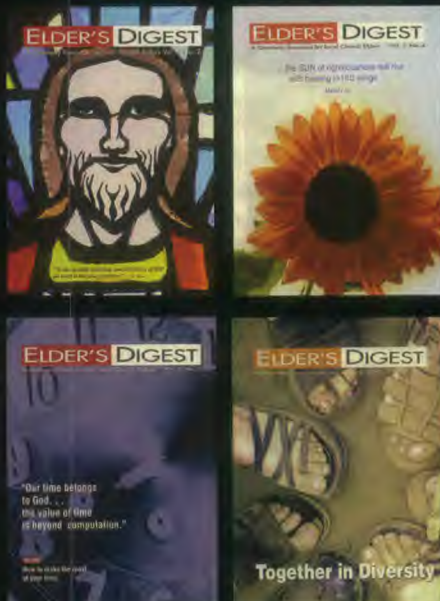
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